

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE MODALITIES OF FILIAL
RELATIONSHIP IN SELECT
MASTERPIECES IN LITERATURE ACROSS THE WORLD**

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Abstract

The paper focuses critically on the modalities of filial relationship as reflected in some of the masterpieces in English literature which ranges from British to Indian, Australian, American and Canadian authors. Firstly, it refers to the mythological and epical writings in India like The Ramayan and The Mahabharat in which both the examples of fidelity as well as infidelity are there. Then, it goes on to Shakespeare's King Lear in which filial ingratitude as well as innocence has been revealed with a greater dramatic flavour. Two famous modern tragedies of Arthur Miller viz. Death of a Salesman and All My Sons have been discussed to show how generation gap and dream fulfillment leads to the tragic consequence of the protagonist. A couple of selected poems of Robert Frost have been included in this to reflect on the poet's thrust on the cycles of nature and natural process which stand symbolic for filial relationship. In addition, the authors have also reflected on the family intimacy and responsibility; sadness of parents for neglecting their children; and sensitivity to the upbringing of the children, mostly in the contemporary writings. Finally, focus has been given on how it is treated as *batsalya rasa* in Indian literary tradition.

Keywords: fidelity and infidelity, filial ingratitude, dream fulfillment, intimacy and responsibility, *batsalya rasa*

Introduction

Filial relationship is the calomel of the key crosscurrents in the stream of human society. It can be interpreted as the cream of socio-cultural and psychological prodigy. This has been the natural attribute in animals to some extent too. It is a natural provision that sustains the human world in different dispositions. 'Filius' is actually originated from a Latin word which means son or daughter. 'Filial', in English lexically means "having to do with a son or daughter, of or expected from a son or daughter." It further explains the word as "connected with the way children behave towards the parents: filial affection / duty". Socially, the love, caring and sharing among parents and children is of immense value. But, at times things are altered and the consequence becomes topsy-turvy.

The Ramayan and the Mahabharat: Filial Relationship at the Epical Height To begin with, it would be pertinent enough to say that there are instances in the great epics like The

Ramayanth Parshuram kills his own mother in an act of filial piety. Two main challenges faced by him and he chose to resolve both killing a woman and disobeying father. Of course, there were some other potential ritualistic and moral causes behind this. Instances of filial piety have been demonstrated in two different manners in it. They are the instances of Shraavan and Ram and Lakshman. Rama leaves Ayodhya despite his birth right to be the king because his father's wishes but also out of love to fulfil his stepmother's wishes. Lakshman also leaves with Rama as a possible means of piety towards his brother. Shraavan carried his blind parents on his shoulders for pilgrimages, an epitome of complete devotion to his parents. Shraavan's death results in the karma for King Dashrath. King Dashrath also dies of the shock of sending his most beloved son Ram to exile for fourteen years.

In The Mahabharat, there are burning instances of filial love of Dhritarastra for all his sons, especially for Duryodhan which led to the final war at Kurukshetra. Kansa proved to be an example of filial ingratitude. In another exemplary manner, the real filial love in it has been revealed by Yasoda as the mother of Sri Krishna. The love of mother to a child has been very delicately reflected by Yasoda and Rohini for both Sri Krishna and Balaram.

Shakespeare's King Lear: Philosophising Father- Daughter Relationship

To go beyond Indian domain in this context, it also expands the dimension with varieties of filial relationship. In English literature, we have a couple of good examples of filial relationship. There is reflection on filial ingratitude in Shakespeare's King Lear. In the beginning, he had deep faith in the words of his two daughters Goneril and Regan. His youngest and the most humble daughter Cordelia became the victim of his anger because she could not satisfy his expectations and ego. She went by the law of the society which was disliked by him. But, later on he realised it vehemently at the point of catastrophe. He developed much of filial love for Cordelia as he expressed in utter madness that:

We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies,....(ActV, Sc.III.P.159)

This happens to be one of burning examples of artistic portrayal of filial relationship in literature. In King Lear, the main plot, which is focused around the error of King Lear, is mirrored by the subplot, which is based on the Earl of Gloucester's mistake. The main plot runs parallel with the subplot in order to reiterate one of the main themes of the play, filial ingratitude. At first, both Gloucester and Lear are unaware of their disloyal offspring those who take advantage of them, and they have wrongfully accused their virtuous heirs. By the time they discover their mistakes, it is too late to correct them.

Gloucester banishes his son Edgar in a fit of passion, just as Lear banishes Cordelia. Both are drawn to their “evil” children’s flattery. These children then display filial ingratitude when they betray their fathers by deceiving them. Lear and Gloucester both suffer for having trusted the children who flattered them. In Act II, Scene IV, Lear pleads with his daughters to allow him to keep some knights. He reminds his daughter Regan, “I gave you all,” (Line 245). She then replies, “...and in good time you gave it.” (Line 246). Though Lear gives his daughters everything they ask him, when he begs them to “reason not the need,” the selfish and heartless sisters refuse. Much like Lear, Gloucester loses his luck to his child. Edmund who betrays him by giving a letter to Cornwall, and thus assumes Gloucester’s title, “This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke instantly know; and of that letter too: this seems a fair deserving, and must draw me that which my father loses; no less than all: the younger rises when the old doth fall.” (Act III, Scene III, Lines 18- 23). Then, Lear goes mad, asking Tom O’Bedlem if he had “give[n] all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?” (Act III, Scene IV, Lines 48-49). The play thus ends with unprecedented purging of emotion.

This shows that his reliance on his children was out of a moral responsibility. But, his misjudgment and ego makes him stand on the wheel of fire.

Arthur Miller’s Popular Tragedies: Father-Son Relationship as a Modern Social Reality

Father-son relationship is a common feature of the American plays written during the first half of the 20th century. Through a family’s interaction with one another, the reader is able to make out the conflicts of the story. In *Death of a Salesman*, the interaction between Willy Loman and his sons Happy and Biff allows us to comment on father-son relationships. Willy would like to be able to count on his two sons, but he knows he cannot. The older one is Biff who is a failure in his life, and the younger one Happy has a steady job. But nobody of them can meet the demand of their father. Thus, there are ups and downs in their relationship at different stages of their life. Though the father-son relationship is quite well at the beginning, it gets twisted with the passing time and the gap is never bridged up. Father favours Biff over Happy which leads to social conflicts.

It is evident that in the most of the father-son relationships matters here, father wants to become more of a "player" in his son’s life than his son believes is necessary. The causes of this are many and can be explained in different dimensions. Miller is able to provide an instance of this action through the activities of Willy Loman. When Biff comes home to recollect himself, Willy feels it as failure. Because Willy blindly wants his oldest son Biff to become successful in every possible dimension, he tries to take matters into his own hand as he says, "I’ll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time." (16). The

cause that Biff visits home is to look for what he wants in life. Since Willy gets in the way, the story becomes more twisted. Partially due to Willy's continuous interference in Biff's life, they have diverse ideas leading to conflict as to what the American dream fits. Willy believes that salesmanship is the greatest job a man could have. Biff, however is of the opinion that the most inspiring job a man is working outdoors.

When their two dreams clash against each other, it becomes discouraging to Willy because he believes that his way is the perfect way. Thus, the father-son relationship reaches at such a stage that Biff cannot tolerate Willy. The frustration of Biff begins, and he does not feel comfortable with the presence of his father.

Miller takes an attempt to show dramatically the conflicts that take place as a result of a father not preaching his sons any morals. Willy implants in Biff's idea that a person can do anything as long as they are popular. Because of this, Biff is addicted to stealing. The reason he lost his job with Oliver is because he steals basketballs from him. He has problem all his life because he steals and says, "I stole myself out of every good job since high school." (131). This is this cause that has created all his troubles with Willy, and Willy is to blame because he never told him differently. Happy also has a bitter relationship with Willy because of the lack of values. Willy always tells them that to be popular is the best quality to have in life. In the meantime, Happy meets some women at the restaurant where he and Biff are supposed to meet Willy. When Willy starts to disintegrate on them, Happy tries to ignore him so that he will not look otherwise in front of the women. "No, that's not my father. He's just a guy." (115). Willy never instils family pride in them for which a gap exists in their relationship with him. But Willy as a responsible father always tries to do something for his sons and never wants to depend on them. He commits suicide only because it would bring twenty thousand dollars of insurance amount which will help Biff to make a good fortune. It is noticed that the son's respect is shown after his death when Happy as he says, "Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's only dream you can have-to come out number-one man."(111).

Miller's All My Sons is set during World War-II, and it is all about a successful businessman Joe Keller, who fails to fulfil his social responsibilities and then fails to recognise the role of society after he turns crazy by his sheer lust for money. He lives peacefully with his wife Kate and his son Chris, but he had persisting problem that another son Larry had died in a plane crash during the war.

The death of their eldest son Larry during the war has completely shaken Kate. Even after so many years, she believes that Larry would be alive somewhere. Joe Keller is a war profiteer during the war, and with his business partner, Steve Deever, he had set up his own business to ship cylinders for the fighter planes. However, Steve Deever, father of

Ann Deever (now engaged to Joe's daughter Chris) is in prison when he was found guilty of shipping cracked cylinder heads for fighter jets. This is supposed to be resulted in the death of 21 fighter pilots. The cylinders were shipped in the absence of Joe Keller, who was sick and on leave on that day. However, Steve never stopped claiming that he had shipped the cylinders on the orders of Joe over a telephone call. Joe finally realises that he has done blunder in supplying defective gas cylinders which caused the death of the pilots in the flight. He accepts that the loss of the lives of the pilots is not only the loss of the sons of their parents but also of the soil and he neglected a national responsibility. Here, the filial relationship transcends the boundary of family and goes up to the national responsibility.

Filial Relationship in the Poems of Robert Frost: A Blend of Reason and Emotion

When it comes to dealing with filial relationships as an important aspect of life, it is Frost's forte as he reflects on the child who gets its identity from his parents and the parents too give meaning to their own lives because of their children. The pride on bringing new life on earth and contributing in its evolution is in fact the most memorable moment that every parents look forward to.

His poem "Spring Pools" is symbolic of this: "The trees that have it in their pent up buds" (7) are a symbol of fertility and energy heralding new life. The buds will spring into flowers from which will emerge a new fruit. This fruit will give rise to a new seed and the process of fertility will again start. This is how new life emerges in humans too. It is pure, sacred and vibrant like the spring pool with a rare radiance, purity and innocence about it which is easily inclined to the immediate environment. It is like wet clay that takes the shape of the mould it's put into.

A very picturesque and graphic image to this effect is reflected "In the Home Stretch", where the woman is so overburdened with her everyday chores and other social commitments that she barely finds time for her offspring or spouse. What Frost depicted through the poem aptly suits its title, "In the Home Stretch" which metaphorically relates to the steady stream of household chores that never seem to end, no matter how laboriously one works.

"A Girl's Garden" is in fact an autobiographical portrait of Frost. Experience and struggle taught him a lot. In his later years, when he lost three of his children and his wife, who was a source of inspiration to him. It was this experience and struggle that helped pave a path for him. Though totally shattered within, he kept a bold front. Initially a pessimist, he was now no longer that shy boy whose voice constantly trembled; instead, a he has become a precursor and paragon of optimism. The family background and the behaviour of the parents play a dominant role in the personality development of the child.

Filial Relationship in Contemporary British Poetry

Blake Morrison in his essay titled “The Filial Art: A Reading of Contemporary British Poetry” has observed many typical things about the younger generation of the British poets. Remarkably, the relationship that greatly influences them is with their parents. Some of these young poets are Tony Harrison (1937-), Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), Hugo Williams (1942-), Craig Raine (1944-) and a few more. In the works of these poets, parents occupy an “unusual centrality” with fathers playing a more prominent role than the mothers. This not only exposes us to know a lot about their generation but also the different ways in which they write about their parents. Some of these sentiments are dealt with in Tony Harrison’s poem “Illuminations”. The family intimacy in it is beautiful, thrilling but at the same time dangerous and fatal. It’s about a boy going to the fair with his parents. The boy’s father in the poem wasn’t impressed with the money that the boy was spending. Time has lapsed. This child has grown up and has changed since he got back from the war. He is now narrating it 40 years later about how now he understands his father. The last line touches the very core of the heart, “the penny drops in time, wish you were here.” (16) As Harrison puts it in his Confessional Poetry, where he confesses that he is guilty and this initiates not just from “abandoning” his parents, but by practicing an art which fails to communicate with them.

Filial Relationship in Modern Novels: A Display of Rainbow of Possibilities

Canadian author Charles G.D. Roberts (1860-1943)’s *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* (1900) set in the late nineteenth century in New Brunswick. The novel tells the tale of a mother and daughter who move to the woods to escape vicious gossip in the town. Despite the isolation, they soon create a comfortable home for themselves and come to know the animals that live in the area. *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) is an autobiographical account of her life with her three sisters in Concord, Massachusetts in the 1860s. With their father fighting in the American Civil War, sisters Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth are at home with their mother, very outspoken women for her time. The story tells of how the sisters grow up, find love and find their place in the world in which parents bear an important role. *Jack Maggs* by another Australian author Peter Philip Carey (1943-) is a 1997 novel based on Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. In the latter story, Magwitch, a convict becomes the main character’s Pip’s financial benefactor and his identity is hidden from Pip until the end of the story.

Carey centres *Jack Maggs* on his Magwitch-inspired character. In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch is sent to Australia and remains absent for much of the story. But the author, who often emphasises on Australian identity in his writings, picks up on this dynamic character’s story of being made him free and remains in disguise. Then Maggs goes on searching for his son Henry Phipps who is author’s replacement for Pip. He starts working for a wealthy Englishman named Percy Buckle. Another character, Buckle’s neighbour, Tobias Oates is a stand-in for Charles Dickens himself, and though he’s meant

to assist Maggs in finding his son. But, he finds is inspiration for the character of Magwitch due to his a compulsive preoccupation with the criminal mind and deception. Jack Maggs's own search for his son is stands as a symbol for Australia's search for its own national identity, which was call of the days when Carey wrote this novel. The Glass Castle by an American author Jeannette Walls (1960) is a 2005 memoir by the author himself. The book counts on the unconventional, poverty-stricken upbringing of Jeannette and her siblings amidst their deeply negligent parents. The title ironically refers to her father's long held intention of building his dream house, a glass castle in which children take a major role.

Filial relationship in modern literary writings is realistic and representative of the cross-currents of the life in families which mostly display mutual familial belongingness and commitment. This continues to be a feature in post-colonial as well as diasporic writings. It is often observed that in such writings, there might be a shift in cultural and temporal set-ups or disintegration of the concept of family, but characters remain nostalgic about the lost native filial value with both feminist and patriarchal concepts.

Conclusion

Filial relationship is one of the natural, socio-cultural and moral phenomena for human being. It has been variously attributed in literature in the forms of ideology as the classical or mythological writings like The Ramayan and The Mahabharat. Characters have displayed their respective roles of how to keep the promises of their parents and the parents have also been equally committed to fulfil the dreams and aspirations of their children. Similarly, there are filial ingratitude as in Shakespeare's King Lear happen to be one of the long lasting action ranging from mythology like The Mahabharat to history as it happens to kings and emperors being betrayed by their children. Still then, it is characterised as belongingness, mutual faith, divine attribute and a lot many things in the positive way and negatively, it is named as generation gap or betrayal of blood, etc. In Indian scriptures, this is scientifically revealed as one of the independent dominant sense rasas leading to bhava and is associated with pride, impulse, fear of evil, etc. and vatsalya is a permanent emotion.

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