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Invisible Labour, Invisible Pain: The Normalisation of Postpartum Suffering in Indian Contexts

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Abstract:

Motherhood has conventionally been associated with the feelings of joy, fulfilment and care. However, such representations often silence the actual experiences of maternal distress, especially during the postpartum onset. The proposed paper aims to study how the Postpartum suffering becomes normalised in contemporary Indian contexts. It thus contends that Postpartum Depression (PPD) is often treated as a natural outgrowth of ideal Motherhood rather than as a condition demanding immediate attention.The paper attempts a literary investigation of two texts namely *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri and *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) by Easterine Kire. It aims to show these texts showcase and reinforce this idea of maternal mental health. The study utilises the the theoretical viewpoints of Silvia Federici and Arlie Russell Hochschild to depict how maternal labour and emotional anxiety are normalised, thus making the women's physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion invisible.

Keywords: Postpartum Depression, Invisible Labour, Motherhood, Emotional Labour, Indian Writing, Feminist Theory.

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Introduction:

Motherhood has conventionally been associated with the feelings of joy, fulfilment, and emotional self sufficiency. Within the Indian socio-cultural context, this idealisation acquires an aggravated form, where motherhood is frequently equated with selflessness, sacrifice, and even divinity, positioning it as the ultimate realisation of womanhood. However, such representations conceal the complicated and often contradictory lived experiences of new mothers, particularly during Postpartum Depression. This period is frequently marked by emotional exhaustion, ambivalence, fatigue, and, most importantly, psychological distress.

Postpartum depression, a mood disorder affecting nearly fifteen percent of the world's women after childbirth remains widely under-recognised despite its prevalence (Sharma 60; Stone 125). The reason why Postpartum Depression remains invisible even in today's scenario is not merely a consequence of medical neglect but is also deeply ingrained within the cultural frameworks that normalise maternal suffering.Rather than being identified as a condition requiring immediate attention, Postpartum Distress is often classified under the traditional norms of caregiving, thereby reinforcing the perception that maternal fatigue and emotional exhaustion are natural and inevitable. This normalisation removes the distinction between labour and affection, situating exhaustion as an inseparable part of Motherhood rather than as a situation of concern. Adrienne Rich rightly opines that Motherhood is not only an experience but also an institution shaped by cultural expectations that controls women's emotions and behaviours (Rich 13). Similarly, Jane M. Ussher observes that maternal distress is often constructed as an individual capability rather than as a response to social and structural pressures (Ussher 45), thereby obscuring its broader cultural dimensions.

The proposed paper aims to study that Postpartum Depression in the Indian contexts is structurally naturalised through two interconnected processes namely the invisibility of

maternal labour and the regulation of maternal emotion. Taking insights from the theoretical frameworks of Silvia Federici andArlie Russell Hochschild, this paper analyses how the physical, emotional and psychological requirements of Motherhood are normalised and rendered invisible within the social and cultural coontexts (Federici 12; Hochschild 27).These theoretical insights are further explored through a literary analysis of *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri and *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) by Easterine Kire which reveal how cultural narratives contribute to the erasure and normalisation of maternal suffering.

By positioning Postpartum Depression within a larger socio-cultural and literary framework, this study seeks to interrogate the dominant narratives of Motherhood and emphasize upon the social conditions that render maternal distress invisible. In doing so, it emphasises that postpartum suffering is not absent but systematically normalised within the Indian contexts, where the expectations of labour, endurance, and emotional regulation shape the experience and interpretation of motherhood.

Postpartum Depression- A Brief Background

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a clinically recognised mood disorder that affects nearly fifteen percent of the world's women following childbirth, typically within the first few weeks to months after delivery. It is characterised by symptoms such as emotional withdrawal, persistent sadness, exhaustion, anxiety, stress and a diminished ability to indulge with the child or the surrounding environment (Sharma 60; Stone 125). Postpartum Depression is characterised by a prolonged psychological condition that affects a mother's overall well-being and her capacity to participate in daily activities. This condition is quite different from the temporary emotional changes that accompany childbirth. It thus becomes essential to discuss about Postpartum Depression in utmost depth.

However, despite its clinical recognition, Postpartum Depression remains underdiagnosed and underreported on a large scale, particularly in socio-cultural contexts where Motherhood is idealised. As Jane M. Ussher opines that maternal distress is frequently constructed as an individual inadequacy rather than as a response to broader social and cultural pressures (Ussher 45). She further opines that women's reproductive experiences are culturally regulated through norms that define acceptable emotional responses (Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine* 78). This societal functioning shifts the focus away from structural order and transfers the responsibility entirely on the mother. It, thus, conceals the broader cultural perspectives responsible for moulding the nature of Postpartum Depression.

Furthermore, Adrienne Rich adds to the above discussion by distinguishing between Motherhood as an experience and Motherhood as an institution thereby arguing that cultural expectations regulate how women are expected to feel and behave (Rich 13). Within such institutional frameworks, diversions from normative maternal feelings such as detachment or exhaustion are often suppressed or misinterpreted. Consequently, Postpartum Depression is not always identified as a medical or a psychological condition but is instead visualised as an extension into the expected emotional landscape of Motherhood.

In the Indian context, this invisibility of Postpartum Depression is further aggravated by the socio-cultural expectations that associate motherhood with endurance, sacrifice, strength and emotional resilience. As a result, the symptoms of Postpartum Depression are often misinterpreted as the natural aspects of maternal adjustment rather than as indicators of Maternal distress. This normalisation removes the boundary between emotional suffering and maternal responsibility, making it difficult to identify Postpartum Depression as a condition demanding medical intervention. Thus, while Postpartum Depression is clinically

acknowledged and widely prevalent, it is a harsh reality that it still remains culturally obscured, particularly in contexts where maternal suffering is ingrained within normative expectations.

Research Gap:

The existing literature review around Postpartum distress has prominently been found within Biomedical and Psychological frameworks, focusing on its identification, symptoms, and subsequent clinical treatment. Although these factors are essential in addressing Maternal mental health, they often tend to overlook the socio-cultural ideals that shape how Postpartum Distress is experienced and administered.one can safely conclude that limited attention has been given to how the influence of cultural narratives and gendered expectations leads to the normalisation of postpartum suffering, especially within non-Western contexts.

Feminist scholars such as Silvia Federici and Arlie Russell Hochschild have drawn attention to the invisibility of reproductive and emotional labour, demonstrating how women's work within the domestic sphere is naturalised and therefore remains underrepresented and unrecognised (Federici 12; Hochschild 27). However, these theoretical contexts have not been justifiably applied to the specific case of Postpartum Depression, particularly within the perspective of literature that examines the cultural portrayals of Motherhood.

Moreover, while literary texts have been analysed for their portrayal of motherhood, there remains a significant gap in exploring how they represent postpartum distress as a normalised condition rather than as an exception. The convergence of literary representations, cultural norms, and maternal mental health remains untapped particularly in the Indian scenario, where motherhood remains synonymous with the ideals of sacrifice and endurance.

The proposed paper seeks to address this research gap by examining how Postpartum Depression is not merely represented but also systematically normalised within the cultural and

literary frameworks. A collective study of *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri and *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) by Easterine Kire helps the paper study the how invisible labour, emotional regulation, and cultural conditioning contribute in shaping maternal experience. By situating Postpartum Maternal Distress within these broader structures, the paper moves beyond the individualised interpretations and highlights the systemic processes that contribute to the making the Maternal suffering invisible.

In doing so, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in literary and feminist scholarship by offering a culturally grounded analysis of postpartum depression. It emphasises that maternal distress, particularly in Indian contexts, is not absent but is normalised through deeply embedded social expectations, thereby calling for a re-examination of motherhood beyond idealised representations .

Theoretical Framework:

The proposed paper examines the normalisation of postpartum depression through the integrations of the ideas of unpaid reproductive labour and emotional labour, drawing primarily from the works of Silvia Federici and Arlie Russell Hochschild. These frameworks help us attain a critical understanding of how maternal suffering is not an individual experience but rather a systemically generated condition embedded within socio-cultural expectations of motherhood.

At the level of material practice, Federici's analysis of reproductive labour comes handy.She argues that domestic work and caregiving are systematically devalued because they are constructed as natural extensions of femininity rather than recognised as forms of labour (Federici 12). Federici further emphasises that reproductive labour sustains social and

economic structures while remaining systematically unrecognised (Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* 5).

This normalisation makes maternal work indiscernible. The activities such as caregiving, nurturing, and physical recovery are perceived not as labour but as instinctive maternal responsibilities. In the postpartum perspective, this invisibility becomes specifically significant. The expectations from new mothers including breastfeeding, sleeplessness, and bodily recovery require an enormous physical and emotional effort. However, they remain unacknowledged within both social and economic contexts. As a result, the labour-intensive nature of the postpartum period remains unseen, and the exhaustion accompanying it is normalised.

This invisibility in further encouraged by situating maternal labour as the individual responsibility of the mother. The reproductive work is wholly confined to the domestic space and remains unpaid, Consequently, it lacks both public recognition and institutional authentication. As a result, maternal suffering becomes difficult to express as it does not fit within conventional ideas of labour or value. The absence of recognition thus contributes directly to the erasure of postpartum distress, as the conditions that produce it are rendered invisible.

Complementing this material outlook is Hochschild's concept of emotional labour, which she defines as the process by which individuals manage and regulate their emotions in accordance with socially prescribed norms (Hochschild 27). Hochschild also observes that domestic and emotional responsibilities disproportionately fall upon women, reinforcing gendered expectations within the household (Hochschild, *The Second Shift* 12).

In the context of motherhood, emotional labour involves the performance of care, affection, and fulfilment, even when such emotions are not experienced inside. This expectation creates a gap between the lived experience and social representation, as mothers are expected to depict emotional stability and attachment irrespective of their inner psychological state.

In the postpartum phase, this performance of emotion becomes particularly significant. New mothers are expected to conform to the ideals of sacrifice and selfless devotion. As a result, they suppress their internal feelings of exhaustion and detachment in order to conform to normative ideals of motherhood. As a result, emotional distress is not expressed but contained, reinforcing its invisibility. Performing motherhood thus becomes a social obligation rather than a reflection of internal experience, ensuring that diversions from conventional emotional norms are interpreted as personal inadequacies rather than as extensions of distress.

The intersection of two framework, namely, unpaid reproductive labour and emotional labou produces conditions under which postpartum depression is normalised. When labour is rendered invisible and emotion is regulated, maternal suffering is both unrecognised and unexpressed. This dual process prevents the identification of postpartum depression as a peculiar condition. It is instead dissolved into the expected ideals of motherhood. In Indian socio-cultural contexts, this normalisation further intensifies. Cultural expectations not only conceal the labour involved in caregiving but also discourage the voicing of distress, framing suffering as an inherent part of maternal identity.

Thus, postpartum depression emerges not as a secluded psychological condition but as a structurally entrenched phenomenon shaped by socio-cultural expectations of labour and affect. The theoretical ideas of Federici and Hochschild, when applied to the postpartum context, reveal that maternal distress is not absent but structurally naturalised through the processes of invisibility and emotional regulation. This understanding forms the foundation for

the succeeding analysis, which analyses how such normalisation is represented and challenged in contemporary Indian narratives.

Literary Analysis: Cultural Normalisation of Postpartum Depression in India

The Lowland (2013):

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* provides a compelling literary representation of Motherhood that diverges significantly from its idealised construction as naturally nurturing and fulfilling. This representation holds true especially in the Indian socio-cultural context where maternal care is assumed to be primarily instinctive and unconditional. Through the character of Gauri, the novel talks about a form of postpartum experience that is characterised not by emotional fulfilment but by detachment, withdrawal, and affective disconnection. Her relationship with her daughter Bela is repeatedly mediated through distance, thereby breaking the deeply internalised belief that motherhood naturally produces attachment.

This detachment can be witnessed through the stark observation that Gauri is "indifferent to the child, holding her without interest, without any apparent bond" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 89). The starkness of this description is prominent, as it busts the cultural expectation that maternal care and affection is immediate, particularly in the postpartum context. However, rather than presenting this indifference as abnormal, the narrative situates it within a broader perspective of lived experience where Gauri herself acknowledges "she did not feel what she was supposed to feel" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 120), thereby, revealing the wide gap between the real Postpartum experience of women than the socially constructed ideals of Motherhood. In doing so, it reflects a cultural disposition to absorb Postpartum distress into the normal everyday functioning of Motherhood, thereby contributing to its normalisation.

The text further supports this condition through Gauri's withdrawal from caregiving and other maternal responsibilities, as she "left Bela to others, retreating from the responsibilities that

were expected of her" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 118). In the Indian socio-cultural context, where maternal responsibility is closely associated with caregiving labour, such disengagement is assumed to be a diversion rather than a symptom of maternal distress. For instance, the implicit judgement that Gauri is described as being "indifferent to the child" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 89). This ignorance is important, as it showcases how Postpartum Depression in not identified as a medical condition but is instead interpreted as a woman's inability to perform maternal duties for her child. The emphasis shifts from acknowledging the presence of distress to judging the behaviour of the mother, thereby masking the structural conditions that produce it.

Gauri's sense of confinement further reinforces this reading. She says that she "felt trapped in a life she had not chosen, bound to a routine that left no space for herself" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 121). The language of constraint here particularly signifies the postpartum context, where the intensification of caregiving labour limits autonomy and reinforces dependence. However, within dominant cultural narratives, such feelings are not recognised as indicators of Postpartum distress but are instead normalised as part of maternal adjustment. The experience of entrapment is thus made unremarkable, further leading to the invisibility of maternal suffering.

This process of normalisation can be understood through Arlie Russell Hochschild's idea of emotional labour, which explains how individuals are required to regulate their feelings in accordance with social expectations (Hochschild 27). In the Indian postpartum context, mothers are expected to display attachment, patience and emotional fulfilment irrespective of their inner conflict. Gauri's inability to perform these emotions is therefore interpreted not as distress but as deviation. The expectation of emotional performativity suppresses the articulation of Postpartum Depression, thus normalising it within the ideals of Motherhood.

Simultaneously, Silvia Federici's analysis of reproductive labour helps elaborate the material conditions underlying this process. Federici argues that caregiving labour is rendered invisible when it is naturalised as a feminine responsibility. (Federici 12). In the Postpartum phase, this invisibility becomes particularly significant, as the intensity of labour increases without recognition. The exhaustion that results from such labour is not identified as an expected aspect of Motherhood. Gauri's withdrawal can therefore be read as a response to unacknowledged labour, even as it is culturally misinterpreted.

Most importantly, Jhumpa Lahiri does not label Gauri's condition as Postpartum Depression.The absence of clinical terminology is itself analytically significant, as it reflects the broader cultural tendency to leave maternal distress unnamed. Her emotional state marked by indifference and seclusion closely resembles symptoms associated with Postpartum Depression, yet it remains unrecognised within the narrative, as Gauri herself "said nothing" (Lahiri). This absence strengthens the analysis that Postpartum Depression is not absent but normalised through its absorption the expected ideals of motherhood.

In this sense, *The Lowland* does not merely present an alternative model of motherhood, rather, it also exposes the mechanisms through which postpartum distress becomes invisible By refusing to frame Gauri's experience as pathological while simultaneously showing its intensity, the novel reveals how cultural expectations prevent the recognition of maternal suffering. Gauri's detachment thus becomes a critical site through which the normalisation of Postpartum Depression in Indian contexts is both represented and interrogated.

***A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007):**

While *The Lowland* emphasises upon the individual experience of maternal detachment, Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* provides the broader cultural background through which such experiences can be understood as socially produced and, more importantly, normalised.

The novel constructs a social environment in which gender roles are rigid and internalised from an early age, ensuring that women are conditioned to accept labour, endurance, and silence as intrinsic part of their identity. Within this context, suffering is not recognised as an anomaly but is instead embedded into the normative structure of womanhood.

This conditioning is explicitly depictedin the statement that "girls were taught to work, to endure, to be silent" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 45). The cumulative force of this formulation establishes a system in which labour is expected, endurance is valorised, and expression is suppressed. The emphasis on silence is particularly significant, as it prevents the articulation if distress, ensuring that suffering remains both unspoken and unrecognised, as women are expected to " do their work without complaint, without question, and without expecting anything in return" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 60). *When* extended to the postpartum phase, this conditioning ensures that emotional and psychological distress is not identified as a condition but is instead absorbed into expectations of maternal adjustment.

Dielieno's relationship with her grandmother provides a vital insight into the early formation of this normalisation. The grandmother functions as a source of cultural discipline, enforcing rigid gender expectations that shape Dielieno's understanding of her gender role from childhood. She is kept under strict control and emotional distance, where her grandmother's affection is replaced by gendered regulation and correction, as Dielieno is repeatedly reminded of her place within the household, where "everything had its place" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 47). As she is positioned within a framework where refusal is not permitted (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 46), compliance to the traditional norms becomes internalised as a normative condition rather than a conscious choice. This dynamic is significant because it depicts that the normalisation of suffering for women does not emerge in adulthood but inculcated in their upbringing from an early age.

The grandmother's authority thus operates not only at the level of regualtimg Dielieno's behaviour but also at the level of forming her perception, shaping how Dielieno interprets her own experiences within the already established gender constructs. By enforcing discipline and endurance, she ensures that suffering is internalised rather than articulated, where there is little scope to question or resist the roles assigned to her (Kire 48). When extended to the postpartum phase, this conditioning becomes critical, as women who have been trained to endure without questioning are less likely to recognise emotional distress as a problem. Postpartum depression, in this sense, is not only socially unrecognised but also internally normalised, as individuals lack the framework to identify their own suffering as abnormal.

The normalisation of maternal suffering is further enhanced through the assertion that "this is how life is for women" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 52). This statement functions as a cultural script that naturalises hardship by presenting it as inevitable. Within such a framework, distress is not interpreted as a deviation from normativity but as a confirmation of it. In the Postpartum context, this logic becomes particularly significant, as experiences of exhaustion, detachment are categorised under the broader expected ideals of endurance, thereby preventing their recognition as symptoms of postpartum depression.

This cultural upbringing can be further understood through Silvia Federici's analysis of reproductive labour, which shows how caregiving work becomes invisible when it is naturalised as a feminine responsibility. (Federici 12). By training women from an early age to accept labour without recognition, the novel reveals how maternal work is framed not as labour but as an inherent aspect of womanhood. In the postpartum phase, this naturalisation ensures that the intensified demands of caregiving are not identified as burdensome but are instead interpreted as expected. The physical and emotional exhaustion that accompanies this labour is therefore normalised, contributing to the invisibility of Postpartum distress.

At the same time, the expectation that women must endure "without complaint" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 60) reflects a broader cultural demand for emotional regulation, which aligns with Arlie Russell Hochschild's concept of emotional labour (Hochschild 27). Women are required not only to perform labour but also to regulate their emotional responses to it in accordance with social norms. In the postpartum context, this expectation translates into the requirement that mothers display attachment, patience, and fulfilment regardless of their internal state. Feelings of fatigue, frustration or detachment are suppressed in order to maintain the appearance of normative motherhood, as women are expected to "accept whatever came their way" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 46). This suppression prevents the expression of distress, ensuring that Postpartum Depression remains unrecognised and thus normalised.

Although *A Terrible Matriarchy* does not explicitly depict Postpartum Depression, its significance lies in revealing the cultural conditions that make such experiences invisible. By tracing the internalisation of labour and silence from childhood, the novel demonstrates how women are preconditioned to accept suffering as an inevitable aspect of their lives, where girls are disciplined into roles that leave " no room for questioning" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 48). This conditioning extends into motherhood, where postpartum distress is interpreted not as a deviation but as a continuation of already normalised patterns of endurance. In this sense, postpartum depression is not merely overlooked but structurally ore-normalised within the cultural framework the novel depicts.

When read alongside *The Lowland,* Kire's text provides the structural explanation for what Lahiri represents at the level of lived experience. While Gauri's detachment reflects the affective consequences of Postpartum Distress, *A Terrible Matriarchy* reveals the cultural logic that prevent such distress from being recognised. Together, these texts demonstrate that Postpartum Depression in Indian contexts in not absent but systematically normalised through

deeply embedded structures of labour, emotional regulation, and social expectation, where women's roles are shaped by discipline and conformity rather than recognition. (Kire 50).

Discussion and Findings:

The analysis of both the texts demonstrates that Postpartum Suffering in Indian contexts is not merely an individual or psychological condition but also a structurally generated phenomenon shaped by cultural expectations, domestic arrangements, and emotional control. Rather than being recognised as a condition requiring attention, postpartum distress is repeatedly absorbed into normative frameworks of motherhood. In *The Lowland*, Gauri's emotional disengagement is described in observational terms—she is "indifferent to the child" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 89)—yet this condition is never identified as distress. Instead, it is implicitly evaluated as a diversion from the traditional norms of maternal behaviour, reflecting a cultural tendency to judge behaviour rather than recognise underlying psychological states. Her withdrawal is thus seen, rather than understood, strengthening how Postpartum Depression is normalised through misrecognition.

This normalisation is further supplemented through the domestic responses to her condition. Subhash's assumption of caregiving responsibilities, where he "took over the care of Bela" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 118), ensures that the household continues to function without requiring engagement with Gauri's emotional state. Rather than showing concern, her disengagement is managed through substitution. This redistribution of labour prevents recognition by resolving visible consequences while leaving the underlying distress unaddressed. Even within the domestic space, Gauri remains emotionally distant, where she is present yet disconnected, and her silence is neither questioned nor challenged. The absence of inquiry ensures that her condition remains unarticulated, demonstrating how postpartum suffering is normalised through accommodation.

The symbolic significance of the lowland also itself deepens this process. The landscape, which "filled with water during the monsoon" and later receded (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 3–4), reflects a cyclical process of accumulation and disappearance. This spatial configuration resembles the cycle of Postpartum suffering , where emotional distress and anxiety continually emerge but are repeatedly absorbed into everyday life without any recognition. Just as the land undergoes transformation without altering its fundamental structure, maternal suffering also becomes a part of the expected rhythm of everday existence. This comparison emphasises how, within the Indian socio-cultural contexts, Postpartum Depression is not treated as an emotional disruption but rather as any other ordinary and recurring medical condition.

A parallel situation is also witnessed in *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Easterine Kire where the foundations of maternal suffering are established through an early cultural conditioning of gendered expectations. Dielieno's relationship with her grandmother reveals how discipline and control shape her perception of labour and endurance from childhood. She is positioned within a societal structure where socio-cultural expectations are internalised at a very early stage in life, thus, learning to accept her gender roles without any resistance (Kire 46). This cultural conditioning ensures that suffering is not recognised as a problem that Dielieno undergoes but rather as a necessary aspect of womanhood.

The normalisation of hardship is further propagated through explicit cultural assertions, such as the belief that "this is how life is for women" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 52). This statement transforms Dielieno's suffering into an accepted and conventional norm rather than as an identifiable condition. When extended to the Postpartum context , this logic ensures that emotional exhaustion, distress, detachment and withdrawal are interpreted not as hurdles but rather as expected components of Motherhood. Distress is therefore not identified but absorbed into the broader perspective of gendered expectations.

This process is intensified through the suppression of expression, as women are expected to endure their circumstances "without complaint" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 60). The absence of expression ensures that the suffering remains internalised, preventing its recognition in the form of distress. In Indian socio-cultural scenarios, where motherhood is closely connected to the ideals of sacrifice and endurance, such silence becomes a key functioning system through which Postpartum distress is encouraged and normalised.

The convergence of the four dynamics which are namely the unpaid reproductive labour, emotional regulation, cultural conditioning, and domestic accommodation—produces a structural system in which Postpartum Suffering is both pervasive and invisible. As Silvia Federici opines that reproductive labour is intially naturalised and therefore unrecognised (Federici 12), while Arlie Russell Hochschild also depicts how the emotional expression is regulated in accordance with the social expectations (Hochschild 27). Together, these frameworks reveal that postpartum distress is not merely overlooked but structurally obscured.

The findings of this study therefore indicate that postpartum depression in Indian contexts is not simply underdiagnosed but systematically normalised. In *The Lowland*, this occurs through misrecognition and domestic accommodation, while in *A Terrible Matriarchy*, it is propagated through cultural conditioning and internalisation. Together, the texts demonstrate that maternal suffering is made invisible not because it is absent but because it immerses into the dominant narratives of motherhood, where endurance replaces recognition and silence replaces articulation.

Conclusion:

This paper has sufficiently argued that Postpartum Suffering in the contemporary Indian contexts has not simply been neglected but also actively normalised through the interconnected

structures of unpaid reproductive labour and emotional regulation. By studying the convergence of physical caregiving and affective performance, the paper has shown that maternal distress is absorbed into the normative expectations of motherhood, where it is made unrecognisable as a condition. Rather than being acknowledged as postpartum depression, emotional withdrawal and exhaustion are interpreted through behavioural and moral scenarios, as is evident in *The Lowland*, where Gauri is described as "indifferent to the child" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 89). This framing depicts how maternal distress is misrecognised and subsequently normalised within domestic and cultural spheres.

A close reading of both the texts further reveals that this normalisation operates at multiple levels—experiential, structural, and cultural. In *The Lowland*, Gauri's detachment challenges the assumption of maternal attachment as instinctive, exposing the gap between the lived experiences and prescribed emotional norms. Her withdrawal is neither questioned nor recognised, but instead accommodated within the domestic space, strengthening its invisibility. In contrast, *A Terrible Matriarchy* situates this condition within a broader idea of cultural conditioning, where women are taught to internalise labour and silence from an early age. The assertion that "this is how life is for women" (Kire, *A Terrible Matriarchy* 52) encapsulates a socio-cultural logic that normalises suffering by presenting it as inevitable. When extended to the Postpartum Phase, such conditioning ensures that distress is not recognised as a psychological condition but as a continuation of expected roles.

The findings suggest that the invisibility of postpartum depression cannot be sufficiently comprehended through the medical or psychological contexts alone. While clinical definitions are essential for diagnosis, they fail to account for the cultural mechanisms that shape how maternal distress is perceived and interpreted. In Indian socio-cultural contexts, where motherhood is closely linked with endurance and self-sacrifice, emotional suffering is often

suppressed or ignored, as women are expected to endure "without complaint" (Kire, *A Maternal Patriarchy* 60). This suppression not only discourages expression but also contributes to the systematic normalisation of postpartum depression.

Reframing Motherhood through the ideas of labour, affect, and cultural expectation has significant impacts on both literary studies and broader discourses on gender and mental health. It calls for a shift away from idealised constructions of Motherhood towards a more critical recognition of the conditions that produce maternal suffering. Literary texts such as *The Lowland* and *A Terrible Matriarchy* play a vital role in this process by exposing the mechanisms through which distress is made invisible, thereby challenging dominant narratives that equate motherhood with self fulfilment.

The normalisation of Postpartum Depression in Indian contexts appears not only as an absence of maternal suffering but also because of its absorption into the everyday structures of maternal labour and gendered expectations. By emphasising the interplay between domestic arrangements, emotional regulation, and cultural conditioning, this study demonstrates that maternal suffering is systematically neglected rather than explicitly denied. Making this condition visible is therefore not only a critical academic project but also a necessary step towards recognising Postpartum Depression as a valid and urgent concern within both literary and socio-cultural frameworks.

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