

The Impact of Parenting Styles: A Study on Jaishree Misra's *Afterwards* Through the Lens of William Glasser's Choice Theory

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Abstract—Literature encompasses a multitude of human emotions and teaches individuals how to understand and manage their feelings. Healthy relationships are crucial for maintaining emotional well-being and fostering personal growth throughout an individual's life. In the case of parenting, nurturing a positive and supportive relationship with children is essential to make them feel that their lives are meaningful and rewarding. This research paper aims to scrutinise the dynamics of parent-child relationships in society through the novel *Afterwards* by Jaishree Misra, incorporating William Glasser's Choice Theory. The study focuses on Maya's strained relationship with her parents, their failure to understand her aspirations and the consequences of their external control psychology. However, it also portrays the supportive and non-controlling behavior of Rahul's parents, which promotes emotional strength and resilience in his life. The paper analyses the distinct parenting styles of Maya's and Rahul's parents, emphasising how emotionally empathetic parenting enhances a child's ability to face adversity with confidence. It also seeks to elucidate how the significant characters in the novel navigate the complex decision-making process when life threatens them with undeserved suffering, in line with Glasser's Choice Theory.

Index Terms—parent-child relationships, choice theory, external control psychology, empathetic parenting, emotional resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

Jaishree Misra, born in 1962, is a prolific Indian author known for her works that blend elements of traditional Indian culture with contemporary themes. She has written several novels that explore themes such as family, relationships and the complexities of modern Indian society. Her writings highlight the universal human experiences that connect everyone with their real life. Misra's novel *Afterwards*, published in 2004, reflects on the diverging impact of controlling and comprehensible relationships. She explores how controlling behaviour affects the relationship between Maya and her parents. Maya, the protagonist, becomes prey to the Puliya Varma clan's cultural customs in Kerala, which insist on conservative virtues and rules for female children. As part of the clan, her parents also insist that Maya should follow the ancient family conventions. They fail to be empathetic towards her and never give importance to her dreams and feelings because their priority remains in upholding the family's fame. On the other hand, Rahul resides in Delhi, where his parents maintain a coherent relationship with him despite adhering to their traditional customs. These different parental approaches influence the lives of Maya and Rahul in distinct directions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review aims to analyse the critical discourse surrounding Jaishree Misra's *Afterwards* and identify the research gap that justifies the present paper. However, many scholars have analysed the novel *Afterwards* from various perspectives. Kishor Kumar Sahu and Dr. Manvendra Prakash Mourya discuss the complexities of marital life, emphasising the sociocultural conflicts that Maya confronts in her life through their article, *Exploring Love, Loss, and Cultural Conflict in Jaishree Misra's Afterwards*. Ritika Kumari, in her article, *Representation of Gender Violence in Jaishree Misra's Afterwards*, examines how a woman is affected under the domination of patriarchy in marital life that extends to both physical and emotional abuse in society through the character Maya. Jeffy Catherine R. & Dr. R. Selvi, in their article, *The Strategic Survival of Contemporary Women in the Novel Afterwards by Jaishree Misra*, illuminate the theme of post-feminism by depicting the struggle of Maya, who is determined to free herself from patriarchal expectations and societal stereotypes. T. Suja, in her article *Cultural Ethics in Jaishree Misra's Novel Afterwards*, addresses the traumatic distress of the character Maya, who struggles between traditional cultural values and her desires for liberty. Ritika Kumari's article, *A Study of Ecofeminism in Afterwards*, explores the dynamics of ecofeminism and the psychological conflict that Maya faces in her struggle for survival in a hostile environment. The extreme climatic

condition of Kerala epitomises the emotional turbulence experienced by the protagonist, Maya. R. Geetha and Dr. K. Radah, in their article, *Delinates: 'Craving', 'Belonging' And 'Liberty' in Jaishree Misra's Afterwards*, analyse the psychological confrontations of Indian woman Maya, who encounters emotional dilemmas in the diaspora community.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have applied William Glasser's Choice Theory to explore the novel *Afterwards*, focusing on how meaningful relationships between parents and children contribute to a sense of purpose and fulfillment in life. The theory uncovers how parents' strict approach can deteriorate the relationship with their children and how the absence of parental support heightens children's emotional turmoil. The narrative highlights the consequences of external control psychology and advocates for the necessity of non-controlling psychology to create healthy relationships. This concept of enriching the positive parent-child relationship was proposed by the renowned psychiatrist William Glasser, M.D., in his book *Choice Theory*. Glasser (2010) describes the theory as an "internal control psychology" (p. 7) that explains why and how one makes the "choices that determine the course of our lives" (p. 7). The paper not only highlights the inadequacy of communication, understanding, and emotional bonding between parents and children but also accentuates the need for a strong and supportive bond to foster healthier relationships, as seen in Maya's and Rahul's lives.

IV. DISCUSSION

Any harmonious relationship results in a dynamic manifestation of understanding, trust and emotional support among two or more individuals. It holds shared experiences and empathy. These include approaches, compromises, the ability to adapt to each other's needs and an inclination to navigate life's troubles and challenges together. Among all the relationships, the parent-child relationship is crucial to a child's progress and security, as it facilitates emotional, social and cognitive development. A positive parent-child relationship is a vital factor in a child's emotional growth, as it influences their ability to navigate life's complexities with confidence and resilience. Misra's novel *Afterwards* highlights the detrimental effects of controlling parenting style on the parent-child relationship, where the emotional needs of children remain unnoticed. It also analyses how positive parenting is essential for shaping the children's lives through the characters Maya and Rahul.

Glasser (2010), in his work *Choice Theory*, states that "the power struggle between parents and children escalates" (p. 60) during the teenage years of the children. He declares that during this period, "many parent-child relationships are damaged severely" (p. 60) and he also claims, "Still, for most people, the idea of going against common sense, especially in how they deal with their children, is a new and troubling idea. But assuming you would like to have less misery in your life, you may be open to learning why controlling and allowing yourself to be controlled are so destructive to the relationships you need to be happy" (p. 8). These statements resonate with Maya's parents, as they fail to value Maya's emotional needs and overlook the importance of investing quality time in raising her.

In the context of parent-child correlation, the adolescent love relationship of teenagers is the key factor that creates discord in their bond. During this phase of life, parents fail to communicate with their children and try to control them by snatching their mobile phones, locking them in their rooms, forcing them to drop out of their studies and get married. This phenomenon is also exemplified in the life of Maya, who faces tremendous pressure from her parents to discontinue her studies and marry Govind after they discover her adolescent love. Maya's parents find fault with her behaviour rather than understanding her emotional needs. Al-Yagon (2011) states that "adolescents who felt securely attached to both parents were least vulnerable to experiencing socioemotional difficulties" (p. 291). On the contrary, Maya's parents fail to provide her with a secure attachment and the lack of parental support leads her to face intense adversities in her life. Glasser (2010) also specifies how parents should handle the critical situation of a teenage girl, as follows:

Tell her why you disagree and tell her to find it difficult to support what she is going to do because you fear she will be hurt. But also tell her that your relationship with her is more important than anything else and ask her how both of you can work out what to do that will keep the good relationship you have. Her chances of doing anything that will ruin her life are much less if you do so. (p. 210)

Most parents believe that social status and financial security are essential for their daughters in leading a marital life. However, they often overlook the fact that their true happiness and peace ultimately depend on compatibility between partners. For instance, Maya says, "He was very well off. My father had been very impressed that he had set up this business on his own and had done so well for himself. Then, of course, they were pleased that they would not be too far from me, so it was fixed" (Misra, 2004, p. 43). It illustrates how Maya's parents prioritise wealth over her emotional fulfilment and happiness. Joseph and Thomas (2017) comment, "Maya's parents believed she will get adjusted to the new life soon but on the contrary, Govind's material possessions couldn't fetch her happiness" (p. 312). It shows the lack of parental bonding and understanding between Maya and her parents. They fail to respect her choices and make her succumb to their expectations.

Maya's parents became distant after her marriage, reflecting the traditional Indian setup and do not communicate with her effectively. Whenever she tries to tell her parents about her marital abuse and how it affects her psychologically, they convince her to adjust to her life. It leads her to develop a strain in her relationship with her

parents and keep herself silent, as it is the only choice left for such a woman in a conservative society. Maya's marital life with her husband, Govind, is filled with dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Sahu and Mourya (2024) comment, "Maya longs for Govind's love and support but finds her expectations unmet" (p. 2). She experiences psychological distress as he denies her the chance to complete her education. Maya perceives her husband's domination as a psychological subjugation that transcends the ethical boundaries of dignity. Despite her trauma, Maya's parents fail to heed their daughter's awful condition and marital abuse due to their fear of societal stigma. Throughout Maya's life, her parents remain unsupportive and she expresses her turmoil, saying, "They sort of know, they must know, maybe not the full extent of possessiveness. But what they want to see is that I live in a nice house, have a nice car, a husband who gives me everything. They don't want to see the other side of that" (Misra, 2004, p. 55). She also emphasises the misconception of people in society, stating, "People think I'm so lucky. They think I have everything a woman can want" (Misra, 2004, p. 55).

According to Glasser (2010), some people prioritise human bonding over materialistic life, as "There is less satisfaction in owning a fine house, a powerful car, or a great painting if no one enjoys it with us. The things we picture in our quality worlds may not be anything we want to own" (p. 54). Similarly, Maya feels her marital life as "a nice cage, though. Three bedrooms, three attached bathrooms, stainless steel sink in a fully tiled kitchen. . ." (Misra, 2004, pp. 56-57). These materialistic aspects of life do not give her the fulfilment that she expects from life. Massie (1840), in his book *Continental India*, points out the status of a woman as follows:

At no period of life, in no condition of society, should a woman do anything at her mere pleasure. Their fathers, their husbands, their sons are verily called her protectors; but it is such protection! day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of absolute dependence. A woman, it is affirmed, is never fit for independence or to be trusted with liberty; for she may be compared to a heifer on the plain, which still longeth for fresh grass. (pp. 152-153)

In everyday life, people often face conflicts between tradition and modernity, desire and duty, love and responsibility. It happens for the characters of the novel, Rahul and Maya, who struggle to balance between them. Rahul, the narrator, develops a new friendship with his neighbour, Maya, which is unwelcomed by her husband, Govind. Rahul understands that Maya is ensnared in a loveless marriage with Govind when he notices the quarrel between them after his conversation with Maya. He recognises that he is familiar enough with his life and small-town India and so he does not want to impose his semi-Western values on everything around him. Rahul remarks that Maya seems nice and her husband is a "complete wanker" (Misra, 2004, p. 19). So, he decides to keep his communication to a "bare minimum" (Misra, 2004, p. 28) to avoid disaster in both their lives. One can see a clash between tradition and modernity where Rahul feels that having a friendly bond with the neighbour is normal, but it results in tragedy.

In Indian society, women are often bound by conventional marriage, and Maya is one such character who feels trapped in an unsympathetic marital life. Anitha et al. (2018) remark, "Govind and Maya lead a loveless life with no liberty in marital relationship" (p. 7). When Rahul asks about her family, she tells him that her parents live in Bangalore and visit her home occasionally. Her parents come to keep her company whenever her husband is away on a business trip. As Rahul understands the nature of Govind, he decides to keep his distance from Maya. When Maya meets Rahul at his home, he tries to avoid her, as evident when he says, "I . . . I don't want you to get into any trouble" (Misra, 2004, p. 36). Considering her husband's attitude and the trouble it brings to their life, he tries to ignore her. Maya convinces him by saying, "I thought you'd heard the shouting that day. . . He can be odd like that sometimes . . . it was nothing to do with you, really . . ." (Misra, 2004, p. 36). He expresses his sense of guilt and feels, "I was truly sorry if my casual encounter with my pretty neighbour had landed her in trouble of any sort" (Misra, 2004, p. 19).

Some relationships offer intensity and hope amidst the challenging traditional expectations of responsibility. Misra portrays the character, Rahul, as a beacon of hope for Maya in terms of liberty. Kumari (2023) also states that "Rahul comes as a ray of hope in the life of Maya" (p. 26). Maya's loneliness is a significant reason for her to invite Rahul for dinner. When Rahul hesitates to accept her request, she mentions that "I hate loneliness" (Misra, 2004, p. 37), which prompts him to reconsider. During dinner, their casual conversation sparks a yearning for liberty in Maya's heart. Her question, "How can you manage to just set up home like this, so far from everyone that you know. Don't you feel lonely?" (Misra, 2004, p. 40) and her statement "I have always been the opposite- sort of scared to think about being far away from the people I love" (Misra, 2004, p. 40) shows her emotional vulnerability and at the same time her urge to live such a life of liberty. Rahul's reply, "My sort of experience can feel very selfish sometimes. I do what I want to do, go where I want to go. . . Big, important things like family ties, statehood and even nationhood seem to have passed me by completely (Misra, 2004, p. 41), which makes her admire his independent nature. She longs for freedom and autonomy and it can be observed when she says, "How lovely to be so free" (Misra, 2004, p. 41) and continues that "People like me just get so bogged down, thinking all the time about what other people want, what other people think" (Misra, 2004, p. 41).

Misra highlights how authoritarian parental control causes Maya to lose faith in relationships and forces her to make hasty, impulsive emotional decisions. Maya tries to find ways to break free from the fetters. Once Maya becomes comfortable with Rahul, she decides to move on from her traumatic life with his help. She asks him, "Please help me to get a job – in Delhi or somewhere. Any job, please!" (Misra, 2004, p. 57). She tries hard not to think about the consequences that she has to face or about her destination. Maya begs, "I could work in a nursery or something. Keep

Anjali with me” (Misra, 2004, p. 57). Initially, Rahul explains, “I’m trying to help you. By showing you that you might not be any better off by flying out of the cage you’re in at the moment, Maya” (Misra, 2004, p. 57). The next day, when Maya meets Rahul with “raging sobs” (Misra, 2004, p. 64), she says, “...he hit me...pulled my hair...shouting things...Anjali was screaming...He said he would...destroy my face...that that was what was causing all the problems” (Misra, 2004, p. 64). At this point, Rahul changes his mind and, out of compassion, helps Maya free herself from the confines of her caged marital life. Geetha and Radah (2021) comment, “Rahul’s sympathy to Maya is comprehensible” (p. 2922). By analysing Maya’s character, the reader can understand that there is always an intricate play between one’s emotional needs and one’s logical reasoning. For everyone, there is always a choice, which ultimately decides the destination. Maya wants to escape the domestic violence and restart a new life with her daughter, Anjali. Similarly, Maya is in the heat of the moment to choose between being a molested wife or a liberated woman. One should understand that if Maya’s parents had created a sense of trust in her heart, she would not have chosen Rahul to help her in her dire need.

Parental guidance helps children to correct their mistakes and it is best to avoid creating a feeling of rejection in their hearts. Glasser (2010) asserts that choice theory does not entail punishment, acknowledging that “punishment is external control psychology to the core – an imposed consequence that always increases the distance between parents and children” (p. 212). Maya repeatedly calls her mother after reaching Delhi with hope and says, “My mother will talk to me, I know” (Misra, 2004, p. 69). Like everyone in society, her parents also make the same assumption that she has eloped with Rahul because of her hasty departure. As a result, they refuse to communicate with her and drop all ties with Maya. Therefore, Rahul takes Maya and Anjali, her daughter, to England. Akkara (2022) observes about Maya’s parental rejection as follows: “It is a very cruel custom to ostracise a living daughter by performing her death rites. After the compilation of this ritual, just like a dead person who keeps no relationship with the family, this ostracised daughter should live away from the family without keeping any connection with them. She has no right in the family property” (p. 246).

Glasser’s third belief of external control psychology describes the traditional psychology of the parents who believe that “it is their right, their duty, and even their moral obligation to threaten, punish, or bribe children or adults who choose to disobey them” (Glasser, 2010, p. 16). Maya’s parents fail to understand her emotional needs and punish her for leaving the place with Rahul because it violates their moral codes. After reading the letter from her father, Maya shares her pain with Rahul and says, “Padi addachu pindam vekkai. The death rites are done and the doors are closed forever” (Misra, 2004, p. 178). Her father writes, “Go and live your life in the way you have to. You do not exist for us anymore. We will forget you ever existed, just as you will have to forget about us. Maya, who was once a child of this family, is now dead” (Misra, 2004, pp. 242-243), which signifies that the emotional rejection of her family leads to intense psychological alienation and loss of her identity within the family.

Emotional support derived from a healthy, understandable parental relationship forms the basis for healthy self-esteem, resilience and a positive sense of identity. Rahul’s relationship with his parents exemplifies the importance of clear communication and mutual understanding in the parent-child dynamic. It contributes to a strong moral and value framework in children. Children who get support from their parents automatically develop a sense of emotional safety and trust. Hinde states that “a relationship involves a series of interactions over time between two individuals known to each other” (Perlman & Vangelisti, 2018, p. 3). In the novel *Afterwards*, it is essential to note that neither Rahul’s parents are initially supportive of his relationship with Maya, nor do they violently oppose it. When Rahul comes home with Maya, his mother is horrified and asks about her. Without rejecting Maya outright, she observes the intensity of her misery and stops suspecting Rahul’s decision. Over the years, she gathers all the letters and phone calls of Maya and realises that she is a virtuous woman. Later, she acknowledges his relationship with Maya and tells him, “You are an adult. I can’t tell you what to do, can I?” (Misra, 2004, p. 114).

The novel portrays Rahul as a carefree individual with a positive outlook on life. One can argue that Rahul’s attitude is derived from his upbringing. Rahul’s parents are an example of good parenting, as they stand by his side whenever he goes through tough times after the death of Maya in a car accident. When he calls his mother after Maya’s death, he hears his father’s voice in the background, saying, “I know, I know how he feels” (Misra, 2004, p. 112). He gently talks to Rahul and says, “Sorry son, tell me, how are you coping?” (Misra, 2004, p. 113) and he adds, “How can a father cope with such terrible news, eh?” (Misra, 2004, p. 113). His mother comforts him by saying, “Beta, why don’t you just take some leave and come here? That might help you forget things” (Misra, 2004, p. 113). They understand the situation regarding the loss of Maya and the pain that he is undergoing in London. This nuanced understanding between parents and children creates a foundation based on empathy, effective communication, emotional bonding and a supportive environment.

When “parenting is the focus, attention is directed to matters such as parenting practices and styles” (Russell et al., 2008). Rahul’s parents focus on being parents by ignoring all other factors, such as social views and stigma. In contrast, Maya’s parents choose to stick with their traditional views and social status rather than understanding what she needs. A strict parental approach can sometimes cause harm to both parents and children, especially when it exceeds the bounds. It can strain the parent-child relationship, which leads to communication difficulties. This further results in emotional disconnection, which affects the well-being of both parents and children. However, if they strike a balance between imposing limitations and promoting independence in their children’s lives, it strengthens the emotional connection

between them. Kochanska says, “Reciprocity between parents and children involving negative behavior and relationship qualities is likely to be associated with difficulties in the relationship. On the other hand, a system involving positive reciprocity and mutual cooperation has been argued to be a foundation for successful socialization” (Russell et al., 2002, p. 210)

V. CONCLUSION

In the darkest times, all one needs is a spark of hope that can illuminate one’s path forward. The paper presents a parallel study between Glasser’s principles and Maya’s experiences, emphasising the adverse effects of strict parental control over their children. Through the comprehensible parenting of Rahul’s parents, Misra attempts to convey that ideal parent-child relationship can be built on love and trust. The *Times of India* news article underscores an unspoken confrontation of parenting, stating that “unrealistic expectations place unhealthy pressure on children and contribute to psychological issues such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of failure” (“Parenting Flaws”, 2024). To prevent long-term consequences and promote fulfilling relationships, parents should instill confidence in their children, especially when they face hardship in life. Parents must provide their children with a sense of assurance, as it enables children to seek help and support from their parents during difficult times. Finally, Glasser states how effective parental relationships should exist: “parents who make clear what they and others will do and what children have to do for themselves can help the children create sensible quality worlds” (Glasser, 2010, p. 59). Therefore, when parents handle their children’s resistance and behaviour without adverse reactions, it results in positive outcomes. Parents can maintain a strong connection with their children in the quality world by offering their love and support rather than exerting control over them. Thus, using Misra’s novel *Afterwards* and Glasser’s psychological framework, the paper underscores the importance of parents’ role in addressing children’s emotional needs to enhance their emotional resilience. The study concludes that parents play a vital role in nurturing their children’s sense of hope and emotional connection, as it is their utmost duty to create optimistic responses when life seems unbearable for the children. They should instill emotional reliance in their children, which serves as a driving force, motivating them to overcome challenges and adversities in the world.

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