

Motherhood: "The Echoes of a Forgotten Love"

Nikita Yadav

Research Scholar

Department of English and Modern European Languages

University of Lucknow

Abstract

The paper follows the story of Aasmaani, whose mother, Samina, a vibrant activist, disappeared fourteen years ago. Aasmaani, whose name means "Celestial Revolution," refuses to accept her mother's death and clings to memories of her. Raised by her father and stepmother, Beema, Aasmaani always felt sidelined by her mother's devotion to activism and a love affair with a poet named Nazim, who inspired her and became a figure of her rebellion. The poet, a prominent voice in Pakistan's political landscape, faced imprisonment, prompting Samina to vocalize her opposition to his treatment. Their tumultuous relationship resulted in Samina's search for her identity beyond the poet, ultimately marrying Aasmaani's father briefly before returning to the poet. Following the poet's tragic death, Samina fell into despair and alienation. Aasmaani feels dejected and lost throughout the novel, and she needs to figure out the reasons why her mother alienated her. The paper focuses on Aasmaani's journey of discovery and understanding of her mother's past and, in the process, her own identity.

Keywords: Maternal Love, Identity, Activism, Resilience, Resistance.

Fourteen years prior, Aasmaani's mother, Samina, a striking beauty and daring activist, left her home and has not been seen since. Aasmaani refuses to accept that she is gone and continues to dream of her magnificent comeback. Aasmaani Inqalab – The name Samina gave to her daughter. Aasmaani Inqalab: Celestial Revolution is such a name that it never really admits the notion of childhood. Aasmaani, at present, is working in STD – save the Data Studios as a Quiz show researcher. Throughout her life, Aasmaani longed for her mother's time and attention. Aasmaani was devastated when her mother died fourteen years ago. She refused to believe that Samina could leave her daughter willingly. After her mother disappeared, she used to see her everywhere—not just in the form of other women but in empty spaces, too.

Aasmaani navigated her childhood primarily under the care of her father and her stepmother, Beema. Her biological mother, Samina, had relinquished crucial decisions about Aasmaani's upbringing to them, allowing her to pursue her own passions, particularly her fervent activism and her tumultuous romance with a renowned poet. This led to Aasmaani spending her formative years oscillating between the idyllic, seemingly perfect family life with her father, Beema, and her stepsister Rabia, and the unorthodox, chaotic environment of her mother's home, which was graced with a connecting door to her lover's lush garden—a symbol of freedom, yet also of distraction. In her mother's house, Aasmaani often felt like an afterthought, overshadowed by Samina's devotion to her causes and her romantic escapades. The absence of maternal attention left a void in Aasmaani's heart, causing her to harbour

resentment toward the Poet, who seemed to capture Samina's heart and mind, leaving Aasmaani feeling neglected. Time and again, the Poet found himself entangled in controversies that beckoned him away—whether it was due to political dissent that led to his exile or arrests for his outspoken views. Samina, unwavering in her support for the Poet, would invariably follow him, further deepening Aasmaani's feelings of isolation and longing for a more traditional mother-daughter bond. In her youth, Aasmaani grappled with the duality of her reality—yearning for the loving presence of a mother while navigating the complexities of a life that felt anything but ordinary. When Aasmaani was 8 years old, the poet and her mother discovered a code language. They would communicate in code so as to keep the secrets away from everyone, especially government agencies.

Aasmaani had a very loved yet strained relationship with her father. She was enamoured by the poet's knowledge, so she always looked down upon her father. In the novel, Aasmaani amends her broken relationship with her father. Her father has always loved her immensely. He helped her in the healing process of discovering and accepting the truth about her mother's death. Beema, the stepmother of Aasmaani, is portrayed as a kind soul in the novel. She was more of a mother to Aasmaani than Samina could ever be. She was the one who stood by Aasmaani as she grew up in a turbulent atmosphere. After Samina's disappearance, Aasmaani lost herself in drink, parties, sex and men. Beema was the one who took care of Aasmaani at that time and took her away from all the vices. Beema loved and cared for Aasmaani as she cared for her own daughter Rabia. Rabia was four years younger than Aasmaani. Both of them shared a good rapport with each other. Beema always had a calming presence and a way of bringing Aasmaani back to reality whenever she strayed too far. She was a pillar of strength in Aasmaani's life, always there to offer support and guidance when needed. Despite the challenges they faced, Beema remained a constant source of love and stability for Aasmaani, helping her navigate the ups and downs of life with grace and resilience. Their bond was unbreakable, a testament to the power of unconditional love and friendship.

The poet was born in Punjab. He moved to Karachi at the age of 13 in 1945. His ghazals drove the crowd into raptures, and he took the pen name 'NAZIM' because he adored Nazim Hikmet's poetry. Poets were used to raise important political and social issues, which garnered huge responses from the public. The poet's love for Samina was something heady and consuming. It was love at first sight for him. Samina was the muse in his poems. He even changed the year of Samina's birth in his poems so that she was the same age as Pakistan. He made her a figure of rebellion, of salvation, and Samina played into it. At that time, Samina was 23 years old. Soon, she was invited to speak at girls' colleges, to join panels on women's upliftment, and to cut ribbons. This was the first phase of Samina Akram- 'the activist'.

Samina walked out of the poet's life and went in search of an identity that wasn't caught up in his shadows. Soon, she married Aasmaani's father. The marriage only sustained for 11 months. After Samina's divorce, the poet and Samina were in a relationship, but they never married. For the most part of Aasmaani's childhood, the poet was either in prison or self-imposed exile. Samina was not far behind. Samina soon started speaking out vocally against the false imprisonment of the poet, who was imprisoned for his poems. In the year in which Zia hanged Bhutto, the poet wrote 'ZEHER', the copies of which circulated throughout the country, being set to music and entering the nation's consciousness. Both her mother and the poet knew that the imprisonment was inevitable. He was released from prison, and he went into exile for three years. And Samina remained with him. In 1986, he was found dead. His body was scarred and unrecognizable. The poems kept at his place were burned.

Samina, not being the legally wedded “wife”, could not get access to the poet’s belongings or his body. Samina, after the death of the poet, remained quiet, hopeless and lifeless. She distanced herself from the people around her. Throughout her life, Samina neglected her daughter over Nazim, and this was something which deeply pained Aasmaani. In her words:

And what of me in all this? I was just a few months old when the Poet was imprisoned in 1972, and my mother knew the ability of a smiling infant to cut through bureaucracy. I could instantly reduce both uniformed and inky-fingered men into cooing creatures- and though they tried to snap back into positions of authority, the damage had been done as soon as they started addressing me in baby-talk. The landscape of my first few months in this world was one of courtrooms, prisons, lawyer’s offices. ‘I would not allow them to tell me there was a choice to be made between motherhood and standing up for justice,’ my mother used to say, and I never asked, ‘But what about the choice to be made between motherhood and romantic love?’ (Shamsie 90).

Shehnaz Saeed, had been the darling of the theatre and the small screen, an actress of amazing range who had retired at the peak of her career 15 years earlier in order to devote time to her son. Shahnaz Saeed was the witness to the two depressing years of Samina after the death of the poet. She was a friend of both the poet and Samina. Aasmaani comes in contact with Mir Adnan Akbar Khan, son of Shehnaz Saeed. Adnan Akbar is called Ed by his friends. He works in the STD with Aasmaani. Aasmaani and Ed are similar in so many ways. Both were the shadows of their mothers' strong personalities. They understood each other – the profound hurt and love. Ed came back to Karachi after a terrorist attack on America. When instead of being seen as an individual, he was seen as a whole religion. Ed shared a love-hate bond with his mother. He has a deep love for her, but deep-rooted resentment is also present. Aasmaani soon starts receiving coded letters in the poet's tone. Aasmaani, who still harbours the hope of her mother’s return, is cynical at first, but later believes them to be true. She again starts hoping that if the poet returns, then upon hearing this news, her mother will come back, too. Later, in the novel, it is disclosed that the letters were sent by Ed. He was misleading Aasmaani, trying to control her because he was in love with her. Ed later confesses that the letters he wrote were essentially for his mother's first two letters. The letters addressed to Aasmaani were to make Aasmaani fall in love with him. Since Aasmaani was consumed with the idea of her mother, he chose the coded letters to grab her attention. Aasmaani is disgusted at this prospect. She leaves Ed. She is unable to forgive Ed. Towards the end, Aasmaani reaches a moment of profound clarity and acceptance regarding her mother's passing. After a long, tumultuous journey through grief and sorrow, she confronts the weight of her emotions, allowing herself to fully embrace the reality of her mother's death. This pivotal moment marks a significant turning point in Aasmaani's life, as she begins to unlock the door to healing. Through introspection and the support of loved ones, she discovers that acknowledging her loss is not a sign of weakness, but rather a crucial step towards finding peace. Slowly, the heaviness in her heart lifts, replaced by cherished memories and an enduring love that transcends the pain of absence. In this way, Aasmaani begins to rebuild her life, nurturing a sense of hope and embracing the possibilities that lie ahead.

There is also a significant takeaway from this text that mothers do possess their individual identity rather than being only limited to child-bearing and rearing duties. In Aasmaani’s words:

“When I was twelve and Mama was at the forefront of political activism with the Women’s Action Forum, the mother of one of my friends said I mustn’t be angry with my mother for getting thrown in jail when she should have stayed at home and looked after me; after all, the woman said, she was doubtless just doing it because she thought she could make the world a better place for me. I looked at the woman in contempt and told her I didn’t have to invent excuses or justifications for my mother’s courage, and how dare she suggest that a woman’s actions were only of value if they could be linked to maternal instincts. At twelve, I knew exactly how the world worked and I thought that by knowing it I could free myself of the world’s ability to grind people down with the relentlessness of its notions of what was acceptable behaviour in women.” (Shamsie 254).

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