DECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD
Indian Cultural Narratives and Ideology (1970s Onwards)

Monica Khanna Jhalani

Through an exploration and analysis of a vast number of literary and cultural narratives from the 1970s to the present, this book explores how motherhood is ideologically constructed as the woman’s primary role in India. It deals with various theoretical approaches to motherhood including the bio-determinist, Anthropological, Marxist and Socio-psychological perspectives, and examines issues such as reproductive choice, infertility, assisted reproductive technologies, abortion, voluntary childlessness, lesbianism, illegitimacy, and “working mothers.”

The cinematic material ranges from classics like Mother India and Deewar, to controversial films like Fire, to the critically acclaimed Astivta, and box office hits like Hum Saath Saath Hain, Gharwali Baharwali and Salaam Namaste. Literary narratives include books or short stories by Indian writers in English such as Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Girtha Harrihan and Jhumpa Lahiri, besides translations of regional writings by authors like Mahasweta Devi and Krishna Sobti.

The book focuses on the average Indian woman, whose identity, regardless of class, caste or religion, seems to be defined by the ideology of motherhood - whether or not she is a mother, why or why she is not a mother, how she can become a mother if she is not one, what kind of a mother she is and what kind of a mother she should be.

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