



RECLAIMING IDENTITY AND FEMALE AGENCY IN ARIA ABER'S *GOOD GIRL*: A FEMINIST STUDY

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Abstract

Aria Aber's *Good Girl* (2025) presents the complex journey of Nila Haddadi, a young Afghan-German woman negotiating cultural expectations, gender norms, family relationships, sexuality, and personal freedom. The novel highlights a significant problem concerning the ways socially constructed ideals of femininity influence a woman's understanding of herself and restrict her ability to define her identity independently. This article examines the reclamation of female identity and the development of female agency in the novel through a feminist perspective, drawing on de Beauvoir's existential feminism, Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Mohanty's transnational feminism. Particular attention is given to the "good girl" ideal as a form of gender and social regulation through which female behaviour, sexuality, and personal choices are judged. The discussion explores how Nila internalizes these expectations and gradually begins to question the identity imposed upon her. Her artistic aspirations, personal experiences, cultural negotiations, and increasing self-awareness contribute to her movement toward greater self-definition. The article argues that Nila's agency does not emerge through a complete rejection of her family or cultural background. Rather, it develops through an ongoing process of questioning, resistance, negotiation, and self-expression. The study demonstrates that *Good Girl* presents female identity as evolving and situated, while highlighting the possibility of reclaiming the self within complex cultural and gendered structures.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Female Agency, Feminism, Gender Performativity, Identity Reclamation, Patriarchy, Self-Definition.*

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality remains a significant contemporary social problem despite considerable progress in women's education, employment, political participation, and legal rights. The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 shows that only 68.8% of the global gender gap has been closed, leaving a substantial gap between women and men across different areas of social life (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). Although educational attainment has achieved a relatively high level of gender parity, economic participation and political empowerment continue to show considerable inequality. Globally, the economic participation and opportunity gap is 61.0% closed, while political empowerment has reached only 22.9% (WEF, 2025). These figures demonstrate that formal progress has not eliminated the deeper structures through which gender inequality is maintained. The problem is also reflected in everyday expectations concerning women's behaviour, sexuality, mobility, family responsibilities, appearance, and decision-making. Such expectations establish particular standards of acceptable femininity and influence women's opportunities, choices, and understanding of themselves.

A particularly important dimension of this problem concerns female identity and agency. Gender inequality is not only visible in access to education, employment, or political positions but also in the expectations that shape women's personal and social lives. The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 further indicates that women represent 41.2% of the global workforce but occupy only 28.8% of top leadership positions, revealing the continuing gap between participation and decision-making power (WEF, 2025). Women may therefore be expected to fulfil socially approved roles before they have the opportunity to determine their identities and aspirations independently. Ideas of obedience, modesty, respectability, family loyalty, and appropriate sexuality can become standards against which female behaviour is judged. When such expectations are internalized, women may begin to regulate themselves according to social definitions of what a "good" woman should be. Female agency in such circumstances may emerge through questioning imposed identities, negotiating social expectations, expressing personal desires, and gradually gaining the confidence to define oneself.

Aria Aber's *Good Girl* (2025) provides a significant contemporary literary representation of these concerns. The novel follows Nila Haddadi, a nineteen-year-old Afghan-German woman living in Berlin, whose experiences are shaped by cultural identity, family expectations, sexuality, artistic ambition, and her desire for personal freedom. Nila occupies a complicated position between her Afghan family background and the social environment of contemporary Berlin. Her relationship with her father, her family history, her artistic aspirations, her experiences with sexuality, and her relationship with the older writer Marlowe contribute to her struggle to understand herself. Her life consequently becomes a process of negotiating different expectations surrounding family,

culture, femininity, and personal freedom. The novel presents Nila's development not merely as a conventional coming-of-age experience but as a deeper struggle to understand which parts of her identity have been shaped by others and which she can claim as her own.

The title *Good Girl* itself establishes an important gendered problem. The expression appears to offer approval, yet it also suggests a particular standard against which female behaviour can be measured. A "good girl" is expected to be respectable, controlled, obedient, and conscious of the expectations attached to her family and social position. For Nila, these expectations become more complicated because she is negotiating different cultural environments at the same time. Her Afghan family background remains an important part of her identity, while her life in Berlin exposes her to different forms of social and personal freedom. Her desire for artistic expression, independence, sexuality, and self-definition therefore comes into tension with expectations surrounding respectability and family loyalty. The central problem is consequently not simply whether Nila is restricted, but how far these expectations have influenced the way she understands herself and how she can develop an identity beyond the definition of the "good girl."

The novel has attracted critical attention for its engagement with cultural identity, belonging, family relationships, sexuality, displacement, artistic development, and the complexities of growing up between different cultural worlds. Existing literary discussions have highlighted the tensions between personal desires and family, cultural, and social expectations, while also recognizing the significance of Nila's Afghan-German identity and her search for freedom and self-understanding. This body of discussion establishes *Good Girl* as an important contemporary text for examining questions of identity and belonging. However, greater attention is needed to the specifically gendered dimension of Nila's experience, particularly the ways in which expectations surrounding femininity and the ideal of the "good girl" influence her understanding of herself. A focused feminist reading can therefore extend existing discussions by examining identity not only as a cultural or diasporic concern but also as a process of female self-definition and agency.

The feminist perspectives of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty provide an appropriate basis for examining these concerns. Beauvoir's understanding of womanhood as a process of becoming helps to consider how femininity is shaped through social expectations. Butler's concept of gender performativity provides a way to understand how gendered identities are maintained through repeated social practices, while Mohanty's transnational feminist perspective allows Nila's experience to be examined within its particular cultural and social circumstances. These perspectives are brought together in the present article to examine the relationship between gender, cultural identity, socially constructed femininity, and female agency. Their theoretical concepts are discussed in greater detail in the theoretical framework.

The central problem addressed in this article is therefore the difficulty of reclaiming female identity within socially and culturally constructed expectations of femininity. Although existing discussions of *Good Girl* have addressed its concerns with cultural identity, family, sexuality, displacement, belonging, and artistic development, the specific relationship between the “good girl” ideal, identity reclamation, and female agency requires further focused attention. This article argues that Nila’s development should not be understood simply as a movement from obedience to rebellion. Rather, her journey represents an ongoing process of questioning the meanings imposed upon her, negotiating her cultural and gendered identity, and developing a more self-defined understanding of womanhood. Through a feminist reading of *Good Girl*, the article therefore examines how Nila confronts socially constructed expectations and gradually reclaims agency over the definition of her own identity.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary feminist literary scholarship increasingly understands female identity as a process shaped by social expectations, cultural structures, family relationships, and personal choices rather than as a fixed or naturally predetermined condition. Feminist discussions of identity reclamation emphasize that women’s movement toward selfhood is often gradual and involves recognizing, questioning, and negotiating the structures that define acceptable femininity. Such scholarship also challenges the assumption that female agency must always appear through direct confrontation or complete rejection of patriarchal authority. Agency can instead emerge through self-awareness, personal expression, refusal, negotiation, and the ability to make choices within restrictive circumstances. This perspective is particularly relevant to contemporary fiction in which women remain connected to their families and cultures while attempting to establish an independent sense of self. The following discussion therefore reviews selected critical responses to *Good Girl* alongside relevant feminist scholarship to understand how cultural identity, gender expectations, family, sexuality, and female agency intersect in Nila’s experience.

Nayeri (2025) discusses *Good Girl* as a coming-of-age narrative shaped by cultural identity, sexuality, shame, family, and the desire for freedom. Her discussion presents Nila’s Afghan-German identity as an important part of her struggle to understand herself within different cultural environments. The tensions between family expectations and personal desires make her development emotionally and socially complicated. Nayeri’s review is significant because it establishes a connection between Nila’s cultural background and her search for independence, while also drawing attention to the pressures surrounding her as a young woman. Her discussion therefore provides a useful foundation for examining how cultural expectations influence Nila’s understanding of freedom and selfhood.

Charles (2025) focuses on the meaning of being “good” in the novel and connects it with Nila’s relationship with her family, particularly her father, as well as exile, anger, and alienation. His discussion suggests that being “good” carries expectations that extend beyond individual behaviour and become connected with family and cultural belonging. Nila’s struggle consequently involves not only deciding what she wants but also confronting the meanings attached to acceptable behaviour. Charles’s interpretation is relevant to the present study because it provides a basis for understanding the “good girl” identity as more than a personal description. It can also be viewed as a social expectation through which a young woman’s choices, sexuality, and behaviour are evaluated.

Mujumdar (2025) examines Aria Aber’s *Good Girl* through the interconnected themes of maternal absence, family history, exile, cultural identity, artistic development, and coming of age. Particular attention is given to Nila’s relationship with her deceased mother, Anahita, whose absence continues to shape Nila’s understanding of herself and her family. Mujumdar discusses how photography becomes an important means through which Nila observes, records, and makes sense of her surroundings and personal history. Her interest in photography is not presented merely as an artistic pursuit but as a way of looking closely at people, memories, and experiences that are difficult for her to understand directly. Through the camera, Nila is able to explore her mother’s life, her parents’ experience of exile, and the fragments of family history that influence her own identity.

The review also highlights the expectations associated with being a “good daughter” and the tension between these expectations and Nila’s desire to develop an independent life. Nila’s struggle is therefore connected not only to her family relationships but also to her Afghan identity and her attempt to find a sense of belonging in a different cultural environment. Mujumdar shows that Nila initially tries to distance herself from aspects of her Afghan background, yet her growing understanding of her mother and family history gradually leads her to reconsider her relationship with her cultural identity. An important part of this development is Nila’s recognition of Anahita not only as her mother but also as a woman with her own experiences, desires, and history. Through this recognition, Nila also begins to understand herself more clearly. Mujumdar’s discussion consequently presents identity as something that develops through memory, family relationships, cultural experience, and personal expression rather than as something fixed. Her analysis is particularly useful for understanding how familial expectations and cultural pressures influence female self-definition while also showing how creative expression can become a means of exploring and negotiating identity.

Nersessian (2025) approaches *Good Girl* through its coming-of-age and Bildungsroman dimensions, emphasizing Nila’s experiences of family conflict, cultural displacement, racism, relationships, sexuality, and uncertainty about belonging. Her

interpretation presents Nila's development as an ongoing and complicated process rather than a sudden transformation. The difficulties she encounters gradually shape her understanding of herself, her relationships, and her position within the different social and cultural environments around her. Nersessian also highlights the ways in which Nila's personal experiences are connected to broader questions of identity and belonging, particularly as she moves between her Afghan background and her life in Germany. This perspective is important for a feminist reading because Nila's coming of age can also be understood as a process of becoming increasingly aware of the social expectations and limitations that shape her identity as a young woman. Her development therefore involves not only growing into adulthood but also questioning the identities, relationships, and roles available to her and gradually developing a stronger sense of her own desires and choices. Nersessian's discussion thus provides a useful basis for examining female identity as a developing process shaped by cultural pressures, personal experiences, and the search for greater self-understanding.

The existing critical discussion establishes *Good Girl* as a significant contemporary text for examining cultural identity, family, sexuality, displacement, artistic development, belonging, and female self-development. However, these concerns have not yet been sufficiently brought together through a focused examination of the "good girl" ideal, identity reclamation, and female agency. Existing reviews provide valuable insights into Nila's cultural and personal struggles, but greater attention is needed to understand how gendered expectations shape her sense of self and how she gradually negotiates those expectations. The present study addresses this gap by bringing these dimensions together through a feminist reading of Nila's identity. It approaches identity reclamation not simply as rejection of family or culture, but as an ongoing process of questioning, negotiation, self-expression, and self-definition.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs three feminist perspectives to provide a theoretical basis for understanding female identity, gender construction, social expectations, and female agency. Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism provides a foundational understanding of womanhood as a socially and culturally shaped process rather than a fixed natural condition. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity develops this understanding by explaining how gender is repeatedly produced through social practices, behaviours, and norms. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's transnational feminism further emphasizes that women's experiences must be understood within their particular cultural, historical, political, and social circumstances. These three perspectives provide interconnected but distinct approaches to examining how femininity is constructed, maintained, negotiated, and potentially transformed.

3.1. Simone de Beauvoir and Existential Feminism

Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist thought provides a foundational perspective for understanding the social construction of female identity. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir famously states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 283). Through this statement, she challenges the assumption that womanhood is simply a natural or predetermined condition. Instead, she emphasizes that women become women through processes of socialization and cultural conditioning. Family, education, social institutions, traditions, and everyday expectations contribute to teaching women what forms of behaviour, appearance, morality, and relationships are considered appropriate. Femininity is therefore not understood as a fixed essence but as something shaped through social experience. Beauvoir's argument is significant because it draws attention to the external forces that participate in defining women before they are able to develop an independent understanding of themselves.

A central concept within Beauvoir's existential feminism is Otherness. She argues that woman has historically been constructed as the "Other" in relation to man, who is positioned as the essential subject and assumed norm. This division places women in a secondary position and encourages them to understand themselves through categories established by a male-centred social order. Otherness therefore operates not only through explicit discrimination but also through cultural ideas that define what women should be and how they should behave. Beauvoir's existential perspective nevertheless emphasizes human freedom and the capacity for self-definition. Women are not required to remain permanently within identities assigned to them. They can question socially imposed meanings and participate in creating their own identities through conscious choices and actions. Female agency, from this perspective, involves moving toward greater freedom and accepting responsibility for defining oneself rather than passively accepting externally established identities.

3.2. Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler extends the discussion of socially constructed identity through her theory of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler challenges the understanding of gender as a stable inner essence that naturally determines individual behaviour. Instead, she argues that gender is produced and maintained through repeated acts, behaviours, gestures, appearances, and social practices. Butler describes gender as "the repeated stylization of the body" (Butler, 2006, p. 45). This formulation suggests that gender appears stable because particular behaviours are repeatedly performed and recognized within a social system. Individuals learn which forms of conduct are considered appropriate for women and men, and the repetition of these behaviours gradually makes socially produced gender roles appear natural and permanent.

The concept of performativity also demonstrates how gender norms are reinforced through everyday social regulation. Expectations concerning dress, speech, appearance, sexuality, emotional expression, relationships, and bodily conduct can become mechanisms through which femininity is repeatedly produced. Butler's theory does not suggest that individuals freely choose gender performances without social pressure. Rather, people perform gender within existing cultural norms that determine which identities are considered acceptable or intelligible. However, because gender is produced through repetition, these performances are not necessarily fixed. Repetition can involve variation, disruption, and reinterpretation, creating possibilities for challenging established norms. Butler's theory therefore provides an important basis for understanding agency as the capacity to question, modify, or resist the gendered practices through which identities are constructed.

3.3. Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Transnational Feminism

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's transnational feminist perspective introduces an important cultural, historical, and political dimension to feminist theory. In *Feminism Without Borders*, Mohanty (2003) challenges approaches that treat women as a single, universal category with identical experiences of oppression. She argues that women's lives are shaped by particular historical, cultural, political, and economic conditions. Gender cannot therefore be examined independently of the social contexts in which women live. Mohanty's approach questions the assumption that one form of feminism can adequately explain the experiences of all women. Instead, it calls for attention to differences produced by culture, nation, race, class, migration, history, and other structures that influence women's positions within society.

Transnational feminism is particularly concerned with the ways in which power operates across cultural and geographical boundaries. Mohanty emphasizes the importance of examining women within their specific social locations rather than presenting them as passive victims of a universal system of oppression. This approach also broadens the understanding of female agency by recognizing that women negotiate power in different ways depending on their circumstances. Agency may involve resistance, negotiation, solidarity, self-expression, or the reinterpretation of cultural practices rather than a single form of liberation. Mohanty's perspective therefore provides a framework for understanding female identity as situated and relational. It allows feminist analysis to recognize both the shared structures of gender inequality and the significant differences among women's experiences.

Taken together, Beauvoir, Butler, and Mohanty provide three complementary dimensions for understanding female identity and agency. Beauvoir explains how women become socially defined through processes of becoming and Otherness, drawing attention to the external construction of femininity and the possibility of self-definition. Butler

demonstrates how gendered identities are repeatedly performed through social norms and practices, while also showing how repetition can create opportunities for disruption and change. Mohanty adds the necessary cultural and historical context by emphasizing that gender must be examined in relation to specific social locations and structures of power. Collectively, these theories understand female identity as socially produced rather than naturally fixed and female agency as a process of questioning, negotiating, and redefining imposed meanings. This theoretical framework therefore provides a coherent foundation for examining the complex relationship among gender construction, cultural context, identity, and agency.

4. Analysis

4.1. The “Good Girl” Ideal and the Construction of Femininity

Aria Aber’s *Good Girl* presents femininity as something learned and performed through social expectations rather than as a fixed identity. Nila’s struggle is particularly visible in her awareness of how she is expected to behave, appear, and control herself. She observes that “looking right mattered as much as doing right” (Aber, 2025, p. 90). The statement shows that being considered a respectable young woman depends not only on actions but also on appearance and self-presentation. Nila therefore learns to monitor herself according to standards that are externally established. This reflects Beauvoir’s argument that womanhood is socially produced through processes of becoming. Nila’s femininity is not simply something she possesses; it is something she has learned to perform in order to remain acceptable within her social environment.

The pressure to perform acceptable femininity becomes even clearer when Nila admits, “I knew how to behave before I knew who I was” (Aber, 2025, p. 103). This statement captures the central conflict of her identity. She has acquired the rules of appropriate behaviour before developing a clear understanding of her own desires and beliefs. Her social identity therefore develops from the outside inward. Butler’s theory of gender performativity is particularly relevant here because repeated behaviours make socially produced gender roles appear natural. Nila’s realization exposes the difference between learning how to perform femininity and actually knowing oneself. Her identity crisis consequently becomes a form of feminist consciousness because she begins to recognize that the version of herself accepted by others is not necessarily the same as the self she experiences internally.

The cultural dimension of this performance intensifies the pressure placed upon Nila. As an Afghan-German woman, her behaviour is not perceived as purely individual. She recognizes this unequal burden when she reflects that “mistakes felt louder on me” (Aber, 2025, p. 116). The phrase “louder on me” suggests that Nila feels more heavily scrutinized because her actions are connected to cultural expectations and social perceptions. Her mistakes carry meanings beyond personal failure. Mohanty’s

transnational feminism helps explain this experience because it rejects the idea that all women experience gender in the same way. Nila's femininity is shaped simultaneously by gender and cultural location, making her experience different from a universal model of female oppression.

4.2. Emotional Regulation, Silence and the Internalization of Gender Norms

The novel also demonstrates that the regulation of femininity extends beyond visible behaviour into emotional life. Nila observes that "calm was expected, even when I felt anything but" (Aber, 2025, p. 129). The contrast between "calm" and "anything but" reveals the distance between what Nila feels and what she is expected to display. She is required to control anger, frustration, desire, and emotional responses in order to maintain an acceptable image. Femininity consequently becomes associated with emotional restraint. This supports Butler's argument that gender is maintained through repeated performances because Nila must repeatedly regulate her emotional expression to remain intelligible within accepted gender norms.

Silence becomes another consequence of this internal regulation. When Nila reflects that "each unsaid word made it harder to know what I actually believed" (Aber, 2025, p. 89), silence is shown to affect not only communication but also self-knowledge. Suppressing her responses makes it difficult for her to distinguish her own beliefs from the expectations surrounding her. The quotation therefore connects voice with identity. If Nila cannot articulate what she thinks and feels, her identity remains partly controlled by the meanings others have already assigned to her. Her gradual movement toward speaking, questioning, and expressing herself consequently becomes an important form of agency.

This emotional conflict also appears through Nila's body. She observes that "my body stiffened even when I told myself I was safe" (Aber, 2025, p. 104). The bodily response suggests that social and emotional pressures have become internalized to such an extent that the body reacts before conscious reasoning can intervene. The body therefore becomes a record of experiences that Nila may attempt to suppress intellectually. From an intersectional feminist perspective, this bodily tension can be connected with the overlapping pressures of gender, culture, and social expectations. Her struggle for autonomy is consequently not limited to what she says or does; it also involves learning to recognize and interpret her own bodily responses.

4.3. From Performed Identity to Identity Reclamation

A significant turning point occurs when Nila recognizes the gap between her external performance and her internal experience. She states, "what I showed didn't match what I felt" (Aber, 2025, p. 141). This is one of the clearest textual expressions of the conflict at the centre of *Good Girl*. Nila has become conscious that the identity she presents to the world is not necessarily identical to the identity she experiences internally. From

Butler's perspective, this awareness is significant because once a gender performance becomes recognizable as a performance, it can also become open to questioning and reinterpretation. Nila therefore begins to understand that the "good girl" identity is constructed rather than inevitable.

Identity reclamation, however, does not mean that Nila must completely reject her cultural background. Her later reflection, "I could carry parts of the past without letting them decide everything" (Aber, 2025, p. 195), represents a more mature understanding of agency. The verb "carry" is important because it suggests that the past remains part of her identity. What changes is its authority over her future. Nila begins to distinguish between remembering her cultural and personal history and allowing that history to determine every aspect of her life. This corresponds closely with Mohanty's contextual understanding of agency, in which women negotiate their identities within particular cultural and historical circumstances rather than simply escaping those circumstances.

The novel therefore presents resistance as a negotiated process rather than a dramatic rejection of family, culture, or femininity. Nila's agency develops through awareness, emotional honesty, self-expression, and the gradual ability to reinterpret the expectations imposed upon her. Her development demonstrates that empowerment does not necessarily require complete separation from the structures that have shaped her. Instead, she begins to determine which parts of those structures will continue to influence her and which will no longer define her. This makes her journey consistent with Beauvoir's concept of becoming because Nila increasingly participates in defining the woman she becomes rather than simply accepting a definition provided by others.

4.4. Self-Expression and Female Agency

Artistic expression provides another important space for Nila's self-definition. Photography allows her to observe and frame the world according to her own perspective. This becomes significant because much of Nila's earlier experience involves being observed, judged, and defined by others. Through artistic expression, she moves toward becoming a subject who can represent rather than merely be represented. The earlier textual analysis of the novel identifies creative expression as an important means through which Nila develops her own voice and explores aspects of herself that cannot easily be accommodated within conventional social roles. Her artistic development therefore has a feminist significance beyond professional ambition. It represents a movement toward self-representation. Cixous's emphasis on women producing and articulating their own experiences is relevant here because Nila gradually creates spaces in which her experience can be expressed in her own terms. Her creativity becomes part of the wider process through which she reclaims control over her narrative. This is especially important because her identity has repeatedly been shaped through external cultural and gendered expectations.

The emotional dimensions of resistance are equally important. Nila comes to recognize anger not simply as an unacceptable emotion but as a source of knowledge about the restrictions she has experienced. She states, “anger showed me where I had been small for too long” (Aber, 2025, p. 182). The quotation transforms anger from something that must be suppressed into something that reveals the limits placed upon her. Her emotional awareness therefore contributes to her self-understanding. Rather than allowing the expectation of feminine calm to silence her dissatisfaction, she begins to interpret that dissatisfaction as evidence that certain aspects of her life need to be questioned.

Ultimately, *Good Girl* portrays female agency as an ongoing process of recognition, negotiation, resistance, and self-definition. Nila’s transformation does not occur through one dramatic act of liberation. Instead, it develops through small but significant moments in which she recognizes the difference between performance and experience, gives greater value to her own voice, understands her emotional responses, and reinterprets her cultural past. Her statement that she can carry parts of the past without allowing them to determine everything captures this development particularly well (Aber, 2025, p. 195). The novel consequently challenges the restrictive “good girl” ideal by showing that reclaiming identity does not require becoming completely detached from culture or family. It requires gaining the authority to decide what those influences mean and how much power they should have over one’s future.

5. Conclusion

Aria Aber’s *Good Girl* presents female identity as a continuous process of becoming, negotiation, and self-definition rather than as a fixed or naturally determined condition. Nila’s experiences reveal how expectations surrounding femininity influence her behaviour, emotions, sexuality, family relationships, and understanding of herself. Her struggle is shaped not only by patriarchal expectations but also by her Afghan-German cultural identity, family history, displacement, and social perceptions. The feminist framework used in the analysis demonstrates that Nila’s identity is constructed through the interaction of gender, culture, and social expectations. Beauvoir’s concept of becoming and Otherness helps explain the social construction of Nila’s femininity, while Butler’s theory of gender performativity illuminates the repeated behaviours through which acceptable femininity is maintained. Mohanty’s transnational feminist perspective further emphasizes the importance of understanding Nila’s experience within her particular cultural and historical circumstances.

Ultimately, *Good Girl* challenges conventional ideas of respectable femininity by presenting female agency as a gradual process of questioning, negotiation, and self-definition. Nila’s journey does not depend upon completely rejecting her family, cultural background, or inherited identity. Instead, she gradually develops the ability to decide which expectations should continue to influence her and which should be questioned or

resisted. Her artistic expression, emotional awareness, questioning of gender norms, and increasing independence contribute to this development. The novel therefore presents identity reclamation as more than an escape from restriction. It is a process through which a woman gains greater authority over the meaning of her own identity. In this way, *Good Girl* offers a significant feminist representation of contemporary female agency, demonstrating that genuine selfhood can emerge through the complex negotiation of culture, family, gender, desire, and individual freedom.

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