

# The Echoes of Oppression and Identity Crisis: An Insight Into Geetanjali Shree's *Mai: Silently Mother* and Krishna Sobti's *Memory's Daughter*

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**Abstract**—Throughout history, women have faced various forms of prejudice and challenges, encompassing physical, psychological, and sociological aspects. Feminist writers across the world have focused on stories about female protagonists who have faced subjugation and marginalization but have had the strength to emerge from their refuge to develop their own identity in society. Krishna Sobti and Geetanjali Shree are two renowned writers whose stories have significantly impacted society. The writers listed above made significant contributions to this discipline by creating characters who promoted the idea of self-sufficient women. This paper examines the depiction of women's oppression and pertinence. Sobti's *Memory's Daughter* and Shree's *Mai: Silently Mother* explored the varied issues that female characters experience in Indian society. This study analyses how female characters in Sobti's and Shree's writings navigate and overcome the constraints of a patriarchal culture. It emphasizes how individuals' struggles for identification and individuality mirror society's cultural developments. Drawing on Kimberly Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, the researchers examine how multiple types of oppression interact to influence female characters' experiences. Furthermore, the paper investigates women's identity crisis in a patriarchal society, examining women's roles in sustaining and exacerbating women's marginalization and exploring the many layers of biases. The study hopes to shed light on India's cultural dynamics and the ongoing struggle for women's emancipation.

**Index Terms**—patriarchy, oppression, identity crisis, intersectionality, struggle

## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of women's status has been related to strict patriarchal norms and traditional conflict. A male-centric society always controls an individual's identity, whether it's religious, cultural, national, or gender-based. Over the years, women in India have shaped the concept of "feminism" and established their unique voice. Indian women authors often explore the prominent themes of patriarchal oppression and identity crises among women. Patriarchy is defined as a system in which men dominate society through their positions of power, with the majority of higher economic, political, industrial, financial, religious, and social roles held by men (Sultana, 2010). Societal expectations, marital servitude, and traditional gender norms subject women to internal conflict and a need for self-identification. Throughout their journey, women face cultural pressures while seeking autonomy and self-expression. The intersections of oppression and identity struggles, particularly when considering women's experiences in patriarchal societies, are critical issues that deeply resonate in contemporary writing. In their families and society, women—especially those from marginalised backgrounds—frequently find themselves at the intersection of discrimination and subordination. This limits their personal growth and makes it more challenging for them to discover their true identities as individuals. Betty Frieden's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticised the concept of women as a child bearer and homemakers. In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Frieden talks about women as victims of societal prejudices and suffers from an identity crisis; "In a sense that goes beyond any one woman's life, I think this is the crisis of women growing up a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity. I think women had to suffer this crisis of identity, which began a hundred years ago, and have to suffer it still today, simply to become fully human" (Friedan, 1963, p. 59). The two well-known authors in India, Geetanjali Shree and Krishna Sobti, write works that address issues of women's identity crisis, oppression, and resiliency. Geetanjali Shree's and Krishna Sobti's exploration of women's experiences within India's sociopolitical context illuminates the complexities of the existing patriarchal society.

Krishna Sobti (1925-2019), a significant writer, remains one of the major voices in Hindi literature, having carved out a special niche for herself via her creative vision and skills. Sobti's works include a bright and unique literary style. Her depiction of female characters in her novels reflects her resistance to society's evident unequal power dynamics.

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Her writings appear to express her personal opposition to enduring prejudice and her focus on highlighting the struggles and worries of women who have suffered at the hands of men-orientated and dominant social institutions and practices. Rather than using a social lens, Sobti's works provide deeper insights and inspire creativity through their honest narratives. *Memory's Daughter* (2007) by Krishna Sobti recounts the tale of a girl named *Pasho* set in a war-ravaged Punjab during the 19th-century Anglo-Afghan conflict. *Pasho* resides with her maternal grandparents following her mother's elopement with a Muslim man. From the beginning of the novel, people treat *Pasho* like a commodity and trade her like livestock. Her experiences as a woman in 19th-century India illustrate the severe realities of gender-based oppression. She passes through different places in search of her true identity, often unwillingly. Furthermore, the colonial authorities and her faith intensify the oppression she endures. Despite facing persistent violence and exploitation, *Pasho's* resilience enables her survival.

Geetanjali Shree is a well-known Indian Hindi-language writer who writes extensively about the feminine experience. Shree's unconventional storytelling methods beautifully depict the regular lives of people. She portrays the plot and characters with her masterful use of language and wit. She is the first Indian writer to win the International Booker Prize 2022 for her novel *Tomb of Sand*. Nita Kumar translated Shree's *Mai: Silently Mother* (2017) from its original Hindi. *Mai: Silently Mother* is a novel based in North India that talks about a patriarchal family through the eyes of a daughter named *Sunaina*. *Sunaina's* mai, or the mother, represents the victim of patriarchal tyranny and the cruel repercussions associated with it. In the novel, *Sunaina* and her brother wanted their mother to retaliate and break the shackles of patriarchal oppression. However, the mother silently suffered and endured whatever came her way to fit in the ideal woman concept, as Virginia Woolf suggested in "Angel in the House." Her character provides intergenerational and deep sociological insights, acting as a powerful barrier for her daughter. Through this narrative, Shree captures the mother's distress and the broader implications of cultural patriarchy in Indian society. Both authors significantly influence readers through their varied representations of protagonists. *Pasho* in *Memory's Daughter* and the maternal figure *Mai* in *Mai: Silently Mother* exemplify hope in the face of adversity.

## II. AN OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework aims to explore women's oppression and identity crisis through a close reading of the novels using the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality. The word "intersectionality" was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race Sex: Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Since then, it has grown into a critical idea in feminist and race studies. The basic definition of intersectionality refers to the different social strata and how they interact with each other to produce numerous experiences of privilege and oppression. According to Crenshaw, "intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking" (Crenshaw, 1989).

Feminism theory has been criticised throughout the years for focusing mostly on white privilege and women. As a result, Kimberlé's work addresses other key axes in social structure that contribute to privilege and oppression, such as sexual orientation, gender, race, class, caste and socio-economic status. These intersecting identities influence the experience of oppression or privilege, underscoring the importance of analyzing how marginalized groups, particularly women, are affected by compounded forms of inequality. Atewologun (2018) states intersectionality is a critical framework that provides us with the mindset and language for examining interconnections and interdependencies between social categories and systems. Therefore, identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality interact in unique ways and shape individuals' experiences and opportunities. The intersection of these identities reflects our society's systematic inequalities and diverse realities. Therefore, it is essential to dissect the forms of oppression through the lens of intersectionality rather than relying on the single-axis framework.

Intersectionality further targets white feminism by referring to the white feminist movements and viewpoints that give precedence to the experiences and concerns of white, middle-class women at the expense of women of colour and other oppressed groups, which were spurred by intersectionality. Gopaldas mentions that, though Crenshaw is credited for introducing the concept of intersectionality to the world, the theory has been developed over the years, keeping Black feminism in mind (2013). The Black women were not represented in either Black movements or women's movements in the United States. Researchers further broadened the criteria to incorporate all social identity structures, suggesting that each individual has unique social advantages and disadvantages that are subject to scrutiny (Gopaldas, 2013). Similarly, the theory of intersectionality entered Indian feminism through Dalit feminist researchers. They argued that caste and gender become axes of oppression for Dalit women as they are further marginalized.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers use a textual analysis method to examine and interpret the axes of intersectionality and identity crisis in the novels. The primary materials for the study are *Memory's Daughter* by Krishna Sobti and *Mai: Silent Mother* by Geetanjali Shree and secondary sources like articles, research papers, and e-resources that deal with women's victimisation and identity crises. The researchers used the "intersectionality" theory of Kimberlé Crenshaw, which helped the researchers to see beyond just gender and understand how numerous forms of discrimination and social

labels intertwine with an individual's life experiences. Through an examination of the stories told by Protagonist Pasho and Mother, the researchers intend to discover the complex ways in which identities that intersect with one another influence the realities that women experience when they are in oppressive environments. Furthermore, by applying the intersectional lens to the works of Geetanjali Shree and Krishna Sobti, the researchers will be able to critically examine the societal norms and power structures that are relevant to society, as well as how women are subjugated to these structures.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. *The Echoes of Intersectional Oppression and Identity Crisis in Memory's Daughter*

Krishna Sobti's *Memory's Daughter* was first published in 1958 as *Daar Se Bichhudi* in Hindi and was translated into English by Meenakshi Bharadwaj and Smita Bharti in 2007. This novel is set during the Anglo-Afghan War in British India. The novel follows the journey of a young girl named *Pasho*, who lives with her maternal uncles and her grandmother. Her mother runs away with another religious man after giving birth to her, and she is left stranded with her remaining family members. *Pasho* goes through many hardships as her uncles control her and treat her like an object. At the beginning of the novel, she is with her maternal uncle, and because of his torture, she flees to her mother's house, where she meets her mother. Later, she is married to an old Diwan so she can be saved from her uncles. When Diwan dies, she is possessed by Lakhpatt and then sold to three brothers to pay off his debt (Kaur, 2020). In the end, she is saved by a Sikh, but he is also killed at the hands of the Britishers, and she must submit herself to the Englishmen (Kaur, 2020). Krishna Sobti beautifully captures the essence of a young girl and how she faces difficulties in surviving in a patriarchal society where women are merely considered objects. Through the narrative of Krishna Sobti, the protagonist *Pasho* in *Memory's Daughter* experiences are deeply intersectional as her struggles are shaped by different aspects of oppression, such as gender, power dynamics, religion, societal expectation, etc. These combine to create unique struggles and marginalization. Throughout the narrative, *Pasho* is treated like cattle that can be bought and sold. As a result, in her quest to discover her true self, she has to confront not only gender-based discrimination but also the complexities of cultural identity, colonialism, and the geopolitical turmoil of her time.

Though the theory of intersectionality emerged from the experiences of Black women in the United States, Few Demo and Allen (2020) discuss its relevance to understanding the systematic oppression and subjugation of women regardless of racial, ethnic, class, or sexual identities. Raja (2003) goes on to say that women have historically faced injustices that have been justified by caste, religion, and divine laws and that such practices reflect men's attempts to assert dominance and control over women. The novel begins with the oppression of *Pasho* by her maternal uncle, which further establishes a cycle of abuse that defines her life. The main reason *Pasho's* family has power over her is because her mother, *Meher*, is a Khatri who flees with a Khoja. By marrying another religious man against the wishes of his family, her mother, who comes from a high-caste Hindu family, creates a stigma that affects her daughter *Pasho* and shapes her life course. She is subjected to oppression as a result of her mother's interfaith marriage, which demonstrates one aspect of intersectionality: religion. Her maternal family members abuse her mentally; for instance, *Pasho* says, "Grandmother clapped a hand to my mouth. "Shh, don't ever utter that name, ladki! We are the Khatri, high caste Hindu. And your mother dared to run away to a Khoja, the tribe that willfully broke away from the Khatri and turned to Islam. No child, if you so much as look in that direction, your uncle will bury you alive" (Sobti, 2007, p. 11). This shows that she can't even utter the name of her mother if she does, she will be beaten up by her uncles. *Pasho* is confined by strict caste and religious boundaries, which prevent her from interacting with people of different faiths and castes. Her uncles even accuse *Pasho* of flirting with *Karim*, a Muslim boy; as Khatri, her uncles are proud of their high caste, and if *Pasho* speaks to anyone below their caste, she is beaten up by her uncles. She endures physical violence because her uncle believes that she met *Karim*. They hit her badly for instance, "I howled with pain but there was no stopping him. Blood flowed. I froze seeing it. I caught hold of his feet and beat my head on the ground again and again, pleading "Don't hit me, Mamu, I haven't done a thing!" (Sobti, 2007, p. 15). In addition to being subjected to gender-based oppression, *Pasho* is also subjected to intersectional oppression, which has an adverse effect on her life. She is tortured by her maternal family because they believe *Pasho* will follow in her mother's footsteps.

These little instances reflect on the broader complexities in *Pasho's* life and how familial, societal, and structural factors shape her experiences. Verma (2014) states that *Pasho* is no better than a commodity. Her thoughts mainly revolve around clothes and ornaments, and in turn, she is overpowered by men forcing them on her. *Pasho's* mistreatments extend beyond verbal abuse to the imposition of menial tasks and societal expectations that reinforce her subordinate status. Her aunts occasionally insult her and expect her to behave in a certain way. For example, she is taunted by her aunt when she sits on a low stool to wash the dishes, "Ari, you ill-begotten creature, don't you know that only the bahu-betis of the good families sit in peedhis! Of which fine family are you a daughter or daughter-in-law?" (Sobti, 2007, p. 9). Therefore, despite her own worth, she is devalued because of her mother's actions. Rana (2012) argues that in a patriarchal society, women's identities are often defined by their physical existence and ownership rather than their selfhood. This could be seen appropriately in *Pasho's* characterisation, where her mother's abandonment not only alienates her but further reinforces her status as an outcast, highlighting the societal repercussions of female autonomy.

*Pasho* experiences an identity crisis due to her frequent location changes. At the start of the narrative, her name is *Pasho*, but it gradually changes to *Malan* and eventually *Naveli*, as she is referred to by various names in various contexts. She is shocked to discover that she was married to a person only because of money: "We gave Barkat a pot full of gold mohars. You are now the chattel of this house" (Sobti, 2007, p. 86). Her constant metamorphosis into different identities serves as a poignant reflection of what other people are trying to perceive her as according to their convenience. All her names become a signifier for the people who possess her. Changing the name of *Pasho* from one household to another parallels the treatment of personal property rather than a human being. Her quest for her identity in a patriarchal world is integrated into the different axes of women's subjugation and several other intersections, such as religion, gender, caste, race, and the socioeconomic nature of the time. It further emphasizes how identity in a patriarchal world could be fluid and manipulated, where the main character, i.e., *Pasho*, even after not wanting it, cannot change. However, *Pasho* is a self-loving girl who is obsessed with herself. It becomes her strength even after repeated torture from different people. Her beauty becomes her asset, getting her through all kinds of difficulties. "There was a time when I would walk down Shah Almi, sure and arrogant, a song in my stride. Eyes would rise and fall on me like a tide, attention congeal in my wake" (Sobti, 2007, p. 6). *Pasho*'s action shows the autonomy that she enjoys over others' decisions. Even when married, she feels proud of leaving her maternal uncle's house and her grandmother's (Kaur, 2020). Even when she is reduced to mere possession of her transactional nature, *Pasho* keeps her head and spirits high. *Pasho* experiences marginalization and dehumanization throughout the narrative, yet despite all the setbacks she encounters, her quest for her identity and roots keeps her alive. In a colonial society already shattered along religious and ethnic lines, her community identity alienates her even more. Even though she is strong, she frequently loses out on chances and basic privileges that belong to those from higher castes. In addition to being reinforced by society at large, caste prejudice is deeply embedded in her environment, resulting in a complicated web of oppression. *Pasho* experiences a deep sense of dislocation because of being torn between colonialism's destructive effects and conventional societal norms. Her quest for identification develops into a moving story of defiance against indigenous and imperial tyranny.

Krishna Sobti paints a picture of *Pasho*, who is compelled to go through experiences that she does not particularly want to go through. *Pasho* simultaneously demonstrates the temperament of a rural girl who lacks access to education and endures hardships because of the patriarchal structure of her community. She disregards her human rights and lives according to what others force her to do (Mourya, 2021). At one point, she becomes the mistress of three brothers after being sold by Lakhpat Rai to pay off his debts. Manjhle, one of the oppressors of *Pasho*, considers her his queen. It is very ironic as she is serving there as a mistress and a slave. At once, she is described as beautiful: "And see if the sardar chiefs are not struck dumb by these big eyes of yours!" (Sobti, 2007, p. 92) and very next, she is tortured by Manjhle, who grabs her shoulder by shaking her hard saying, "This haughtiness, I will crush it with these very hands" (Sobti, 2007, p. 89). She further loses her only child and her husband in all these circumstances and is left alone to fight the world. Through *Pasho*'s story, Krishna Sobti comments on the necessity of exploring the intersecting forms of oppression that women still go through and endure. By exposing her experiences, Sobti calls for a more nuanced understanding of how different axes of intersectionality interact and continue to marginalize people like *Pasho*.

#### B. *The Echoes of Intersectional Oppression and Identity Crisis in Mai: Silently Mother*

Geetanjali Shree's *Mai: Silently Mother* was first published in Hindi as *Mai* and was later translated into English by Nita Kumar. The story unfolds in a middle-class family in North India, centering on the narrator's mother, who remains unaffected by the treatment she receives from others. At the same time, the narrator, Sunaina, and her brother want her to take a stand for herself irrespective of the people who hurt her or disrespect her because of her gender. Shree poignantly portrays the character of a mother, which could be seen as a reflection of Indian mothers—selfless, resilient, and respectful. The mother in the novel is one of the iconic characters who has been silently oppressed in a patriarchal family and never retaliates for that. Different members of her family silently oppress her, and, therefore, she becomes an ideal victim in a male-dominated society. The oppression of *Mai* could be seen through different axes of the intersectional theory, where the complexities of her experiences are not just shaped by her gender but also by familial and societal pressures. *Mai* is portrayed as a woman who performs domestic work continuously throughout the story. This job makes it difficult to distinguish between her and the duties performed by her housekeeper, Hardeyi. At one point, her daughter also remarks, "Sometimes *Mai* churned the buttermilk and sometimes Hardeyi. Sometimes *Mai* ground the chutney or lentils, and sometimes Hardeyi. Sometimes *Mai* brought the wood, and sometimes Hardeyi" (Shree, 2017, p. 13). This further emphasizes how women's labour often goes unrecognized and is mostly taken for granted.

At the beginning of the novel, Shree focuses on the mother's fragility by describing her physical appearance as a "weak spine" because "she constantly bends." "*Mai* was always bent over. We should know. We've been watching her from the beginning. Our beginning is her beginning after all. She was bent over right from the start, a silent specter moving around, taking care of everyone's needs" (Shree, 2017, p. 1). This signifies her nature in attending to and working for all her family members, irrespective of time and health. Gradually, this physical trait also becomes her mental characteristic, where the bent posture is relevant to understanding the mental burden given to her in the same household by her in-laws and her husband. Within the narrative, it becomes evident that *Mai*'s experiences are deeply influenced by the intersectionality of her identity as a woman and her role as a daughter-in-law and a wife in Indian

society. According to Maracek (2016), one of the essential aspects of intersectionality theory is that “social categories by which hierarchies are constructed intersect” with each other. That is to say that they do not have fixed meanings; instead, they are constitutive and synergistic and further serve as an insight into universal claims about women. Therefore, by recognizing these complexities, it becomes easy to access the diverse realities women face. Despite her continuous and relentless efforts, *Mai* is subjected to constant blame and taunt, even for a simple matter. She is never attributed to the work that she is doing. For example, Dadi, her mother-in-law, would taunt her, and she was “never tired of elaborating on how she had given incomparable service to her mother-in-law” (Shree, 2017, p. 23). Therefore, *Mai*’s experience exposes the impact of generational gender expectations, which confine women to patriarchal roles irrespective of their standing in the family.

Due to her responsibilities, she is alienated within her family as obligations towards her home overshadow her identity. Moreover, *Mai*’s emotional and psychological tension increases because of societal norms. Gender dynamics and familial oppression are constantly imposed on women, and that can be seen through the characters of both *Mai* and her daughter, *Sunaina*. Though the mother is primarily silent in front of her in-laws, she plays freely with her kids and supervises their schoolwork (Sarkar, 2016). At the same time, her inability to challenge and confront her oppressors highlights the systematic power differentials that exist in the domestic sphere. *Mai* keeps numerous fasts and sacrifices herself so the other family members can be healthy and prosperous. She kept a long list of fasts: “Ahoyi, Teej, Lalhichhat, Thursday, Monday, Shivratri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Jyutiya. Some for the husband’s prosperity, some for the son’s health, some for her children” (Shree, 2017, p. 53). The mother becomes a figure of sacrifice without asking anything in return. This unreciprocated devotion towards family members exposes the cultural expectation for women, as they embody the role of a selfless carer and ultimately reinforce their oppression.

The depiction of gender oppression in the novel is multifaceted, as seen from *Sunaina*’s experiences. The narrator of the novel, though two years older than her brother *Subodh*, suffers because of her gender. The depiction of *Sunaina*’s ongoing subjugation serves as a commentary on the society that oppresses women based on their identity. Despite her brother’s privilege of attending a prestigious school, *Sunaina* cannot apply for admission. *Subodh* pursues higher studies in England, while *Sunaina* remains in her hometown. However, *Sunaina*’s rebellious nature and her *Mai*’s support enable her to follow her path. The constant discussion revolves around the unequal treatment of characters of different genders, particularly *Sunaina*, who is not even permitted to meet her male friends and must do so discreetly. For instance, “Subodh did not hesitate in speaking to my girlfriends in front of *Mai*, nor I in talking to his friends. Yet, if Babu came on, my tongue would turn to stone. Even if he sat in the nearby room, my eyes would look down and lips fall still, and our general noise lessens, if not subside completely” (Shree, 2017, p. 77). Nevertheless, *Subodh* brings female friends to his house openly without any hesitance from others. According to Sreekumar (2015), *Mai*’s conscious choice not to force her children to follow the wishes of others may be seen as a clear rejection of a tool that upholds patriarchal identities and ideas. She encouraged her kids to challenge social conventions in whatever way possible, raising them with their opinions and convictions. Her purported “ignorance” allowed them to develop into independent adults who were undisturbed by social conventions of beneficial and evil (Sreekumar, 2015). Through these experiences, Shree focuses on the multifaceted nature of intersectionality and systematic oppression and how these women have endured them throughout their lives. *Mai*’s identity crisis is symbolic of women’s struggles in our society.

Moreover, *Mai*’s character is not just a woman but also a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. The complex interplay of societal expectations, personal aspirations, and family duties suppresses her identity. As a devoted carer, she forgets her own self and her desire to be an individual woman. During all this, she grapples with the tension between her responsibilities as a mother and her unfulfilled ambitions. She must get permission even to talk to her maternal family. At one point, both her in-laws taunted her because of her brother. Even when the children force her to retaliate because of the dominant views of male society, she chooses to remain silent. All her hard work is subjected to scrutiny from her in-laws. Therefore, *Mai*’s struggle in the face of patriarchal oppression increases her subjugation and identity crisis.

Dada, an older character in the novel, represents a conventional man through whom Shree criticizes the nature of patriarchy, the oppression of women, and the way that various castes, religions, and genders are treated. His manners and social expectations scrutinize the development of identity, and these minor instances are the only areas where the nation’s societal structure is clearly visible. For instance, when addressing Dada, who belongs to the upper caste, the servants are expected to bend over and take off their slippers when addressing him. “Dada did not like servants inside the house. Apart from the fear of theft if they were given the freedom to move around, they might become bold enough to talk back” (Shree, 2017, p. 14). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the intersectionality of these issues when critiquing the nature of casteism and gender oppression in Indian society. Dada’s character further demonstrates contempt towards individuals who are not Hindus, as he holds them in low regard and believes himself to be superior. Even people from his religion are seen as inferior by him. Therefore, caste-based intersectionality personifies the stratification of social status through its numerous axes, as evidenced by relevant studies. The treatment of these people is relegated as inferior because they either belong to a different community or are from a different caste. This reflects on the intersectionality of caste, gender, and religious identity, showing how these overlapping axes of oppression shape individual experiences and perpetuate systemic inequality in our society.

The novel also explores the oppression of caste by showcasing their treatment in the house. *Hardeyi* and other household servants belonging to a lower caste are treated differently. They are discriminated against because of their

caste affiliation. Jha (2022) asserts that “a Dalit woman will face more discrimination than her female counterparts of a higher caste and male counterparts of the same caste.” Therefore, the relevance of casteism in the novel serves as a broader thematic concern that intersects with the narrative of Geetanjali Shree. Hardeyi and other household servant’s roles are essential in understanding the systemic discrimination and societal expectations of their caste. For instance, specific tasks are strictly reserved for Hardeyi, while she and the other servants are prohibited from entering the kitchen. Even when the mother is ill, instead of Hardeyi cooking the food, the grandmother takes over the responsibility of cooking. The novel showcases the intersection of gender and caste by shedding light on the complexities of negotiating identities.

#### V. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the novels *Mai: Silently Mother* and *Memory's Daughter*, this paper deeply exposes the themes of women's subjugation and oppression through various axes of intersectionality. Krishna Sobti's Pasho, though a character set during the Anglo-Afghan War of British India, resembles the modern complications faced by women in our society. Pasho, coming from a Khatri family, is sold like a commodity to different places and other people. Occasionally, men beat her, and she loses her only son, who briefly becomes her source of strength. Multiple perspectives reveal her oppression and identity crisis through the lens of intersectionality. She suffers because of her mother, who runs away with a Muslim man. At the same time, her other intersections of oppression are gender, caste, and societal expectations. However, her character becomes an act of defiance against all odds and survives. In a world marked by violence and exploitation, she confronts her circumstances with a high head. Similarly, Geetanjali Shree's *Mai: Silently Mother* focuses on the subjugation and oppression of middle-class North Indian women. The character of Mai resonates with the conditions of Indian mothers who relentlessly work for their families without thinking about themselves.

Different intersections and axes reveal that Mai's oppression stems from her gender, societal expectations, and family pressure, among other factors. She sacrifices her identity and herself for her family. However, when it comes to her children, she doesn't remain silent, and her voice or even a stare is enough to overturn the decisions of her in-laws and her husband. At times, her children force her to retaliate against the forces of societal expectations and generational patriarchy, but she remains silent and chooses her way of living. Geetanjali Shree also infuses other female characters who suffer solely because of their gender. Sunaina, the narrator, experiences gender discrimination; her brother has access to more opportunities and career choices, while she does not. Moreover, unlike her brother, she cannot pursue higher education abroad. Consequently, a few other characters face discrimination based on their caste and social class in the novel. Through the theory of intersectionality, Mai from *Mai: Silently Mother* and Pasho from *Memory's of Daughter* offer fascinating insights into women's subordination and resilience. Despite their strength, Mai and Pasho respond to their challenging circumstances in distinct ways, reflecting the differences in their respective cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Mai purposely does not want to break the shackles of patriarchy, yet she helps her children to live the life that they want, irrespective of the consequences. She doesn't find the patriarchal hegemony at her house terrifying, but her children find her reaction to it unbearable. Similarly, Pasho is a character who does not understand her actual worth in a man's world and fights it through her beauty and inner strength. They both overcome these oppressions while facing an identity crisis.

This study aims to shed light on the changing conditions that women are facing and to increase awareness in Indian society about the oppression that women face due to their gender and other factors which affect their lives. Instead of allowing women to become victims of a patriarchal society, Indian society can change its views on them and help them gain the personal agency to live their lives as they see fit. Both stories show how diverse manifestations of courage exist and emphasize the intricacy of women's lives under patriarchy. Mai and Pasho both represent the resilient spirit of women who, in their ways, overcome and resist their repressive situations, whether by quiet defiance or fearless confrontation. Both protagonists reflect a form of empowerment in their sense by confronting their identities amidst oppression.

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