
Dismantling the Metanarrative of Motherhood : A Postmodern Reading of 'Em And the Big Hoom'

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Abstract:

The paper throws light on the concept of Metanarrative or Grand narrative and applies the same to the idea of motherhood as portrayed in Jerry Pinto's 'Em and the Big Hoom'. According to the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, complexity and diversity of human experience and knowledge are not sufficiently captured by these metanarratives. Rather, society has reached a point where metanarratives are no longer credible, which is marked by skepticism and a rejection of explanations that apply to everything. This paper associates the concept of grand narrative to the idealized and glorified image of "motherhood" in the Indian context. In India, the cultural, social, and religious fabric are woven with a strong emphasis on the virtues of motherhood. The objective of this paper is to present a postmodern reading of 'Em and the Big Hoom. Jerry Pinto's book "Em and the Big Hoom" was originally released in 2012. Set in Mumbai, India. The story centers on Em, the protagonist whose real name is Imelda. She is the spouse of the Big Hoom, the narrator's father. Em is shown as a mysterious and complicated person who suffers from bipolar disorder, which has a significant effect on her family.

Keywords: Dismantling, postmodern reading, cultural, social, religious, motherhood.

Introduction:

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard popularized the word "metanarrative" in his seminal work "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" (1979). Especially in the context of modernity, Lyotard criticizes the vast tales, or "metanarratives," that have historically been employed to explain and legitimize knowledge.

These grand narratives are the conventional belief systems of science, religion, history and social structure that do not have the same authority and

credibility in the postmodern era, according to Lyotard. The complexity and diversity of human experience and knowledge are not sufficiently captured by these metanarratives. Rather, according to Lyotard, society has reached a point where metanarratives are no longer credible, which is marked by skepticism and a rejection of explanations that apply to everything. This rejection of totalizing narratives and the subversion of hierarchies of knowledge and culture are the indispensable elements of Post Modernism.

This paper associates the concept of grand narrative to the idealized and glorified image of ‘motherhood’ in the Indian context. In India, the cultural, social, and religious fabric are woven with a strong emphasis on the virtues of motherhood. It embodies selflessness, sacrifice, caring, and unconditional love. There are cultural norms and expectations that support the exaltation of motherhood. Motherhood is seen as a defining characteristic of femininity and womanhood, and women are frequently evaluated on the basis of their duties as mothers.

The objective of this paper is to present a postmodern reading of ‘Em and the Big Hoom’. Jerry Pinto's book "Em and the Big Hoom" was originally released in 2012. Set in Mumbai, India. The story centers on Em, the protagonist whose real name is Imelda. She is the spouse of the Big Hoom, the narrator's father. Em is shown as a mysterious and complicated person who suffers from bipolar disorder, which has a significant effect on her family.

Em's mental illness is a recurring issue in the book, and her experiences with bipolar disorder are very nuanced. Em's personality is defined by her inventiveness, brilliance, and sporadic bouts of extreme emotional instability. Her disease affects her relationships with her husband and children, and she alternates between times of severe misery and elation.

Em is revealed to be a loving and loyal mother despite her battles with mental illness, even if she also faces personal issues. She is very attached to her kids, especially her son, who acts as the book's narrator. The complexity of dealing with mental illness and its effects on familial relationships are highlighted by Em's nuanced and empathetic portrayal of her character.

Throughout the novel the narrator is searching for hints to find how his mother's mental illness actually started and just at first chapter ‘somebody opened a tap’, the reader realize that the narrator himself is somewhere responsible as it all started with his birth. Em tells his son, the narrator:

‘After you were born, someone turned on a tap. At first it was only a drip, a black drip, and I felt it as sadness.’

Here, the reader is able to link Em's bipolar disorder's original etiology to giving birth. It highlights the mental anguish Em endured following the birth of her child. She was a gentle woman who cherished her kids, but she was unable to cope with losing her sense of self as a free woman.

Once she says , “I thought it would drown little You and Susan. So I got up and got dressed and went out on to the road and tried to jump in the front of a bus”.

Em's strong maternal values prevented her from wanting her kids to suffer the most from her mental anguish. She would repeatedly attempt suicide because of

this. Even though being a mother was the primary cause of her disease, even in that state she wished to shield her kids from herself.

Em's thoughts regarding motherhood are are astonishing. She says, "Marriage is all right. At least the person you are having a go at is an adult. But motherhood... You're given something totally dependent, totally in love with you and it doesn't seem to come with a manual."

In her sane moments Em seems philosophical and unfiltered. She does not hesitate to have conversations regarding sex with her children. She tells her son about the psychoanalytical movement and Oedipal complex. She had long rants about pregnancy and abortion.

As she tell her children about a quirky way of giving up her babies, she says, "I gave them straight out of my womb. I could always tell when it had happened. I'd hear a click and I would know I was pregnant again, and I'd pray to Our Lady to take the poor wee thing and give it to someone else who wanted a child."

'So you'd have...'

'Abortions? No what do you take me for? I'd just climb down five stairs and jump the six. Six steps and land with a thump, six times, to shake those little mites from their moorings.'

Undoubtedly, Em's bipolar disease could be the reason for her extreme irrationality in this situation, but this incident is from her youth, when she was competent to make her own decisions. Em also attempts, albeit in her own customarily crass way, to teach her daughter Susan about sex education.

She says to her daughter, "But if you get knocked up, you come and tell me and I'll come with you to the doctor. We'll get you D'd and C'd. When you are knocked up, you'll get a proper doctor to fiddle with your middle"

Here Em means Dilation and curettage. Here, she is cautioning her daughter about unsafe illegal abortion facilities and unintended pregnancies. She also advises her daughter to kick on the genitals and flee if someone tries to rape her. Em, therefore, defies all the clichés associated with women, and particularly with "mothers," in Indian society, in a most peculiar and ridiculous way.

Once Em recalls the rhymes that she would say among other children to choose the den in a game. "mother most horrible, most terrible, mother standing at the door, mouth full of dribble.' She admits that mother at the door to eat her children is a horrible image but assumes a possibility that it might be true like those in greek myths. And then

She innocently asks her son, "Do you think I'm that kind of mother? The kind who'd devour her infants?" When the narrator doesn't deny it she tells him dejectedly that he could have lied for comfort. Em comes to the revelation that, despite her love for them, she posed a perpetual risk to them because she had no desire to become a mother in the first place.

Em had a unique perspective on motherhood. She seemed to be trying hard to make the word seem as an insult when she uttered it. She speaks the word mother as 'mudh-dha' in certain sort of contempt. Once the narrator asks her if she didn't want to be a mother to which she replies,

“O God, no. I saw what children do. They turn a good respectable woman into a mudd-dha. I didn't want to be a mudh-dha. I didn't want to be turn inside out. I didn't want my world shifted so that I was no longer the centre of it.”

Em believes that children might take up all of a mother's attention to the point that she forgets about herself and gives her all to them. She somehow gives up her freedom in the process of becoming a mother. Particularly in India, We have observed that a woman's personality changes dramatically when she becomes a mother. Her children become the center of her universe.

She further warns her daughter to be careful about being a mother, ‘It never happens to men. They just sow the seed and hand out the cigars when you've pushed a football through your vadge. For the next hundred years of your life, you are stuck with being someone whose definition isn't even herself. You are now someone's mudd-dha!’

These seem not to be the words of a deranged individual. In actuality, Em is doubting the place of men in parenting. A woman experiences numerous emotional and bodily changes. She must spend nine months carrying the child inside of her, and she must remain by the child's side at all times following delivery. In the meanwhile, this process scarcely affects a man's life. A man continues as though nothing had occurred. This argument seems to expose the problematic family system in which a woman is deemed whole only when she becomes a mother. Em's character excellently exemplifies the disadvantages of carrying the burden of greatness linked with the word 'mother'. Motherhood is the dissolving of a woman's'self' into the lives of her spouse and children. The adjectives of greatness and sacrifice associated with the word mother are occasionally used to hide hard work and persecution. Removing this layer may reveal the culture and manners designed for the comfort of a male-dominated society. A woman is more than just a mother. She has her own individuality and identity as a human being. Under the pretense of greatness cultural exploitation upon her is glorified.

References

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