CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood is a unique and universal gift bestowed upon woman by nature, conferring a great responsibility upon her. But is this ‘gift of motherhood,’ a boon or a bane, does motherhood elevate and empower or does it subjugate and enslave a mother? The answer – isn’t simple because it is embedded in the intricacies that involve the various aspects and perspectives that influence motherhood. So complex is the issue that, even while defining motherhood one wonders where to begin? Should one begin to define it from pregnancy or does one begin to define it from the early childhood or adolescence – a stage which prepares the female body for motherhood? If one has to make a thorough study of the subject then perhaps it would be appropriate to define it from early childhood, adolescence, followed by late adolescence, conception and pregnancy, child-bearing and child-rearing. All the stages of motherhood have an impact on the life of a woman, but the last, which is child-rearing, saddles her with great responsibility. In order to, understand the impact of motherhood on a woman’s life let us first study, the causes that are generally believed to affect motherhood.

MOTHERHOOD AS INSTITUTION AND EXPERIENCE

Mothering which involves all the stages of motherhood is perhaps, the most beautiful and gratifying of all human experience. There is nothing else in this world perhaps that can even be closely compared to the blissful arrival of a new life into the world of the parents. Though as a personal experience, motherhood can be explained as the spontaneous and instinctual love and care that a mother bestows upon her child. This relation is generally considered as one of celebration, solace, peace and harmony. This is considered so because a mother is biologically and physiologically made for child-bearing and child-rearing; therefore it is generally believed to be perhaps, the most fulfilling experience! This is commonly understood, as the basic and the most fundamental concept that explains ‘motherhood as experience’. The noted psychoanalyst and feminist, Nancy
Chodorow, in her revolutionary book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, notes that the instinctual is biological and therefore self-explanatory. The instinctual aspect therefore of motherhood too is universal and unchanging. It has to be the same for all mothers and inevitable as well. Perhaps, put in another way as, women have been mothers since times immemorial.

Until the early 1970’s, there was the general assumption about motherhood, that women suffer because they are biologically destined to reproduce. Since women are biologically designed to reproduce, then motherhood, as Chodorow says, is both “natural and self-explanatory.” It was the seminal text of Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, that for the first time perhaps, established that though reproduction is a biological essential, motherhood as a social institution is a ‘social construct’. It is generally believed that such theories and analysis that drew the attention of the feminists to motherhood as something more complex than just being an instinctual and personal experience. It was only after the 1970’s that women liberationists and feminine theorists, as is generally believed, blamed the reproductive capabilities of women as one of the major causes, that lands women in this predicament. One wonders, what took them so long to realise that reproduction was not just a natural and biological function, but also a major cause that, is generally believed to have, for centuries entrapped mothers in the various, so called political institutions. It was perhaps the dawning realisation that motherhood was, as is commonly understood, the target of institutions like patriarchy, marriage, religion etc, which, is commonly understood to serve the vested interests of these institutions and the overall patriarchal design. This institutionalised form of motherhood, perhaps, issued forth from the already well established institutions, which as it is believed is a hidden political agenda to; carve out a motherhood role, which would perhaps spell the ideology of motherhood.

The study of the ideology of motherhood shows that, for centuries a long history, of mother-goddesses, has lent legitimacy to women’s glorification and deification as divine mothers. It is generally believed that with Sita, Savitri and Virgin Mother Mary as the pre-dominant role models, the glorification of women’s roles as mothers, and their mother image as that, of a benevolent mother goddess was promoted. They were generally considered as symbols of fertility, energy and
power. It was through these mythological and cultural symbols as is believed, that these role models served, as reference and instilled the concept that women were expected to be pure and faithful as wives and self-effacing and sacrificing as mothers. Therefore, even though motherhood is natural and universal it was entrapped in its glorification, which, as is generally considered, was promoted to serve institutions like patriarchy. The patriarchal design to suppress women and subjugate them functions by setting high standards of motherhood and presenting the supreme sacrifice of the mother-goddess as role models it could, set the model of sacrifice and purity as the established norm for good mothering thus idealising motherhood. Anything short of the divine sacrifice was taken as bad mothering and therefore reduced the status of the woman, under such social and ethical pressure women were reduced to mere sacrificial goats. Though there were, generally speaking, similarly high standards set for men, but there is no such thing as, ‘good fathers’ or ‘bad fathers,’ and in case a child does not come up to the mark a father is not blamed for it.

It is believed that the patriarchal forces sought to ascertain the supremacy of man, and for this the suppression of women was mandatory. Therefore in a patriarchal kinship structure, a woman’s status in the house was/is determined, as is commonly understood by her ability to produce male issues for her husband’s lineage. As though her role as a procreator and reproducer isn’t achievement enough, it is believed that she has also, to ensure that she gave birth to ‘male issues’ and only that would qualify her as a good mother. Her identity revolved around the wife/mother role beyond which, it is believed that, no individuality was required to be established or recognised, this leads to motherhood being reduced to a typical and pre-specified role as demanded by the society. Not only this as has been already discussed the social standard of motherhood was modelled by the creation of symbols and deities like ‘earth mother’ and ‘supreme goddesses’, which glorified the role of a mother to super-human levels of sacrifice and tolerance. Thus, it is generally understood, that it takes away the natural and instinctual element from it, and makes it a hidden agenda, to serve patriarchal interests. The society demanded only ‘good mothers’ and therefore all mothers were compelled to follow the idealised role of motherhood as modelled out to them. The interference from the
established institutions like patriarchy, religion and marriage, it is believed influenced maternal behaviour and attitudes. However, the ‘how and why’ of institutional motherhood, cannot be perhaps completely comprehended, without an overview of the historical background of motherhood. For centuries motherhood and its effect on women was, commonly understood as the natural outcome of reproduction.

Dr. Vesna Leskosek, in her, *Historical Perspective on the Ideologies of Motherhood and its Impact on social work*, states that, motherhood has been considered as a basic aspect of a woman’s existence and an inseparable part of her existence, throughout history. It is their inner instinct that ensures the healthy and proper development of their child, under their love and protective care. It is the same instinct that draws women into motherhood. So strong is the instinctual connection between motherhood and womanhood that the two are equated with each other. But women are not just mothers; they have to perform their kinship roles, where they have to perform their duties as wives, daughters-in-law, daughters, sisters, etc. But motherhood was considered not only the most beautiful and natural of all the hetero-sexual relations with in the family which were an inseparable part of a woman’s being (Machnic, 1893; 317). It was within the structure of marriage that gender roles were defined. In all marriages whether it is Catholic, Hindu or Islamic the subordination of women is there because they rest on a strict dichotomy, whereby, it is believed that, women are the heart and men are the mind. Therefore marriage is essential because only the union of the two could create the whole. In a traditional Catholic marriage as Castellic, also observes, the man and woman are considered as equal parts of a whole (Castelic,2001).

According to this conviction, it is believed that women are more attached to religion and more connected with God. They are the most loyal guardians, as is commonly understood. Women are considered as emotionally gullible, and more pliable as compared to men. They are taken as intellectually inferior to men, and therefore are considered weaker and more susceptible to external influence and religious affiliations. Men are considered rational while women are considered emotional, therefore a woman is considered to be a man’s ‘emotional reservoir of strength’ while she herself is autonomous. The woman is spontaneously drawn
towards religion where she feels that the principals of justice and love will protect her against men’s supremacy and self-opinionated will. Her mission therefore is to propagate religion which as a mother she does proficiently. However even religion could not elevate a woman’s status or save her from inferiority. The mother is considered inferior to the father, to an extent that in some countries. She is even denied the custody of her child after divorce. Dr. Vesna Leskošek’s preview of the historical perspective on motherhood depicts how the institutions of patriarchy, marriage and religion, together combine by losing their fine distinction to create a social structure, and women/mothers are motivated to fit into the society as respectable women by performing the idealised maternal role and duty. But latter, the concept that men and women create a whole was altered and it was established that somehow, women are not considered as capable of independent existence, even when men are able to live alone women are not. For a women marriage is a refuge, where she can live with dignity under the care and control of her husband. In her marital home she was given security and protected against all dangers that could bring harm to her. But the price she had to pay for this was that she was considered subordinate to her husband and had to fulfil his wishes and commands. It has been seen historically and is commonly understood that the age old convention, that nature and temperament were a woman’s domain in contrast to culture which was ascribed to men, though ‘nature’ in women expresses itself as motherly instinct.

Such a patriarchal mental pattern, it is believed, debased the woman mentally and physically. Woman was generally speaking, weaker than and feeble than men and therefore she has to depend on them for her subsistence. She had no other function or utility. A woman’s ability to reproduce was her only endowment that attributed certain value to her. As a reproducer or procreator she became an object that for reasons of lineage and inheritance became an object of patriarchal ownership. The man wanted to be sure that the children she begets for him are his and for this she was to follow strict norms. She was prohibited to have sexual physical relations with other men, in some cultures women had to even prove their virginity at the time of marriage. All this was done to make it possible to ascertain the identity of the child, who was to later inherit the wealth of the family. When viewed from this angle the woman is not different from any other means of
reproduction. Rothman compares her womb to a “flowerpot,” where the seed of the man grows. According to the patriarchal theory therefore, a woman is only a medium, through which a seed passes, and so the child actually belongs to the man from whose seed it was produced, and so children were considered the fathers property. Patriarchy thrives on the basic fundamental principal that the characteristics as well are passed on from the father to the son and so it symbolizes continuation of progeny and lineage. The father son relationship is taken as the only true relationship in this world, and this explains the desire of men to have a son, popularly known as the universal male-preference. Perhaps it is this myth that explains the present intervention of medical technologies, which has established a direct connection with the foetus.

The patriarchal authority of men over women is so strong that a women cannot even decide, whether she wants to continue with her pregnancy. Women’s reproduction is controlled by institution like patriarchy, marriage, religion etc. One may view it as the denial of women’s right to take charge of their own body. The actual advocate of the child is the moralizing public, which feels that a mother can damage or harm a child as she is just a medium. Only once a child is born then it is no longer anyone’s concern, except the mothers.

Motherhood and womanhood have been considered as synonymous, for very long. Motherhood has been considered a natural and a beautiful profession for women, by women. So deep rooted has been this notion of motherhood that it has almost shackled and bond aged women. It was during the second wave of feminism that the realization that motherhood in itself may not be oppressive or burdensome, but the institutions that have been linked to motherhood have in reality reduced motherhood to the oppressive and suppressive phases in a woman’s life. The story associated with motherhood to patriarchy and its patriarchal designs has influenced the feminist movements in the initial stage (after the 1960’s) and sought to bring these interrogations to entire stage. Now the feminist observed and argued that all through the natural experience, this far had been expressed in lots of institutions like patriarchy, religion, allure, art, psycho- analysis and other bastions of male power. These institutions have, as is believed, objectified motherhood thus degrading female subjectivity to balance the voice of the female
mother. It was in this background that the feminist activists insisted on the middle
class women’s right to work and actively participate in public life. Though the
working class women had been working all along to support their family at the same
time raise it. The feminists now preached and propagated that mothering was not
essential to woman’s fulfilment and definitely not the only fate for woman.

This form of institutionalised motherhood was different from natural and
universal motherhood, in the sense that natural motherhood can be understood in
terms of instinct, because instinct is innate and internalised, it may find outward
expression as spontaneous maternal experience. Therefore maternal behaviour and
attitude can be studied, as is generally understood, in the light of the two
perspectives on motherhood, institution and experience. Even the feminist theory on
motherhood postulates dual perspective on motherhood, there is a difference of
opinion on motherhood between the first –wave and second – wave feminists. The
feminist theorists in the late 1970’s, therefore regarded motherhood as purely pro –
patriarchy and anti - womanhood and therefore a powerful resistance was put up
by the liberationist against the norms and conditions imposed by these institutions
upon motherhood . They rose to fight against their firm belief, that even though
motherhood is an instinctual and a purely personal experience, it has been used by
patriarchy to serve as a lethal weapon to pin women down to an inferior status
forever. The bearing and also the tedious task of rearing children has limited the
female potentialities and rendered women, frustrated and powerless to a large
extent. It was due to this that women questioned this politics of reproduction and
asserted that reproduction and motherhood was not all that women were created
for, it was not their sole destiny or their holiest mission as they had been made to
believe. Rather the choice to be or not to be mothers must rest exclusively upon
women. Therefore in the 1970’s and 1980’s women began to look at motherhood
as something beyond the biological process . They could understand that it was
not child bearing that was problematic rather it was the institutional interference that
was the cause of all the problems.

With this understanding the feminist opinion on motherhood was
reinterpreted. The feminist of the late 1980’s began to look at motherhood as a
fulfilling experience, that could provide immense power and pleasure . The new
image of motherhood was a reversal of the earlier image, it now come to the treated as a celebration, rather than the earlier image of 1960’s which was of indifference and revolt. The feminist now, began to promote instinctual motherhood or motherhood as an experience, as a role that enriched and ennobled a women’s being rather than a socially enforced obligation. A detailed overview of the feminist theory will help us understand better, the shift in the position of the feminist theorist on motherhood. The next chapter ‘Motherhood: A Feminist Perspective’ deals with this issue at length.

Now we see, that on the basis of the views and opinion of the feminist theorists the liberation moment held two opposite view points. In the 1970’s and before era, motherhood was taken as enslaving and subjugating. But in the 1980’s this view was replaced by the view that instinctual motherhood, free of idealized institutionalized motherhood could be actually empowering.

In order to fully comprehend the influence that these perspectives have on motherhood, an understanding of the various aspects that influence motherhood is required. Motherhood, generally speaking, depends upon a wide range of aspects, like political, economic, religious, biological, social, cultural, psychological etc. But in order to delimit the topic so as to bring it within the scope of this study, the textual analysis is based on - the biological, psychological and socio-cultural aspects. A brief explanation of the features and concepts that are related to these three aspects are discussed below. The biological aspect has been discussed first as this forms the basic ground perhaps for any motherhood related study.

**BIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF THE MOTHERHOOD**

When does motherhood begin? As discussed earlier it isn’t very clear. Perhaps for the purpose of this study, it would be right to begin from the initial formative years of a girl’s growth, when she is perceived and groomed as a mother, because it is then that her psychological and social initiation into motherhood begins. Though biologically, it may be apt to begin from early adolescence followed by late adolescence, the stages in a girl’s development because, even during these initial years when a woman’s body is being prepared for motherhood, through a variety of changes, she is affected biologically, psychologically, socially, culturally
and in a number of other ways. The biological aspect of motherhood deals with the changes that develop purely as an outcome of biological determinism. As defined by Wikipedia, “Biological determinism is a term used in some literatures to describe the belief that human behaviour is controlled solely by an individual's genes or some component of physiology.” (Wikipedia; retrieved on 26.8.14) Therefore the genetic prototype that a body contains prompts it to function in a pre-determined way and this is perhaps, the basic cause of gender dichotomy. The biological aspect of motherhood is concerned with the changes and their effect on a mother’s body that develop during her biological growth and prepare her for motherhood and maternal role. The publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir was one of the major reasons that drew attention to the ‘social construction of motherhood’ it was Beauvoir, who posited that women were not so much limited and restricted by their physical body, as they were by the way it had been created and constructed by society. It was, after the publication of De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, that feminist theorising of the body and the self took centre stage. The role of the female body as a biological essential came in for sharp criticism. Beauvoir recognizes that “to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world” (Beauvoir 39). What is centrally implied here is the intertwining of the physical and cultural self that is, one may naturally exist as a male or a female but this mere fact that one is born a woman does not physically impose her to the type of limitations that have been culturally imposed on women. Therefore Beauvoir says, that “woman is a social construct”. Nevertheless her account provides the starting point for contemporary work on the relation between bodies and selves, where bodies represents the biological aspect and self represents the psychological, socio-cultural, economic and various other aspects.

As the girl enters puberty Beauvoir describes the way in which her body becomes to her a source of horror and shame. “This new growth in her armpits transforms her into a kind of animal or algae” (333), her menstrual blood a source of disgust. At adolescence - a girl realises through the changes in her body that motherhood is her chosen destiny; this not only affects her biologically, but psychologically, socially and culturally – as in some cultures menstruation is
announced publically through a ceremony. Simone de Beauvoir argued that women are repeatedly told from infancy that they are "made" for childbearing. While the "splendours of maternity" are forever being sung to her, the drawbacks of her situation—menstruation, illnesses, and even the boredom of household drudgery—are all justified by this "marvellous privilege" she has of bringing children into the world. Beauvoir pointed out that such pervasive socialization shapes women's desire to "choose" motherhood.

Though De Beauvoir’s, phenomenology of the maternal body has been especially controversial, “ensnared by nature the pregnant women is plant and animal … an incubator, a conscious and free individual who has become life's passive instrument … not so much mothers… as fertile organisms, like fowls with high egg production” (513). The woman during the period of gestation faces multiple issues –physically she undergoes bodily changes like weight gain, loss of shape and becomes inactive and restricted. She might in some situations suffer on account of her profession as well, she might even have to forego it on account of her pregnancy, which leads her to financial and other insecurities, and makes her totally dependent on her husband. These issues even though they cannot be rejected out rightly; have been a source of criticism, particularly when later feminists sought to celebrate the female body as a source of pleasure, fertility, and empowerment. However it is important to recognise what Beauvoir was offering was a descriptive phenomenology of female bodies as lived in specific situations. As she explicitly says “if the biological condition of women does constitute a handicap, it is because of her general situation … It is in a total situation which leaves her few outlets that her peculiarities take on their importance” (356–7). It is this situation which Beauvoir’s writings hoped to highlight and change. Here Beauvoir could be referring to the institutional perspective of motherhood. But when gestation and physical changes during pregnancy are viewed from the perspective of experience/instinct – they are perhaps desired by women, and this leads to the ultimate fruition and fulfillment of her desire. The desire to become a mother is an internal biological urge that women have and in case of infertility or a woman’s inability to become a mother, she is helped through medical intervention techniques like IVF, surrogacy, adoption, etc to achieve motherhood. It is an established fact that women who are
barren or for some reason cannot bear a child do have complications latter on in life. Therefore, motherhood is an essential part of a woman’s biological self.

Pregnancy is followed by child-birth, which is accompanied by the next stage that is child-rearing. Initially it takes some adaptation for the new mother to tend to the new born and lactation as well imposes restrictions upon her, she has to change her sleep pattern and her daily routine as well at least for a while, this stage also demands adapting to by the mother. While instinctually a mother rejoices in bearing and rearing her child. To see her child well nurtured and nourished gives immense satisfaction to a mother. Though the biological changes that accompany motherhood affect a mother physically as well as psychologically, this aspect may also be considered as a form of the biological aspect, but it has greater impact on motherhood, and the mother-child relations, especially the mother-daughter relations that play a vital role in the understanding of maternal attitude.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF MOTHERHOOD**

The intricacies in the manifestation of the psychological aspect of motherhood are deep and torturous to comprehend, because it affects maternal behaviour both directly as were as indirectly. Therefore the psychological aspect of motherhood is taken as one of the key factors in understanding maternal behaviour; the theorists so far have blamed this aspect of motherhood for serving the patriarchal design - the perpetration of gender-inequality. The vicious cycle that has gone on from mother to daughter and then from the daughter who now becomes a mother to her own daughter, for centuries, may be attributed to it. This aspect highlights the uniqueness of the mother-daughter bond. The psycho analyst and feminist, Nancy Chodorow, has explained maternal behaviour on psychological basis and asserted that the sociological aspects could be of secondary importance as compared to the psychological aspect.

Nancy Chodorow (1978) has criticized the social learning theory as an incomplete explanation for gender difference. She holds that gender gets defined as early as childhood parenting. She blames the maternal socialization process, during the initial parenting years that have been instrumental in creating gendered
personalities. Her views have been supported by (Deaux and Major 1990, Gatens 1996)

She suggest that the basis difference between a mother-son relationship is that mothers tend to hold on to their daughters more strongly and therefore do not allow them the freedom and independence, to individuate and develop a confident, dominating self-assured and self-reliant personality. While the sons are set free by the mothers at a very early stage, because she has nothing much in common to share with him. Due to this boys generally tend to individuate and become independent though in some delinquent cases, whose mother don’t allow their sons to individuate the personality reflects it. Thus it is this tendency of the boys to grow and individuate with well defined ego boundaries, while the daughters to grow with confused and bleary ego boundaries, that perpetrates gender at the psychological well. This initiates masculine and feminine egos. Chodorow thus professes that gender gets constructed due to wrong mothering practices adopted by mothers. Though not totally but this observation by Chodorow has its roots in Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

The mother-daughter bond, therefore has great significance in any study related to motherhood. Basically it assumes importance because a mother tends to cultivate in her daughter all the qualities, that will help to make her a good mother in the future. Thus to break free from this bond is difficult both for the mother and the daughter, it either inspires both or it depresses both a victim of patriachary as well as its agent. That is why Flax in her publication. ‘The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy within Mother and Daughter Relationship and within Feminism,’ blames the mother for creating daughters that back the emotional strength and "individuate" into strong mothers and individuals (178-179)

This is the irony of the mother-daughter bond, it is a double bind situation, on the one hand the daughter wants to break free from the deep emotional and psychological dependence she has with her mother and on the other hand she wants her mother's strong support and encouragement. Flax in her essay describes a twenty year old therapy patient who has had a problematic relationship with her mother. The patient says that, her worst fantasy was that she would take up like her mother, but no sooner than, she had the fantasy than she feels already trapped.
This problem complicates as is referred by Flax, Irigarry and Chodorow, when young daughters associate with mothers. Flax traces the root of such desperate thinking to the fact that nurturance and autonomy do not go hand in hand in a patriarchal set-up where nurturance is assigned to the mother and autonomy to the father. According to her, mother-daughter relationship can turn out ideal and intimate only if it offers both. The conflict between nurturance / child-rearing and autonomy / the mother’s independence has been translated into the conflict between the genders.

Irigarry, Flax and Chodorow, refer to how when very young, daughters associate with mothers. But as she grows, a realisation sinks in that her mother whose alter-ego she is, is a much dependent and under-valued individual. This makes the daughter want to break free from her mother and move close to her father, who is for her all powerful and more valued. This breaking free of the daughter from the maternal bond is at the root of the mother-daughter conflict, with the former resenting the latter's efforts to align with the father. Chodorow also goes to the extent to say that when a daughter crosses the boundaries of love and identification in which her mother binds her, the daughter longs for an independence and freedom from this and turns to her father. This situation of the mothers and daughter has also been discussed by Irigaray in *And One doesn’t Stir without the Other*, leaves the daughter “immobilized”, and forbids her from gaining the freedom that she requires. This condition has been very vividly depicted by the daughter when she says, “full grown and still in the cradle” (Irigaray; 61-62). The daughter wants to break free from the suffocating and stifling love of the mother in order to unite with someone more alive and powerful with this in mind she turns to her father, who though welcomes the daughter initially, only to turn her into a mirror-image of her own mother later. He returns her to the same fate as that of her mother.

The most unique feature of the mother-daughter bond therefore is the ‘ambivalence about the separation and the deep emotional bond at the same time’. Behaviour calls the daughter at once the mother’s “Double” and ‘another person’. Thus placing the mother and daughter at the two ends of a pole, where the relationship is both of revaluation and reconciliation. Thus Irigaray considers the
mother-daughter bond as, “the confusion of the identities in the mother-daughter bond”(35).

Various writers have taken up the issue of mother-daughter bond and proven that it is a vital part of the psychological aspect of motherhood. There are a number of writers like M.B Walker, Mary Daly, Arcana, Susic Orbach and Nancy Friday who have expressed their dissatisfaction over mothers for not preparing their daughters well, and having pushed them into a life of inequality. Friday in her book, *My Mother / My Self*, openly focuses on this theme and blames the mother of not allowing the daughter to individuate. She advocates that daughters have to be self sacrificing and they might have to give up some of their leisure and security to aid in the development of her daughter. So the psychological aspect of motherhood explains the intricacies of maternal behaviour that manifests itself in various forms and expresses itself as various maternal actions that can be related to the psychological aspect of motherhood. Otherwise, how does one explain the nuances of the mother-daughter bond, or else explain a mother’s role in the perpetration of gender, or still again her role in what may be the ‘reproduction of mothering’? The outcome of motherhood that results in the propagation and perpetration of gender dichotomy has been widely studied by the feminist theorist. The various aspects of motherhood facilitate the analysis and study of motherhood, though it is not possible to draw clear cut demarcations about the extent of their influence. The role and influence of the social and cultural aspect on motherhood also plays an eminent part in understanding the various maternal attitudes.

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECT OF MOTHERHOOD**

Adrienne Rich (1976) wrote, “all human life on the planet is born of woman.” (p. 11). What follows from this statement is a simple derivation that motherhood and mothering are simple tasks. But this is not the case! Instead motherhood is a tumultuous task because of the social expectations, experiences and structures that are associated with being a mother. Motherhood as is believed plays a vital role in the subjugation of a woman and it has therefore become the focus of feminist research with childbirth, childrearing, and mother work becoming an area of academic and feminist interest. It is a theme that has been, generally
speaking, elaborately dealt with by a large number of women writers. The kaleidoscopic panorama of the motherhood theme depicts the effect of institutionalised as well as the subjective experience of motherhood, as is commonly understood, on the life of a woman.

To understand properly the logistics of the impact that the social aspect, as is believed, has on institutionalised motherhood, let us start from the very beginning. De Beauvoir has mentioned in her book, *The Second Sex* that, during childhood the young girl's body is anatomically different from that of the young boy. But socially and culturally a boy is taught to be strong and energetic, while girls are taught to be shy and delicate; boys are encouraged to climb trees and play adventurous games, while girls are taught to play with dolls or play sober games. This smacks of the impact of child-rearing in the personality development of young boys and girls. It forms the basis for future gender – inequality. But why do mothers influence the child in a way that perpetrates gender dichotomy? The answer to this goes back perhaps, to the time when the society was initially being formed. Women are physically weak as compared to men; they become restricted during gestation and pregnancy, and during the period of lactation. For all this they require male support and protection, therefore, the male who provides for the woman and the children owns them. Since the man had to move out of the house to earn a living he wanted to be assured that the children for whom he fends, are his. To ensure this, women are restricted and chained to the confines of their homes. Therefore, over the centuries the social construction of the society was orchestrated to suppress women and subjugate them. The woman is at once a victim and an agent of patriarchy because she is the very person who suffers in the hands of the patriarchal forces as a woman and a wife but then also, serves as an agent of patriarchy when as a mother she trains her own daughter to follow the demands and diktats of the patriarchal society, as a part of the latter's societal initiation. This is vividly depicted in the literature and art of those times, a woman persona that was frequently found in the novels of the 19th century orthodox conservative female novelist was drawn in the image of the angel-perfect, sacrificing and self-disciplined housewife who is implicitly or explicitly a contrast to the implicit whore-figure. The woman in Hunt's painting, "The Awakening Conscience" is poised between these two possibilities for female
subjectivity. Such a situation prevailed upon a lot many female novelists and urged them to question aspects of domestic ideology, a portrayal and exploration of which makes *Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gunbar a groundbreaking study.

Throughout history, various instances and attempts have been made to construct motherhood, both socially, as well as culturally. Women were chained to their homes, by the unwritten laws of the society. These laws were disguised as the various rituals customs and traditions. As has already been discussed motherhood roles got defined and became more gender specific during the period of industrialization, even though they were there during the pre-industrialization era, when people shifted from the agrarian to the capitalist economy. Industrialization and nuclear families brought about new roles and power centres within the family, which deprived women of even those rights that they enjoyed.

The post-modern theory of the twentieth century was dominated by the idea of "natural" gender distinctions and by a conception of normative sexuality that was centred largely on the middle-class families that emerged in Britain and America as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and strong economic growth. Emily Allen and Din Felluga, in *General Introduction to Theories of Gender & Sex*, described the new middle class culture as, “existing in two complementary but separate imaginary spheres: the public and the private. These spheres were roughly commensurate with the binary gender distinctions. Men belonged to the public sphere; it was the sphere of business and money-making, of politics and empire building, of industry and struggle. The women belonged to the private sphere, on the other hand, which was considered to be a feminine preserve: it was the space of the home and the hearth, of simple piety and childrearing, of sympathy and nurture. Men, therefore got to enjoy both the spheres, as they obviously crossed into the private sphere when they left their work for being at home—where they were to be "pampered" by the gentle adorations of their dear home angels—but women had absolutely no or limited access to the "public sphere." Therefore as a consequence of the impact of industrialisation within the family the financial control and economic superiority became exclusively a male bastion. The mothers were now confined to the home and children, as they had to singularly rear the children, which made them
dependent on men for financial support, the long years of confinement also ostracised them socially, due to lack of both the financial and social support, women became totally dependent upon their husbands. This became the primary reason for the subordination of the mother.

Motherhood is a complex and at the same time a sensitive issue, because it is affected by, almost any and everything, be it politics, religion, culture, economy, and so on. This aspect has to be understood with the help of multiple theories like the patriarchal, post-modern, which also concurs with the Marxist / Socialist / feminist theory, which explains the social aspect of motherhood. But another theory that no study on motherhood can risk to ignore is the post-colonial theory. Post-colonial literature, that includes the literature of the non-white races, of those countries that have served as colonies of the imperial power. The women from these countries, races and ethnicities claim to suffer from double-oppression. They are victims on account of being colonial subjects and also as women, therefore their oppression is of a different nature as compared to their western counterparts. Therefore the study of post-colonialism that leads to the double-oppression of its subjects, is important to understand the condition of mothers that belong to the post-colonial world.

The role of the mother was imposed upon women as their main identity. Postcolonial literature written by men has treated mothers as symbols of earth, nation and state and idealised motherhood. In contrast, postcolonial women writers have begun to question this romanticised view of motherhood and to present details of women’s lived experience in different cultures and societies. In order to analyse and study motherhood, the poetic texts that will provide the data for study have been chosen from a wide cross section of continents, races, cultures and periods, with a wide range of maternal themes, because rich maternal experience and maternal predicament will help provides a clear insight.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study attempts to understand motherhood in the light of the two views as propagated by the feminist theories – ‘motherhood as an institution’ and ‘motherhood as an experience’ and the impact of both on the lives of women. The purpose of this study is to analyse how and why, a natural and universal phenomena,
such as reproduction, affects women to such a great extent that the consequence of it leads to a wide gap between the two genders—male and female. The central focus here will be to explore, the effect of ‘motherhood as an institution’ and ‘motherhood as an experience’ upon women. The basic methodology that will be used in this study is the corroboration of the existing theories on motherhood, with the available data—the poetic text. The theories will be mapped on the poetic texts, with the intention to corroborate personal experience as given by the persona in the poems, to existing theories. To study a broad brush topic like motherhood, which is not only a universal experience, but also vastly varied, the parameters for this study have to be framed, so as to delimit the topic and bring it within the scope of this study. The study within the given scope, proposes to analyse poems as textual data, which have been randomly selected so as to cover a wide range of maternal experience, the poems selected for the study are all written by women writers and address specific themes concerning maternal experience and attitudes.

**WHY A STUDY OF POETRY?**

Poetic texts provide a rich source of personal data that provides the basis for corroborating theory and its concepts. For this study, the literary genre—poetry has been preferred because poetry through its process of exploring the human condition also enlarges our consciousness and aptly refines our sensibility. For all practical purposes one may say that poetry is the communication of something new in a new language. It may also; at times have a deliberate social and political purpose. What makes poetry an apt tool for protest and celebration, as well as poetry of defiance and longing, or poetry of love and compassion on the other is that it is short and can be learnt by heart. The French linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva conceptualized the poetic dimension of language, “that breaks the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics, and at the same time, is a social and political protest” (Kristeva in Moi 1986, 36) Therefore, what can be conveyed through poetry efficiently cannot be dealt with in prose. The language of poetry is distinct from the language of our daily conversation, the ordinary language of poetic word signify and connote. The language not only expresses through its words and sentences, but also through its sound and rhythm. The words may refer to reality or
abstractions, thus enhancing the ability of the poetic text to convey the deepest human emotions.

Even though the poems have not been selected on the basis of any time period or literary movement, care has been taken to include poems that are rich in maternal experience, attitude and expectation. The poems have been selected from across the continents, countries, races, ethnicities, cultures and socio-economic diversities. Only poems written by women poets have been considered. Though the theme of the poems is the sole criteria for their selection, preference has been given to those poets who have written multiple poems on a variety of maternal themes such as pregnancy, motherhood, mothering and mother-daughter bond, precisely for the simple reason that they themselves are in a better position to understand the situation. Although at times the women poets are blamed for their loud and confessional poetry. As has been noticed already in the psychological aspect of motherhood, the mother-daughter bond plays a significant role in analysing the maternal behaviour and maternal attitude.

The study of the poems that deal with the theme of mother-son bond have deliberately been left out as that would involve the whole aspect of masculinity and male-mentoring. This would not have been possible within the scope of this study, though it would help provide a holistic opinion to the whole issue and help avoid a slant perspective. In order to delimit the topic, poems written by men and the mother-son bond have not been considered. Also pertinent here, is a mention of Helene Cixous’s concept of feminine writing, where women as readers of texts, by women should bear in mind Cixous’s idealising metaphor. It suggests that the writing comes from the maternal body and its generosity. Cixous uses the myth of the Medea and Medusa as paradigms for female experience where men are aligned to economy of exchange, property owning and rigidity, while a woman’s writing is generous and subversive as are female body and female sexuality. The femininal writing she argues, brings into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression, by defeating the overpowering masculinist viewpoints. It is for these very reasons that writings challenged the patriarchal and capitalist system and were revolutionary, even though the women writers were accused of writing about personal experience and being subjective. Cixous states however on subjectivity
that, “There is no true art which does not take as its source or root the universal regions of subjectivity” (Seller’s 1994,XVII). It may serve as an apt example to illustrate the concerns of subjectivity, where poetry serves as an indebt study of the exploration and revelation of human condition; it therefore functions as an appropriate data to explore maternal attitudes and behaviour.

Perhaps it is these aspects of poetry that have influenced the choice of poems for this thesis. Additionally, the poems that take into consideration the issues of the theoretical part-feminist theories of motherhood have been preferred over the others. This thesis aims at finding out whether and how these poems depict the impact of the biological, psychological and the socio-cultural aspects on motherhood and mothering, and whether and how these intersections reflect the concepts of the theoretical part – the feminist theories. The two perspectives of motherhood – the political as institution and the personal as experience provide purpose to this research; the basic endeavour is to explore the impact of these aspects on motherhood and mothering, and in the light of the inferences drawn, work out an appropriate solution.

It is worth mentioning here that not many precursors could be found for this kind of work, although there have been a number of similar works on prose, but poetry as text for research seems to have been neglected. The methodology applied to analyze these poems is to relate the postulates of the feminist theory on the selected texts, which will be categorised according the three basic aspects of motherhood – biological, psychological and the socio-cultural aspect. The overview of feminists’ critical theoretical writing epitomises some thousand easily available pages covering at least five decades. But for poetry, however, a still small window of publication has begun to open only since the late 1970’s. Looking at both issues of the thesis and regarding the availability of literary material, there is a strong inclination to compare it to David’s challenge to Goliath. His tools are his brain and the small stone of poetry that he uses for his sling against the physical presence of Goliath.
Sometimes these poems tell about conflicts and sometimes about cohesion, but always about a main concern of parenting which could link knowledge and emotion, social responsibility and collective struggle to initiate a politics of women/men's-a solidarity. Yet, it is by no means intended to read the selected poems “didactically”. The reading and analysis of poetry here, is shaped by Jacques Derrida’s short essay “Che cos’e la poesia?” (“What is poetry?”) or more literally, “What thing is poetry?”) (Kamuf 1991, 223). Derrida’s comparison of poem to a road, reminds one of the danger of the hedgehog getting lost or being run over. Bristling with difficulties, it seeks protection on its movement from critical commentary to poetic language. The poetic appeal that involves both the heart and mind is obvious here. Poetry is an expression of the poet’s feelings and emotions. The source culture and target culture will have to be kept in mind. Both, reception and production should respect all elements that create a poem: statement meaning of the words, in the various aspects under consideration. But the main objective of this work will be to dissect the texts thematically. To study whether gender sensitisation, which may be explained as the role of the parent and the mentor in inculcating an attitude of empathy in the child, towards the opposite sex, will help bridge the gender divide and create gender parity. This study is basically exploratory in nature and not conclusive. In order, to study and explore the issue in a systematic and organised manner, this thesis has been divided into five chapters.

CHAPTERISATION

The first chapter, wherein the topic and the problem statement have been introduced, and also the important aspects that influence the maternal attitude and behaviour, according to which the poems have been analysed, in the chapters that follow. The three aspects that have been considered that is the biological, the psychological and the socio-cultural aspects of motherhood have been explained, and also the methodology which has been applied to conduct the analysis of the poems. The second chapter of the thesis deals with the feminist perspective on motherhood and is an overview of the feminist theories. The impact of the two facets, the political – institution and the personal - experience, on motherhood, as postulated by the feminist theorists, forms the basis of this research. To understand this perspective, a study of the various feminist theories, which span a period of over
five decades, have been discussed. Based upon these two facets- institution and experience, the poems for analysis have been divided into three chapters. The third chapter is ‘Maternity and Maternal –Body; Politics and Romanticism,’ it analyses the poems that reflect the theme related to the changes that a woman’s body undergoes during her journey toward motherhood. The poems that belong to the various aspects of motherhood have been analysed according to the concepts pertaining to the respective aspects and also, the feminist theories that intersect these aspects have been discussed along with them. Similarly, in the fourth chapter: The ‘Reproduction of Mothering,’ all those poems have been analysed that depict issues related to the reproduction of motherhood and the mother- daughter bond, while the former may be understood as the maternal training that is provided to a girl child, by the mother or the mother- figure, it could be a grandmother, a teacher, a preacher or else any socially superior person who mentors with the intention to rear. The latter part deals with the poems that deal with those aspects of the mother-daughter bond, which also as it is believed lead to the reproduction of mothering. The fifth chapter: ‘Motherhood: Oppression and Delight,’ in this chapter the poems that deal with both the aspects of motherhood- the institutional and the instinctual have been analysed. The focus here is on the duality of maternal experience and with the help of the coinciding feminist theory; the poems have been analyzed, to bring out the various aspects of motherhood, so that their effect on women can be studied. The fifth chapter deals with the findings and inferences of the analysis. The prime focus will be to study the impact of institutional motherhood and instinctual motherhood on the lives of women. It attempts to find solutions that can narrow the gender gap, so as to create gender harmony and suggest and open arenas for future possibility of related research.