CHAPTER -2
MOTHERHOOD – A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

To be able to comprehend the journey that the feminist liberation movement has undertaken, ever since it came into existence, a brief overview of the feminist movement is imperative. It is also important to understand why motherhood is an important issue for the feminists and the impact of motherhood on womanhood. It is only then that a clear picture of the issues related to motherhood and their role in fostering gender-dichotomy can be studied. In order to understand the twin related issues - womanhood and motherhood and the role of the feminist movement. This chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with a chronological overview of the feminist movement, and the second part deals with the feminist perspective and its related theories on motherhood.

A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

As early as 1680-1731, the two earliest advocates of the women’s movement, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Astell, voiced their concerns regarding the subordination and subjugation of women. Not only this the two also inspired women to stand up for their rights, through their highly systematic approach.

Mary Wollstonecarft in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, portrays how women were exploited in every sphere- the economic, social, psychological or the political, in all societies and walks of life. She was a pioneer as she promoted the famous Radical School of Thought, even when the liberation movement was in its infancy. She strongly stood up against the segregation of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. She opposed it because she was of the view that this segregation lead to gender-specific role-play. She felt that a women's life was devoid of intelligence, creativity and innovation, as it was sacrificed to beauty: She resented this and said that if women were, ‘mere play things,’ then their lives was nothing but a ‘barren blooming’. This perhaps, laid the foundation of the ‘First-Wave of Feminism,’ that went up to 1949.

During the first wave of feminism, the three major issues that took centre-stage were employment rights, domestic equality and enfranchisement. The activists
and writers, encouraged women to liberate themselves from inequality and oppression. Writers like Cady Stanton and Virginia Woolf, stressed upon the unity of women, to launch a collective attack against the oppressive forces. Woolf, in *A Room of Ones Own*, depicts that women are weak, because they are alienated and aloof, they are economically and socially suppressed, which delineates them to an inferior status.

The publication of Simone De Beauvoir’s, *The Second Sex*, in 1949, changed the way women were viewed and the way they viewed themselves. This book, was a seminal work that established her as a great thinker, philosopher and feminist of her times. The basic difference that her work created in the image of women, was that she revealed the woman as the oppressed ‘other’ as defined by patriarchy, where the male was considered as the ‘whole’. her revolutionizing claim, “that one is not born a woman, but becomes ones. This revolutionizing thought helped usher in the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1960’s. Some even went to the extent of captioning her work “a definitive declaration of women’s independence”. The primary difference between the ‘First Wave’, and ‘Second Wave of feminism was that Beauvoir looked into the ‘cultural identification of women.’ She stressed that women were not born but created, ‘ social construct.’ Here the woman was constructed in a fashion that she could be socially, economically and culturally subjugated. Thus reducing her to ‘The Second Sex,’ and also a secondary status in a male dominated society. The second wave, therefore sought the social, economic and cultural emancipation of women as its clear objective. It was now demanded that women have a history of their own and a literature of their own, because they wanted to relinquish the secondary and linked roles allotted to women writers, critics and heroines. The women writers struggled to implore readers to approach literature from an unbiased feminine view point.

The writers, who flourished during the second wave were Ellen Mores, Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert and Elaine Showalter, to name just a few. The liberation movement gained strength as a (main stream feminist movement). The Liberal Feminist Movement, which advocated equal education and enfranchisement, along with its other demands, like pay parity, women’s improved health care and welfare measures thus gained momentum. This movement got further strengthened when
liberationists like J.S. Mill, Zillah Elisentern and Simone de Beauvoir, provided support and the much needed nourishment to the movement. Thus initiating the foundation of the liberal feminist group.

Bethy Friedan in her book ‘Feminist Mystique,’ attacks the age old practice of conditioning women and making then believe that their only fate and happiness lies in being good mothers and devoted wives, rather than their aim at education and autonomy. For this they initiated a new group by the name of National Organization for Women (NOW), which sought equality for women in higher education and good employment. Friedan revolted against the lack of opportunity given to women as mothers for self-development, which in turn lead to an internal voids, and resulted in the “progressive dehumanization of their sons and daughters.” (Friedan 318). It is for this reason that Friedan raised her voice, to enlighten women/ mothers to raise their voice as well, to overcome passivity and despair. This could provide them the security, so that when the need arose, they could manage their lives independently and properly.

The main attention therefore of the feminists was focused on the ‘public sphere’ as women faced maximum hardships and challengers, when they crossed over to the ‘public sphere’, from the ‘private sphere’. The liberal feminists movement which helped solve such related issues, later gave rise to the Maxist / Socialist movement.

The Maxist Feminist Movement, sought to address issues raised by the class-based oppression of women. But it was observed that women’s oppression was there even before class oppression was there. Therefore Marxist feminism gave way to Socialist Feminism. The feminist movement began with the Liberal Feminist view it was followed by the Maxist/ Socialist Feminism, which in turn lead to Radical Feminism.

The Radical Feminist movement, unlike the previous two movements, supported the view that women’s oppression is primarily due to their ability to become mothers. The Radical thinkers blamed the constraints imposed by motherhood upon women as a major cause for their suppress and subjugation. But later the other feminist movements like the Radical mode, the Psychoanalytic,
French and Gynocentric Feminism, also supported the opinion that women’s oppression is due to their ability to reproduce. The latest theory that is the Eco-Feminist theory emerged to counter the exploitation of both ‘The Earth Mother’ and ‘Women as Mother.’

All the feminist theories work around the basic notions of women’s difference and their ability to become mothers, therefore all these theories will be dealt with in details in the next part of the chapter. As we proceed to trace the chronological history of feminism, the next theory to gain ground is the Eco-Feminist theory, named by the French feminist Francoise d Eanbonne in her book ‘Le Feminism on La Mart.’ The eco-feminists professed that the similarity between the earth mother, as a means of production and procreation, is similar to women as mothers. But men exploit both, and it is due to their ability to reproduce that ‘earth’ and ‘women’ both are, “exploited, abused, hated and raped,” (Bryson 185). The exploitation of both women and earth can be prevented, if only the positive aspects of mothering are highlighted. Earlier too theorists like Rich, had highlighted the close affinity between earth and mother. She also cited many examples, where in the various languages of the world the words used for ‘mud,’ and ‘mother’ are similar.

The Indian feminist Dr. Vandana Shiva, who is famous as a vocal third-world feminist, mentions that the best solution for salvaging the identity and dignity of both the ‘earth’, and ‘women; is to support the, ‘Indian World View,” which holds Prakirti (Nature), as “Living and Creative,” this is the feminine principal that is also the procreator of all life (XVI-XVIII). These concepts have been taken from mythology, where earth is referred to as ‘Dharti Mata’ and considered as ‘sacred and holy.’

Perhaps, Dr. Vandana Shiva, may be right that it may be the most effective step to liberate women from the shackles of patriarchy. The oppression imposed by the various intuitions-patriarchy, marriage, religions, etc, will have to be resisted and overcome. It is the ability of both to reproduce that has reduced them into being mere ‘producers’ and ‘nurtures’ of children. But feminist like Rich, claim that totally parting ways with such a system could lead to the abolition of motherhood. Motherhood is essential for procreations and for life to progress. Rather it is the
releasing of motherhood from the patriarchal divisive forces, which should be sought. Rich and others, therefore promote women to overcome “the machinery of institutional violence,” and to gain supremacy over the “experience of motherhood” (297).

For this the mothers will have to revolt against the self effacing and sacrificing image of Victorian role model, that sets the ideal for ‘good motherhood’ vis-à-vis ‘good womenhood.’ Women will have to evolve for themselves a new image. That is empowering and ennobling, which would help them to transform motherhood into a gratifying and exhilarating personal experience. But for this revolutionized maternal image, women will have to be enlightened. It was due to this that the early 1990’s saw a backlash and revolt against the second wave feminism, and the third wave of feminism, emerged.

The American writers Rebeeca Walkers, coined the term ‘Third-wave feminism,’ in her essay in 1992. The issues of primary focus of this movement are the ‘queer’ and ‘non-white’ women. The third wave of feminism is believed to be the perception that women may be of various races, nationalities, religious backgrounds and socio-economic strata. The third wave feminism bears striking dissimilarity to the second wave, in the fact that it has also taken into focus ideals like queer theory, the abolition of gender role expectations and stereotypes. The general stance on motherhood was changed, owing to the shift in the opinion of the third wave feminists.

Michelle Obama during her presidential companion in a speech said that she defined herself, primarily as a mother. She could proudly say so because of the shift in general overall opinion on motherhood due to the third wave of feminism. The second wave feminists viewed ‘children as bars in a gilded cage,’ and perhaps it was views like this and others that did not allow women to proudly proclaim their love for motherhood. There was a tendency to propagate the welfare of both the child and the mother. The passing on of the task of childrearing to the mother was a welcome suggestion during the third-wave of feminism, which required child-rearing to become professional. The third wave feminists also propagated the concept of exclusive women only spaces. They promoted the notion that when women work
together they create a dynamics which is not possible in mixed-groups. This sisterhood of women is more capable of solving their problems as it creates inclusive and holistic groups.

**Feminist Perspective on Motherhood:**

Once motherhood came to be recognized as the major reason for ‘women’s difference’ and motherhood became defined as a sex-specific gender role, it became a vital concern for the feminists. The feminists' liberation theories also regarded motherhood as a vital concern. Though at times these theories may be contradictory and conflicting to issues regarding motherhood, but motherhood became a recurring and popular theme in women’s writings and literature; and came to occupy a prominent space in feminist literature.

Till the 1970’s the feminist views regarding motherhood were totally negative. The complicit task of bearing and rearing children was considered as instrumental in reducing women to a dependent state, which made them powerless, and rendered them helpless and frustrated. The women’s liberationists questioned this politics of reproduction that asserted that motherhood was not the role or primary purpose of a woman’s life. Even though motherhood was purely an exclusive female experience, it was patriarchies most lethal and effective weapon to suppress women and pin them down to home and children. The liberationists of the post 1990’s said that even though motherhood is an essential part of a woman’s life, the choice to be or not to be and when to be a mother must rest entirely upon them.

When tracing the history of the feminist’s perspective on motherhood, the first feminist to come to mind is Mary Wollstonecraft. She supported the belief that motherhood in itself was not derogatory or damaging. But when women are denied the right to acquire proper formal education, because of their duty as mother or wives then they suffer from loss of self-esteem and dignity.

Wollstonecraft states that women should not sacrifice themselves at the altar of motherhood. Wollstonecraft says, “To be a mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few woman possess, who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Such wives are foolish mothers”(106). Therefore she
wants every woman to lift herself from the state of degradation to which they have been reduced so that they can empower themselves and their children to lead fulfilling lives. The liberationists of the 1980’s and 1990’s also regarded motherhood and mothering as sheer wastage of powerful feminist energy, in the home and the household which they viewed as an area of “arrested social development.” (Mitchell and Oakley 131).

Behaviour too in her seminal publication, The Second Sex, described the female reproductive organs as “peculiarities that imprison her in her subjectivity”(15). Both history and religion have created her to suit the patriarchal design. The notions concerning motherhood are rather fixed and permanent, which is to oppress mothers and at the same time idealise her. Beauvoir uses the instance of Virgin Mary to support her opinion. She says that Virgin Mary is denied the status of a spouse so that she could be exalted as a mother. She too is shown as excepting her inferiority later as a mother, when she is pictured ‘as kneeling before her son,’ Beauvoir, thus rejects the prevalent concept of motherhood, at the same time she bursts two prevalent myth regarding motherhood. One is that in motherhood lies a woman’s glory and that a child’s happiness lies only in the arms of its mother.

The feminists considered motherhood as a patriarchal construct, most women rejected motherhood and the false aura that hallowed it. They openly declared that they loved children but hated being mothers. They lodged a strong protest against the institution of motherhood. Mothers regarded motherhood as “a body-trap” (Bernard;14) and an unfulfilling experience, which women basically rejected the responsibility associated with motherhood rather them motherhood in itself. Child-rearing demanded heavy attention which sucked the mental as well as physical sap from them and affected both their mental and physical health. They were expected to live up the idealized standards of motherhood, and if due to some reason they could not they were humiliated and publically labelled as ‘bad mother’s’. Therefore motherhood that was considered as poles apart from feminism ultimately became its major concern.

Patriarchy orchestrated mothers at once as its victims and also as its agents. The popular concept of angelic mother (mother-figure) drew that attention of the
liberationists. They castigated the role mothers played in the socializing of the child into gender role traditions, thus perpetrating gender, by propagating male dominance and female subordination (Palmer 96). It served as a barrier to hinder women in their attempt to equal men. They disliked the restrictions that motherhood imposition on them, therefore the 1960’s and 1970’s saw a rejection of the traditional idea of motherhood, which was an important element in the construction of feminist identity (Sevenhijen and Vries 12).

The feminists realized that motherhood is a powerful weapon in the hands of women, if properly used. Therefore they tried to swap the image of the ‘guilt ridden dejected mothers’ of everyday life with happy, devoted, beautiful and uncomplaining mothers. The liberationists now came to focus upon the use of biological motherhood as a “reason for condemning women to the role of powerlessness and subservience in the social order” (Rich, On Lies,74). Rich called this politics as “the institution of motherhood”; she probably for the first time identified that the basic flaw with motherhood lay not in motherhood itself; rather it was the interference from various outside, related institutions that targeted motherhood, to serve as maternal suppression and oppression. The compulsions, nature and requirements of motherhood drew. Rich’s attention from the very beginning when “motherhood was a still relatively unexplored area for feminist theory” (Rich, Of Women; 15).

Rich for the first time threw fresh light and perspective upon her views regarding motherhood in her masterpiece Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. She regards motherhood, mothering and mother daughter relationship in this book. In this book she cites her own experience to expose the patriarchal glorification of motherhood, she does not agree to the concept that “woman’s highest and holiest mission is motherhood” (Of Woman; 42). Rich refers to motherhood as, on the one hand a social institution, where all mothers are under social compulsion to adhere to their social status as ‘mothers,’ which has been set for them in accordance with patriarchal values; and on the other hand, it as a crucial emotional experience as natural and spontaneous instant with which they can topple patriarchal definition of feminity (151). The institution of motherhood, generally in all social setups marginalizes the experience of motherhood it seems;
because most of the times, it is believed that, women are excluded from decision making regarding the various issues of pregnancy like, the sex (as to whether or not to go in for sex-determination), number of children and the time, (as to when to plan a pregnancy).

She is persuaded to accept motherhood and not to go deep into its meaning and nature. As M- Rivka and Polatnik say regarding mothers as natural child-rearers rather than as a social policy meant to dominate mothers with in the social and domestic set up(37). This the mothers may seem to be comfortable with but even though they put in silent effort, the indifferent and thankless attitude of the people around them creates a suffocating atmosphere that surrounds them, because they, it is believed, have to follow strict norms of goodness and virtue and have to serve, in a way that it sets an example for their children. For this they have to remain peaceful and stable by presenting a happy and passionate attitude, and perhaps, passively suffer the destiny that seems to be generally the fate of every woman. There are times in a woman’s life, that make her feel lonely and powerless because of the demands of motherhood and the conditions that, sometimes, affect a woman’s personal experience and make their lives messy and powerless. This ultimately may result in self denial and mental agony, all this just for the propagation of the human race in a socio-cultural set up that seems not to forgive mothers for even the slightest negligence. Therefore the crux of the maternal situation as it emerges from this is that, a mother, generally speaking, is trapped on the one hand within the four walls of her house, and on the other hand within the maternal bond. Maternal self-sacrifice and its unhappy consequences are therefore a highly discussed and debated theme in writings by women. There are numerous examples of desperate and depressed mothers in literatures.

Even though women realise their predicament as hopeless and helpless, that makes them angry and frustrated, but still they endure it all in the name of motherhood. In case women chose to workout side home as in the lower economic strata, it becomes a compulsion for them to contribute to the family income. Their jobs impose upon them additional burden of work. They have to put in equal amount of work at home, as well. In the case of middle class educated professional women, generally a choice has to be made, at some stage in life between men,
family and profession. It is generally, the professional obligations that have to be set aside. This sacrifice as a mother makes her lose financial security, social contacts and results in a total loss of identity for her. Now she becomes a women who has to sacrifice and the sacrifice may not in certain cases, yield the desired result, especially when her own children realise that she is a much under-valued person in the social and domestic set up, and drift their loyalties to their father. They feel that the father is a much recognised and powerful person, whose inferences can help them attain their social and financial goals. In case, such a thing happens the onus is on mother, because she is made to feel guilty that, her plight is due to her poor mothering and that only she is to blame for her children’s behaviour. Sara Ruddick’s well-know piece ‘Maternal Thinking’ as well, discusses the grim aspects of mothering, aggravated by the mother’s physical and psychological “isolation, restricted options and social devaluation which induces a sense of a sense of guilt in her, and an emotional and physical discomfort in the children”(344).

These feminists, generally speaking, were all of the opinion that it was the idealization of motherhood – good mother or angelic mother, that added to the stress and pressure upon a maternal situation and reduced it to a task that was to be performed for the society and others, rather than a source for the gratification of the maternal instinct, as it may be believed as, a celebration of her womanhood. As is commonly understood, feminists in the late 1970’s and 80’s, considered motherhood as something that is beyond the biological process or that is a patriarchal construct.

But during this period motherhood came to be viewed in a new light. There was a paradigm shift in the opinion of motherhood as viewed by the feminists. They now came to regard it as a whole and fulfilling biological experience. It is believed that writers like Lynne Segal lashed at “Maternal Revivalism,” a new trend that came to be noticed in the 80’s (145). They were of the opinion that women turned to motherhood as an escape from the trials and tribulations of the public world but there emerged a fresh viewpoint as well where many others did not look at reproduction as a handicap rather, they considered it as it is commonly understood as an achievement. Soon as is believed, this paradigm shift in the views regarding idealized / traditional motherhood from the all- sacrificing and all –suffering mother, was to be replaced, perhaps, by the image of the happy and content mother.
It is believed, that the new image of motherhood emerged, as a role that enriched and ennobled her being. Sevenhevijen and Vries article, ‘Women’s Movement and Motherhood,’ cites some of the reason for the newly acquired popularity of motherhood. Why motherhood was considered to be burdensome came to be considered in a new light. The focus now shifted from the presence of children as the core issue to the oppressive circumstances under which women mother that make motherhood burdensome. The mother-child relations, according to these two writers, is not, as is commonly believed, one of passive maternal sacrifice for the sake of children, rather it is a form of give and take, between the mother and child.

The experience of motherhood thus became an elemental human condition, it is believed, which gave life its meaning and purpose. Maternity to feminists like Rich did matter more than marriage or any other significant event in a woman’s life. Rich accepts that it is not easy for a young woman to accept motherhood, “even though the arrival of a new child heralds great eagerness in the life of a mother” (Of Woman; 167). It was believed, that such an opinion unfolded fresh perspectives in the lives of women, and they now came to consider pregnancy and child birth as their unique and exclusive privilege and experience, instead of considering them as patriarchal devices meant to suppress and subjugate them.

Contratto and Chodorow suggested that it was essential to liberate motherhood from the clutches of patriarchy and male-dominance, so that it can flourish and flower, as an instinctual innate maternal experience. Ann Kaplan’s, Motherhood and Reproduction, depicts motherhood in a new light, in which she portrays it as an enriching experience strengthened by her own relation with her mother and daughter. She shares that being a single woman and not a mother could have made her life incomplete and empty, perhaps like most issueless mothers, who suffer on account of their ‘barren hood,’ or inability to become mothers. It was in the 1980’s that motherhood came to be regarded as a fulfilling and satisfying experience in the life of a woman. The mid 1980’s projected motherhood, “as enhanced and not ravaged by children” (Myerson130-131). The richness of maternal experience formed a vital part of a woman’s life and imparted exuberance and richness to the maternal experience. Thinkers and writers like Dutch and Ruddick promoted the positive factors of motherhood and maternal influence.
“giving rise to womanly values” to do with nurturing, co-operation and peace, which was in contrast to male attributes of self-interest like “completion and aggression” (477).

Ruddick states that maternal experience forms the basis of all maternal attitudes and experiences. It is the constants’ and limitations imposed by mothers on institutionalised motherhood that reduces women to feel pressurized, suffocated and frantic, but it does not extinguish their love for their children. On the contrary, perhaps it can promote the innate capabilities and competence of mothers to, as she says, “protect and fosters the growth of the children” (344). In order, to transform the enslaving impact of the ‘institution of motherhood’ into an empowering ‘experience of motherhood, it has been suggested that women make deliberate and persist efforts to come out of the so called, Victorian role model of motherhood. They are prompted to make conscious efforts to experience motherhood as an instinct and convert it into a gratifying and fulfilling mission. The only way to achieve, this is perhaps to perform the mothering task in a way that it empowers them and evolves their personality. One major obstacle faced by theorists in achieving this objective was the problem of evolving a motherhood to convince the unenlightened mothers.

No study of motherhood can be complete without a reference to the vital contributions of the French Feminist School. The theories postulated by Helen Cixious, Julia Kristeva and Lucy Irrigary, are not only feminist, but also highly literary and psychoanalytic (316), says Gallop. Though Cixious in her book 'écriture feminism,’ seems to raise a protest against the inferior social and economic state of women, Toril Moi at the same time advocates Cixious view on motherhood as “omnipotent and generous dispenser” or “love nourishment and plenitude” (115). Her views have also been referred to by Pam Morris and Irrigary. Every mother-based theory focuses on the ambivalent position of the mother; they elaborate on her powerfulness as well as her powerlessness at once within the existing framework. While the common understanding is that the political facet enslaves a mother the personal facet empowers her. The duality in maternal position is perhaps one of the most hotly debated topics in feminist critical discourse.
According to Palmer, a favourite topic with many theorists is the “contradictions in power and vulnerability which child bearing involves for women” (99).

Chodorow, states that the manifestation of ambivalence between power and powerlessness, leaves both the mother and child in a state of mutual victimization (Reproduction; 86). Both Chodorow and Contratto agree to inherent traits of maternal ambivalence, as a mother is powerful in relation to her children, but powerless within patriarchy. The dichotomy of maternal power, and also maternal powerlessness, has been reiterated by Palmer.

The ambivalence here translates itself as, if a mother is able to use her reproductive capabilities to her own and her child’s advantage, though some power comes with it; but if the same reproductive potential is turned against her she becomes powerless. Mothers and children are the worst victims of wars, social and domestic disturbances, natural calamities, economic deprivation and pressures at work place. These attribute to her powerlessness.

As cited by Rich, Elizabeth Gould Davis ‘The First Sex’ and Robert Briffaults, ‘The Mother’, are a few attempts made by writers to promote matriarchal form of society that arise out of this discussion on the ambivalence of maternal experience, that naturally treads to a discussion on tradition and matriarchal supremacy. All these theories take one aspect as given that is that the patriarchal social order is natural. But Rich’s matriarchal women in her book, ‘Of Woman’, is described as an individual with distinct “practical and spiritual vision,” and she is taken as an “active and an admired participant,” this promotes their status as an equal.

In the Indian mythology and culture, all life-giving and life-sustaining forces are referred to as ‘Ma’ (Sanskrit word for mother), therefore she was placed on a pedestal and worshipped. But in ancient India multi-focal society was prevalent, and the status of mother was not all that venerated or elevated. According to the writer Jasbir Jain, the primary reason could be that motherhood was not fully understood because motherhood is viewed, “as a process begun through male initiative and the mother is a figure which merges easily with the background” (53). The maternal supremacy, which was perhaps, already drowning got suppressed by the patriarchal
power, with this the image of the “Ma” a “great mother,” also lost its sheen and was reduced to a mere “womb that produced lives.” The transformers of the matriarchal, “Great Mother” to the patriarchal “Good Mother” reduced “Good Mother” motherhood a political institution. The good mother was supposed to perform selfless maternal function and dole out constant, love and care to her husband and children. So high were the standards set by the patriarchal social order that it was almost impossible for any mother to attain the levels of perfection. The glorious image of the 'Basking Madonna’ was automatically metamorphosed into guilt – ridden, frustrated, victimised and pitiable mother characters. Such characters are depicted and frequently discussed in multiple themes on motherhood discourses. It is but natural, that all mother images depicted in motherhood discourses are shown to be marked by the ambivalence that is the inherent characteristic of mother-based theories.

Women are caught in a precarious dilemma –between those who confront the patriarchal societal order and opt out of motherhood and those, who for some reason cannot conceive or become mothers, they are referred to as ‘non-mothers’ or ‘barren- mothers’ though feminists are in strong disagreement with this. Rich in On Lie, does not spare this classification as she says that terms like, ‘non-father’ and children’s man appear ‘absurd and irrelevant,’as contrasted to ‘barren mothers’ etc.

An analysis of the impact of motherhood on the life of women, children and its combined effect on society will have to be divided into the various aspects that influence motherhood. So universal yet so diverse is the maternal experience that a fine balance in the analysis will have to be maintained to guard against a slant or prejudiced perspective. The central aspect that influences a woman’s life from her very birth to adulthood and after is the biological aspect. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, there are a few factors related to the biological aspect, which influence the girl child right from her birth, Firstly, it could be due to the fact that in some communities there is male-preference and the arrival of a girl child is not welcomed, especially if she unfortunately happens to be the second or third girl child of her parents. The desire for a son may be stronger in some societies depending upon their cultures, but it is a globally accepted fact that men have the desire to father at least ‘one son’. So the very news of the birth of a girl child will
perhaps in some house-holds dampen the spirits of the parents. This mindset of the parents affects the maternal behaviour, perhaps, because the mother due to the reaction of her husband in particular and the society at large may not have the required intensity and the warmth of affection that a new born baby girl requires, or, she might on the contrary become an over protective and indulgent mother, due to the sense of insecurity that the mother might feel for her child. In both the cases the natural maternal emotion and behaviour may be impacted by the biological sex of the child. Secondly, if the mother is mentally prepared for her pregnancy then conception comes to her as a celebration and joy. But in case, she has been forced into pregnancy-due to social pressures, contraceptive failure or any such reason, conception will make her upset and depressed, thus initiating a row of chain reactions, that could trigger long term effect on her maternal attitude.

Thirdly as the pregnancy proceeds she undergoes a variety of physical and emotional changes. These could be aggravated, if she is made to, due to any reason, forgo her outdoor activities, which might even include her job. If she is forced to give up her job then, she might blame her pregnancy and her ability to become a mother for this. Due to which a very deep psychologically complex attitude could develop, where her emotions will shuttle between her acceptance to the biological function as a woman and her personal and social function as a wife and a professional. She will be torn between these two poles because so wide is the gap between the two that they seldom if ever meet.

This could also be related to the basic perspective that she could oscillate between the institutionalized (which may be understood as forced pregnancy) and instinctual or as motherhood of experience (which may be understood as wilful pregnancy). With the progress in her pregnancy her emotional dilemma which arises due to mixed feelings that she might have with advancing pregnancy, like changes in her physical form - marked by gain in weight, loss of shape and disfigurement. Which to a woman is very upsetting, when she loses her shape, which she may or may not regain ever, she slows down markedly in all her activities and ultimately, the birth of the child, which is also a traumatic at the same time glorious moment for her. Child birth is a maternal function which it is generally believed, women accept
and it also gives them a sense of fulfilment and achievement because it is her biologically essential trait.

It is after child birth that she enters the next stage of motherhood, which may be even more difficult for her, because after a mother accepts her child, perhaps it could be, with mixed feelings of joy and also at the same time her new found task of mothering, she undergoes more psychological and emotional feelings, which could either be of stress and elation, stress because now she has to accept this new born as a part of her life. Her sleep, movement and daily routine for the first few initial lactation months will be totally dependent upon the babies’ cries and smiles; she is elated because she has lived through a unique biological experience of bringing a new life into the world. There is an instinctual bond of closeness and association between the mother and her child, and this gives meaning and reason to her existence in this world. Now the women, becomes a mother because with every passing day she will rear and nurture the child into an adult individual. Though she is fully capable of rearing the child based on her own maternal instincts but these instincts are to be curbed at times, under various institutional pressures—patriarchy, religion and culture. This reduces her into a mere puppet and role player in the hands of the intuition of motherhood. As has been already discussed earlier in this chapter, the mother who through tears, sweat and toil, rears her children, would become very powerful, as is commonly understood, in the domestic sphere, if not curbed and suppressed by the public sphere, where she is not a much valued person.

Now the role of a woman as a mother comes full circle. If this woman, who is now a mother had not given up her profession/job to mother her children she would have been financially independent and therefore socially powerful. Through her professional life she could have maintained her social contacts and links, as well as her financial independence and so would not have been wholly dependent upon her husband for her identity. If she had her own identity then her children would have given her due respect, because then she would not have been dependent on their father her husband. As the children grow up they realize that their father is a much valued man and he has the capability to provide for their material needs. Therefore the children now turn to him for love and support and therefore, this woman suffers and is undervalued by her own children at home and in society.
publicly. Therefore the feminist liberationists considered motherhood as an important cause for female suppression and subjugation. It was in this background that the ‘Radical Feminists’ argued that woman’s oppression is the result of their being inferior to men on account of their gender.

The Radical Feminist theorists encourage women to guard their feminist with care and gain control over their body. They also exhort women to change their outlook. The Radical feminists suggest that women should rather take pride in their ability to reproduce. Though the Radicals concentrate on the female body as a major cause for female oppression, but at the same times they also viewed it as a form repressing ‘women’s difference a reason to celebrate it. The Radical feminists stand in sharp contrast to the Liberal Feminists. Their general aim would be to reduce or eradicate attention to bodies. Kate Millet, who belongs to the Radical Group, uses the broad term politics to include all ‘power structured relationships; in which one group of persons rules over the other, as in male and female group (23). Here Millet helped define society not as a dichotomy created by biological difference but as the oppression of women by men, who consider it their birth-right priority.(25).

Shulamith Firestone, another well-known critic and co-founder of New York Red stockings, of the Radical Feminist group, blames the capability of a woman to reproduce as a cause of her oppression. Firestone’s book ‘The Dialectics of Sex,’ like Millet’s ‘Sexual Politics,’ is proclaimed as a manifesto of the women liberationists of the second-wave feminism. The main argument in Firestone’s book is that the physical realities of reproduction pin woman down to the domestic sphere, rendering them socially, politically and economically insecure. The reasoning put forth by the feminists to explain gender-disparity was based on the notions of women’s difference, biologically

But with the shift in the way motherhood was viewed in the earlier and in the mid-1980’s women understood that motherhood was something that was a biological process or patriarchal construct, rather it became a happy and self-fulfilling task that mothers who accepted childrearing took upon them as a rewarding and welcome episode in their lives, says Kaplan. Now in the new light motherhood became a role that enriched and ennobled a women’s being.
This lead to the unfolding of fresh perspectives on motherhood, it now came to be considered as a unique female experience that exalts and elevates a woman’s mood and status rather than reducing her to a patriarchal device meant to be silenced and subdued.

Another aspect which can be considered as an extension of the biological aspect is the ‘psychological aspect of motherhood,’ because the mind and its issues is also a part of the physical body. But the ‘psychological aspect involves multiple issues in it, that need to be listed before a comprehensive study of its impact on motherhood can be conducted. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter in detail, the psychological aspect is a two faced aspect, as it deals on the one hand with the biological state of a mother’s mind and on the other hand the effect of the psychological state, and its impact on her children, because it is this maternal influence on the child’s mind that leads to further gender-prejudices. Since the psychological aspect is a cyclical process that sets the whole issue of the mother–child and daughter-mother relationship into a vicious cycle, therefore a specific starting point to begin the discussion becomes difficult to establish.

Let us begin with a young girl, and study this circle as girl-mother-girl. When a little girl is brought up by her family, especially the mother, she is made to wear frocks and skirts that distinguish her from the boys who wear pants and shorts, she is given dolls and teddy bears to play with, she mother’s them as she imitates her own mother’s mothering; she is asked to behave in a dainty and docile manner. She is brought up with extra care to inculcate in her tender, passionate and affectionate temperament and is also made to conduct herself in a refined and graceful manner. While on the other hand, a young boy is made to wear trousers and shorts, made to play active sports and toys like balls and guns are given to him. He is then allowed to be rough, harsh and even rude at times. His aggressive and violent behaviour is ignored or at best tolerated by the elders, without too much tutoring by the elders, though this might depend upon the individual parent. But the overall personality development of a young boy ensures that he is more forth going and adventurous. Thus far, the male and female child is brought up as two parallel dichotomies, in manner, attitude and demeanours. As they grow into individuals these psychological differences in attitude translate into dichotomous male and female binaries. These
psychological issues further lead to the more complex issues that have already been discussed in the previous chapter (kindly refer to pg; 9-13). Based on the psychological aspect of motherhood, the Psychoanalytic, French and the Geocentric feminist theories were propagated.

Now the critics shifted their focus and stressed upon the psychic transformation in the lives of women, if their subordination was to be brought to an end. One opinion that was held by all critics was the Freudians view of women’s inferiority and male superiority. The need for women to keep their distinct identity was stressed upon by the Gynocentric critics; they also elaborated the sexual and physical difference and the effect of these on gender-dichotomy. Since the Gynocritics insisted that women write on subjects like domesticating, gestation, child birth, abortion, contraption and female bonding, a new brand of innovative writers was formed. They were confessional writers, basically because of the intimate and confessional nature of their writings, with the female body as a rich source of imagery. Through there writings the experience of motherhood thus came to be looked upon, as it may be believed, as a more elemental human condition which rendered life more meaningful.

Eventually, when this girl enters society as an individual she realizes that there is no place for her until she accepts the established conventions of female behaviours, that is if she wants to carve out a different destiny for herself; in case, she accepts the norms and conventions that have been thought to her by her mother then she will be happy and comfortable to accept her fate. Once this girl becomes a mother, she is entrusted the role of child rearing, for which she will have to slowly mould herself and sacrifice her ambitions and identity. Now, her only identity as is generally understood becomes that of a mother. At times this sacrifice creates on the mind of the woman a sense deep rejection and frustration, which might as it is believed express itself in the form of anger, hatred and indifference towards her children. But in case she willingly accepts her maternal role and does not face despair and depression, then she becomes an affectionate and normal mother. All these emotions affect maternal attitude and behaviours. It was Deutsch, an early theorist on motherhood, which suggested psychological concerns. She became a pioneer in evolving the concept of mothering which relates to all fields of life for her
reproduction coupled with emotional warmth can help women attain excellence as mothers. She postulated that reproduction alone makes a woman a ‘mothers but coupled with emotional warmth it becomes ‘motherliness’. It was for the first time that the two words ‘motherhood’ and ‘motherliness’ were defined as the former being used for the institution of motherhood and the latter being used for the experience of motherhood. It was Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the pioneering feminists who said for the first time, “to be a good mother women must have the ability and that agility and independence of mind which few women possess, who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are foolish mothers” (106).

As has been seen the biological aspect basically concerns the physical difference of the body. The psychological difference deals with a combination of the physical difference and the response that this difference generates from the society. But these two aspects alone cannot help us to comprehend the impact of motherhood on the lives of mothers and in the society. In order to understand the status and position of mother’s in society, Beauvoir’s explanation of it in her book, ‘The Second Sex’, is vividly and aptly illustrated. She cites here, an excellent example of a mother, who is subjected and cherished at once, when she talks about Virgin Mary.

It was under such social circumstances that the liberal feminist movement gained strength. The basic issues involved were the revolt against social inequalities on the female front and on the maternal front it was a revolt against the patriarchal construction of women, who according to patriarchy were alone responsible for child bearing and child rearing. What was even more oppression was the patriarchal concept of the idealization of motherhood, which regarded only those mothers as good who projected qualities like love, devotion, happiness and compassion. They demanded that women serve as role models for their daughter’s by facing silently all odds and atrocities that they are subjected to by their husbands / families or the society. The women had no right to demand equal status, and she had to obey and respect her husband for whom she will bear and rear children and take care of the home and the hearth. Most women, as is commonly understood, openly defied this institution of motherhood by declaring, as it seems, that even though they loved children, they surely hated being mothers.
It was welfare liberationists and thinkers like J.S Mill and Betty Friedan who sought equal entry of women into higher education and good professions. It may be worth mentioning here that even till this day this battle is not over. The very reason that the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Mallala Yousufrai, for advocating women education shows, that in many parts of the world female education, emancipation and liberty, are still not granted. The socio-cultural aspect of feminism forms the basis for another feminist movement that grew out of the sociological inequalities and prejudices. It is the Marxist Feminist movement that influenced the thinkers of the 1960’s and 70’s. The Marxist feminist advocate that apart from issues like gender and sexual difference, even class differences affect maternal experience. Woman who belong to the upper strata of society, as is generally understood, are less oppressed as compared to their economically weaker sisters who therefore face double oppression - economically and on the basis of gender. Along with the gender based discrimination they have to at times rear their children under tight economic constraints. Due to which they may have to take up under paid menial jobs. This leads to the neglect of their children, who become victims of malnutrition and negligence because most of these women have to put in long hours of labour for very petty wages. The Marxist Feminist therefore focused their attention on the public sphere.

But soon the Socialist Feminists that share some elements of Marxism but they felt that women’s oppression could not be as is believed, caused by class division alone. Therefore the Marxist / Socialist feminists focused their attention on the cultural, social and economic factors as the cause of maternal oppression. But here too writer and thinker Michelle Boulos Walker, states, regarding ‘ tensions inherent in motherhood.

Rich warns us that motherhood is not about “blooming women with rosy children at their knees” Rather it concerns various kinds of mothers and maternal issues. Though there are various aspects and factors that concern motherhood, but here in the succeeding chapters, the biological aspect, the psychological and the social cultural aspect of motherhood has been analyzed, both from the perspective of motherhood as intuition and motherhood as experience.