Conclusion: Maternity Discourse as Alternative Politics

This study carries out a detailed feminist reading of five select works of fiction by women writers – *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* – illustrating how these fictional works acknowledge and celebrate the Woman-Mother, woman’s maternity, as the source of an alternative discursive politics. This feminist reading ultimately leads to the genesis of an ever-new set of maternity discourses. Feminists have worked on the equation of female body with “maternal body” since the experience of mothering is the defining element that characterizes a woman’s identity. As this study demonstrates, the selected works of women’s fiction prove to be effective literary attempts generating a common perspective on the emergence of woman’s maternity as an alternative discursive field.

Maternity discourses constitute a new feminist theoretical realm that deconstructs the conceptual and practical patriarchal discourses. These discourses, thereby, create a feminist theoretical space for the re-emergence of the Woman-Mother as an active and articulate discursive figure. The female protagonists, the Women-Mothers, in the select fictional works represent every woman, every mother, who is capable of throwing insights into the ways in which woman’s maternity develops as the source of an alternative discursive politics that can...
powerfully overthrow an intolerably oppressive system like patriarchy or phallocentrism.

A feminist rereading of Lacanian psychoanalysis celebrates a “female-centred,” “maternal-oriented,” semiotic realm as opposed to the paternal realm of the Symbolic. This feminist rereading facilitates a scope for redefining Lacanian concepts like the psychic stages, phallus and so on. Rereading Lacanian concepts generates wonderful feminist theoretical possibilities like the overlapping or extension of psychic stages, the women-mothers’ proximity to phallus as subjects. These feminist theoretical possibilities constitute an interesting phenomenon – the Woman-Mother’s re-emergence in the signifying realm as an active and articulate discursive figure rendering the patriarchal man/father silent, passive and inarticulate. This leads to the creation of a new system of signification that is no longer phallocentric but female-centred, maternal-oriented. This also results in a new dyad model of family consisting of Woman-Mother and her children preventing paternal intervention.

French feminists like Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva oppose the reign of a phallocentric universe with insights drawn in from women’s, mothers’, bodily experiences. The French feminist theorizing heads towards an open, vocal, eloquent celebration of “mothering,” an experience of the body and the mind, as the model, the real source for
female identity. French feminists make an attempt to expose how patriarchy stands hostile to the fulfillment of the female desires. By redefining woman’s “maternity” as the source of her real strength, the French feminists retain the focus on the paradigms of the “maternal-feminine desire” manifest in the interconnectedness of women-mothers transcending generations, age and cultures.

Reading Foucauldian notions of power and reverse discourse along with the feminist theoretical standpoints put forward by feminists like Rubin and Brownmiller generates the scope for evolving a new feminist theoretical domain that re-establishes woman’s maternity as strategic resistance to the colonial model of patriarchy. This new feminist theoretical space welcomes the evolution of maternity discourses as a revolutionary political move against all colonial structures of patriarchy and views the Woman-Mother as a discursive figure capable of resistance and of decolonizing her “body” herself from the patriarchal oppression. Woman’s maternity can, thus, be seen as a newly-discovered force of resistance that enables women to fight back the political strategic games of the colonial model of domination and subordination in patriarchy and decolonize herself overthrowing the oppressive, restricting and confining modes of sexual inequality in the phallocentric universe. Here, the Woman-Mother reclaims the territorial right of her body and the exclusive right of her children.
Maternity discourses constitute a new female discursive space with its distinct feminist narrative strategies. The expanding dynamics of the feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the new female discursive space which maternity discourses generate coincide with Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine* and Cameron’s notion of language and sexuality. The new narrative strategies include female sexual desire, open-endedness and tactility voiced by the Woman-Mother, and female sexuality explicitly discussed from female perspective and discursively constructed. The feminist narrative strategies distinctly belonging to the new female discursive space of maternity deconstruct and dismantle the narrative space of the patriarchal discourse. All these feminist theoretical dimensions, therefore, transmit the possibility for evolving a new feminist theoretical framework in which woman’s maternity re-emerges as an alternative discursive politics.

A reading of the five select women’s fiction using this new feminist theoretical framework demonstrates that these fictional works are brilliantly effective literary attempts that deconstruct those patriarchal assumptions that argue for the “lack” of the Woman-Mother and the “separation” of the Woman-Mother from the child as the prerequisites preparing the ground for the intrusion of the patriarchal man/father into the scene, causing a deadly fracture in the mother-child bond. These literary attempts by women writers constitute a
revolutionary feminist political move to help the Woman-Mother reclaim her lost glory and significance against a male-dominated society.

In other words, a feminist reading of the fictional works selected for the study can be taken as an attempt to render voice to the Silenced, the Colonized: the repressed/suppressed “maternal-feminine,” the submerged Woman-Mother who is forced to fall from the sight into forgetfulness and compelled to disappear into the marginalized space of the “absent” and “silent” in patriarchy.

Women, as mothers, stand out in their emotional intensity and physical bonding with their children, which is, in fact, beyond the reach of patriarchal imagination and predictions. As feminists argue, it is this unique experience of “mothering” that gives new meanings to women’s lives as belonging to an apocalyptic community which to men appears as an “alien, dark land.” The fictional works, *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, illustrate such intrinsic powers of the Woman-Mother. These five works of fiction are analysed in the context of a distinctly new feminist theoretical domain of maternity discourses.

Maternity discourses constitute a new feminist theoretical space that disproves the mystique propagated by patriarchy that woman becomes weak, vulnerable and helpless as she becomes a mother. On the contrary, as the feminist theoretical domain of maternity discourses
propagates, woman’s maternity, her state of being a mother, gives her real strength and identity and causes her real emancipation. The selected works of women’s fiction, as this study demonstrates, harmoniously agree in their attempts to illustrate the possibilities of redefining woman’s maternity as an alternative discursive politics that challenges the phallocentric discourses and social order.

The five fictional works selected for the study explore the unimaginable and unchallengeable powers of woman’s maternity and therefore serve as an excellent dedication in literary form to all women, all mothers, in general. Maternity is an emblem of women’s culture; it is a force or an experience forming the source for the construction of a female community and female collectivity. Woman’s maternity is the source of all female creativity which is nonlinear, non-hierarchical, intimate – an unending creative force that stands in opposition to the realm of the paternal. Maternity, in simple terms, is a force or an experience that has kept alive the creativity of women century after century irrespective of their age or culture.

We can even regard the select women’s fiction as literary attempts to search for the artistic foremothers, the entire humanity’s foremothers. In these works of fiction, we come across an essentially significant attempt to revive “that” which is absent in the canons of patriarchal culture – the “foremother,” the “maternal” – and to free
humankind from the hegemonic hold of the patriarchal forefathers. The fictional works, *Mama*, *Room*, *The Things We Do for Love*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, revive the Woman-Mother and thereby give voice to an entire maternal history often silenced by the political rhetoric of patriarchy. They can, thus, be taken as literary attempts of breaking silences and stereotypes of women, of mothers, in the past, present and even in future. In other words, these works of fiction trace the evolution of the Woman-Mother’s quest for identity and its final accomplishment effected by her “maternity.”

The female protagonists, the Women-Mothers, in the women’s fiction selected for the study evolve from the state of being cruelly exploited and mutilated in both body and mind, relegated to the most narrow and confining lives, to that state of being where they ultimately gain a new consciousness and pride as they rise as strong, independent, confident all-powerful Women-Mothers in the end. Their quest for identity finds its attainment in their maternity. Using their maternity, their state of being a mother, these Women-Mothers in the fictional works finally reclaim their sole right to their children and their bodies. It is their maternity that redefines their identity as women, enabling them to deconstruct the oppressive restrictions of patriarchy and to reshape the world using their maternity.
Thus, we find that the women writers like McMillan, Donoghue, Hannah, Shriver and Maracle have filled in their fictional works with eternally powerful Women-Mothers whom the great feminist writers of the past have only sketched. The Women-Mothers in the select works of fiction by the above-mentioned women writers prefigure the ideal Woman-Mother who is yet to arrive in futurity: a Woman-Mother who is noted for her self-reliance and firm sense of connectedness to her child and also for her acceptance and acknowledgment of her maternity as the sole source of her true identity as a woman.

Woman’s maternity evolves as the central discourse in the select women’s fiction rendering the paternal passive, absent and blurred, forcefully making the patriarchal man/father fall into the realm of the absent and the silent. This power of the “maternal-feminine,” which is understated in patriarchy, re-emerges as the Women-Mothers’ strength in the selected fictional works. This aspect of woman’s maternity, characterized by the forces of creativity and regeneration, takes shape and colour in the selected fictional works as the female protagonists, the Women-Mothers, finally succeed in earning a new, independent life for themselves and their children.

The selected works of fiction by women writers, *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, present the Woman-Mother with
great power, vigour and hope. The female protagonists, the Women-Mothers, in the above mentioned fictional works are therefore politically involved and they arise as the “future” for the maternity discourses that emerge as an active feminist theoretical realm. For these Women-Mothers in the selected fictional works, maternity is a sign of self-defining freedom in its resistance to patriarchal violence, along with the pains and rewards of the experience of mothering. These Women-Mothers, these female protagonists, are therefore the “window” to those maternity discourses that call into question and challenge the patriarchal system which has subordinated women to mere artifacts or objects. Therefore, the select fictional works by McMillan, Donoghue, Hannah, Shriver and Maracle can be regarded as embodiments of “that” which appreciates and prefers the incredible power and strength of woman’s maternity.

The five works of fiction by women writers selected for the study, thus, announce the emergence of maternity as an effective discursive field of resistance where women finally succeed in creating a unique cultural and intellectual space for themselves challenging the domain of male-dominated disciplines in patriarchy. They, in other words, provide revelatory insights into the political realm of maternity discourses that threatens the very existence of patriarchal society. Hence, these fictional works emerge as effective manifestations of maternity
discourses that politically re-position the Woman-Mother so that she is no longer relegated to the margins and her needs are no longer subordinated to those of men/fathers.

The fictional works by McMillan, Donoghue, Hannah, Shriver and Maracle, selected for the study, can be seen as a point of initiation in the field of literature that marks the emergence of the Woman-Mother as the new discursive Subject. As in the case of the Women-Mothers in the select fictional works, the arena of maternity discourses witnesses the wonderful reunion of “woman-mother,” a reunion toward which women aspire all the more passionately. They represent the interconnectedness of women-mothers, transcending generations, ages and cultures. Our age faces the terrible need for the production of maternity discourses as we see in *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*. To phrase it differently, our age actually requires the birth of more women, more mothers, like the Women-Mothers in the above-mentioned fictional works, in order to bring about a revolutionary change in the patriarchal attitude towards women, towards mothers.

A whole range of fiction constituting the realm of maternity discourses, like the five select women’s fiction, is necessary to subvert the desire for clear beginnings and tidy closures and thereby to challenge the monologic discipline of patriarchy which otherwise keeps women,
mothers, in their assigned place of the “oppressed,” the “silenced.” Woman’s maternal identity is clearly devalued in the patriarchal society. The development of maternity discourses as a distinct feminist theoretical realm in the field of literary studies brings to light how women must live through their children, through their maternity, to prevent men from perpetuating the system that devalues women, mothers. Thus, the new feminist theoretical space generated by maternity discourses redefines woman’s maternity as an alternative discursive politics powerful enough to challenge the patriarchal discourse. So, the select works of women’s fiction, *Mama*, *Room*, *The Things We Do for Love*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, initiate the development of maternity discourses by providing insights into the ways in which these discourses can powerfully overthrow phallocentrism. These works of fiction by women writers, therefore, effectively evolve as practically productive literary contributions towards the revolutionary political move in establishing maternity discourses as the new promising feminist theoretical stream. They open the possibilities of a new structure of family (a dyad consisting of Woman-Mother and her children), a new system of signification (an alternative semiotic system that either renders man/father inarticulate/passive or transform him), a new spirited celebration of feminine-maternal body, the “maternal-feminine desire”
that functions through the interconnectedness of women-mothers and their new sense of community and collectivity. They also generate the possibilities of the incredible evolution of “maternity” as a reverse discourse decolonizing the female body, the transformation of woman’s maternity as a defence, a power and as a strategic resistance, and the development of a new dynamics of feminist narrative strategies. They illustrate how maternity, the core of female sexuality and the inexhaustible source of female identity, can be discursively constructed.