

# Monica Pradhan's The Hindi Bindi Club A Saga of Parent-Child Relationship

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**Abstract:** Societal depictions of mother-daughter relationships owe much to historical and socio-economic conditions. Society relegated women to love, marry and attain motherhood. Since then, women are expected to be devoted nurturers, carriers and representatives of unbounded love, all responsible for children's outcomes. She has carried her offspring in her womb for a stipulated period of time. And once they are born she spends even longer time in nursing and upbringing them. Compassion, love and caring are indispensable for strengthening the bond between herself and her children. The same motherly sacrifice has been unambiguously portrayed in the present research paper, wherein every sincere endeavour has been made to showcase the saga of parent-child relationship; keeping in mind every minute detail mentioned in the novel "The Hindi Bindi Club by Monica Pradhan".

**Keywords:** Culture, diaspora, ethnicity, matrilineage, mother-daughter relationship.

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## INTRODUCTION

Parent and child relationship has always been an inevitable bond since the inception of this world. Of the many different relationships people form over the course of the life span, the relationship between parent and child is among the most important; it stands above all (Post 12). It is composite of such a bonding and telepathy that by being tight-lipped, both the parties comprehend the entire implication. The aspiration of every parent and child is to treasure bliss in life and to live in an affectionate, blissful family liaison. However, scuffle, rebellion, disorderliness, misunderstanding and unease, often mar the harmony and happy relationships that should reign in the family. In this present research paper, every sincere endeavour has been made to showcase the saga of parent-child relationship; keeping in mind every minute detail mentioned in the novel "The Hindi Bindi Club by Monica Pradhan".

Monica Pradhan's biological parents immigrated to the United States from Mumbai, India, in the 1960s. She took birth in Pittsburgh, PA, and her upbringing was to the exterior of Washington, DC. Presently, she resides in Minnesota and Toronto with her spouse. She pooled her experience and acquaintance of other immigrants, along with her gifts from her blood relation, and penned down a striking novel of two generations of women, letting expression to each of them in The Hindi- Bindi Club.

Three utterly diverse Indian women, all in their thirties, from entirely unlike cultures formed an impromptu alliance upon their advent in the United States, dragging together to assist each other and hold onto their backgrounds while befitting into their new existence, sharing recipes, customs, and the challenges of being women shaped by ancient ways yet living modern lives. They are the women who despite being so far away from their motherland have endeavoured to uphold their identity in an alien land (now their home) by their dialect (Hindi) and attire (Bindi). They have vexed their best to imbibe the traditional values, customs in their coming generation who are born in the US and are brought up as 2nd peer group Indian-American. As East meets West across time and tradition, six women take their first steps toward true sisterhood, shattering long-kept secrets, sharing joy and tears, and allowing the real power of the Hindi-Bindi Club to take hold.

When Indians of different subcultures get together, they often flit in and out of English and Hindi with equal ease. To those of us who don't understand Hindi, they shut us out of what sounds to our ears like a secret, special language. Thus our nickname for our mother, the Hindi-Bindi Club: They spoke in Hindi and sometimes wore bindi (33).

The Hindi Bindi Club narrates the story of two generation of Indians, parents and their children, more specifically mothers and their daughters residing in America, a native land; their differences as the progenies nurture captivating in

bits from both the cultures, emerging up as beings of dual identity. The novel also highlights the challenge that the offsprings of these double-faced parents undergo to live up to the level of expectations of their parents and still remain chastised and loyal to their own selves.

To initiate with, The Hindi-Bindi Club, epicentres around three pairs of mother and daughter, Kiran and her mother Meenal from Mumbai, Priety and her Punjabi mother Saroji, Rani and her Bengali mother Uma from Kolkata. Kiran, Priety and Rani develop a network by default as their mothers' friendship grew stronger over the years. The girls, now all grown up and settled into their own lives, jokingly came to call their mothers' the Hindi-Bindi Club.

The basic plotline of The Hindi-Bindi Club is about coming to terms with familial relationships as well as ethnic cultural issues. The Hindi-Bindi Club attempts to delineate the complicated immigrant experience through the portrayals of the relationship between Asian immigrant mothers and their American daughters. Hence, in the novel matrilineage reigns utmost and functions as a metonymy for ancestral heritage from the "homeland."

Two of the Hindi-Bindi mothers are professional women: Uma is a professor of English, and Saroji, braving her husband's condemnation, weaves a promising career in catering South Asian food. Monica Pradhan sketches the contextual for the Hindi-Bindi mothers:

The aunties are in their late fifties to late sixties, both pilgrims and Indians, born in the Far East land of spices for which Columbus set sail and erroneously thought he discovered. Instead, they wouldn't arrive on American shores for hundreds more years, their sizable waves post-1965, a direct result of new, highly selective U.S. immigration laws (31).

Some of the Hindi-Bindi mothers are also preys of war catastrophes, as exemplified by Saroji's haunting memory of the Partition in 1947. Yet instead of indulging in the distress of parting from a "motherland" The Hindi-Bindi Club sports a kind of multicultural cosmopolitanism and transnational "flexible citizenship," that characterize the lives of contemporary middle-class South Asian diasporas (Bhattacharjee 163)

The Hindi-Bindi mothers, who all emerge from privileged backgrounds and carry with them distinct cultural traditions from the subcontinent, are presented as members of a postmodern computerized society. They are electronically versed and experienced surfers of the Internet. The Hindi-Bindi Club, which is very much deep-rooted in the tradition of the contemporary urban "chick lit" genre, is distinctly classed and gendered.

The three Hindi-Bindi daughters linger intimate to their mothers. And the close mother-daughter connexion in the novel is styled in culinary terms. For instance, Rani reminiscences, "When I was little, I was my mother's shadow. An only child, I was the center of her world, and she was mine. I loved to watch her prepare Bengali food" (80). Fascinated by the way how her mother, armed with "a bonti - a contraption with a curved upright blade that served as an old-fashioned, manual food processor" cuts vegetables into different shapes, the young Rani once vowed "to chop all the vegetables" when she grows up (81). When as an adult she suffers from an artist's block, she attempts to compose herself by producing her own chocolate version of the "celebratory sweet, sandesh" out of her mother's recipe (79). Even the prodigal daughter Kiran, a prosperous physician in her own right, turns around to acquire Indian cooking and embraces the tradition of arranged matrimony.

Through wonderfully vivid personal history, stories, recipes, emails and letters, Monica Pradhan tells the story of different generations trying to cope. The novel is labelled as a hybrid form of novel writing, which interestingly links the communicative function of e-mails with that of the recipes. The e-mails are used to transpire information horizontally and intra-generationally, the recipes are more like family legacies inculcated for vertical communication.

Kiran finds out that her mother Meenal starts writing when the latter is diagnosed with breast cancer because, according to Meenal, it is the mother's liability to tutelage the daughter "the basics of Indian cooking" (177). Her recipes are written "with measurements" so that it will be easy for Kiran, who possess "meager time and more meager skill," to adhere (21). These judiciously scripted recipes are gifts from a mother who has confronted the shadow of death. Thus Kiran's apprenticeship in Meenal's kitchen is also a route of acquiring significant "life lessons" from her mother (177).

In any society mothers are seen as life givers and the most important teachers of survival skills. In any society faith rests on mothers for bringing up children that are productive and can contribute positively to its development. Children learn the basic survival skills largely from their mothers. Mothers create the immediate link to the outside world for daughters. Moreover, the maternal recipes in *The Hindi-Bindi Club* are persistently subject to daughterly modifications. Both Priety and Rani tête-à-tête about how they “tweak” their mothers’ family recipes for their own palate at the risk of provoking maternal displeasure, even anger. Priety candidly makes reference to Saroji’s “conniptions” over how the daughter has Americanized her recipes [57]. The daughter responds to the mother’s micromanagement with a spirit of American individualism - “It’s my kitchen. I can do what I want to” (57). This daughterly revisionist practice is actually a point at which the “exotic” South Asian cooking has turned into an Asian American cuisine. These Hindi-Bindi daughters obviously have their own clue about their own “culinary citizenship.”

As Kiran comments on the old days when she has interrogated her mother to “please speak English,” “It wasn’t that we weren’t proud of our heritage. We were. But we were equally proud of our nationality” (173). A mother’s recipe in *The Hindi-Bindi Club* is sometimes attached with a note termed “Mum’s Tips,” telling the daughter for instance to be vigilant about handling spices that will stain, passing down information about a preferred brand of store-bought ingredient, or cautioning against the use of so-called “curry powder” (40). Such an intimate note denotes another personal touch that again emphasizes the prominence of mother-daughter inter-communication while practicing the “nourishing arts” (46). Nevertheless, food sometimes can be a source of physical disorder. “At our house, ‘eat, dear, eat’ was my mother’s mantra,” Priety evokes (385). The mother’s “nourishing arts” actually make the daughter sick. At the same time the daughter is keeping this “shameful secret” from the parents because an eating disorder of such a nature is beyond the imagination of the immigrant generation. Having enough food to offer to their children is seen as a sign of material success and achievement for the immigrant parents. As “Perfect Priety” confesses to her childhood rival Kiran:

I rotted all my teeth with all the stomach acid . . . . And still, I couldn’t tell my parents. Can’t you just imagine? I’d never hear the end of it. “All these starving people in the world, and here, this spoiled rotten girl not only has the luxury of eating like a queen, afterward, she sticks her finger down her throat and intentionally throws up. She is puking enough food to feed a village! We should send her to India. Let her volunteer in the Peace Corps. That will teach her (386).

The daughter’s doggedness on taking the responsibility for her illness seems oddly old-fashioned compared to the mother’s open pursuit of physical gratification. What remains unchanged in the constant flows of the diasporic condition in the novel is the affective bond between mothers and daughters constructed around the kitchen table (Brown 56).

## CONCLUSION

Pradhan's pulsating fiction bears testimony to the interminable scuffle between mothers and daughters, with a slight Bollywood twist. Instead of elaborate musical numbers, the reader is pickled to all manner of delicious, mouth-watering recipes that bookend each chapter. Articulated from the manifold points of view of both mothers and daughters, we perceive that, although cultures may be diverse, the glitches between the generations are worldwide. A rich tapestry of a people, a country and three distinctive families is entwined into this saga of mothers and daughters, childhood and adulthood, nuptial and love, food and sustenance.

Mother-daughter relations are further complicated in multicultural and multiracial societies such as the United States where there is tension and ambivalence over strategies of racial or ethnic maintenance and cultural assimilation.

(Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995, p. 214)

An Indian mother feels it's her responsibility to forward her recipes to her daughter, to "pass along her wisdom before she dies" (how 89). Through *The Hindi-Bindi Club*, Monica Pradhan tenderly has showcased a fascinating blend of family relationships, her olden times, passionate and complex characters and Indian history recipes and ethos to starved and indebted bibliophiles. It is truly a heart-warming and thought-proving story about the liaison between mothers and daughters and the challenges of amalgamating Indian and American values crossways generations.

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