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## Evolving Masculine Identities in the Novel *The Forgotten Daughter*

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### Abstract

The research focuses on the role of evolving masculine identities like caring masculinities. It also aims at analyzing the role of caring masculinities in domestic ambience. There are lot of dysfunctional elements in the family portrayed by the author Renita D'Silva in the novel *The Forgotten Daughter*. Male characters in the novel with caring attributes helps in sorting out the domestic dysfunctionality thereby establishing a functional familial space. Such caring masculine identities vary sharply from dominant hegemonic forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity plays a major role behind patriarchy due to which there are both male and female victims. When hegemonic masculine identity focuses on oppressing other genders, caring masculinities favor gender equality. This paper analyzes characterizations of major male characters in the novel along with significance of creating awareness regarding evolving forms of masculine identities. Thus, through the in-depth analysis of the novel, this paper contributes to the understanding of the importance of caring masculinities.

**Keywords:** Caring masculinities, Domestic dysfunctionality, family, gender equality, Hegemonic masculinity

### Introduction

Masculinity Studies has gained prominence as it also plays a vital role in attaining gender equality. There are certain evolving masculine identities which are dealt in detail in this study. The role of masculine identities in a domestic space is the research gap which is addressed through this analysis. The conflicts that arise due to different

circumstances in a family can be effectively addressed through caring masculinities. Such evolving forms of masculinity have the potential to eradicate dysfunctions to a larger extent. This is identified through the in-depth study of the novel *The Forgotten Daughter*. The novel deals with Shilpa, the mother of Nisha and Devi. Shilpa gives Nisha for adoption to a couple from London believing the words of an old lady. She

says Shilpa that only if Nisha is given for adoption, she will be alive. Devi gets to know about this only later in her life. The novel traces the journey of Nisha in finding where she belongs. Throughout such intricate circumstances, there is an unwavering support from Manoj, Shilpa's husband, Matt, Nisha's friend in London, and Rohan, Devi's husband (D'Silva). These three male characters in this novel prove that men have the potential to care for their family members. They also highlight that caring masculine identities help in sorting out dysfunctionalities in the family.

### **Evolving Masculine Identities:**

One of the masculine identities which is predominant and always holds a sense of oppressing other genders is hegemonic masculinity. However, there is still a lack of awareness on other evolving masculine identities which help in rescuing other genders from patriarchal domination. Few other evolving masculine identities include Sentimental Masculinities, Caring Masculinities and Positive Masculinities. Sentimental Masculinities clearly indicate that a man has all rights to express emotions. In general, men are taught not to reveal what they feel and there is always a societal pressure in conforming to the standards of the society (Connell). However, Sentimental Masculinity breaks the stereotype. There is a classic example of Sentimental Masculine identity. Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* novel has a male protagonist who cries several times in the novel. He is not projected as weak but simply as a trait of a human being to express emotions. Thus, Sentimental Masculinity helps in creating an awareness among men that expressing one's emotions is normal and healthy. Similarly, Caring Masculinities is a concept in which Karla Elliott, posits that caring masculinities stands straight opposite to the characteristic features of hegemonic masculinities. Most importantly, caring masculinities promote gender equality and understands mutual contribution of men and women in a family's welfare. Such caring

masculine identities also help in achieving work life balance in general. There are other masculine identities like positive masculinities which clearly indicate that alternative to hegemonic masculinity has begun to flourish. So, such alternative masculine identities have the potential to plant the seed of change in which all the genders, including men, can be freed from the domination of hegemonic masculinity (Armengol). The awareness on such emerging concepts is absolutely necessary in order to make the changes in a practically possible manner.

### **Caring masculinities in the Novel:**

Manoj, Matt and Rohan show similar caring attributes which add value to their respective characters in the novel. Manoj, Shilpa's husband shows his caring nature towards Shilpa right from the beginning of the novel. He supports his wife even when people in their neighborhood criticize Shilpa for not having a baby in initial stage. He cares for his wife even when there are several miscarriages. Finally, when Shilpa is pregnant, he tries to fulfill all her wishes. Though, he dies very early, even before the birth of Nisha and Devi, his caring nature and concern towards his family solidly highlight the fact that caring masculinities play a key role in the family. Similarly, Matt is Nisha's friend in London. Nisha grows up as a reserved woman, which is the characteristic nature of her adoptive parents. She finds it difficult to express her feelings. Matt understands this and offers maximum comfort to Nisha. Once, when Nisha gets to know that she was an adopted child, she does not know how to express her emotions. During such critical times, Matt remains a strong support for her by expressing his caring masculine identity. Nisha, undertakes a journey to find her parents in India and it is Matt who stays supportive in this process. Matt's caring nature towards Nisha helps her a lot in carrying out the process of identifying her roots. Even though there are certain dysfunctionalities, it is proved that caring masculinities help in eradicating the

same. Rohan, Devi's husband also shows similar characteristic trait towards Devi. Though, there are numerous dysfunctional elements in both their families, Devi and Rohan stood together during critical times. Devi remains indignant towards her mother, when she gets to know that her mother gave her sister into adoption. Rohan plays a crucial role in resolving such dysfunctionalities by understanding the family dynamics. Therefore, it is obvious that caring masculine identities are against and opposite to hegemonic masculine identities. It is also observed that caring masculine identities can play a positive role through which the family functions well in all aspects (Elliott). Therefore, evolving masculine identities like caring masculinities have a positive impact.

#### **Domestic Ambience:**

The domestic ambience in the novel is portrayed as dysfunctional as there are numerous conflicts. Shilpa, in India, feels about her decision to give her daughter for adoption and is not ready to face the indignation of her another daughter Devi as well. Devi keeps questioning her regarding the decision to give away her daughter. Meanwhile, Devi's in-laws are also not much favorable to Devi after marriage. So, even Devi decides to move to London along with her husband. In London, Nisha's adoptive parents are dead and they just leave her a letter stating she was adopted. Thus, this is exactly the domestic ambience the author has portrayed in the novel. Shilpa, Devi and Nisha reconnect with each after experiencing lots of dysfunctional elements. Caring male characters in their families along with the perseverance of female characters in the novel played a vital role in rebuilding the emotional bond between them. Such caring masculine identities have to be expressed in the society as well. This paves way for a positive change in the society. Such evolving masculine identities also create much needed awareness (Joseph). Though, there are certain dysfunctionalities, Nisha's strong mindset, Devi's courageous nature and Shilpa's genuine bond with both her

daughters unite them in the final stages of the novel. Only because of the presence of men who exhibit caring masculine traits towards women in their lives along with strong determined mindset of women characters, the family becomes functional eventually. This shows that both men and women need to contribute mutually in a family for the growth. If this does not happen, then attaining the functional state of the family becomes highly difficult. Therefore, domestic ambience which is more functional helps in attaining work life balance as well. This is mainly due to the mutually shared work between men and women of the family (Cheal). Thus, it is clear that the domestic ambience is of paramount importance. If a functional state of family is assured as a result of caring masculinities, then the probability of rising conflicts diminishes in a larger scale.

#### **Conclusion**

The role of evolving masculine identities in a familial ambience is obvious through this research. A family is considered to be the basic component of a larger society. So, functionality in a family assures functionality in the society as well. Awareness and practical interest to follow evolving masculine identities like caring masculinities aid further in achieving the positive change. If an awareness is created, people, in general would also know that sentimental masculinity and subordinate masculinities are also victims of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. Thus, it will enhance on a positive note towards attaining gender equality along with functional domestic ambience. Thus, similar to the familial space analyzed in the novel, there are various conflicts in different family structures in the society. This is exactly when support from caring masculine identities is required the most in the family. Therefore, this research highlights the need for understanding the importance of positive alternative masculine identities. An awareness on such masculine identities fosters the emotional and mental well-being of a family. This, in turn, contributes for the welfare of the

society.

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### About the Author

**Dr.S.Karthick** is an Assistant Professor of English in PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore. He has published research articles in the fields of Domestic Fiction and Comparative Literature. His area of specialization is Gender Studies. His academic interests lie in exploring socially relevant themes, and he aspires to contribute further to these fields to promote societal progress.