

Rewriting Psychoanalytic Memory: Gynotopic Structures in the Intergenerational Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amy Tan

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Received: July 10, 2025 Accepted: September 29, 2025 Online Published: April 10, 2026

doi:10.5430/wjel.v16n4p257

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v16n4p257>

Abstract

Responding to the historical relegation of the maternal to the margins, this paper reimagines psychoanalytic memory as a literary structure by introducing Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics, a feminist-critical framework rooted in Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism and expanded through Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Gynotopic spaces are narrative and symbolic sites where women's experiences, voices, and memories are legitimized as acts of epistemic justice, transforming what has long been marginalized into authoritative culture and literary knowledge. The gynotopic lens illuminates how domestic and caregiving experiences, historically dismissed as apolitical or non-literary, become sites of resistance, healing, and literary innovation. Through a close reading of intergenerational fiction by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amy Tan, the study explores how maternal memory and emotional inheritance are not merely thematic concerns but foundational narrative architectures. Mother-daughter relationships in these texts function as affective blueprints through which voice, temporality, and identity are shaped, transmitted, and resisted. By situating psychoanalytic memory within narrative form, this paper argues that diasporic women's fiction rewrites the maternal script, restoring silenced subjectivities. Reflecting the evolving global consciousness around gender justice and inclusion in knowledge systems, this intervention aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The study expands the scope of English literary studies, bridging psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and narrative form, offering a transformative reading of how memory, power, and voice intersect in the emotional landscapes of diasporic fiction and beyond.

Keywords: Gynotopic Narrative, Gynocriticism, Reproduction of Mothering, Maternal Marginality, Emotional Inheritance, Sustainable Development Goals

1. Introduction

In a world increasingly shaped by global migrations, intergenerational trauma, and gender-based inequalities, diasporic women's fiction offers a vital archive of maternal voices, silences, and inherited emotional scripts (Lotfi, 2014). Despite significant advances in feminist literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory, the emotional architectures of mother-daughter relationships remain under-theorized as formal structuring devices in diasporic women's fiction (Stone, 2011). Traditional psychoanalytic approaches often subsume female subjectivity within Oedipal frameworks or relegate maternal roles to symbolic or secondary status (Finzi, 1995). Simultaneously, feminist literary analysis has highlighted thematic concerns of motherhood but seldom interrogated how maternal affect functions as a narrative logic that shapes temporality, plot development, and intergenerational voice (Staub, 2007). This conceptual gap calls for a renewed interrogation of how psychoanalytic memory, particularly maternal memory, is encoded and reproduced within the narrative form. The present study addresses this lacuna by introducing Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics, a critical framework that synthesizes Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism and Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, to explore how intergenerational fiction by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Amy Tan inscribes maternal inheritance as both theme and narrative strategy. The study responds to a broader call for methodologies that can engage the intersection of narrative form, psychoanalytic theory, and feminist memory work in English literary studies.

Reexamining psychoanalytic frameworks through feminist and literary lenses is not only theoretically urgent but also culturally necessary (Teller & Dahl, 1981). This study foregrounds the maternal as a site of narrative knowledge, a domain often trivialized in dominant academic and psychoanalytic traditions, and demonstrates how these stories produce counter-histories and intergenerational epistemologies (Thomson, 2009; Andrews, 2002). Additionally, by integrating theoretical insights with global gender discourses, particularly those aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, this research seeks to move beyond textual analysis toward socially responsive literary scholarship. It responds to the need for narrative strategies that not only represent but also resist the erasure of caregiving labor, emotional resilience, and maternal memory within both fiction and critical theory (Clark & Standard, 1997; Hager, 2015).

This study builds upon and expands key strands in psychoanalytic feminism, particularly the foundational work of Nancy Chodorow, who

articulated the internalization and reproduction of mothering as both a psychological and social process (Chodorow, 1978). While Chodorow's theory has had an enduring impact in feminist psychology and sociology, its application to literary form, especially diasporic narrative structures, remains limited. Similarly, Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism advanced the recognition of women's writing (Xu, 2007) as an autonomous domain but did not extend far into the intersection of narrative form and psychoanalytic memory.

Evolving from Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism, which is defined as a form of literary criticism that focuses on women's writers and the development of female literary tradition (Newton, 1997), this study expands the critical framework to introduce the concept of the gynotopic narrative, a literary space defined by women's intergenerational emotional experiences, silences, psychic mirroring, and relational complexity. "Gynotopic", derived from the Greek *gyne* (woman) and *topos* (place), signifies both the thematic and formal spatialization of feminine experience within the text. Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics refers to a narrative architecture in women's fiction that encodes the psychic reproduction of mothering within its structure, themes, and character arcs. Gynotopic spaces function as textual and affective arenas where the devalued dimensions of women's lives are recuperated, allowing the negotiation of identity, relationality, and power. They provide a framework to analyze how domestic and emotional labor, historically dismissed as private or apolitical (Mansoor, 2016), is transformed into a medium of literary innovation, resistance, and healing. In diasporic fiction, these spaces reveal how memory and culture intersect, highlighting the transmission of affective legacies and offering a lens to recognize the lived realities of women.

By focusing on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amy Tan, this study also acknowledges the existing body of work on diasporic identity, memory, and family (Lotfi, 2014), while distinguishing itself through its formal-theoretical emphasis on narrative reproduction and affective structuring rooted in psychoanalysis. In the selected works, the use of narrative fragmentation, multiple timelines, epistolary forms, and varying perspectives collectively reflects the emotional disconnections, desires, and inherited traumas that characterize the relationships between mothers and daughters in both local and diasporic settings. This article presents a novel approach to reading, Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics, to bridge feminist literary theory with the emotional architecture of storytelling, offering a distinct critical methodology that contributes both to literary theory and to the interdisciplinary field of memory and gender studies.

This study proceeds with the central hypothesis that maternal memory and emotional inheritance function as narrative structures, not simply thematic content, in diasporic intergenerational fiction. The secondary hypothesis posits that these gynotopic structures operate as forms of epistemic resistance to dominant masculinist paradigms, thereby allowing emotional labor and caregiving to emerge as sites of meaning and critique.

2. Literature Review

The mother-daughter relationship has garnered significant scholarly attention within feminist literary criticism, particularly since the late 20th century, as it serves as a crucial framework for understanding gender formation and identity development (Barrett-Kruse, 2000). Recent studies in feminist narrative theory (Messias & DeJoseph, 2004), trauma studies (Suomi & Levine, 1998), and intergenerational memory (Osoian, 2014) have opened critical avenues for exploring affect, transmission, and identity. In "*Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis*," Juliet Mitchell advocates for a feminist lens in psychoanalysis and literature, challenging the dominance of phallogocentric narratives that overshadow women's voices. She emphasizes the need to critique these structures to reveal how they constrict women's identities and experiences (Mitchell, 1990). Nancy Chodorow's work, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), has played a crucial role in transforming feminist discussions by suggesting that the initial bond with the mother, particularly for daughters, forms a relational framework for identity. Chodorow argues that this emotional relationality does not merely reproduce women's roles in care, emotional labor, and maternal self-sacrifice through overt ideological instruction but rather through a complex process of psychic internalization (Bondi, 2008). However, most existing research either treats mother-daughter relationships thematically or overlooks the formal grammar through which emotional legacies are narrated (Hershberg, 2006). Scholars such as Marianne Hirsch have offered critical interventions into postmemory and maternal absence, but the gynotopic structuring of narrative—the influence of maternal inheritance on the very essence of storytelling necessitates additional clarification.

In diasporic literature, scholars such as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Kavita Daiya have examined how migration complicates the mother-daughter dynamic, introducing layers of cultural transmission alongside emotional ties. Their analyses often highlight the struggles of identity formation, assimilation, and cultural dislocation, particularly within Asian American narratives (Kim, 2013). For instance, Amy Tan's literary works have been frequently interpreted as a medium through which cultural memory and intergenerational trauma are navigated and expressed (Lotfi, 2014). Meanwhile, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction is often discussed in terms of its spiritual symbolism, immigrant identity, and themes of female empowerment (Ranirevathi, 2019). While these approaches offer valuable insights into the themes surrounding motherhood (Hirsch, 1989), they often neglect to consider how the narrative form itself serves as a gynotopic space, creating a dynamic interplay between content and structure. Contemporary scholarship in feminist and diasporic literary studies has highlighted how mother-daughter relations are not just thematic but formally encoded in narrative structure, challenging monologic plots and foregrounding the polyphony of maternal and daughterly voices in transnational fiction (Codina Solà 2024; Sharma, 2024). The existing literature has largely neglected to connect Chodorow's theories of maternal reproduction with the aesthetics of narrative, leaving a gap that this paper aims to address. To address this, the study introduces the concept of gynotopic narrative dynamics, expanding the analysis of maternal emotional inheritance beyond character development to consider how it is also encoded in the very structure and rhythm of storytelling. This integrative perspective bridges psychoanalytic feminism, narrative aesthetics, and diasporic consciousness, offering a critical lens that has remained underexplored in contemporary scholarship.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative methodology grounded in psychoanalytic feminist literary criticism, combining close textual analysis with comparative reading. The method prioritizes narrative form, affective structures, and relational memory, attending to how maternal subjectivity is embedded not only thematically but structurally within diasporic women's fiction. Close reading is employed to trace recurring emotional patterns, silences, repetitions, and disruptions through which intergenerational memory is transmitted and transformed.

The primary texts: *Before We Visit the Goddess* and *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan, are selected deliberately to foreground women's writing that has historically occupied an ambivalent position within the English literary canon.

Firstly, Divakaruni and Tan are chosen because their fiction actively reclaims maternal and domestic experience as legitimate literary and epistemic space, challenging the long-standing canonization of male-centered, public, and rationalist narratives. Both authors write against the marginalization of motherhood, caregiving, and emotional labor, transforming what has traditionally been dismissed as private or sentimental into complex narrative architectures. Their works thus align directly with Elaine Showalter's gynocritical project of recovering women's literary traditions and repositioning women as producers of meaning rather than peripheral subjects.

Secondly, these authors are central to this study because their intergenerational narratives intervene in psychoanalytic discourse itself, revising Freudian and post-Freudian models that have historically framed the maternal as absence, lack, or pre-Oedipal background. Drawing on Nancy Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of mothering, the selected texts demonstrate how maternal bonds function as enduring psychological and narrative forces that shape identity, memory, and voice across generations. Divakaruni's and Tan's fiction offers fertile ground for examining how maternal memory operates as a structuring principle of narrative form, rather than as a supplementary theme.

Thirdly, although rooted in distinct cultural traditions: Indian-American and Chinese-American, respectively, Divakaruni and Tan are read together because their works reveal parallel yet culturally inflected gynotopic narrative strategies. The comparative framework does not collapse cultural difference into a universalized notion of womanhood; rather, it highlights how gynotopic spaces emerge differently across diasporic contexts shaped by migration, linguistic displacement, generational conflict, and culturally specific constructions of motherhood, silence, and obligation. Reading these authors in dialogue allows the study to trace both shared feminist investments and context-sensitive divergences in how maternal memory and emotional inheritance are articulated.

The theoretical framework draws primarily on Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism and Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic feminist theory, which together enable an analysis of how women's relational experiences are reproduced at both psychological and narrative levels. These frameworks are applied with sustained attention to cultural specificity, resisting abstract generalizations about "women's spaces." Instead, gynotopic spaces are examined as situated narrative sites, shaped by diasporic histories, familial structures, and socio-cultural expectations.

By integrating close reading with culturally attentive comparative analysis, this methodology directly addresses concerns about overgeneralization. Gendered and maternal spaces in the selected texts are not treated as homogeneous or universal; they are read as differentiated, historically grounded, and diasporically mediated formations. Collectively, the materials and methods employed here demonstrate how Divakaruni's and Tan's fiction not only expands the literary canon but also reconfigures psychoanalytic memory itself, establishing gynotopic narrative structures as sites of epistemic justice and feminist literary innovation.

4. Discussion and Analysis

In examining the intricate emotional landscape of the narratives by Divakaruni and Tan, this discussion investigates how maternal legacies influence identity and relational dynamics through the generations. Central to these works is a generational chain of psychological inheritance, where emotional labor, unvoiced sorrow, and gender-specific expectations are transmitted from mother to daughter. When analyzed through the lens of Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory, these maternal legacies serve not only as thematic elements but also as narrative frameworks, leading to what this paper terms gynotopic narrative dynamic literary realms characterized by emotional recollection, relational silences, and matrilineal transfer.

4.1 A Feminine and Psychoanalytic Interpretation via the Umbilical Cord Symbolism in "Before We Visit the Goddess"

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess* is a textured novel that delicately maps the emotional, cultural, and psychological legacies transmitted through maternal bonds (Anuar & Pourya Asl, 2022). Central to its narrative structure is a symbolic and psychic umbilical cord, a metaphorical thread that connects three generations of women: Sabitri, Bela, and Tara (Jeyasingam et al., 2018). This cord represents the unsevered lineage of emotion, trauma, silence, resistance, and storytelling that flows across time and space. The novel's use of alternating perspectives, fragmented timelines, and polyphonic voices enables a gynotopic narrative dynamic, centering the maternal voice in spaces where it is often marginalized. The novel's use of alternating perspectives, fragmented timelines, and polyphonic voices enables a gynotopic narrative dynamic, centering the maternal voice in spaces where it is often marginalized. This is immediately established as the novel opens with a worried Bela, prompting the narrative action by calling Sabitri to intervene with Tara, revealing the deeply intertwined emotional lives: "Even now Bela had this effect on her. But Bela, preoccupied as she often was by her own drama, didn't seem to notice. She rushed into her tale. Tara was thinking of dropping out of college..." (Divakaruni 13).

Simultaneously, the text exemplifies Nancy Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of mothering, which emphasizes how mothering is not only performed through caregiving but also transmitted psychically and affectively through relational dynamics (Fischer, 2012; Chodorow, 1978). The metaphor of the umbilical cord is woven throughout the text as a symbol of emotional entanglement. Though each woman in the novel is physically and emotionally distanced from her mother, the underlying psychic connection remains intact, manifesting through gestures, silences, and acts of storytelling. For example, Sabitri's reflection on a photo of her granddaughter Tara serves as a form of non-verbal, affective connection that validates a shared internal female life, acting like a textual umbilical cord that transmits memory and identity across generations (Shanthicoleen, 2020). Observing Tara's picture, Sabitri recognizes her own history of risk and breakthrough: "Dressed in a pink two-piece swimsuit, she balances on the edge of a board, about to leap into the water. Her face is filled with terror and elation. How well Sabitri knows that feeling" (Divakaruni, 15). This shared feeling, this intimate knowledge of the granddaughter's emotional state, is a testament to the unsevered psychic inheritance that transcends physical separation and differing cultures.

Divakaruni's choice of a non-linear, fragmented narrative mirrors the fractured yet continuous nature of the umbilical connection between mothers and daughters (Stone, 2011). The novel does not present a seamless transmission of values or identity; instead, it reveals a psychic landscape where each generation grapples with inherited emotional patterns, shame, exile, longing, and resistance. These repetitions underscore Chodorow's concept of emotional inheritance: daughters unconsciously internalize the unresolved emotions of their mothers, reproducing maternal roles not through conscious choice but through deeply embedded psychic structures (Balsam, 2021). Bela's rejection of Sabitri's legacy and Tara's detachment from Bela illustrate how the umbilical cord, though strained, is never truly severed. It becomes instead a site of psychic tension and identity negotiation. Sabitri's didactic letter to Tara is driven entirely by her own memory of shame and marginalization while living at the Mittirs' house, compelling her to write: "Granddaughter, this is the truth: if you are uneducated, people look down on you. To survive, you are forced to accept crumbs thrown from a rich man's table" (Divakaruni 21). This moment highlights how the ancestral pattern of shame (Sabitri's struggle for dignity) is directly translated into maternal advice (Bela prompting the letter) for the next generation (Tara's path to independence), making the transmission of emotional inheritance explicit.

Before We Visit the Goddess becomes a living Gynotopic Narrative by shifting the conventional patriarchal lineage narrative on an unbroken, active line of female self-discovery and recovery of voice. The interlinked, non-chronological chapters, like the "Fortunate Lamp: 1995" and "The Assam Incident: 1963" structure, embody this by making the past and present equally urgent and simultaneous. Each woman's story is given equal narrative weight and centrality, forcing the reader to recognize that the mother's journey of ambition, loss, and survival is not merely a background for the daughter's life, but a psychic inheritance that requires acknowledgment, confrontation, and ultimate integration to shape a future where the maternal voice is finally restored as the primary source of selfhood.

4.2 Gynotopic Storytelling and the Feminine Interior in "Sister of My Heart"

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* constructs an intricate tapestry of female kinship and emotional interdependence through a narrative form that privileges women's inner lives while simultaneously highlighting the generational absence and marginalization of maternal figures (Divakaruni, 1999). Through the interplay of dual voices, mysteries, and domestic geographies, the novel builds a gynotopic narrative structure, one where the storytelling is shaped by women, for women, and about women, yet paradoxically silences those who are meant to nurture and guide. This female-centric perspective is immediately established by the deep, internal connection shared between the cousins: "But never Sudha. I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half. The sister of my heart" (Divakaruni 19).

A key feature of the novel's gynotopic architecture is its dual first-person narration, alternating between cousins Anju and Sudha. This duality of voice creates a tightly woven emotional rhythm that mimics not only sisterhood but also a substitute form of mothering. Anju and Sudha nurture, discipline, and emotionally mirror each other, forming a relational bond that becomes the emotional core of the novel. In doing so, Divakaruni subtly displaces traditional maternal figures and instead constructs a surrogate maternal intimacy between peers (Rakwal, 2022). Their peer-led emotional support takes the place of parental comfort, illustrating the novel's core structure: "And when we had nightmares, instead of going to our mothers for comfort, we squeezed into one bed and held each other" (Divakaruni, 20).

What sets the novel distinctively gynotopic is its portrayal of maternal invisibility. The older women: Nalini, Gouri, and Pishi, occupy the space of caregivers, yet they are denied narrative agency. They hover in the background of the domestic sphere, more as enforcers of tradition than as emotionally expressive or empowered individuals (Morell et al., 2020). Their actions are largely dictated by societal expectations, and their emotional voices are subdued or entirely omitted. We do not gain access to their interiority or pain in the same way we do with Anju and Sudha. This deliberate narrative marginalization functions as a powerful literary strategy: it not only reflects how patriarchy conditions women to suppress their own stories but also shows how maternal presence can exist without emotional availability. The silence of the mothers becomes an emotional void that compels the daughters to seek answers elsewhere—through each other, through forbidden questions, and eventually through acts of defiance. Anju's critique of her Aunt Nalini reveals this constant enforcement of traditional roles rather than emotional connection, "I hate Aunt Nalini for constantly telling Sudha and me about how good girls should behave... Worst of all is when she makes up little rhymes with morals tagged onto them. Good daughters are bright lamps, lighting their mothers' name; wicked daughters are firebrands, scorching the family's fame" (Divakaruni 18).

Even in the lack of supportive maternal influence, the impact of emotional legacy is inescapable. The sisters do not simply reject the past; they embody it, often unknowingly. Sudha's obedience, self-sacrifice, and desire to maintain peace mirror the values silently passed down by the elder women. Anju's rebellion, though louder, is also shaped by the constraints of her upbringing. Divakaruni shows that even

without active maternal transmission, daughters inherit emotional frameworks, often internalizing unspoken rules and suppressed desires. This intuitive communication resonates with Nancy Chodorow's idea of mothering being perpetuated not via physical presence, but through emotional structural patterns (Bueskens, 2020). The inherited framework of female misfortune is demonstrated when Sudha internalizes the whispers surrounding their birth: "Pishi shakes her head in regret. 'Maybe the Bidhata Purush doesn't come for girl-babies.'... I've heard the whispers often enough to complete it in my head. For girl-babies who are so much bad luck that they cause their fathers to die even before they are born" (Divakaruni 14).

The narrative's emotional climax is not found in reconciliation with the maternal figures, but in the daughters' ability to navigate the void left by them. Sudha's decision to raise her daughter alone, free from the constraints of her failed marriage and her mother's unspoken expectations, is not a rejection of motherhood, but a redefinition of it. Similarly, Anju's evolving self-awareness in the face of personal grief marks a moment of narrative maturity. In both cases, agencies are forged not by following inherited roles, but by confronting the silences and constraints those roles impose. Sudha's moment of agency is marked by her profound personal reflection upon leaving her marriage: "I waited for despair to break over me like a flood wave—but it didn't. There was a sense of great tiredness, yes, and some sorrow. But there was also a huge relief, and a small hope" (Divakaruni 270).

By focusing the alternating narrative perspectives solely on Anju and Sudha, Divakaruni constructs a literary space that is entirely gynocentric, mapping the complexities of female desire, constraint, and survival outside the direct influence of male characters or even the emotional guidance of the preceding generation. The novel's conclusion, which sees Sudha and Anju finally reuniting in America and the mothers in Calcutta gaining a "girlish lightness" by engaging in activities previously forbidden (Divakaruni 308), proves that the daughters, by choosing their own paths, have ultimately freed the mothers as well, allowing all women in the family to re-envision their lives. This dual liberation, daughter finding selfhood, mother finding lightness, is the ultimate expression of a Gynotopic Narrative that breaks generational cycles of repression and silence.

4.3 *Mahjong, Memory, and the Matrilineal Map: Stories Woven in "The Joy Luck Club"*

Set between the cultural poles of China and the Chinese American immigrant experience, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* stands as a seminal literary work offering a richly woven narrative structure that prioritizes the feminine psyche, intergenerational trauma, and cultural memory (Wei, 2022). Through its polyphonic storytelling, emotional doubling, and layered representation of female spaces, the novel presents a literary space governed by the emotional logic of matrilineal experience (XU, n.d.). This is immediately demonstrated when the daughter, Jing-mei Woo, assumes the physical and spiritual place of the preceding generation: "My father has asked me to be the fourth corner at the Joy Luck Club. I am to replace my mother, whose seat at the mah jong table has been empty since she died two months ago"

At the core of the novel is its unique quadruple dyadic structure (mirroring the structure of the game 'Mahjong' itself), which features the voices of four Chinese immigrant mothers and their four American-born daughters. Each mother-daughter pair narrates their own stories across four sections, creating a nonlinear yet emotionally cohesive mosaic of perspectives (Hai-yan, n.d.). This fragmented and cyclical form resists linear temporality and masculine narrative conventions, instead embracing a circular, intimate, and memory-driven structure that reflects the way women remember, suffer, forgive, and endure. It is not a single plot that drives the novel forward but the accumulation of emotional moments and generational echoes, a hallmark of gynotopic design, which is clearly mapped in the novel's design: "THE MOTHERS Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, Ying-ying St. Clair" and "THE DAUGHTERS Jing-mei 'June' Woo, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Jong, Lena St. Clair"

The act of storytelling itself becomes a maternal inheritance and a feminist strategy within the novel (Souris, 1994). The mothers tell stories from their pasts in war-torn China, filled with pain, sacrifice, betrayal, and survival, not to simply pass on heritage, but to communicate what cannot be otherwise said in their present relationships with their daughters (Caniş, 2014). Their stories serve as emotional maps—guides for the daughters to decode their own identities, conflicts, and grief. Just as importantly, these stories highlight the failures of language and cultural translation: daughters often cannot fully comprehend the weight of their mothers' histories, while mothers struggle to communicate in a world that has already displaced them. This gap, filled with silence and misrecognitions, becomes the narrative tension that drives the novel's emotional core. This tension climaxes in a story exchange between Suyuan and Jing-mei: "What happened to the babies?" She didn't even pause to think. She simply said in a way that made it clear there was no more to the story: "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies". This traumatic, abrupt delivery of a fundamental truth is the mother's legacy, a painful emotional map that the daughter must decode.

Silence is another crucial narrative element that defines the novel's gynotopic dynamics. The mothers, though central to the novel, are often silent within their own families, speaking broken English or withholding their painful histories (Huang, 2013). But Tan's narrative structure reclaims that silencing by giving each mother her own narrative space, voice, and emotional depth (Shear, 1993). Their internal worlds are exposed not through external action, but through memory, regret, and longing (Evans, 2010). The maternal voice is not marginalized, but repositioned at the center, allowing the novel to critique both cultural patriarchy and generational erasure while simultaneously reaffirming the psychological depth of women's experiences. Though Jing-mei initially dismisses her mother's words, "I can never remember things I didn't understand in the first place," the text breaks this silence by then allowing Suyuan to speak in detail, conveying the emotional poverty she felt in Kweilin: "And when I arrived, I realized how shabby my dreams were, how poor my thoughts".

The domestic space, particularly the gatherings of the Joy Luck Club itself, functions as a sacred feminine space of emotional exchange, ritual, and resilience (Zeng, 2019). It is through domestic rituals such as cooking, mahjong, and storytelling that women reestablish community and identity (Lawrence, 1982). These spaces are not mere backdrops but gendered sites of meaning, emotional labor, and generational continuity (Taylor, 2003). In this way, the novel constructs a gynotopic geography, where female memory, kinship, and resistance are mapped into spaces historically coded as domestic and private (Lu, 2000). Suyuan Woo details the defiant, therapeutic function of the original Kweilin club: “We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost... And that’s when I thought I needed something to do to help me move. “My idea was to have a gathering of four women...”.

Crucially, the novel *The Joy Luck Club* engages with emotional inheritance and psychic doubling, a concept central to both psychoanalytic feminist theory and gynotopic narratives (Li, 2010). Each daughter, though ostensibly disconnected from her mother’s past, unconsciously reenacts or resists the emotional scripts of her maternal line (Hirsch, 1989). Waverly’s need for perfection mirrors her mother Lindo’s, survival through cunning (Fickle, 2014). Rose’s indecisiveness and submissiveness reflect her mother An-Mei’s childhood wounds (Souris, 1994). This mirroring reveals how emotional patterns, rather than cultural customs alone, are passed down across generations, often without conscious realization. In this way, the daughters are shaped not only by American modernity but also by the emotional residues of maternal trauma and resilience. Rose, for example, feels the effect of her mother’s influence as a profound, inherited psychic surveillance: “She said a mirror could see only my face, but she could see me inside out even when I was not in the room. And all these things seemed true to me. The power of her words was that strong”.

The final section of the novel, where Jing-mei travels to China to meet her deceased mother’s twin daughters, serves as a symbolic moment of narrative closure and continuity. Though the mother has died, her story lives on—not just in memory but through emotional realization and recognition (Huang, 2013). Jing-mei’s understanding of her mother’s pain becomes a moment of transgenerational healing. This act of posthumous identification marks the full realization of gynotopic narrative form: the daughter, who once misunderstood her mother, finally steps into her emotional and historical world, completing the arc not of reconciliation, but of recognition. The novel closes on this image of recognition and fulfillment of the maternal wish: “And although we don’t speak, I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish”.

The Joy Luck Club constructs a gynotopic narrative by transforming the Mahjong table from a simple game space into a sacred archive of female history. The novel structurally resists the linear, action-driven narratives of patriarchy, replacing them with a circular form where the emotional legacy of the mothers is continually dealt and replayed in the lives of the daughters. By giving voice to the women’s inner lives, their ancient survival tactics, their contemporary American confusion, and their profound sorrow, Amy Tan elevates the traditionally marginalized mother’s story to the status of ultimate cultural, historical, and psychic truth. The narrative’s final, healing realization that Jing-mei and her sisters “look like our mother” confirms that the Gynotopic project succeeds not in rejection of the past, but in its profound, loving recognition, making the matrilineal bond the definitive source of identity and narrative continuity.

4.4 Emotional Inheritance and the Maternal Psyche in “*The Bonesetter’s Daughter*”

Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* is an exceptional example of female narrative that reveals how maternal recollection, unspoken words, and emotional legacy influence the experiences of daughters across different cultures and generations (Vizan, 2014). Structured through a layered, polyvocal narrative, Tan’s novel exemplifies Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics, where the central conflicts, transformations, and reconciliations emerge not from male-centered events but from the interior, often invisible world of maternal affect.

The narrative unfolds in two primary timelines, interweaving the present-day experiences of Ruth—an American-born daughter navigating care for her aging mother, LuLing, with LuLing’s handwritten life story, which spans her childhood in early 20th-century China (Lotfi, 2015). This split narrative form is not only structurally significant but also represents the act of emotional excavation that is central to Chodorow’s theory. Ruth’s journey is not linear; it is cyclical, psychological, and affectively layered. As she reads her mother’s forgotten and untranslated manuscript, she engages in the process of reconstructing maternal memory, and by doing so, begins to trace the emotional origins of her own identity. It is this act of narrative translation—literal and symbolic—that reactivates a buried maternal history and initiates the daughter’s reclamation of self. The structural split is immediately clear as the book opens with LuLing’s interior thoughts: “These are the things I know are true: My name is LuLing Liu Young” (Tan, 7), followed by the beginning of Part One, which focuses on the present-day life of her daughter: “For the past eight years, always starting on August twelfth, Ruth Young lost her voice” (Tan, 11).

What makes this narrative profoundly gynotopic is the centrality of female memory and voice, especially when mediated through silence, trauma, and nonverbal expression. LuLing’s story, passed down through writing rather than speech, mirrors how mothering is often marked by repression, rupture, and emotional residue (Tan, 2001). Her relationship with her own mother, Precious Auntie, is shaped by secrets, guilt, and loss—an inheritance that profoundly alters her ability to mother Ruth. Precious Auntie herself was silenced due to a physical injury: “She had no voice, just gasps and wheezes, the snorts of a ragged wind” (Tan 94). In turn, Ruth grows up perceiving her mother’s speech as erratic, her emotions unpredictable, and her love inconsistent. This reproduction of mothering through emotional dysfunction is not a simple repetition but an affective legacy—Ruth unconsciously absorbs patterns of withdrawal, self-silencing, and anxiety without fully understanding their historical roots.

Tan dramatizes this psychic transmission through Ruth’s annual psychosomatic muteness—a powerful metaphor for inherited silence. Her literal loss of voice each year echoes her mother’s emotional muteness, and further, Precious Auntie’s lifelong silence due to her

disfigurement. This recurring trauma, passed down like a genetic wound, is not caused by overt violence but by layers of unprocessed maternal pain. In Chodorow's terms, mothering is not only passed on through caretaking behaviors but through the daughter's internalization of her mother's unresolved conflicts. Ruth's psychological entanglement with her mother is therefore not merely cultural but deeply psychoanalytic—her identity is shaped through the absorption of maternal absence as much as maternal presence. Ruth's muteness is directly connected to the maternal legacy of superstition: "Her mother, though, had often told Ruth throughout her childhood that shooting stars were really 'melting ghost bodies' and it was bad luck to see them. If you did, that meant a ghost was trying to talk to you" (Tan 18). Her own psychic silence on August twelfth, the night of the meteor shower and the start of her annual muteness, is the unconscious re-enactment of her mother's trauma and superstition.

Narratively, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* constructs a gynotopic space through its embrace of female voices, especially those once silenced or deformed. LuLing's decision to record her life story and Ruth's eventual act of reading and interpreting it, mark a shift from maternal repression to maternal recognition. Voice, in the novel, is not only a symbol of selfhood but of relational repair. The transmission of voice from Precious Auntie (silenced) to LuLing (fragmented) to Ruth (restored) charts a generational arc of healing, one that is only made possible through storytelling. It is in this act of narrative witnessing that Ruth begins to break the cycle of unconscious reproduction, transforming her understanding of herself from victim of her mother's volatility to co-participant in a legacy of unspoken pain and survival. This arc is completed when Ruth, finally understanding her mother's wish, writes a story of her own: "She can write... Now she has that reason. It is for her grandmother, for herself, for the little girl who became her mother" (Tan 315).

Therefore, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is a quintessential gynotopic narrative because its central action is the excavation and translation of the maternal manuscript. The novel makes the previously invisible feminine interior—LuLing's forgotten trauma and Precious Auntie's permanent silence—the sole engine of the plot. By making the daughter, Ruth, the agent who must literally and figuratively *read* the mother's past to save her own future, Amy Tan establishes a literary space where the traditional historical record is replaced by the matrilineal story. The healing of Ruth's psychosomatic muteness and LuLing's final, peaceful recollection of only being "loved very, very much" (Tan 315) proves that the cycle of inherited trauma is broken not by cutting ties, but by the daughter's conscious, empathetic act of narrative restoration, transforming a legacy of pain into a continuous history of female survival and voice.

4.5 Gynotopic Elements and Narrative Architecture

The conversion of gynotopic elements into narrative form occurs by manipulating the standard elements of narrative, structure, space, and time, to prioritize the female interior over external, patriarchal events. The question of "Where" (Gynotopic Spaces) shapes the narrative structure by elevating traditionally feminine settings, such as The Joy Luck Club's mahjong table, from a mere *setting* into a cyclical, polyphonic scaffold. This structure replaces the linear, cause-and-effect masculine plot with a four-part, accumulated narrative built on the intimate, shared emotional logic of the space, where the ritual of gathering dictates the flow of voices. The question of "When" (Maternal Relationships) shapes narrative time by compelling the story to reject external chronology in favor of a fragmented, dual-timeline structure, as seen in Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess*. This fragmentation proves that the mother's past is not history, but a simultaneous, active psychic force (the "umbilical cord") driving the daughter's present conflicts, making the relational and emotional reconciliation the central structural event. Finally, the question of "Who" (Psychoanalytical Memory) dictates narrative voice by making the excavation of the repressed or silenced maternal voice the primary plot. In Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the discovery of LuLing's secret memoir creates a fundamental dual-narrative voice where the act of reading and translating the mother's buried trauma becomes the necessary structural action that transforms the daughter's psychosomatic muteness into restored selfhood.

4.6 Comparative Gynotopic Dynamics

The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*Before We Visit the Goddess*, *Sister of My Heart*) and Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*) collectively define the parameters of Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics by using distinct yet functionally similar methods to center the feminine experience. Both authors resist patriarchal historiography by employing non-linear, fragmented narrative structures that prioritize emotional chronology over temporal order. Divakaruni's use of the symbolic umbilical cord in *Before We Visit the Goddess* and the surrogate maternal bond in *Sister of My Heart* focuses on the unbroken relationality of women. Conversely, Tan's novels use the literal archival object (LuLing's manuscript) in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and the ritualistic space (the Mahjong table) in *The Joy Luck Club* to excavate the repressed history of the mother. Crucially, while Divakaruni often depicts the mothers as having a fragmented or silent voice that is then reclaimed by the daughters' actions, Tan explicitly critiques this marginalization by structurally giving the maternal voice its own, full narrative chapter, ensuring that the mother's story is the source text for the daughter's identity. Thus, both authors utilize the tools of silence, psychic doubling, and narrative fragmentation to confirm Nancy Chodorow's theory: Gynotopic narratives are ultimately driven by the emotional inheritance that dictates the daughter's psychological landscape, whether that inheritance is a felt absence (Divakaruni) or a buried, traumatic past (Tan).

4.7 Reclaiming Narrative Space: The Political Function of the Gynotopic

Gynotopic narratives, focusing on the emotional journeys, unspoken truths, and relational memories of women, reclaim literary space as a platform for resistance, healing, and redefinition. In the intergenerational works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amy Tan, the narrative framework becomes intricately linked to emotional inheritance, wherein maternal voices once muted by patriarchal, cultural, and diasporic disruptions are redefined and remembered. Throughout these works, maternal narratives—previously regarded as private, sentimental, or apolitical—are reaffirmed as essential literary ground. These narratives not only confront prevailing portrayals of

motherhood but also elevate the significance of emotional labor, caregiving, and the passing down of female identity through generations (Linn, 2002). Through the use of disjointed timelines, complex recollections, and nuanced mother-daughter relationships, gynotopic stories uncover the hidden struggles faced by women and transform trauma into resilience.

This storytelling approach carries a significant political purpose (Berg, 2001). It challenges systemic gender disparities, amplifies women's real-life experiences, and redefines identity and autonomy through creative literary techniques. Such portrayals resonate closely with the moral principles of the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which champions the empowerment of all women and girls, and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which aims to eradicate discrimination and foster social inclusion. By highlighting maternal narratives and restoring agency to voices that have been historically marginalized, these works play a vital role in facilitating a larger cultural transformation—one that prioritizes care, emotional health, and intergenerational healing as essential components of sustainable and inclusive futures. The gynotopic narrative serves not just as a literary style but also as a pivotal intervention that connects literature with social change. In this way, they engage in a feminist reterritorialization of narrative space, where maternal memory shifts from being mere background noise to becoming the emotional heartbeat of the narrative.

5. Conclusion

The novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amy Tan transcend mere narratives of migration and maternal love, creating gynotopic spaces where women's emotional legacies are both remembered and rewritten. Utilizing Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic feminist theory, these works reveal that the reproduction of mothering is an internalized emotional script shaped by silence, sacrifice, and care. Through fractured timelines and layered voices, the architecture of maternal influence emerges as central to literary meaning. The concept of Gynotopic Narrative Dynamics illustrates how intergenerational stories are influenced by both spoken and inherited emotions, reclaiming storytelling as a feminine epistemology that affirms lived experiences. This study reframes the reproduction of mothering as a literary act, showcasing how maternal inheritance operates within characters and the narrative structure itself. These novels create a reparative narrative space that empowers maternal voices, disrupts inherited trauma, and models intergenerational healing through empathy and storytelling. By addressing the emotional marginalization of mothers, they advocate for culturally informed mental health awareness and feminist frameworks of care. Ultimately, Divakaruni and Tan demonstrate that maternal memory is dynamic, evolving through storytelling, allowing daughters to rediscover their mothers and reconstruct their identities. These narratives compel readers to witness the silenced truths of maternal experience, using storytelling as a transformative tool for healing and restoring intergenerational emotional integrity.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Vellore Institute of Technology for providing an encouraging academic environment conducive to research. Special thanks are extended to the research supervisor, Dr. Meenakshi S., for her guidance, critical insights, and consistent support throughout the conceptualization and completion of this manuscript. The author also gratefully acknowledges the reviewers for their constructive comments, which contributed significantly to improving the quality of this work.

Authors' contributions

Ms. Bidisha Dutta was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, conducting the research, and drafting the manuscript. Dr. Meenakshi S., the corresponding author, proofread and revised the manuscript critically for intellectual content. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI Acknowledgment

To uphold academic writing standards and ensure the clarity and precision of this manuscript, the authors acknowledge the responsible use of AI-based language tools during the drafting process. Specifically, tools such as Grammarly [<https://www.grammarly.com>], QuillBot [<https://www.quillbot.com>], and ChatGPT [<https://chat.openai.com>] were employed for grammar refinement, sentence restructuring, and phrasing enhancement. Prompts such as “improve sentence structure,” “refine phrasing,” and “clarify specific points” were used to strengthen the manuscript's linguistic presentation. These tools were used solely as editorial aids and did not contribute to the generation of original content, interpretation, or critical analysis. The intellectual contribution, analytical rigor, and authorship remain entirely that of the authors. The use of such tools is in accordance with ethical academic practices and conforms to the guidelines set by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The authors affirm full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work presented in this paper.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Not applicable, as the study does not involve human subjects.

Ethics approval

Not applicable, as the study does not involve human subjects.

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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