

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of The Study

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* is a critically acclaimed novel that explores generational trauma through the complex relationship between a mother and daughter. The novel's fragmented narrative structure reflects the psychological instability caused by maternal neglect, making it an essential text for trauma studies. *Burnt Sugar* narrates a toxic mother-daughter relationship between Tara and Antara. The story is told from Antara's point of view. She is dealing with the baggage from her childhood because as her mother, Tara, slightly is a rogue child and has not always been the best mother. Tara is getting older and losing her memory, Antara has to take care of her. This brings up all painful memories and makes her think about their past. *Burnt Sugar* presents an intense, exploration of familial complexities, particularly in the context of trauma and its generational impact. In an interview Greenwich Library (2021) "*Avni Doshi, Author of Burnt Sugar*" on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Utaf3UfyRQ0?si=HpDMRk5PTnOVypP> Avni Doshi said the title *Burnt Sugar* is a fitting title for the novel, because it captures the essence of the complex and often toxic relationship between Antara and Tara. The title evokes a sense of bittersweetness, lingering pain, and the challenges of reconciling with a troubled past.

Back in the day when she was young, Tara left her arranged marriage, joined an *ashram* and basically lived life on her own terms. Tara left her marriage because she felt alone, her husband did not show her any affection and she had a mother-in-law who controlled her too much. Tara is depicted as neglectful and abusive toward her daughter, Antara. As she ages, Tara develops dementia, further complicating the relationship between her and her daughter.

According to Marianne Hirsch (1990) The way offspring of people who went through major trauma, like the Holocaust, connect to their parents' memories is known as postmemory. These memories are passed down through stories, picture, and actions rather of being directly experienced, forging a strong emotional bond that may resemble a personal recollection. Since Antara

is the story's narrator, the entire book is told from her perspective. The main focus of Antara's story is the enormous chip she bears regarding her mother, Tara. She believes Tara was an awful mother who was incredibly self-centered and heartless. Antara views everything she does and remembers through this resentful prism. Even when Tara was losing her memories, she was still criticizing her all the time. It feels as though Antara is either seeking revenge on her mother or simply trying to understand her, yet what emerges is a steady flow of anger and resentment. Although moments of love and affection surface, they are consistently eclipsed by the pain. Antara clearly bears deep emotional scars from her childhood with Tara. She is perceptive and intelligent, but also profoundly wounded and filled with anger. Antara was left behind when her mother went to live at the *ashram*. There, she was looked after by Kali Mata, an American woman and former devotee who became a surrogate mother figure to her. While Tara, Antara's mother, was absorbed in a romantic relationship with the *ashram's* guru, Baba, and neglecting her daughter, Kali Mata stepped in to provide some of the care and attention Antara needed. Later, as Antara takes on the responsibility of caring for her mother, she is forced to confront the conflicting emotions from her past. She feels a duty to look after her mother, yet at the same time she remains deeply angry with her for everything that happened.

This novel is compelling to explore as it portrays a journey through shifting memories, showing how Tara failed to fulfill her role as a mother due to her own unresolved trauma. Having grown up without her mother's care, Tara repeated the same pattern with her daughter, Antara, which deeply affected Antara's sense of identity. Once, Antara dreamed of a beautiful wedding and becoming a loving mother herself. Yet those dreams turned into a nightmare, as she remained haunted by memories of her neglected childhood. This drives her to search for the truth and to question whether she can overcome these painful traumas and finally break free from the cycle of the past. This theme forms the central concern of the novel. Antara carries deep emotional wounds from not receiving the kind of love most children expect from their mothers. Her mother, Tara, abandoned her during childhood as a result of her own unresolved trauma.

While the novel does not detail every painful event in Tara's past it suggests that her life was highly unstable. She was expelled from places multiple times, and her experience at the *ashram* left her further scarred when Baba betrayed her for a younger woman. These hardships appear to have contributed to Tara's mental health struggles. Similarly, Antara endured her own share of heartbreak in college, a boy she was close to suddenly left her without explanation. Later, fearing she might fail as a mother, Antara also abandoned her own daughter, continuing the cycle of neglect.

According to Amy Marschall (2024) Intergenerational trauma refers to trauma that is passed from a trauma survivor to their descendants. It can also be referred to as transgenerational or multigenerational trauma. People experiencing intergenerational trauma may experience symptoms, reactions, patterns, and emotional and psychological effects from trauma experienced by previous generations (not limited to just parents or grandparents). *Burnt Sugar* by Avni Doshi explores trauma through the complicated relationship between a mother and daughter. Antara struggles with the emotional neglect and mistreatment she experienced from her mother, Tara, and those past wounds continue to affect her identity and relationships. Tara's Alzheimer's symbolizes the fragility of memory, highlighting how trauma can distort recollections and create uncertainty. The novel shows how pain and unresolved emotions are passed down through generations, making it a powerful story to analyse from a trauma perspective.

This paper focuses on the theme of trauma experienced by the characters in *Burnt Sugar*. Trauma refers to deeply distressing experiences that can leave lasting emotional and psychological impacts. It may arise from events such as abuse, accidents, disasters, or the loss of a loved one, often leading to complex emotions and challenging behaviors. Trauma can also stem from difficult experiences during childhood, shaping an individual's mental and emotional well-being over time.

This topic is worth discussing, because currently there are still many children who lack the role of parents, both mothers and fathers. A lack of parental presence especially from the mother can lead to deep emotional trauma

in children, with effects that may carry over into the next generation. Children who are neglected by their parents often struggle with feelings of being unloved, lack a guiding figure to teach them and may fear repeating the same mistakes when they eventually become parents themselves. When left unresolved, such trauma can create long-term difficulties in managing emotions and relationships, often leading to anxiety, exhaustion, poor health, and challenges in forming meaningful connections with others.

## **1.2 Statement of The Problem**

According to the information in the background above, this study seeks to answer the following question:

1. How does the mother-daughter relationship in *Burnt Sugar* reflect the transmission of generational trauma and how does Antara attempt to break free from the cycle of trauma?

## **1.3 Purpose of The Study**

Based on the statement of problem above, this study aims to:

1. To show how the mother-daughter relationship in *Burnt Sugar* reflects the transmission of generational trauma and show how Antara attempts to break free from the cycle of trauma

## **1.4 Significance of The Study**

The writer expected this study raises awareness of the lasting effects of familial trauma, encouraging discussions on emotional inheritance and healing. It may offer readers to explore similar theme in other literary works and real-life experiences. This study explores the theme of generational trauma in Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*, focusing on how trauma is passed from mother to daughter and its lasting psychological impact. By analysing the complex relationship between Tara and Antara, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how unresolved emotional wounds influence identity memory, and interpersonal relationships. This study enriches literary trauma studies by examining *Burnt Sugar* through the lens of intergenerational trauma, adding to discussion on how literature portrays inherited pain and psychological distress it also provides insights into the role of

memory and subjectivity in storytelling, emphasizing how trauma shapes personal and collective narratives. This study contributes to the understanding of trauma in literary and gender studies by examining how *Burnt Sugar* portrays generational trauma within the mother-daughter dynamic.

### **1.5 Method of The Study**

This research adopts a qualitative narrative analysis approach, examining *Burnt Sugar* through the lens of trauma theory. The study applies key theories from:

1. Marianne Hirsch (The Mother-Daughter Plot) – Postmemory and Inherited trauma
2. Adrienne Rich (Of Woman Born) – Feminist perspectives on motherhood and trauma

By integrating these theories, this study explores how trauma is experienced, inherited, and expressed through narrative, memory, and familial relationships.

### **1.6 The Scope and Limitation of The Study**

This study has scope and limitation. The scope of this study, the writer used the novel for research purposes. This study only utilizes the novel as the primary source, without incorporating external research materials. The novel to be used is "*Burnt Sugar*" by Avni Doshi. Of the seven characters, the writer only analyses two characters, namely Antara and Tara. For the sake of research, the writer will examine the research only to the extent of emotions, desires, conflicts, and the trauma experienced by the characters in *Burnt Sugar*. The characters Antara and her mother, Tara are chosen as the central focus of this study because their relationship embodies the core theme of generational trauma in *Burnt Sugar*. Unlike other characters in the novel, their dynamic directly illustrates how trauma is passed down from mother to daughter, shaping identity, memory, and emotional bonds. Tara and Antara are the focus of this analysis because their relationship is the main focus of the novel. The story highlights the complex connection between them as mother and daughter, marked by emotional pain, anger, and unresolved issues from the past. Tara's lack of care during Antara's childhood had a lasting impact on Antara's adult life. Since the novel is narrated from Antara's perspective, readers

gain a deep understanding of her emotions and personal struggles. While other characters appear, they are not as important. Tara and Antara's relationship shows the main themes of the novel such as trauma between generations, memory, and identity, which is why they are the focus of this study.

### **1.7 Status of The Study**

The present writer found previous studies using this novel as the object has been conducted by Chabane Houria (2021). He used Freudian approach and Oedipal Complex in particular to decode the psychological being of both a mother and her daughter. The researcher investigated the problematic areas in mother – daughter relationship that is shown through a dysfunctional motherhood exhibited in Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* main character. The researcher has made an attempt to map out the problematic areas and spheres of motherhood. She throws a wealth of her efforts to study the ways of looking at mother - daughter relationship, but also the concept of mother as a choice –or imposed. She also sheds light on the mother-daughter relationship which becomes a woman's experience that cannot be left for male writers. Next study by Neelofar Shafi & Dr. Prachi Priyanka (2023) with the title *Navigating Memory and Trauma in Avni Doshi's Burnt Sugar: The Interplay of Remembering and Forgetting*, the result of the previous study is, Antara's memories of her mother, Tara's memories are not clear or simple, they are filled with strong and uncomfortable details that mess with her current life. This portrayal aligns with Caruth's idea that trauma manifest though involuntary and current recollections, disrupting the victim's sense of linear time and coherence. According to Janina Fisher (2021) Trauma is not just caused by child abuse or domestic violence or war. It is caused by accidents, natural disasters, political terrorism, and even diseases. The trauma experienced by Antara, a character in this novel, is how she saw her mother failed in marriage and also failed in taking care of her daughter. She is also afraid of experiencing something similar to her mother and what she worries about happened. The difference between this study and previous studies are, in this study the focus is on the trauma experienced by the characters in the novel. The present writer did not find any study discussing trauma in *Burnt Sugar*.

by Avni Doshi (2019). The purpose of this study is to analyse and show the trauma in *Burnt Sugar* by Avni Doshi.

### **1.8 Organization of The Study**

The use of organization is to help the reader understand more clearly about the study. This research consists of four chapters.

#### **Chapter I – Introduction**

This chapter explains the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research methodology, the scope and limitations of the study, the status of the study, and the organization of the study.

#### **Chapter II – Review of Related Literature**

This chapter explains the approach and the theory that the writer uses in the study.

#### **Chapter III – From Mother to Daughter: Generational Trauma in Doshi's *Burnt Sugar***

This chapter explains the findings and also explains why the novel is analysed with the theory.

#### **Chapter IV – Conclusion**

This chapter explains the results of the study and also the suggestion and recommendation from the writer who wants to do a study with the same topic.