

Mother-Complex: A Psycho- Archetypal Study of Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*

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Abstract

The image of the mother has been glorified since ages as embedded in art, literature and scriptures. Mother's love which includes care, warmth, shelter, tenderness etc is one of the most indelible early imprints on the mind of a person. The concept of mother archetype which leads to the foundation of the mother –complex could be understood in a variety of ways. It could be associated with personal mother, grandmother, stepmother, mother -in- law, etc; or any other woman with whom the relationship exists, i.e., a nurse or a governess. In the figurative sense, the mother symbol appears in arousing devotion or feeling of awe, for example, the Church, University, City, and Country etc. The development of the mother –complex in children disturbs the child and spilt his/her psyche. This influence of the mother on child configures archetypes which, in turn produce fantasies that come between the child and his mother. The effect of the mother complex also depends on the difference of sex. It appears in sons and daughters differently. In this paper, therefore, much emphasis is laid on the mother complex in daughter as it is clearer and uncomplicated to understand the contours of parental as well as filial bonding in the archetypal sense. The study will explore how Shashi Deshpande has incorporated the mother complexes laid down by Carl Jung, through the female characters like Madhu Sapatrishi, Savitaribai and Munni in the novel in point. Carl Jung's concept of the mother archetype and the mother-complexes explained in an essay "The Archetypes of Literature" contained in, *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, will form the theoretical framework.

Key Words: Mother-Archetype, Mother-Complex, Psyche, Filial, Imprint.

The novel *Small Remedies*, speaks about the remedies that the woman characters opt for the care and longevity of their children. It also highlight the mental and emotional delima that a women faces when she pursues her career. The novel contains many lives intermingled with each other commenting upon the remedies they chose to face their lives. The narrative begins with the bereaved mother Madhu Saptrishi, who lost her son Adit. In order to cope up with the grief, she decides to write the biography of Savitribai. For the purpose of writing the biography she meets with Savitribai and expects her to talk about her daughter Munni but Savitribai never talks about her daughter. It is through these women, Madhu finds her own self. The significant female characters who embody the mother complexes in various forms are Madhu Sapatrishi, Savitribai Indorekar, and Munni respectively. Madhu could be seen as the hypertrophy of the maternal elements whereas Savitribai reflects the negative aspect of the mother and of Munni, reflects the mother complex in terms of resistance to the mother. In the *Archetypes of Collective Unconscious*, Carl Jung explores the mother archetype and postulates the mother-complex in daughters in four different forms. 1) the hypertrophy of the maternal element or to its atrophy, 2) overdevelopment of the Eros, 3) Identity with the mother and 4) resistance to the mother. While describing the hypertrophy of the maternal elements in the daughters he believes that the mother- complex in daughters leads either to a hypertrophy of the feminine side or to its atrophy. In an essay “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious” contained in *The Basic Writings of C.G.Jung*, He postulates:

The exaggeration of the feminine side means an intensification of all female instincts, above all the maternal instinct. The negative aspect is seen in the woman whose only goal is childbirth. To her the husband is obviously of secondary importance; he is first and foremost the instrument of procreation and she regards him merely as an object to be looked after, along with children, poor relations, cats, dogs, and household furniture. Even her own personality is of secondary importance;.....first she gives birth to the children, and from then on she clings to them, for without them she has no existence whatsoever.(338-339)

In *Small Remedies*, Madhu Sapatrishi, suffers from the same mother –complex of hypertrophy. Even before Adit’s birth, Madhu betrays an anxiety and strong desire to have a child. She

considers the existence of a woman incomplete without a child. Just after the revelation of her pregnancy, she leaves her job and invests all her time and energy for the well being of the baby. She is unable to compromise with her romantic illusions of motherhood. After giving birth to Aditiya she completely forgets her own self and becomes a devotee of her son. The commitments of motherhood make Madhu over involved in the life of Adit. Madhu remembers that being a mother involves her so much that “I’ve nothing left for anyone, for anything....as far as I’m concerned, there’s only Adit and me in this new world I’ve entered. The others are mere shadows. Som is part of our world, but he’s on the periphery.” (146). With Adit’s birth she withdraws herself from the outer world and devotes herself fully to his rearing. Even her husband, Som, is also relegated to the position of secondary importance after Adit’s birth as if the only job of Som was to impregnate her. She observes a sea change in her demeanor something that she becomes an entirely different person.

It’s my baby’s dependence that changes me; my place in the universe is marked out now. After the uncertainty, the indefiniteness of everything, of things whirling off, away from me, here is something a hundred per cent steadfast. Yes, that’s it-steadfast. It is I who is providing the certainty, the central pole of a whirling universe for this small human being, and at same time, it is he who is keeping me there, making me into this stable figure. ... His dependence fills me with delight; my power over him awes me. I indulge him, enjoying my power to transform his tears into smiles. I flaunt my feelings there is no need to hide them. It’s just legitimate, it’s something to be proud of, this mother love. (183-184)

Child’s birth has eventually shot Madhu into significance as she is the central driving force of his life. She feels that her older self has been shed off and, therefore, experiences a rebirth. She exalts in the ambience of motherhood and betrays a sense of assurance that is steadfast and permanent. It seems that Madhu is completely possessed by the archetype of mother. She is engulfed so deeply in the mother complex that she is hardly concerned about her own self and forgets herself and all her desires completely. Susan Douglas, and Meredith Michaels also hold the similar view even if they believe that the mother myth undermines

women. In the *Mummy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* (2005) They state, “the best mother always put their kid’s needs before their own. The best mothers are the main caregivers. For the best mothers, their kids are the centre of the universe”. (6)

Becoming mother metamorphoses Madhu from a confused and decentred human being into a centered and stable person. She personifies the undisputed certainty that defines her son’s existence. By defining Aditya’s existence the phenomenon of motherhood also defines Madhu and steers her from periphery of life to the centre. Madhu does not only find herself in the grip of archetype of motherhood but finds other women in her life being operated upon by the same instinct. This gets confirmed in the text when she shares the pleasures and experiences of motherhood with her friends and, in the words of Douglas and Meredith, indulges in ‘competitive motherhood’. This suggests that Madhu is under the deep influence of the instincts of motherhood as the archetypal mother is deeply embedded in her psyche. While discussing the positive aspects of Mother-complex, Carl Jung states:

The positive aspect of the first type of the complex, namely the overdevelopment of the maternal instinct, is identical with that well-known image of the mother which has been glorified in all ages and all tongues. This is the mother-love which is one of the most moving and unforgettable memories of our lives. (*Four Archetypes* 28)

Thus Shashi Deshpande, through the character of Madhu, has portrayed the image of mother who has shown all the qualities of a mother figure that are associated with life principle and can be idealized and glorified, like; birth, warmth, nourishment, love, care, sympathy, protection, fertility, growth etc. In short, representing an archetypal woman, Madhu manifests the ‘Good’ mother and, therefore, the Jungian mother-complex of overdevelopment of the maternal instinct could be understood as the positive aspect of the mother-complex.

Similarly, in the exposition of the life of Savitribai, the three dimensions of her personality, i.e., Bai the woman, Bai the singer and Bai the mother are elaborated. In her role as a mother, Bai is depicted as an unconventional woman who flouts all the conventions and expectations of the society to fulfill her desires to be an accomplished singer. In pursuit of her

aim, Savitri Bai, walks out on her husband and begins to live with a Muslim man called Gulam Sahib, herself being a Brahmin woman. In doing so, she flouts another rigid convention of a Brahmin social setup. Not only that, Savitri Bai does not provide the required motherly love to her daughter Munni sired by Gulam Sahib.

The character of Savitri Bai has been used as a foil to that of Madhu whereby creating a clear contrast between them. Whereas Madhu showers whole of her being in performing the role of a mother in her son's life, Savitri Bai disentangles herself from all the familial engagements and invests her energies in realizing her dreams without caring anything about the institutions like family, marriage, religion and society at large. If Madhu represents the positive aspect of mother-complex called hypertrophy of maternal instinct, Savitribai represents the dark side of the mother archetype often symbolized by Corn Mother Myth. Just as Corn Mothers smite the land by withholding crops (which results in death), so do some mothers symbolically "smite" their children by withholding love, attention, and communication. The mother who gives the "silent treatment" to their children or 'isolate' them as punishment withholds their nurturing, i.e., life-giving love. Symbolically, this is much like the famines in the Corn Mother myths. This withholding stunts the emotional growth of children and—if severe enough—damages them irrevocably. Hillman, in his essay *The Bad Mother: An Archetypal Approach*, explains that the tandem leads to "basic structures of bad mothering-rejecting her child, resenting her child, dependency on her child, and fostering dependency from it" (111). Savitribai turns her face completely away from her illegitimate daughter Meenakshi Indorekar, alias, Munni. Munni is born out of wedlock and is a child of passionate relationship between Savitri and Gulam Sahib. In this, Savitri becomes a veritable 'corn mother', a mythical figure who smites the land so that the crop does not grow at all. She withholds maternal love and care from Munni, something which devastates the girl to such an extent that she does not recognize Savitri Bai as her mother. Figuratively, Savitri brings about an emotional feminine in the life of Munni so that she finds herself not belonging to anyone. Far from being loved by Ghulam Sahib, the real father of Munni, the treatment meted out to her by him borders on something inhuman. He not only slights her away as well as ignores her, he also beats her at the smallest pretext. Madhu remembers:

Yes, a gentle, kind man. But Munni says he's cruel. She speaks of starvation, of being tied up and beaten. She shows me a scar on her arm. It looks like a mosquito bite to me. She's offended when I say so, she squeezes it to make it bleed. Nothing happens. She covers it up swiftly and says, 'Don't tell anyone. If he knows I've told you, he'll whip me.'

Yet, when I see the two of them together, Munni and her kidnapper, he seems affectionate and loving. It's Munni who runs her back on him, Munni who ignores him and he who looks hurt and sad. (64-65)

What Munni tells Madhu about her relationship with Ghulam Sahib confuses the latter. Munni's narrative portrays Ghulam Sahib as someone cruel, authoritative and demonic but Madhu's observation of the manner in which Ghulam Sahib treats Munni paints a different picture of him. Whatsoever be the relationship between Munni and Ghulam Sahib is, the main culprit remains her mother Savatribai who does not take any measures to placate Munni in the moment of anger and displeasure nor does she make her daughter loved or cared for. Carl Jung explains the role of mother in shaping the psyche of a child, especially during early childhood as follows"

It is an open question whether a mother-complex can develop without the mother having taken part in its formation as a demonstrable casual factor. My own experience leads me to believe that the mother always plays an active part in the origin of the disturbance, especially in infantile neurosis or in neurosis whose aetiology undoubtedly dates back to early childhood. In any event, the child's instincts are disturbed, and this constellates archetypes which, in their turn, produce fantasies that come between the child and its mother as alien and often frightening element. (*Four Archetypes* 19)

Given the ignorance about the identity of her father she considers Savitribai's husband who lives in Pune as her real father. Savitribai's rejection of Munni as her child is so total that during her two months long interaction with Madhu, her biographer she does not make any reference to Munni, howsoever oblique it might be. This comes to Madhu as a shock because she has shared her childhood with Munni as Savitri Bai's only daughter. She remembers:

Munni has soon becomes my best friend, I have dropped most of the others, who were never friend like Munni is, anyway. She is most exciting friend I've ever had. If she bewilders me with her swift changes of moods, if at times she dominates me and bosses me around, there's still something about her that I enjoy-something that gives an edge of excitement to my days. (34)

Madhu remembers the early days of her childhood spent in the company of Munni as a neighbor. She recounts Munni showing her the freshly inflicted wounds on her body by Ghulan Sahib and her insistence that he is not her father; that he father lives in Pune and shows love and care on her. Madhu feels distraught on discovering the chasms between Munni and her mother Bai. She finds that both the mother and the daughter refuse to acknowledge each other's existence:

There's no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, no abandoned husband, no lover. In showing me her album, she's presenting me with her own illusion of her life. A life of success and achievement. Nothing lacking; no unreconciled child, no dead daughter.

Her obduracy tempts me to say to her bluntly, I am Munni's friend, your daughter's friend'. It makes me want to put a knife to her skin, to see her jump. Ever more often I wonder: What kind of a woman are you, denying you own child? Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such a thing. (77-78)

By refusing to recognize Madhu, Savitribai refuses to acknowledge the existence of Munni. Her single-minded obsession with a successful career as a singer has overpowered Savitri to an extent that she becomes completely transfixed in the intoxication of being an accomplished artist. She is conveniently ignorant of the havoc which her single-minded pursuit of career has played in the form of an abandoned husband, an illegitimate child, and a committed lover. Madhu finds Savitribai a woman who is completely bereft of any sensibility of motherhood. The relationship between mother and daughter sufficiently represent the mythical patterns that are in operation in human life. If Savitri Bai fits into the role of devastating corn mother or a bad mother, Munni suffers from the negative aspect of the mother-complex defined as 'resistance towards the mother'. In the *Four Archetypes*, Carl Jung postulates:

This kind of daughter knows what she does not want, but is usually completely at sea as to what she would choose as her own fate. All her instincts are concentrated on the mother in the negative form of resistance and are therefore of no use to her in building her own life. (26).

Munni's relationship with her mother is also unusual. The life of Munni gets negatively shaped as she remains obsessed and, therefore, influenced by the treatment which is meted out to her by her mother. All her actions including changing her name and settling down for an ordinary life of complete invisibility because she does not want to be identified as Savitribai Indorekar's daughter. As her mother's ambitions made her neglect her daughter, Munni reciprocates in the similar way. In this connection a reviewer of Deshpande, Malathi Mathur observes that Munni too "turns her back on her mother and all that she stands for, in a desperate desire to conform, having encountered early in life the poisoned barbs that society levels against those who dare to be different". (Malathi Mathur 2000) Munni has uncompromising contempt and hatred for her mother. Madhu says, "Munni herself rarely speaks of her own mother. Unusual, because most children are forever quoting their mothers, going on and on about 'my mother said ...' Not Munni" (SR-33) Munni is not even willing to share the name and surname given to her by her mother. In order to escape from being in relationship with her mother she prefers to call herself 'Shalija Joshi' and rejects the surname of Indorekar adopted by her singer mother. Even after so many years when Madhu met Munni in a bus, she refused to recognize and acknowledge her as her childhood friend.

'You're Munni,' I said abruptly, startled into recognition.

She looked at me, I could swear there was recognition there before the face became blank and inscrutable.

'My name is Shalija – Shalija Joshi.'

The name was uttered slowly, clearly, her hand going to her mangalsutra as she spoke. Was it a habitual gesture? Or was she reassuring herself that she was indeed Shalija Joshi the black beads has transformed her into? (SR-76)

Like her mother Savitribai, Munni's act of not recognizing Madhu in a bus reflect her intention to sever all possible ties with her past, be it her mother or Madhu, her childhood

friend. She startles when Madhu recognizes her as Munni and immediately introduces herself as 'Shalija Joshi', a newly adopted identity of a proudly married middle class woman. Her gesture of holding her '*mangalsutra*' symbolizes her desire to completely obliterate her past as a daughter of a singer woman. The reference to the black beads in *mangalsutra* is the embodiment of new identity which she gained after she got married. In a busy city like Bombay an unexpected and sudden appearance of Madhu opens a window to Munni's past which she attempts to shut immediately by refusing to acknowledge Madhu. Thus as per Carl Jung, marriage has become a kind of 'refuge' for her and a way of escaping from her mother. This shows that she tries to sever any connection with the past and strives to attain the respectable life and identity, contrary to her mother.

But Munni closed herself against her mother, against everything she was or stood for, and chose an ordinary life. I think of the girl I knew, the flash of her skinny white limbs as she flung up her skirt and rushed to the back of the house, behind a tree trunk or a bush, to relieve herself. Uninhibited, impulsive. And the Shalija Joshi, the woman I met on the bus-another name, another person altogether. The result of Munni beating herself into shape with a savage determination, like dough being pounded into soft pliability, capable finally of taking any shape. (225)

Defining 'resistance to mother', Carl Jung writes, "should she get as far as marrying, either the marriage will be used for the sole purpose of escaping her mother." Munni's death in the bomb blast neutralizes her life-long struggle to attain her identity as a respectable woman unlike her mother. In the same stretch, Carl Jung states that a woman exhibiting 'resistance to mother' seeks refuge in marriage and there is a possibility that she might meet a diabolic fate. In case of Munni, this rings true as she dies in a bomb blast. The news of her death is published as "Shailaja Joshi-only daughter of Savitaribai Indorekar" (255) even this 'diabolic fate', as Jung calls it, cannot obliterate her identity that she has struggled to hide throughout.

The study undertaken reveals the two forms of mother-complexes like maternal hypertrophy and resistance to the mother symbolized by Madhu and Munni respectively.

Madhu represents the mother complex of 'maternal hypertrophy' and becomes like a mother hyper obsessed with the child where as Munni, Savitribai's daughter suffer from the complex of 'resistance to the mother' abhors Savitribai to an extent that she changes her name to Shalija Joshi and lives an oblivious life. Even her death in a bomb blast could not hide her identity as her death is reported in the newspaper as "Savitribai's only daughter" Madhu, however, achieves a state of self-realization after shredding herself off the working of the mother archetype embedded in her unconscious. Beginning her life as a motherless child and ending as a childless mother, Madhu encounters and negotiates different aspects of life with regard to the centrality of mother in one's life.

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