



Father-Daughter Relationship in *Banaras*

Dr. Pradeep Kumar, Associate Professor of English, Government College Safidon

ABSTRACT: Father-Daughter Relationship can be oversimplified in binary opposites such as positive/negative or good/bad. *Banaras* movie presents a positive father-daughter relationship, as Shwetambari identifies with her father Mahendranath, but the present paper aims at explaining the grey shades in their relationship that accounts for the drastic turns in daughter's trajectory of life. She has high self-worth and self-esteem. Her father has raised her in a permissive parenting style and secure attachment pattern. He reflects her image in positive qualities and she proudly possesses *sattvik* Guna that her Papa exhibits. Equally significant is the role of family as socializing agent: it makes aware its young ones about social differences and cultural prejudices, or it adopts ideal ways to overlook socio-cultural biases. Mahendranath committed the mistake of posing himself as a liberal humanitarian in front of her. Ironically, this image of an inner father gets shattered when Shwetambari overhears his guilty confession. This was too much for her; she drifts away from him and returns after sixteen years only to forgive him at his last breath. Her expressive images on the plasma screen reveal her inner mind and her true self that informs her mystical vision and also her focus on realizing salvation from worldly desires. She is above grudges, jealousies, ambitions and mundane ideology of discrimination. She looks at her family relationship in a very compassionate understanding without demanding anything in return. She resolves the conflicting emotions that generated from the father-daughter relationship.

KEYWORDS: Self-esteem, self-worth, parenting style, attachment patterns, inner father, mysticism.

It can be comprehensively observed that father-daughter relationship is shaped out of parenting styles, attachment patterns, dys/functional family and socio-cultural systems and structures. In addition, father and daughter are two individuals, who correlate, as they contribute to the development and dimension of their relationship and consequent thereupon it adds to their personalities. The present study offers different perspectives to look into the father-daughter relationship and relocate it in cultural understanding with reference to *Banaras* movie. The representation of father-daughter relationship in this cinematic narrative is herein explored in psychosocial and cultural paradigms to obtain a comprehensive view. The word daughter is primarily relevant only in relation to parents and vice-versa. Their relationship is a normative social position embedded in family, which is the basic structure of society, but it is marginalized in interfamilial relationships owing to the lesser degree of communication interaction and emotional intimacy between them across all societies. Having a daughter gives new meaning to a father's life. Likewise, a daughter derives a sense of being and belonging from the immediate agents/subjects (father, mother and elders) who help to add to her developing identity in formative years. Equally significant is the existential purpose that all family members locate in socio-familial ties as they perform respective roles to support social structures: father and daughter have role identities based upon patterned behaviours, norms and values. Equally worth noting is the suggestion-imitation phenomenon that runs a society, and its process in a daughter's mind leads her to model her behaviour accordingly through observing her father's

relationship with significant others such as her mother, elders in family and people in society; which gets reflected in essence in her relationship with him. The quality of father-daughter relationship is determined not only by the external factors such as language, rituals, rites, myths, literature, signs, and symbols of a society in which the family is rooted but also by the father's personality traits, education, financial condition, social status and mental health.

Father-daughter relationship in *Banaras* movie is "unique" owing to its distinct feature of telepathic communication made by a father, on his deathbed, to his daughter, who has been away from home for the last sixteen years, and of a daughter's mystic powers like a saint (Burke and Stets, 39). The phenomenon of telepathy has been a part of human interaction. Herein the present usage gets validated and elucidated through comparison with other instances available in Magic Realism and Gothic genres of novel, such as, Salim Sinai in a virtual conference with compatriots born together reads their minds in *Midnight's Children*, and in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester in his deteriorated health summons telepathically Jane, who immediately embarks on journey to join him. So does Shwetambari.

The movie opens with the introductory scene in which Mahendranath is lying on his deathbed in his grand mansion at Banaras; he is seriously ill, duly attended by his wife. He is sieged by torments of guilty conscience in his foul play about his relationship with his daughter. He regrets that he didn't have the courage to act promptly in favour of his daughter and to disregard the expectation of a caste prejudiced society. He says, 'I want to see her once. So many years have passed, she hasn't yet forgiven Banaras... Tell her (on telephone), I don't have much time.' Apparently he is burdened with guilt that he hadn't been able to protect his daughter against the treacherous killing of her fiancé, Soham. Even he is not ready to forgive his wife for her criminal alliance in honour killing. However, audiences aren't yet informed enough to comprehend this look of reproach in his eyes. Having given consent to telephone call, he murmurs in delirium, 'Shwetambari', and the theatre hall resonates with his voice. Whereas, in Mauritius, Shwetambari is in the middle of her address to a congregation of followers, wherein she delves into a metaphysical inquiry to bring home the pointed difference between Truth and imaginative conceptualization of truth that humans create and worship under psychological compulsion to get rid of anguish, fear and terror. She concludes in placid alacrity by repeating the unsolved basic question: 'What is Truth?' That is the end of her sermon. One can safely infer from her discourse that Truth is an undiscovered error. She happens to suddenly dismiss the assembly without observing the usual rituals of prayer at the end. Her awareness about happenings at a distance in terms of time and space informs her access to paranormal planes. Only the chosen few are blessed with such powers, and an unaffected disposition is one of the prerequisites for this, as Dr Bhattacharya, after a miraculous treatment of his lung cancer done by Babaji, whom he saw in physical form, says, "Your daughter is a Devi. That which is simple is Truth" (*Banaras*). She has achieved a spiritually enlightened state through self-realization, which her father has not, so he is not endowed with any conscious mystic capacity, but the power of flickering flame of his life force at its end makes the telepathic call. On being told about the telephonic conversation, she says she already knew it and she stands at a crisis of indecisiveness in going home to her father. Shwetambari reminisces about her past, and flashback technique is employed to interject the episodes of earlier happenings, which represents in vivid detail her relationship with her father. It is fairly evident that Mahendranath is her biological father for her mundane activities, ambitions and aspirations; and Babaji is spiritual father to both Soham and she, but he met her only once, touched her by the shoulder, kissed her forehead in affectionate blessing, and he does not meddle with the issue of their marriage, and in a prior event also he remains just an uninvolved witness to a sweeper woman's rescue of helpless abandoned infant whom, later, he gives a name, Soham (meaning, *Tat tvam asi*, I am that super consciousness, from *Chhaandagyo Upanishad*; and *Anul Haq*, I am God, in Sufi traditions). Later it is also discovered that whenever she concentrates in meditative moods to seek help in compassionate healing of fellow beings, it is granted by Babaji's grace. Dr Bhattacharya is a case in point. When Dr Bhattacharya sees him in physical form and experiences the miracle in getting cured and

feeling better enough to give up wearing a mask for safe breathing, Shwetambari was playing on piano as if in dynamic meditation seeking Babaji's blessings for him. Her relationship with her spiritual father Babaji does not get recognized nor sanctioned by science which, according to her, is 'confused rationality', and which, according to Dr Bhattacharya, is 'hallucination', hence requiring immediate psychoanalytic treatment. She is among those chosen few who get captivated by the *leela* of super consciousness. However, such individuals have had to pay the price in worldly affairs, so does Shwetambari in the tragic death of her fiancé and also in the tragic failure of faith and support from her personal father. True, her father's role is instrumental in her becoming a successful spiritual healer.

In fact, the daughter internalizes the characteristic behaviour of father and others so that her self-image gets constructed, i.e. how she views herself and values or devalues herself (Krampe, 2009). It depends largely on the quality of interaction, for instance, intimate interactions with her father of helping, caring, listening, and filial attachment are genuinely exhibited when father involves himself with daughter in her games, plans and play, which induces in her positive emotions of happiness. On the contrary, negative interactions --- when father is avoiding, rejecting, irating, criticizing, and aloof --- create emotions of fear, anger, and sadness in her. Father is the first mature male in her childhood and the pivotal entity in her family. So she takes him as a mirror that reflects her image. On evaluation of the image she experiences positive or negative emotions. In the positive image, she is proud of herself; in the negative image, she is ashamed of herself.

What is Shwetambari's past that changes her life trajectory of her pursuits in worldly love for Soham and tremendous attachment to her father towards spiritual love for mankind? There happened significant tragic incidents in her pre-sainthood life. First, the death of her Soham causes her unbearable mental pain. What could be the response of a person to the tragic death of someone near and dear? One may turn into stone due to trauma, as is the case of the girl in the beginning of the narrative. Shwetambar's response is different, as she cries out her heart when looks at the dead body of Soham. Crying is a healthy or positive sign to save one from madness or post traumatic stress syndrome. It is important to point out that she gets her father's emotional support and affectionate care at this critical juncture. After all there is a loving father to console her, and she survives the tragedy Owing to her father's teaching messages from scriptures, she seems to become mentally strong and emotionally stable; and she expresses her wish to resume her studies. But the next moment she is terribly shocked to find Soham's ring in her mother's cupboard. It flashed through her mind like a bolt from the blue that the murder is a conspiracy of her mother, and the ring is given as a proof. This is the second time she cries from the core of her existence, calling in her Papa, who immediately embraces her in his arms. It is unbearable to lose a sense of belongingness to mother, who happens to be a primary caregiver. Importantly, at this crisis, she finds again refuge in her father figure. Thirdly, it happened that she overhears her parents' conversation that concerns her.

Gayatri Devi. I sometimes feel that she has got some miraculous power. Have you noticed the shine in her eyes? I can't look straight into her eyes.

Mahendranath. You know why? There is a reason for this. It is our guilt consciousness. We have been preparing for the wedding ceremony, but at the same time we have been pressuring him to refuse in person to marry her. If it isn't deceitful and a sin, what is it then?

Gayatri Devi. What else could we do? Did you want that we would give our daughter's hand to that of a low-caste?

Mahendranath. No, Gayatri, you...

Shwetambari. Papa...you too, you too, why?! No, No...(Banaras).

Consequently, she left Banaras. She is once again terribly shocked, and by none other than her own father. The positive, supporting, caring, protecting, providing and affectionate mage of the inner father gets shattered. Her personal father has betrayed her. Her shocking reaction echoes the famous utterance of Julius Caesar, You-Too-Brutus, in Shakespeare's history play, that has become a modern cliché for being betrayed by a close friend or relative. Her father, being the only prop of her life, has caused irreparable loss to her. Here are slings and arrows of broken images of the father figure, failures and frustrations may lead the subject to different paths; first, she may become self destructive if her depressive feelings turn inwards leading to post traumatic stress. If turned outside in the form of anger, she may become desensitized and behave violently. She may convert her negative thoughts and energy into socialism of a kind.

She may transform her state of being in *Ishq-e-majazi* to the next stage of *Ishaq-e-haqiqi* i.e., from worldly love to spiritual / Sufi love. The story of love is as simple as that in its narrow expressions it gets limited to one's family, but in its expansion it embraces all creation. She started the journey of love with father, then with Soham, but the deceit, deception and tragic separation from the loved ones led her to universal love. Truly, it is a prerequisite that first one has to ruthlessly stop loving the family and friends, if one wants to love all like a saint. She leaves her family behind to realize her potential in sainthood. Shwetambari's case falls under this category. She becomes a saint and a mystic spiritual healer. It happens only because of her spiritual father, Babaji's grace.

Shwetambari is deeply in love with Soham, finding in him a divine inspiration, and totally unaware of disapproval of the community in Banaras. The news brought unhappiness, anger and strong reprimanding at this Identity non-verification. To Shwetambari's woes, it is her father's hypocrisy in matters of caste differences. Her "inner father" is in conflict with her personal father (Krampe). She rebels, as do the children brought up in permissive parenting style. Mahendranath immediately covers up the damage by affectionately reconciling with her and brings her to supper. He discovers that Soham is a Hindu boy who was abandoned and found with a locket of Aum around his neck but sadly brought up by a sweeper woman. But this is too poor testimony to please the community, more importantly to convince her. Her father also remained indecisive and ambivalent. The larger forces entangle the family and lead this father-daughter relationship to a disaster. Nevertheless, both father and daughter reconcile with each other at the latter's death bed. The narrative presents a classic case of father-daughter relationship.

References:

Burke, Peter J. and Jan E. Stets. *Identity Theory*. Oxford University Press. 2009.

Krampe, Edythe M. "The Inner Father". *Fathering*. Vol. I No. 2 June 2003. Men's Studies Press. 2003.

Krampe, Edythe M. "When is the Father Really There? A Conceptual Reformulation of Father Presence". *Journal of Family Issues*. Vol.30 Number 7 July 2009.

Parashar, Pankaj. *Banaras*. <https://www.amazon.com/Banaras-Mystic-Story-PankajParashar/dp/B003038L3W> 2006.

References:

Burke, Peter J. and Jan E. Stets. *Identity Theory*. Oxford University Press. 2009.

Goings, William T. "Store and Mockingbird: Two Pulitzer Novels about Alabama". Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Edited by Harold Bloom. The Random House Group Limited. 2007.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. The Random House Group Limited. 2010

