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Performing Daughters, Un/Supporting Fathers in Selected Narratives

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Abstract: It is fairly evident that an individual's excellence in performance is directly related to one's intellectual caliber, emotional well-being and physical strength. The psychological process in which a daughter values herself to gather a sense of self-worth, evaluates her to gain self-esteem, and analyzes herself to internalize a self-image, constructs her self-identity which affects her performance. Behavioral psychological researchers conclude that the qualitative father-daughter relationships help her in constructing a stable identity, whereas the avoidant and authoritarian fathering makes her unstable identity. But for father's support, it is likely that a daughter may not register her powerful presence in patriarchal setup. Hence, it is a prerequisite that fathers transform their role behavior for empowering daughters to enter the masculine fields that already poses challenges. The present paper focuses on the role of father in daughter's performing a social role identity, through different perspectives of history, patriarchy, gender, psychology and culture, and also aims to explore three narratives of different genres in comprehensive support of arguments and conclusions.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Gender, Performance, Psychology, Self-worth, Self-esteem, Self-image, Identity, Social Roles, Parenting.

Introduction:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women are merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,

--Shakespeare, *As you like it*

The figurative usage informs that a human being happens to perform multiple identities on the stage of life. The word performance is narrowly associated with theatricals and cinematic expressions, but the metaphor herein widens the scope of its meaning in which sense it is used in the present paper.

The word daughter is relevant only in relation to parents. Daughter's trajectory of life is more or less decided by father in patriarchy. Since performance is son's or male's privilege in the rule of father, daughters have been excluded from performing in out-home spaces; however, at in-home space she can achieve expertise in household duties and be satisfied with the exalted status of motherhood. She is rarely located as a rebel against the patriarch because she is overburdened with stereotypes that have social, cultural and religious sanctions.

It is really interesting age to live in and witness the currents of recent history that several phenomena such as industrial revolution, democracy in politics, scientific progress, technology of information superhighway, globalization amongst others have superseded the old agrarian setup of society and have led to economic progress; consequent thereupon fathers have started taking unprecedented interest in daughters' education which culminates into an opportunity for them to secure a job for living a better life. Hence, women have registered their presence in diverse fields of vocation and avocation. There is little relaxation in constraints of patriarchal structures when she is permitted to do a job but not exonerated from simultaneous performing the traditional stereotype roles to maintain household and motherhood. It is to suspend the disapproval of a staunch feminist for having a comprehensive view of social and familial realities in opining that she is perhaps wiser than sacrificial in not wanting to hurt her husband's ego for the sake of conjugal harmony. Her performative excellence can subvert prohibitive structures but cannot abolish them nor obliterate the gender prejudices because to exercise his hegemonic power to control her is a male prerogative in patriarchy.

“On the contrary, she was snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted. Her mind must have been strained and her vitality lowered by the need of opposing this, of disproving that. For here again we come within range of that very interesting and obscure masculine complex which has had so much influence upon the woman's movement: that deep-seated desire, not so much that *she* shall be inferior as that *he* shall be superior, which plants him wherever one looks...” (*A Room of One's Own*, 597)

It is obvious that in patriarchal setup daughters are discouraged to be a performer or as a performer. Generally fathers along with daughters face challenges, opposition and adverse opinions from society. Men with patriarchal mind set either deny women to perform or denigrate her performance. When a competitive woman happens to be at prominent position due to present day democratic setup and excels in achieving a target, again confronts gender prejudiced comparison that If-a-Woman-Can-Do-That-Why-Can't-You-Man?, otherwise on her non performance, she may be inferioritized as woman, Why-Can't-They-Stay-Home-instead-of-Meddling-with-Men's-Job?, connotatively associating them with frailty, incompetitiveness, and timidity, hence, unworthy of entering the masculine fields. Female encounters everywhere male anxiety in overpowering her, whereas in case of his partial or no success to that, she faces misogyny, physical abuse or gets treated in derogatory linguistic expressions. The traditional division of labour such as "Man for the field and woman for the hearth"(Tennyson) is founded on the premise that gender dictates genre of work. Apart from identity of motherhood due to biological or natural exigencies of child bearing and rearing, in this way gender identity lies in performance divided in masculine field and feminine field which have shallow boundaries because “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler,25). Hence a daughter can successfully be a doctor, a teacher, a soldier, a sportswoman, an administrator, a corporate manager, even a spiritual healer, and/amongst other professions that fall under the category of so-called masculine enterprises. In addition, a daughter in performance faces the challenge of a compelling comparison between her performative excellence and her counterpart male's ubiquitous practice of gender coherence based on cultural order and hierarchy principle.

A person's self-identity construct primarily centers upon his social role behavior, and secondly, on his philosophical understanding about his place in larger universe, on his psychological mental makeup, and on his physical attributes. Importantly, the secondary aspects, namely, one's spirituality, personality traits, psychic and physical health, contribute to the quality of performance in social roles. For instance, the existential question -- Who am I? -- can be addressed philosophically, socially, culturally, religiously, psychologically, and politically. Humans are social by innate disposition and society with its structures and systems is preexistent to an individual, consequent thereupon s/he is supposed to perform a role or fit into a role behavior. Since, the social change happens gradually, the individual's identity may also change with respect to social role behavior. Traditionally, a daughter is trained to adhere to the role identity of a home maker and mothering in accordance with the widespread gender based division of labour. As de Beauvoir contends that, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'(de Beauvoir, 267). She argues that femininity is not an outcome of biological, intellectual or psychological differences but a social, cultural and civilizational construct. A woman's identity is determined through learning her role from man and from social and familial environment. It leads to logical inference that she can perform any role provided her father involves himself in her(daughter's) socializing and education. Further, It can be deduced that woman as feminine gender is not a final construct because becoming is a process not an end. That the repeated actions and reprimanding make her adept at feminine habits and accordingly social role behaviors are imposed on her. If father, being imminent role model, educates her in counter gender behavior, she may avail chances to perform such social roles as fall under masculine category. Her enacting male dominated role or profession marks a transformation in male attitude that "exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction"(Butler-24).

It won't be an exaggeration to emphasize the functional importance of urbanization, economic progress, and scientific and technological development in daughters' emancipation and fathers' evolution. Urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon that prompts fathers to rethink about certain norms of traditional patriarchy. Anonymity is characteristic feature of the overcrowded modern urban cities and the living cost is so high that every member of a middle class family including daughters is supposed to do a job for a better living. In addition, the inhabitants of small towns and villages try to adopt modernity under the rampant awareness spread out by electronic and print media. Fathers as patriarch are relenting in rigid gender constraints to encourage daughters to have an independent career not necessarily as much to support native family as to become financially independent women, which, much to his satisfaction and peace ensures her achieving an esteemed status not only in society but also at her in-laws. Marriage is not out of consideration and its allied issue of dowry gets almost resolved owing to her financial freedom. It is rather ostensible that a daughter gets overburdened with three significant segments of her life: professionalism, motherhood, and womanhood. Achieving excellence in professional career is directly related with her academic qualification, self-esteem, self-image and self-worth. Motherhood is bestowed upon her as a biological compulsion, and womanhood entails role behavior such as maintaining her household. A father has also transformed his behavior; he is not merely a provider, protector and supporter, contrarily, he changes from authoritarian to nurturing and caring parent, from distal to proximal relationship with her, from stay-away from home to stay-home, from aloofness to involvement.

The present paper attempts to explore father-daughter interaction in three narratives, namely, *Dance Like a Man*, a movie (2004), *Ek Kasbe ke Notes* (2012) a Hindi novel and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), with reference to daughters' performance and fathers' supportive or unsupportive behavior.

Dance like a man is an offbeat cinematic narrative based on a play with eponymous title. Its screenplay is written by Mahesh Dattani in collaboration with its director Pamela Rooks. The action shows the parents' extraordinary focus on their daughter's career to make her a professional Bharatnatyam dancer. Lata, the daughter of Jairaj, a Gujarati, and Ratna, a South Indian; they make an aged couple who have been established Bharatanatyam dancers in their prime. The trio constitutes a nuclear family living in metropolitan city of Bangalore. Jairaj's career is destroyed by his father, Seth Amritlal, through a conspiratorial alliance with Ratna. At the behest of her father-in-law, she deliberately outdoes him and he is compelled to perceive his mediocrity in dancing skills, and thereby his self-esteem gets injured to the extent that he stops dancing professionally. The art was very dear to his soul, consequently, he turns alcoholic. Ratna becomes a celebrity, and is too

preoccupied with her performances to deliver her duties of motherhood towards Shankar, the Infant, that he dies due to double dose of opium administered on him by herself and the Aayah in ignorance. The guilt feeling gathered upon the couple and they abandoned their career altogether.

When Lata was born, they decided to realize their unfulfilled dreams through her in proxy. Consequently, she undergoes a regular rigorous training imparted by her parents, and especially her father has taught her his self composed dance items of ashtapadi based upon *Geeta Govindam* which is acclaimed a classic for its sensual pining love of Radha for Krishna. Her father is modern in his outlook and a detached performer that it does not prevent him teaching his own daughter the aesthetics of spiritual sensuality. Apart from being a responsible provider, protector and supporter of his daughter, he enacts as a teacher, guide, mentor and Guru for her. Thus, they are in unique relationship. Her mother also initiates her into Southern culture of dancing and cookery. She turns out not only a professional performer of the dance art but also a deft homemaker.

Regarding dance, Jairaj's father, Seth Amritlal, like an epitome of traditional patriarchy, considered dance the profession of prostitutes, hence, not a worthy career for a respectable woman of noble elite class. He argues with Jairaj that his guru's feminine way of walking along with his growing long hair is a gender trouble. His prudent remark emanates from patriarchal mindset: "A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic" (*Dance Like a Man*, 50). His gender based division of art forms sounds narrow-minded, prejudiced and illogical, too backward for intellectualized urban setting. Yet, interestingly, he believes the cause of his defeat in election lies in the ignominy brought about by his son's profession. Political ideologues and the uneducated voters play upon demagogy. It passes unacknowledged that a genuine interest in art performance is a medium of expression for an individual's genius irrespective of one's gender identity. Jairaj has survived his own father's wrath, but he determines he won't let Lata face crises in realizing their shared dreams.

The mother knows the most significant aspects of the art as acquired from an old devdasi called Chenni Amma: that a dancer should perform with total surrender, mentally and physically, to the act of dance like a devotee surrenders to Shiva in order to transport the audiences to other heightened plane of existence. The performer, the performance and the spectator get tuned in and set on the same frequency, that one cannot separate the dancer from the dance in a live performance. Lata has achieved this perfection and exhibits it in her debut performance. She brings laurels to her father from her arangram and becomes the cynosure of all and sundry. Her father feels proud of her on achieving the long time cherished goal. Lata has high self-esteem and self-worth. Lata knows that her career is far more important than her marriage for her father. Simultaneously, she comprehends that along with the performative career in art she would not be left with enough time and energy to fulfill her responsibilities of a wife and motherhood. So she tries to persuade Vishwas, her fiancé, to postpone begetting children, nevertheless, toward the end of the movie, she was found in the family way and determined to rear up offspring even by postponing her dancing career. Because she discovered the cause of her parents' injured relationship. Truly, performance is super but family is superior still. It is through her parents' live example and mother's guidance that Lata happened to unite her right to professional career with her duties as mother and wife. But for their metropolitan identity, the trio, father, mother, and daughter, wouldn't have realized their dreams.

Neelesh Raghuvanshi's masterpiece *Ek Kasbe ke Notes* is a work of fiction in which two different genres of novel -- social realism and autobiographical fiction -- have been merged together. The narrative depicts the daily life of a poor family of eleven members with meager resources living in a typical Indian town called Ganj Basoda ensconced on Parasari River in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh. The children affectionately address their father as Kakka or Kaka, who involves everyone in running his family dhaba. Because of financial constraints, employing servants is not possible, and consequently, daughters help him doing all kinds of work there, and when son overtakes dhaba, his business acumen makes it well furnished and finally closes it for a cycle shop for a more lucrative business, to Kakka's disappointment in him. But he forcefully retires Kaka. He gives in ruefully and appears elderly, forlorn, weak and sad because he cannot help working as his moto in life is Work-is-Worship. The daughter-narrator named Babli, the sixth among nine siblings, recollects randomly the selective events from her life and arranges them in the text that as a whole it appears like a

"collage of memoirs"(Aggarwal, *Ek Kasbe ke Notes: Smritiyon ka Collage*. It is story of a father-daughter relationship, the father provides equal opportunity to education to make them independent career women, but his dreams are shattered due to successive failures in them and the pre-marital inter-caste and inter-religious affairs or liasoning of three daughters, Shalu, Shiva and Seema. The daughter-narrator keeps her promises and by securing a job of lectureship ensures her entry into higher strata of society which is a dream come true for both, otherwise, he has already changed into "a tragic figure like a kasbai King Lear -- the difference is that only one daughter empathises with him and converts his moment of defeat into a touching victory". (EKkN 222.) (All the translation of original is mine)

Kakka is a *sattvic* personality. He instills confidence and courage into his daughters, who occasionally felt inferiority owing to their association with dhaba, because they know that it is not a much respected job. He effects a change in their attitude by asserting, "Why to be ashamed in honest labouring?"(09). Kakka converts their weaknesses into their strengths and dhaba becomes their identity. They excel in their performance at work because of the boosting up of spirits by Kakka's positive parenting. He doesn't care for people's opinionated objection to grown up daughters' working at dhaba. But he gets jolted by a setback of the unhappy marriages of three elder daughters, Asha, Usha and Kiran. He decides that the rest of the five daughters will complete their education first, and then find a job for financial freedom and thereafter marriages can be arranged. He is strong-willed. He has already trained the girls to face challenges and feel comfortable in away-home spaces. He little cares for their mother's regular complaints about daughters' mostly staying away from home and she doesn't find a quality time to spend with them so as to inculcate feminine behavior in them. His express purpose is to prepare daughters for upper social mobility through education and afterwards performance in diverse jobs. He thinks big, as he wants to make Shalu and Shiva doctors, without considering the incurring of heavy expenditures of medical education.

His political identity is affiliated with Indira Gandhi's Congress Party. He supports Babli in her contesting for the post of President in College Student's Union through engineering her election campaign. His aim is to develop leadership qualities in her. His affectionate and caring support helps daughters develop a stable identity and high self-esteem. The narrator gratefully states, "Our father burnt his last drop of oil to make us, the batties, light"(218). The narrator acknowledges that Kakka stood by her side through thick and thin:

"When the narrator gets a job of Rupees one thousand per month, she came running home to her father, who still extended full support to her. He never lost patience amidst other family member's cursing words and gossiping about me. Having talked miscellaneous topics he would come to the main subject, 'My dear daughter, you will certainly succeed, if not today, then tomorrow. Bear in mind that the wrong path must be avoided. Don't panic. In big cities children easily go astray'... Father saw her off reminding her, 'Bai, don't lose hope whatever happens we will face it'... Kakka ignited my self-confidence as he used to fuel the coals into flame in the oven through his powerful fanning"(207).

The narrative represents a positive father figure, far ahead of and above the traditional outlook of common people in surrounding environment. He displays supportive attitude toward daughters. His bonding, especially with Babli, strengthens, and she identifies herself with him.

In Anita Desai's novel, *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), there are four father-daughter relationships that inform the sad and tragic plight of daughters vis-a-vis their fathers' unsympathetic gestures, unsupportive attitude, and authoritarian control over them. The third person narrator unfolds the circular plot, first, depicting Uma's story through her point of view, and the second part is told through Arun's point of view. The first part of the story is set in a small town in India with occasional references of Aruna's and Anamika's environment at Bombay. But the second part is set in America, to bring home to the readers the same gender biases and stories of negativity, neglect and emotional abuse across cultures. Uma is forty three years of age, divorcee, and dependent on her father for a living, frustrated and subjugated. Her parents present "their Siamese twin existence on the veranda swing"(FF, 6). They are addressed as PapaMama or Mamapapa or Papaandmama in single breath. Their names are not divulged by the author. Uma finds that Papa is over domineering, authoritarian, and a traditional patriarch. With regard to solving her problems through religious austerities, Uma remains in a state of chaos, due to lack of guidance and support from her father, who, on the contrary, exhibits indifference and a secular attitude. Papa is dissatisfied at Uma's educational failures and her

clumsiness in her performances. Papa's "chosen role was scowling, Mama's, scolding. Since every adult had to have a role, and these were their parents', the children did not question their choice"(FF,10).

There is no communication between Uma and her father and usually mother acts as go between whenever he requires saying something to her. Uma feels insecure, inadequacy and rejection due to poor interpersonal communication with her Papa, who represents a negative father figure, least aware of her emotional needs. He is narcissistic and unsympathetic in his behavior to one and all. On being an ill-fathered daughter, she grows up into low self-esteem, and low self-confidence to the detrimental of her psychic health, and she suffers epileptic seizures, whenever she feels anxious and overstressed.

Being semi-educated, Uma cannot find a good job and her social role behavior is confined to household. Dr. Dutt happens to propose Uma a job which Papa immediately rejects because he thinks the career oriented and financially independent women pose a threat to his authority and chauvinism. Finally, her fair chances of getting a new societal role identity through job are foiled. She is neither allowed to use telephone, nor to choose friends, nor to enjoy little sojourn with her ascetic aunt, Meera Masi, nor to find happiness in cousin Ramu's company. Finding herself in utter disgraceful subjugation, she attempts suicide by drowning but fortunately saved and the waters mercifully wash away her epilepsy for good. Contrarily, her sister Aruna escapes from father's negative influence, neglect, and avoidant behavior, partly because she is more beautiful and intelligent in her studies. However, despite all her qualities she is allowed only to become a housewife. Bakul uncle's daughter Anamika wins a scholarship to Oxford but her father denies her to avail this opportunity. Like a traditional patriarch, he gets her married to a rather aged and selfish person afflicted with mother fixation. She silently suffers at her in-laws. She is burnt to death by her mother-in-law and husband for dowry and her inability to give birth to children. She was no more an object of utility. Despite the evidence, her native family of lawyers does not file a case against them; rather their silence is painful to Uma. In America, their alter ego, a teenager daughter Melanie is estranged, neglected and unsupported by her father. She turns a case of bulimia. Thus all these daughters in both cultures develop psychopathological symptoms due to insecure, unsupportive and distal relationship with their fathers.

Of these three Narratives, the first two, *Dance Like a Man* and, *Ek Kasbe ke Notes* are found representing fathers as supporting their daughters, who excelled in their respective performances, whereas the fathers in *Fasting, Feasting* have been found practicing negative and authoritarian parenting extending no support to daughters who become low spirited, uncompetitive and clumsy. These daughters appear unfit for any performance in social roles.

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