



---

## REIMAGINING THE DEVOURING MOTHER ARCHETYPE: TRAUMA AND MATERNAL NEGLECT IN AVNI DOSHI'S *BURNT SUGAR*

*Javeria Ahmad*

*COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus*

*Dr. Memoona Idris*

*COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus*

**Abstract:**

*Avni Doshi's Burnt Sugar (2020) closely examines the painful and complicated relationship between mother and daughter. The main character is Tara, an emotionally distant, uncaring mother who is incapable of taking care of her daughter, Antara. This paper examines how Burnt Sugar redefines the concept of the Devouring Mother by applying trauma theory. It examines how the absence of a caring mother and the transmission of trauma influence Antara's emotions while growing up. Applying concepts of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), this research examines the psychological and emotional impact of having a neglectful mother, the trauma cycle, and how these influence how Doshi redefines the Devouring Mother concept. This paper presents a new perspective on mother-child relationships in contemporary literature. The research also examines the broader influence of generational trauma in family relationships and challenges society's perception of motherhood.*

**Keywords:** *Trauma, Maternal, Neglecting, Archetype, Reimagining.*

**Introduction:**

In modern literature, the mother-daughter relationship is most frequently the unifying theme, and one that has a profound impact on a character's emotional and psychological growth. In Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*, Tara and Antara's relationship is far from typical. Tara's abandonment and emotional absence serve to highlight a nuanced portrayal of maternal failure, an unease that pervades Antara's life. Rather than the clichéd "Devouring Mother" type—frequently found in maternal overprotection or emotional manipulation—Doshi offers a reimagining, wherein Tara is emotionally unavailable and neglectful, yet still exercises considerable control over Antara's identity and destiny.

This paper discusses how *Burnt Sugar* subverts the classic presumption of the Devouring Mother by prioritizing emotional neglect over control. It discusses how trauma is intergenerational and demonstrates how Tara's unresolved trauma impacts her relationship with her daughter. Drawing on trauma theory, in particular the work of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), this research will demonstrate that Tara's neglect is not an individual problem but part of an intergenerational cycle of trauma. The paper will contend that Doshi's novel provides a sophisticated and critical portrayal of motherhood, which reveals the psychological impact of maternal neglect on individuals and the family.

At the center of the argument is an examination of the labor of trauma theory in the formation of the mother-daughter relationship. In this essay, we will examine how unresolved trauma inherited by Antara informs her emotional growth and relationships. Through close reading of narrative, identity, emotional withdrawal, and attachment motifs, the larger implications of generational trauma will be evaluated. Finally, this paper will add to the body of scholarship on



maternal relationships in modernist literature, specifically how Doshi's depiction of maternal neglect reconfigures the Devouring Mother archetype.

Mother-daughter relationships are a considerable topic in psychology, literature (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2021), and feminist studies. It is especially relevant to how emotional trauma and suffering are transferred (Javaid et al., 2024; Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). In recent literature, the Devouring Mother is a theme that appears prominently, showing the complicated effect of a mother's presence, control, and neglect. Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020) offers a thoughtful analysis of this theme, demonstrating Tara, a mother whose emotional neglect and absence dramatically affect her daughter, Antara. This section analyzes recent scholarship on the Devouring Mother theme, trauma theory, and how motherly neglect affects psychology, placing Doshi's novel in these scholarly contexts.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. In what ways does *Burnt Sugar* challenge the conventional manner of representing the Devouring Mother figure in terms of trauma theory?
2. How does intergenerational transmission of trauma affect Antara's psychological development and her adult relationships?

#### **Research Objectives:**

1. Describe how *Burnt Sugar* reworks the Devouring Mother template in trauma theory, highlighting maternal neglect and emotional insufficiency.
2. Watch how the trauma is transferred from Tara to Antara and examine how Antara's emotional growth, sense of self, and relationships are affected by the neglect of the mother.

#### **Problem Statement:**

The mother-daughter relationship is central to identity and emotional growth. When this relationship is filled with neglect, emotional absence, and past trauma, it can result in longstanding and serious psychological issues. In *Burnt Sugar*, Tara's inability to emotionally care for Antara creates a cycle of trauma that is transmitted from generation to generation. This paper will discuss how the novel re-implements the Devouring Mother role, depicting her as the neglectful rather than controlling mother, and how this neglect affects Antara's self and her adult relationships.

#### **Significance of the Study:**

This study is important as it adds to the existing literature on trauma in modern literature, especially in the context of mothers and mother-child relationships. Through the analysis of *Burnt Sugar* in light of trauma theory, this study highlights how mothers' neglect affects an individual's sense of self and emotional development. This study also presents a feminist analysis of how mothers are romanticized in popular culture, highlighting the challenges of being a mother and the psychological effects of intergenerational trauma. This study is also part of the wider debate on the transmission of trauma within families, noting its lasting impact on family relationships and personal identity.

#### **Literature Review:**

##### **The Devouring Mother Archetype:**

The concept of the Devouring Mother is commonly discussed within feminist and psychoanalytic thought. It is associated with the way some mothers have an overly controlling emotional hold on



their children. Marion Woodman (1982), likely one of the most famous voices on this concept, explains the Devouring Mother as someone who emotionally controls her child and suppresses their emotional and intellectual development (Khanam et al., 2022). She is someone who is overcaring and controlling, and it prevents the child from finding their own identity or becoming autonomous. Although this figure is commonly seen in a negative light, her impact is not always obviously abusive. In most cases, it is the excessive emotional dependence and manipulation that do the most harm.

Woodman's writing on the Devouring Mother outlines how these mothers create abusive conditions that prevent children from ever becoming autonomous and self-expressive. The emotional control of the Devouring Mother is also usually accompanied by a passive form of psychological domination, where the needs and desires of the mother are more important than the child's, so that the child's sense of self is compromised and dependent.

In *Burnt Sugar*, Doshi reverses the traditional definition of the Devouring Mother by introducing us to another form of neglect—not one based on control, but on distance. Tara has a powerful impact on Antara, but she achieves this not by making a great number of demands on her, but by shutting down emotionally. This absence of concern produces its own form of control, leaving Antara very hollow within. Doshi's play reverses the traditional definition of the Devouring Mother, and insists that neglect and distance can be just as much to blame for creating a child's feelings as overt emotional control.

Jessica Benjamin (1988) describes how classic psychoanalytic thought tends to portray mothers in a certain way regarding absence and neglect. She points to harm that results from people not noticing mothers' failure. Benjamin postulates that, when children grow up in circumstances of emotional neglect, they never learn who they are and are unable to make healthy, secure relationships as adults (Akram et al, 2021; Akram & Li, 2024). Antara's intimacy issues and lack of self-esteem in *Burnt Sugar* are all attributed to a lack of emotional nurturance by her mother. Antara's need for validation by Tara and her inability to bond or trust others reflect the psychological impact of neglect by a mother.

#### **Trauma Theory and Intergenerational Trauma:**

Trauma theory, particularly the work of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), assist in the explanation of the psychological impact of unresolved trauma and how it is passed down from generation to generation. Caruth argues that trauma is not only an experience that occurs at a point in time but is a force that returns and impacts the individual much further in the future than the traumatic event. In her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth argues that trauma is something one cannot possibly process or understand at the moment it occurs. Rather, it returns in fragments, commonly impacting an individual's memory, identity, and relationships in meaningful ways.

In *Burnt Sugar*, the cyclical trauma theme informs us about Tara and Antara's relationship. Tara's emotional withdrawal appears to be a result of her own psychological issues, but illustrates how trauma is transmitted, and has a significant impact on Antara's childhood. Van der Kolk (2014), in *The Body Keeps the Score*, describes how trauma is not just a psychological condition but physical as well, and impacts the body and mind in a way that has an influence on future behavior and relationships. For Antara, the hurt of being neglected by her mother is one that



lingers, conditioning how she feels and behaves around people, for instance, in her love life and self-worth.

Caruth and van der Kolk both explain that trauma does not disappear; it continues to impact the people who experienced it, usually in distorted forms. Tara's emotional neglect trauma dominates Antara's life. Despite her efforts to distance herself from her mother, Antara also replicates her mother's emotional unavailability and intimacy problems. This act of passing on trauma demonstrates how maternal neglect and emotional withdrawal continue to exert an influence, one that Caruth terms "unclaimed." This demonstrates that the trauma is not repaired and continues to exert an impact on subsequent generations.

### **Maternal Neglect and Psychological Development:**

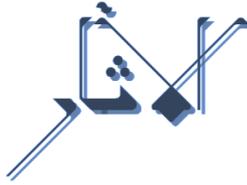
Emotional or physical neglect by their mother has a deep impact on the mental development of a child. Van der Kolk (2014) believes that children brought up by emotionally unavailable or neglectful mothers experience attachment issues, low self-esteem, and difficulty in trust. They will struggle to have secure relationships later in life as their emotional needs were not fulfilled in childhood. In *Burnt Sugar*, Antara's issues with intimacy and feelings of inadequacy are the direct outcome of Tara's emotional neglect. As an adult, Antara yearns for the approval she never got from her mother but overwhelming fear of abandonment prevents her from opening herself fully to others' love and affection, primarily her boyfriend, Dilip.

Herman (1992) points out the impact of emotional neglect on the mind of an individual, particularly on their sense of self. She states that neglectful mothers are unlikely to provide their children with a solid emotional foundation, leaving them susceptible to emotional and mental issues. In *Burnt Sugar*, Antara's failure to develop a solid sense of self can be observed through Herman's concepts. Her inner conflict, between anger and a need to please her mother, indicates the mental impact of a mother's neglect. Antara's sense of self is broken, constructed on the absence of her mother's love and support. According to Benjamin (1988), children who are exposed to maternal neglect are unlikely to develop a full sense of self, struggling with feelings of worthlessness and emotional detachment.

Feminist researchers have long diagnosed problems with the ideal image of the self-sacrificing mother. The image can mask the reality of maternal neglect and emotional failure. Ann Oakley (1984) says the cultural idealization of mothers as always giving and caring does not account for the emotional challenge and hardships of motherhood. In *Burnt Sugar*, Doshi subverts this image by showing Tara not as a hero but as a woman whose emotional neglect is a consequence of her own trauma. Tara's inability to meet the ideals of mothers indicates the pressure put on women to be the ideal nurturing and emotionally available mother. By showing Tara as a neglectful mother and one who doesn't fit the ideal, Doshi subverts the popular stereotype of mother roles.

### **Methodology:**

This research applies a qualitative research method of interpretive literary critique to examine Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*. The emphasis is placed on the examination of how trauma, mother neglect, and the Devouring Mother figure are constructed in the novel. Based on trauma theory and feminist psychoanalytic criticism, the research examines the relationship between the main character, Antara, and her emotionally distant mother, Tara. The research emphasizes how



trauma is repeated, how emotional hurt can be intergenerationally transmitted, and the psychological impact of having no mother.

The chosen method enables us to analyze the psychological elements of the narrative, emotional feelings, and important themes in depth. These elements are hard to measure but are essential in comprehending the intricate issues in the novel. The method is appropriate for literary analysis that centers on character evolution, emotional struggle, and psychological development—focusing on trauma passed down through generations.

This paper employs two major concepts: feminist psychoanalytic theory and trauma theory. These theories inform us on how Doshi's novel challenges traditional understandings of motherhood and highlights the psychological impact of ignoring mothers.

Trauma theory, particularly as explained by Cathy Caruth (1996) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), is a significant theory to this research. Trauma theory examines how people are affected by traumatic events and shows that trauma is not one event but recurs, frequently without warning and disturbingly. Caruth (1996), in her work *Unclaimed Experience*, states that trauma is an event never known fully when it occurs. It is a wound that continues to affect the individual in ways not even known. This is connected with Caruth's concept of trauma being "unclaimed"—the individual can never even know it when it occurs. Rather, trauma returns later in life, frequently in bits and pieces, and the individual must cope with the emotional and psychological ramifications never fully "claiming" or knowing what has occurred.

Bessel van der Kolk (2014), an expert in trauma research, explains how trauma is both mind and body. Van der Kolk argues that traumatic experiences are not only in the mind but also in the body (Akram & Oteir, 2025). Van der Kolk's argument about trauma is applicable in explaining how Antara's trauma is both in her behavior and body sensations. According to van der Kolk in *The Body Keeps the Score*, survivors of trauma can experience long-term physical pain or emotional numbness as their bodies struggle to cope with and adjust to extreme stress (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025). In *Burnt Sugar*, Antara's body reactions towards her mother's neglect and her emotional disconnection show the body and mind wounds of her childhood trauma. The trauma she went through during her childhood does not stay in the past; it accompanies her to adulthood, affecting her relationships and her inability to connect emotionally with others.

Trauma theory enables us to realize that Tara's emotional neglect trauma is not merely something which occurred in their history. It continues to influence their lives presently and alters the present mother-daughter relationship. Antara's emotional and psychological challenges, such as her failure to form stable relationships, exemplify this unresolved trauma.

In addition to trauma theory, feminist psychoanalytic theory provides an additional perspective through which to examine how the mother-daughter relationship in *Burnt Sugar* is constructed by social and psychological expectations of motherhood, identity, and emotional labor. Marion Woodman (1982) developed the theory of the Devouring Mother, which classically describes a maternal figure who overwhelms a child with too much emotional control, stifling the child's autonomy and development. The archetype is commonly represented as a woman who eats her child emotionally, either by overprotecting or overdependence. The archetype implies a form of maternal emotional dominance that forestalls the child's development of their own identity (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025).



Woodman's revision of the Devouring Mother in *Burnt Sugar* differs from the traditional interpretation of this stereotype. Tara is not like the typical stereotype of the Devouring Mother. Even though Tara does not overwhelm Antara with excess emotionality, her lack of emotion has an equally strong impact. Her absence paralyzes Antara on an emotional plane and renders the child unable to form authentic connections with other human beings. Tara's failure to respond on an emotional plane with Antara in the book is neglect that deprives the child of the emotional sustenance and bonding a mother normally provides. This deficiency in maternal nurturing is at the heart of the understanding of how Antara's self develops in the absence of a mother's love.

Jessica Benjamin (1988), in her work *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, provides further understanding of what occurs when a mother fails. In Benjamin's terms, if a mother does not offer emotional support, the child cannot develop a clear and robust sense of self. This point is central to understanding why Antara's sense of self issues and her lack of ability to relate to others are the byproducts of her mother not being able to give her emotional support. Tara's failure as a mother, in this sense, is not that she is overprotective and controlling, but that she doesn't offer sufficient emotional nurturing, which makes Antara feel broken on the inside and seeking external validation in toxic ways.

Hence, feminist psychoanalysis contributes to the research by criticizing the traditional definition of motherhood. It provides a superior and more in-depth understanding of how emotional absence rather than emotional control has the greatest impact on the psychological development of a child.

The analytical method of this study is thematic analysis. These are two important approaches used in literary study to investigate the underlying themes and psychological aspects of a text. The close reading method is highly appropriate for literary analysis of Doshi's depiction of trauma, mother abandonment, and Antara's psychological growth. Close reading is the reading of a text in close detail to identify underlying themes and meanings. For example, the symbolic use of memory, identity, and forgetting in *Burnt Sugar* provides a lot of material to analyze, especially in relation to trauma and emotional disconnection. This method allows close analysis of how Doshi uses language and narrative form to represent the fragmented, disjointed nature of Antara's experiences of trauma.

In addition to close reading, thematic analysis is employed to identify broad themes in the novel, including identity formation, emotional neglect, memory and forgetting, and intergenerational trauma. Thematic analysis is where one identifies patterns in the text and connects them to broader concepts. Antara's emotional issues, such as an inability to trust others, for example, can be framed as a reaction to her childhood trauma. The intertwined theme of memory and forgetting, most obviously in the context of Tara's dementia, indicates the tension between remembering the past and the suffering of forgetting. Memory is at the heart of understanding trauma, and Doshi's investigation of Tara's loss of memory is a rich metaphor for how trauma can be broken or concealed but still exert influence in the present.

This research employs close reading and thematic analysis to examine the complex psychological dimensions of *Burnt Sugar*. These techniques assist in delving deeply into the dense emotional and psychological implications of not being mothered by a mother, as well as engage with broader concepts surrounding trauma, identity, and the mother.



The major text of the study is Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*. The entire novel will be analyzed, particularly the Antara-Tara relationship, and how scenes in the novel reveal their psychological and emotional dynamics. Sections that involve Antara's introspection regarding her childhood, Tara's disease, and scenes where the characters come face to face with one another will be read attentively. Special attention will be given to sections of the text that address issues of trauma, neglect, and identity formation explicitly or implicitly, particularly the scenes when Antara's emotional wounds are on full display in the present.

The novel revolves around the intricate feelings between the mother and daughter. This study closely focuses on only these two characters and their relationship. Through the way they relate to one another, this study analyzes the deep feelings and thoughts that propel the story and help Antara develop.

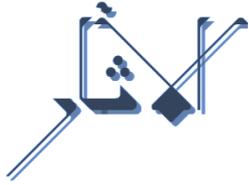
This research does not incorporate human subjects and thus does not require a formal ethical clearance. Nevertheless, the sensitive issues at hand demand a responsible and considerate manner of addressing them. *Burnt Sugar* is a description of emotional neglect, trauma, and mental illness, and therefore these issues must be addressed in a respectful and dignified manner. The research will not stigmatize the characters as being ill but rather address the emotional and psychological forces that drive their behaviors and experiences. This approach tries to appreciate the characters' emotions in a complex way and not in simplistic or judgmental terms.

The research methodology utilised in the study integrates trauma theory and feminist psychoanalytic criticism to identify how Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* reworks the Devouring Mother archetype and negotiates the psychological effects of neglectful mothering. By utilising close reading and thematic analysis, the study offers insightful interpretation of novel's sophisticated depiction of trauma, identity, and the emotional aftereffect of failed mothering. The qualitative, interpretive approach to research undertaken in the study provides richly detailed insight into the novel's themes and character, which enables wider academic contest in trauma studies and feminist literary theory.

### **Analysis:**

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* is a moving narrative that traces the impact of a mother's abandonment through the central character, Antara, and her dysfunctional relationship with her mother, Tara. Trauma is a dominant theme in the book; it is not depicted as a single giant incident but as an enduring hurt that permeates generations. Rather than depicting trauma in an uncomplicated manner that can be repaired easily, Doshi allows it to impact her characters in subdued but painful means, linking it to their recollections, selfhood, and bodily sensations. At the epicenter of this trauma is the mother—a nurturing figure once, an emotional vacuum now.

In this new framing of the Devouring Mother archetype, Doshi reverses the expectations. Tara is not a devouring mother who overindulges Antara with love or denies independence but a mother who is completely absent. Tara's emotional absence, repeated absences, and mercurial decisions when Antara was a teenager deprive Antara of the nurturance that traditionally comes from mothers. The Devouring Mother, therefore, is not marked by presence but absence—an anachronistic concept where deprivation of love is worse than overabundance of love. This concept is comparable to Marion Woodman's but is explored from a contemporary, trauma-sensitive angle by Doshi.



One of the most powerful aspects of *Burnt Sugar* is its employment of narrative voice to convey the effect of trauma. The novel is written in the first person by Antara, whose voice is ironic, brittle, and ambivalent. Her head is full of feeling but detached, allowing readers insight into her internal conflict and at the same time withholding full comprehension. This narrative device imitates the psychological fragmentation that occurs due to unresolved trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996) asserts that trauma distorts perception, altering the way events are remembered and interpreted. Antara's memories are dictated by emotional pain rather than chronology, and her tone is often shifting between resentment, nostalgia, and bewilderment.

Doshi portrays the body as a site of trauma in a way that truly resonates with people. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) says that trauma is not only remembered in the mind but also in the body. The body remembers, responding to the past long after the mind has attempted to forget. Antara's physical responses to her mother—her headaches, insomnia, and numbness—demonstrate how her trauma continues to be a part of her, influencing her emotions and physical responses. These concrete manifestations of trauma demonstrate that Antara's pain is not merely a notion but very real.

Tara's dementia is symbolic as well as an actual disease. As Tara's mother forgets, Antara has to tend to the woman who never tended to her. The situation is brutally cruel: Tara's decline requires constant sympathy from the daughter she deserted. Doshi uses this role reversal to analyze how trauma complicates forgiving, loving, and being accountable. Antara says, "I should be sad instead of being angry. At times I cry when no one else is around." She is mourning, but "it's too early to burn the body." Her sadness is for what is to come, along with suppressed anger, which shows how complex traumatic relationships are.

The novel revolves around memory, which is of the utmost importance to the themes. Antara's memories are piecemeal, not necessarily trustworthy, and filled with overwhelming emotion. Trauma scholars, like Caruth, say that memory is one of the major battlefields of trauma. Memory, in *Burnt Sugar*, is both helpful and painful—it helps Antara make sense of what has happened, but also traps her in cycles of pain. Her mother's growing inability to remember, as opposed to Antara's desperate desire to remember, offers a powerful contrast: Tara can avoid the weight of remembering, but Antara is paralyzed by it. To highlight this contrast between the two of them is to show the impacts of trauma between generations and how it affects victims and perpetrators differently.

Doshi's prose is sharp, economical, and rather bitter—a style that mirrors Antara's repressed pain. Her language is circumspect; her perceptions are often cold even when writing of very private or painful issues. Relating her story in this manner is protective, demonstrating van der Kolk's description of emotional numbing in trauma survivors. Antara's repression of intense affect does not represent healing but an intellectual way of preserving control faced with intense emotional pain.

The dynamic between Antara and Tara can be explained through attachment and self-development theories. Jessica Benjamin's (1988) relational psychoanalysis illustrates the necessity of individuals being recognized by one another in order to construct a healthy sense of self. Without that recognition—without a caregiver validating the presence and emotions of the child—the child will most likely have a fractured sense of self. Antara's conflict with her



husband, her intense need to draw, and her obsession with her mother's illness all illustrate her desperate, unmet need for recognition. Tara's aloofness is left with an emptiness that Antara circles around, attempting to discover meaning and identity in a relationship that has never been validating.

Antara struggles with establishing a clear identity, and this is reflected in her artwork. Her sketches start off sharp and precise, but become more abstract and emotive as her mother deteriorates. What once was an escape through art now becomes a means of confronting her trauma. The blurred lines in her paintings reflect the blurring of the lines between her past and present, self and other, and trauma and memory. Doshi uses artwork to depict emotional pain, providing us with an understanding of how artwork can both reveal and exacerbate trauma.

The novel also delves into what mothers and women are expected to be in society, especially in Indian society. Tara's refusal to follow traditional motherhood—like taking up an ashram, leaving Antara, and living for pleasure—violates strong cultural expectations. But Doshi does not portray her as all bad. Instead, Tara is shown to have inherent flaws and perhaps even her own trauma, in a man's world that had little options for her. Her neglectfulness, painful as it is, is not shown as pure evil but a result of deep emotional issues within society. This makes it harder for readers to judge and highlights that trauma is not only individual but also connected to society and the past.

The psychological abuse in *Burnt Sugar* is insidious and ongoing. Antara's thoughts are filled with ambivalent feelings: love, repulsion, guilt, clinginess, and anger. These ambivalent feelings illustrate what trauma professionals call "attachment to the abuser," wherein those who have been emotionally abandoned remain bound in their minds to those who have abused them. Antara's preoccupation with her mother's decline and her inability to fully disconnect from her illustrate this contradiction. She wants both revenge and tranquility, showing how deeply trauma blurs emotional boundaries.

Doshi's decision to structure the narrative around a very flawed narrator makes the novel's feelings more intense. Antara is not merely a victim; she is cruel, volatile, and angry at times. Her trauma does not transform her into a better human being but rather complicates her. She confesses to having enjoyed her mother's pain, which unsettles the reader's moral compass. This blurring of moral lines is in keeping with contemporary narratives of trauma, which do not subscribe to the simplistic victim-perpetrator model but rather examine the messy reality of survival. Trauma does not make for likable characters; it makes human beings—fractured, messy, and contradictory.

The passionate feelings of love and hate, closeness and faraway-ness, are most evident when Antara is taking care of her mother. One moment she tenderly cleans spittle from Tara's mouth; the next, she daydreams about her mother passing away, daydreams about a world without her. These moments portray the manner in which Antara is caught in a trap—her responsibility is pitted against her wounds. As she struggles with taking care of her mother, she is forced to confront not only the passing of her mother but also the wounds of her childhood.

As the story goes on, Doshi shows how Antara's trauma is passed on and exacerbated by people not talking about it. The people around Antara do not see her suffering; even her husband does not see how much she hurts. That kind of lack of support makes things worse, supporting



Benjamin's idea that lack of recognition can intensify emotional suffering. Antara's hidden hurt points to a larger problem of how emotional trauma—especially trauma due to abandonment—is generally ignored because it does not manifest physical scars.

In *Burnt Sugar*, Doshi shows how trauma impacts not just the individual who suffers it but also all of their relationships. Antara's toxic relationship with her mother is a blueprint for how she relates to other people. Her issues of trust, love, and safety are not isolated issues but are linked to her primary hurt. All of the shattered love affairs, all of the pulling away from other people, and all of the numbness stem from the initial hurt: her mother's failure to offer emotional support.

The book concludes without any resolution. Tara keeps disappearing, both physically and mentally, and Antara is left with a complicated collection of emotions. There is no forgiveness, no huge fight, and no ultimate epiphany. Rather, the book concludes on an emotional precipice, emphasizing the fact that trauma, particularly if it is based on family strife, does not just disappear. This lack of resolution is not a failure of narrative but a basic fact: trauma sticks around, transforms, and persists many years past the events that created it.

Lastly, reading *Burnt Sugar* through trauma theory and feminist psychoanalysis reveals a richly layered novel that resists the conventional forms of mothering and victimhood. In conceiving the Devouring Mother as absence, rather than overpresence, Doshi recharts maternal failure as a singularly destructive form of emotional violence. Antara's narrative is not a journey of healing, but a struggle—with memory, with identity, and with loss. Her narrative illustrates how trauma is not an experience to be endured, but a condition to be lived with. Doshi's novel, with its searing prose and emotional honesty, is a deep exploration of the psychology of neglect, and of the wounds that love, or its lack, can leave.

### **Conclusion:**

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* is a scorching and emotionally charged examination of the long-term consequences of motherly neglect and the insidious weight of trauma transmitted from generation to generation. The novel is centered on the frayed connection between Antara and her mother, Tara, and presents an alternate vision of the Devouring Mother—not one who over-controls her child, but one who is absent and indifferent and wounds her daughter internally. This essay has discussed how Doshi deconstructs the idealized ideal of motherhood by presenting a mother whose failure is not in doing too much, but in doing far too little. With its emphasis on trauma, *Burnt Sugar* is a powerful novel about emotional neglect, identity issues, and unresolved family wounds.

The study demonstrates that trauma, which has been studied by scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Bessel van der Kolk, not only happens to the individual but also to the body, relationships, and memory. Antara's suffering stems from more than her childhood; it follows her into adulthood in her failure to form stable relationships, her muddled sense of self, and her overdependence on attention from her mother. The trauma is exacerbated because it is never named or worked through; Tara's slide into dementia prevents closure, leaving Antara adrift emotionally.

This research employs feminist psychoanalytic theory, and more particularly the work of Marion Woodman and Jessica Benjamin, to demonstrate that it is possible to be as harmfully neglecting



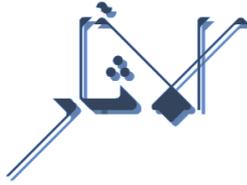
as over-controlling. Tara's refusal of traditional mothering and emotional unavailability to Antara contradict cultural assumptions about mothers always being kind and self-sacrificing. Rather, Doshi portrays a mother with actual flaws, perhaps her own trauma, and incapable of offering the emotional nourishment her child requires. This portrayal does not attempt to justify Tara's flaws but complicates them, illustrating the ways in which patterns of trauma and repression have a tendency to be re-created in patriarchal family structures.

*Burnt Sugar* also examines the reality that emotional trauma does not leave tracks, particularly trauma that results from neglect rather than violence. Abuse leaves scars, but neglect doesn't, which makes it more difficult for the victims such as Antara to be heard and believed. Without physical evidence, her emotional hurt is increased, and she gets further isolated. Doshi's refusal to grant a happy ending or an easy resolution indicates that trauma—particularly trauma combined with family problems—does not conform to the linear story pattern. There is no grand reconciliation nor emotional transformation but ongoing struggle against the past.

*Burnt Sugar* illustrates the issues of being a mother, how people can feel shattered within, and how memories can become so heavy on us. It provides valuable insights into the complex emotions between daughters and mothers. The novel forces readers to confront the harsh reality that some pain is invisible, and not every mother is supportive. With its raw and personal narrative and its courageous exploration of missing emotions, the novel forces us to reconsider what it is to love, to hurt, and to continue when the person who was supposed to protect us inflicts the most pain on us.

### References

- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2023). Application of ClassPoint tool in reducing EFL learners' test anxiety: an empirical evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Computers in Education*, 1-19.
- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2025). Examining the role of ClassPoint tool in shaping EFL students' perceived E-learning experiences: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Acta Psychologica*, 254, 104775.
- Akram, H., & Oteir, I. N. (2025). A longitudinal analysis of physical exercise in shaping language learners' emotional well-being: a comparative analysis between L1 and L2 students. *BMC psychology*, 13(1), 1-10.
- Akram, H., Al-Adwan, A. S., Aslam, S., & Khan, M. I. (2021). Pedagogical practices and challenges in cultivating moral values: A qualitative study of primary school teachers in Pakistan. *Education 3-13*, 1-13.
- Javaid, Z. K., Chen, Z., & Ramzan, M. (2024). Assessing stress causing factors and language related challenges among first year students in higher institutions in Pakistan. *Acta Psychologica*, 248, 104356.
- Khanam, L., Akram, H., & Kamran, M. (2022). Parental Expectations and Students' Academic Interests: A Case Study of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(1), 61-70.
- Li, S., & Akram, H. (2023). Do emotional regulation behaviors matter in EFL teachers' professional development?: A process model approach. *Porta Linguarum: revista internacional de didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras*, (9), 273-291.



- Li, S., & Akram, H. (2024). Navigating Pronoun-Antecedent Challenges: A Study of ESL Academic Writing Errors. *SAGE Open*, 14(4), 21582440241296607.
- Ramzan, M., & Javaid, Z. K. (2025). Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity: Gender, Power, and Agency in the Narratives of Qaisra Shahraz and Soniah Kamal. *Asian Women*, 41(2), 159-184.
- Ramzan, M., Akram, H., & kynat Javaid, Z. (2025). Challenges and Psychological Influences in Teaching English as a Medium of Instruction in Pakistani Institutions. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(1), 370-379.
- Ramzan, M., Bibi, R., & Khunsa, N. (2023). Unraveling the Link between Social Media Usage and Academic Achievement among ESL Learners: A Quantitative Analysis. *Global. Educational Studies Review*, 8, 407-421.
- Ramzan, M., Qureshi, A. W., Samad, A., & Sultan, N. (2021). Politics as Rhetoric: A Discourse Analysis of Selected Pakistani Politicians' Press Statements. *Humanities and Social Sciences Review*, 9(3).