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Representation of Motherhood in 21st Century Women's Writing

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Abstract: *The figure of motherhood in the women writing in the twenty first century is a mark of a radical change to the idealised and sacrificial models of the figure to more complicated, truthful and emotionally warped and detailed images. In the works of traditional literature influenced by patriarchal ideology, motherhood was represented as the natural fate of a woman, linked with self-sacrifice and moral obligation and silent suffering. The modern women authors, though, have contested this very limited construct by portraying motherhood as an experience that is lived, full of decision-making, identity negotiation as well as conflict, and socio-cultural forces. This change reflects the wider feminist interests of agency, autonomy and reevaluation of female subjectivity in the new world.*

This paper discusses the ways in which women writing in the twenty-first century reclaims the process of mothering by subverting the myth of a romanticised motherhood and preempting the maternal ambivalence, vulnerability and resistance. Feminist literary criticism and motherhood studies also guide the study, especially the distinction of motherhood as an institution and motherhood as an experience as made by Adrienne Rich and influential (Rich, 1976) . Although the institution of motherhood still uses the institution of motherhood to subjugate women bodies and roles in terms of social norms and expectations, the modern literature is giving more focus to the individual maternal voices as they challenge the homogenous and idealised definition of motherhood.

One of the main points of this paper is how maternal ambivalence the simultaneity of love, fulfilment, frustration, and exhaustion has become one of the central concerns of modern motherhood discourse. Recognizing emotional turmoil and psychological tension, the writing of women subverts the cultural belief that women are naturally happy in motherhood, which is emotionally fulfilled. These representations make motherhood human and the maternal struggle is justified as part of the lived experience of women instead of an ethical hypocrisy or a lack of conformity.

The paper also addresses how motherhood and female identity are related to the modern social and economic situation. Most of the narratives in the twenty-first century have depicted motherhood to be an experience that is transformative but destabilising to the extent that women are forced to renegotiate their identity, creativity, and career goals. The idea of intensive mothering proposed by Sharon Hays is specifically applicable here because it emphasizes the fact that contemporary cultures subject mothers with too many emotional, physical and moral pressures (Hays, 1996) . The struggle of contemporary women writers against this ideology is critical through revealing the unseen labour and emotional weight of women taking care of babies.

Besides this, the article also takes into account the impact of the representations of motherhood on the class, culture, and global contexts. Modern feminist writing is diverse and maternal and was

shaped by economic disparity, migration, and post-colonial conditions and thus opposing universalised ideals of motherhood. These stories show motherhood as the biological role, but as the socio-political place where power relations, cultural expectations and opposition meet.

Keywords: *Motherhood; Women's Writing; Feminist Literary Criticism; Maternal Ambivalence; Contemporary Literature.*

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Introduction

Motherhood has been one of the strongest and most debatable topics of female writing, and the representation of motherhood in literature was never unchanging. In previous literary culture, motherhood was mostly represented in idealised terms of self-sacrifice, moral purity, and blind devotion. These representations were highly shaped by patriarchal society that made motherhood the most important role of a woman and her identity. Emotional conflicts, personal desires, and intellectual ambition of women were frequently minimized to the overriding discourse of maternal responsibility. Consequently, motherhood became a more abstract idea in the works of literature than a humanized and lived experience.

However, the twenty-first century has been the period of deep social, cultural, and ideological changes which have greatly changed the literary depiction of maternity. Feminist ideas, altered family dynamics, greater involvement of women in the workplace, and a general rise in discussions on mental health and bodily sovereignty have all led to a reconsideration of maternal identity. Modern women writers cease to make motherhood a homogeneous, naturalized process, but rather make it a heterogeneous, negotiated, and highly individual experience. This change can be considered a transition towards a position of non-mythological narrative towards the depictions of emotional realism and social criticism.

Feminist researchers note that motherhood should not be only seen as a biological role but as a socio-cultural role. Andrea O'Reilly highlights the fact that feminist representation can reclaim maternal voice and control over the traditional standards of good mothering because patriarchal motherhood tends to silence women by imposing strict standards of good motherhood (O'Reilly, 2016)[1]. Motherhood in the women writings in the twenty first century is a place where women express resistance, challenge social expectations, and declare their own subjectivism. The purpose of literature, therefore, is a central point of contradiction to dominant ideologies of maternal responsibility and feminine selfhood.

Motherly ambivalence and emotional complexity is another important feature of modern manifestations of motherhood. In stark contrast to the previous description where harmony and fulfilment were the two most important values, contemporary narratives confirm the existence of anxiety, exhaustion, guilt, and loss of identity in addition to love and care. These portrayals dispel a cultural belief that motherhood is naturally happy and full of feeling. According to Julia Kristeva, the process of motherhood is a constant negotiation between the self and other, and thus a highly transforming and disturbing process to women (Kristeva, 2005)[2]. The twenty-first century women writing makes this psychological tension more evident, and the idea of writing about maternal experiences now can be done without shame or idealisation.

[1] O'Reilly, A. (2016). Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice. London: Routledge.

[2] Kristeva, J. (2005). Motherhood Today. New York: Columbia University Press.

Moreover, the modern ones place motherhood in the context of socio-cultural and global environments. Class, race, migration, and economic inequality problems progressively contribute to the fact that literary portrayals of maternal life are shaped by them. Motherhood is not portrayed as a isolated private area of experience but each is a reality that is shaped by power structures and social realities. These types of narratives broaden the research on motherhood by adding other voices and disrupting universalised models based on western experiences.

The aim of this article is to discuss the ways in which motherhood is reconstructed in the twenty-first century through the lens of writing by women who preempt the emergence of emotional truthfulness, agency in the motherhood role and socio-cultural conflict. The analysis of the modern literary works, with the assistance of a feminist critical approach, aims at proving that motherhood is re-thought as a vibrant place of identity construction, opposition, and self-representation. By doing it, the article will contribute to the current debates in the field of feminist literary criticism and emphasize the role of the maternal narratives in comprehending the lived experience of women in the contemporary world.

Literature Review

Motherhood in Twenty-First-Century Women's Writing

Feminist literary criticism has significantly reshaped the understanding of motherhood over the last few decades. Earlier feminist scholars largely viewed motherhood as a patriarchal institution that restricted women's freedom, creativity, and social mobility. However, contemporary feminist criticism approaches motherhood as a complex, lived experience shaped by emotional labour, cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, and personal agency. In twenty-first-century women's writing, motherhood is no longer portrayed as a fixed or idealised role but as a dynamic identity marked by contradiction, negotiation, and resistance. Literature has become a vital space where women writers explore maternal ambivalence, selfhood, and social pressure.

Sara Ruddick provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding modern representations of motherhood. In *Maternal Thinking: Towards the Politics of Peace* (1989), Ruddick argues that mothering involves a specific form of moral and intellectual labour developed through caregiving practices. She rejects the idea that maternal behaviour is purely instinctive and instead presents it as reflective and learned. According to Ruddick, mothers engage in preservation, nurturance, and social responsibility. This perspective allows literary critics to read maternal characters as conscious decision-makers. Many contemporary women writers portray mothers who actively negotiate care and personal identity.[3]

Elisabeth Badinter challenges the romanticised ideal of motherhood through her work *The Myth of Motherhood* (1981). She argues that the idea of a natural maternal instinct is a cultural construction rather than a biological truth. Badinter exposes how society promotes self-sacrificing motherhood as a moral ideal. Her critique has influenced literary studies by encouraging scholars to examine maternal dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Twenty-first-century women writers often depict mothers who resist unrealistic expectations. Such narratives question the cultural pressure to perform "perfect" motherhood.[4]

Adrienne Rich offers a crucial feminist distinction between motherhood as an institution and motherhood as personal experience. In *Of Woman Born* (1976), she criticises the patriarchal control embedded in the institution of motherhood. At the same time, she acknowledges the emotional power and creativity within maternal relationships. Rich's work highlights the tension between

[3] Ruddick, S. (1989). *Maternal thinking: Towards a politics of peace*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
[4] Badinter, E. (1981). *The myth of motherhood: An historical view of the maternal instinct* (R. DeGaris, Trans.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

maternal duty and female autonomy. Literary critics use her ideas to analyse conflicting maternal identities. Contemporary women's writing frequently reflects this struggle between oppression and empowerment.[5]

Nancy Chodorow, through *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), explains motherhood as a socially reproduced role rather than a biological destiny. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, she shows how mothering roles are transmitted across generations. Chodorow links gender identity formation to early maternal relationships. Her theory helps critics explore mother-daughter dynamics in literature. Modern women writers use this framework to question inherited gender norms. Motherhood appears as a learned and contested identity.[6]

Andrea O'Reilly represents contemporary feminist maternal theory by focusing on maternal agency and diversity. She argues that motherhood can function as a site of resistance against patriarchal norms. O'Reilly emphasises the importance of class, race, culture, and social location in shaping maternal experiences. Her work expands earlier feminist theories that universalised motherhood. Twenty-first-century women's writing reflects these intersectional realities. Literature thus becomes a platform for marginalised maternal voices.[7]

I. Theoretical Framework

The current work has its foundation on feminist literary criticism which offers a critical approach on how the experiences of women especially motherhood are implicated, silenced or redefined in literary works. Feminist literary criticism has contested the dominant male canon and these conventional representations which placed women historically in passive or idealised roles. This strategy of foregrounding of the voices, emotions and lived realities of women helps to take the reality of motherhood as a culturally mediated and politically charged experience as opposed to a biological or natural experience.

The main idea of the feminist literary theory is that motherhood is not a natural and universal phenomenon but a socially shaped phenomenon that is impacted by historical, cultural, and ideological factors. In her book The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir calls a famous argument that women are not born, but made due to social conditioning (Beauvoir, 1949)[8]. Her reflection shows how motherhood has been utilized as a tool of restricting the definition of women in terms that are limiting and less liberating to them. This construction is often expressed in terms of literary descriptions of maternal sacrifice that suppress the individual needs of women and their intellectual autonomy. The writing by contemporary women, however, actively opposes such constructions representing motherhood as varied, negotiated and, in many cases, conflicted.

The fact that gender is a socially constructed identity helps to cement the theoretical basis of this study. A theory of Gender performativity by Judith Butler redefines the gender roles as fixed by arguing that the issue of gender is constructed through repetitive social performance and cultural practices (Butler, 1990)[9]. Using this theory in relation to motherhood, it implies that the behaviour of motherhood is not predetermined but done in a way that is socially approved over expectations of femininity and nurture. This performative nature of motherhood is often revealed in women writing

[5] Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
[6] Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
[7] O'Reilly, A. (2004). *From motherhood to mothering: The legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of woman born*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
[8] Beauvoir, Simone de. (2011). The Second Sex. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 283–285.
[9] Butler, Judith. (2006). Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, pp. 33–34.

in the twenty-first century, in which mothers are unable to fit the ideals of motherhood or ignore them.

The theories of gender and identity also underline the flowing and scattered female subjectivity especially concerning motherhood. Motherhood also tends to create a division in the self-concept of women, forcing them to be less self-centric and more maternal than they are supposed to be according to the social conventions of their societies. Feminist theorists claim that such tension is an important place of narrative exploration in the female literature. The literary works allow women authors to define the paradoxes of motherhood identity love and resentment fulfilment and loss without reaching the simplistic conclusions. These representations are a challenge to essentialist ideas of womanhood and affirm maternal ambivalence is legitimate.

Furthermore, feminist literary criticism places the concept of motherhood in a wider context of power, and it emphasizes the impact of the class, culture, and ideology on maternal expectations. Gender identity theories can explain the working of motherhood as a disciplinary instrument which dominates the body, time and emotional labour of women. Concurrently, the reclaiming of motherhood as a resistant space can also be traced in the current women writing whereby women redefine the care, responsibility, and identity,and selfhood on their own terms.

II. Motherhood as Social and Cultural Construct.

Motherhood cannot be narrowed down to a biological or natural issue, but it is firmly rooted in social and cultural institutions. The modern feminist literature is based on the idea that motherhood should be theorised both as an experience and as a form of institution, both having different impacts on the reality of the life of women. A canonic work by Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1976) provides a critical base of this point of view, outlining the personal, lived sphere of the maternal experience within the social framework that determines, controls, and often limits the sphere.

Motherhood as Experience

Maternal experience is the affection, psychological and individual aspect of being a mother. It involves the close relationship existing between mother and child, the pleasures that come with raising a child as well as the difficulties involved in raising a child. It is a subjective feature that can be different depending on the situations of individuals, personalities, and relationships. Rich (1976) argues that the maternal experience is modelled to suit the feelings and thoughts of the mother as well as her own agency and thus can not be formulated in a way that would standardise or generalise it. Accounts of a literary nature that preempt maternal experience often depict mothers who are at the same time negotiating between affection, attachment, fatigue and the desire to be free.

Motherhood as Institution

On the contrary, institutional approach sees motherhood as a social/cultural construct, which institutionalizes the definition of what a mother should be. Such frameworks include social standards, legal provisions, family norms, and gendered ideals which dictate the behavior of mothers. In her argument that uncovers the institution of motherhood, Rich (1976) postulates that what she suggests are ideals of motherhood, including self-sacrifice, nurturing perfection, and moral responsibility, need not always coincide with the desires or lived experience of a mother. This institutional prism highlights the socialization of women to meet cultural demands of a perfect mother at the cost of the self, personal ambitions and feelings.

What the Culture Expects a Real Mother to be.

The ideal mother is a culturally ambiguous construct but often stresses on selflessness, patience, emotional warmth, and moral direction. Females are conditioned habitually to put the needs of their children and family first before their desires. By interpreting the literary tradition and feminist criticism, it is demonstrated that these expectations breed the sense of ambivalence, guilt, and psychological pressure due to a dissonance between personal identity and cultural standards among mothers. Modern female authors are defying these stereotypes by portraying the women characters as mothers who resist, negotiate or redefine motherhood and thus show that motherhood is not spatially situated or experienced by everybody.

Overall, both theories of conceptualising motherhood as a social institution and a subjective experience qualify scholars and readers to discuss the literary complexity of the phenomenon. The work by Rich provides a critical perspective according to which the ideals of culture are imposed on the reality of the maternal life of the subject, as well as according to which the truths of the maternal life of the subject are not subjective knowledge, but are at the same time structural facts and personal agency. This duality is drawn out more in contemporary literature texts with subtle descriptions of mothers who are meeting demands of society at the same time demanding individuality, emotional truthfulness, and control.[10]

III. Transforming Ideas of Motherhood.

The concept of motherhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century has been re-oriented fundamentally to move away out of an implicit statement of biological inevitability to a conceptualisation of motherhood as a choice. According to the previous social and literary paradigms, motherhood was often seen as an obligatory stage of the woman life that had a close relationship with moral responsibility and feminine identity. The modern writing by women ridicules this supposition by making motherhood one of the possible choices out of many, but not an inevitable fate. The changing attitudes of society are reflected in these narratives, and they were influenced by the feminist movements, reproductive rights, and the growing independence of women concerning the choice of their body and life.

Motherhood as choice remains a motif that recurs in the modern women literature with characters making choices to determine whether, when and how to become mother. This image destabilizes traditional discourses that equate the womanhood with the biological reproduction. According to literary critics, these stories justify women who delay motherhood, who choose to have no children or who reinvent maternal fulfilment in less conventional ways. Feminist discourse has been prescriptive of reproductive choice in the foreground of autonomy in women, as Snitow (1992)[11] argues, and is in opposition to the cultural demands that see motherhood as a given or something that women have no control over.

The next change that is of great importance to the image of motherhood is the increased attention to working mothers and the implied conflict between her work life and the role of a nurturer. The writing of the twenty-first century women often explores the emotional and psychological burden on women when they become caregivers and wage earners at the same time. These stories shed light on the way the institutional systems and cultural values still keep favoring the maternal devotion rather than the profession of women. The sociological theory of the so-called second shift,

[10] Rich, Adrienne. (1976). Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 3–10.

[11] Snitow, Ann. (1992). Feminism and Motherhood: An American Reading. In Feminism and Motherhood (pp. 32–35). New York: Routledge.

introduced by Hochschild (1989)[12], is especially relevant, with it being the focus of uneven distribution of both domestic and emotional labour on the side of working mothers. This reality is replicated in literary texts through depictions of mothers who struggle through exhaustion, guilt, and judgment in the society as they attempt to hold onto their careers and family life.

The other way of extending the definition of motherhood is the depiction of single mothers, adoptive mothers, and surrogate mothers in the contemporary literature. Those stories challenge the nuclear-family model and shed light on other ways of nurturing and family. Single motherhood is often portrayed as a seat of strength and self-sufficiency, but it also reveals social stigmatization and economic weakness. Adoptive motherhood anticipates the existence of emotional attachments instead of blood relationships, which is why it challenges the traditional beliefs about blood relations. On the same note, narratives of surrogacy are concerned with the ethical, emotional and corporeal questions of reproductive technologies and the manner in which motherhood is becoming subject to medical, legal and international forces.

With these various images, the writing of the twenty first century woman re-invents the concept of motherhood as changeable, accommodative, and socially constructed. Contemporary narratives are resistant to essentialist definitions by recognizing choice, labour, and other forms of maternality and by asserting the plurality of maternal experiences. It is this changing literary image that highlights the importance of viewing motherhood not as a role but as a practiced process, a process that is subject to the agency of the individual and the changing social realities.

IV. Emotional and Psychological Aspects.

The affective and psychological aspect of motherhood is one of the main focus areas of research in feminist literary studies of the twenty first century. Contrary to the literature traditions of the previous century that praised maternal affection as inherently nourishing and unconditionally tolerant, the modern day narratives are placed as an emotionally challenging and psychologically complex experience of motherhood. Female authors are more and more prophetic of the interior of mothers, portraying not just affection and caring but anxiety, guilt, fatigue and vulnerability. This paradigm shift is a reflection of a greater cultural ethnography that recognizes maternal mental health as an important and valid issue and not a taboo area or a personal one.

Motherly love and care still form the basis of the ontological form of motherhood, but modern literature is not willing to portray them as spontaneous or non-problematic. Maternal care is instead presented as a constant process of emotional labour which requires one to be attentive, responsible and self-negotiating. The concept of the good enough mother by Donald Winnicott is especially relevant in this regard when the myth of a perfect motherhood is destabilised in favour of being more realistic, responsive and attentive than being an impeccable mother (Winnicott, 1971)[13]. This understanding is reflected in prose written by women, which depicts mothers who love their children with all their heart but at the same time have to deal with self-doubt and exhaustion of emotions. These renderings give human status to maternal love, recognising its limits but not its worth.

Together with love and care, anxiety, guilt, and exhaustion are the frequent affective conditions under literary expressions of motherhood. The female authors of the 21 st century tend to plot the motherhood of women that are full of anxiety about the quality of their children, the social criticism and the sense of failure that they feel. Another widespread consequence of the inabilities to satisfy competing demands is the emergence of guilt, which can be illustrated by the necessity to balance

[12] Hochschild, Arlie Russell. (1989). The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home. New York: Viking Penguin, pp. 4–6.

[13] Winnicott, D. W. (1971). Playing and Reality. London: Tavistock Publications, pp. 10–12.

between caring, work, and personal gratification. These are emotional conflicts enhanced by hegemonic pressure which identifies exceptional motherhood with complete self sacrifice. The literature thus, is a hermeneutic zone where such unspoken emotions are explicitly brought to the fore so that they can portray mothers as emotionally dimensional characters and not moral idealisms.

Mental health as a theme achieves a certain popularization in modern female literature about motherhood. Stories gradually explore the issue of post-natal depression, emotional burnouts and psychological isolation, disrupting the silences that traditionally surrounded maternal mental illness. Social expectations, lack of support, and gendered pressure are the key factors that influence maternal mental health as it is argued by Paula Nicolson in her study of postnatal depression, instead of individuals being weak unilaterally (Nicolson, 1998,)[14]. Literary documents resonate with such a stand by situating maternal distress in general social and relational contexts. The mothers are shown to need help not because of their inability to love the kids, but due to unrealistic ideals and poor emotional support.

Through anxiety, fatigue and mental health, the writing of modern women destabilises the mythology of the emotionally satisfied mother. These stories legitimize the suffering of mothers as real and relevant, challenging cultural institutions requiring mothers to remain silent and strong. At the same time, they do not deny the existence of love and care, on the contrary, they offer the readers to view motherhood as an emotional spectrum where love and vulnerability exist simultaneously. By such uninhibited portrayals, women literature helps in making the concept of motherhood more inclusive and sensitive to the compassionate dimension of the maternal experience where the psychological complexity becomes part and parcel of the maternal experience.

V. Maternal Ambivalence

Maternal ambivalence has become one of the crucial concepts in the exegesis of the literature on motherhood written by women in the twenty-first century. Whereas literary canon of the past era glorified motherhood as nothing but an outpouring of joy and the emotional constancy, the modern-day narratives predetermined the presence of conflicting feelings as part of the maternal constitution. Happiness, attachment, love tend to coexist due to a sense of burden, resentment, exhaustion, and emotional conflict. Female authors are more often depicting this ambivalence as a natural and a necessary attribute of motherhood and not something that is an aberrant of motherhood.

The contradiction between happiness and weight is one of the main axes of these images. On the one hand, the motherhood in the literary texts is written as the most significant relation which is characterized by intimacy and emotional connection. They reveal, on another, the physical requirements, emotional burnout and inexhaustible responsibility that often follow the motherhood. In Torn in Two, psychoanalyst Rozsika Parker argues that maternal ambivalence is based on the clash between a woman who wants to have independence and the high level of dependence a child has (Parker, 1995)[15]. The issue of modern women prose is evidence of this psychological fact because it allows female characters to express not only affection but also frustration without a sense of moral condemnation. These depictions refute the belief that true motherhood requires emotional consistency or personal elimination.

Motherhood expectations in society contribute to maternal ambivalence. Images of the loyal, repeatedly patient, ever-available mother are still perpetuated by cultural norms, with few

[14] Nicolson, P. (1998). Postnatal Depression: Psychology, Science and the Transition to Motherhood. London: Routledge, pp. 45–48.

[15] Parker, Rozsika. (1995). Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence. London: Virago Press, pp. 5–7.

opportunities to reveal the dissatisfactions or anger. Any non-conformers are often portrayed as poor or selfish in the mainstream narrative. These restrictive norms are however questioned in literature. Modern discourses clarify the fact that the burden to live up to ideal motherhood increases guilt, anxiety, and emotional self-monitoring, but not fulfillment. These readings bring into view the fact that maternal ambivalence is a by-product of social demand and not motherhood itself.

Breaking stereotypes of ideal motherhood is one of the characteristic elements of woman literature of the twenty-first century. Women writers object to mushy and moralised views of the mother-life by symbolically expressing the regretted, craving-to-be-alone, or emotionally overburdened mothers. In her essay Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty, Jacqueline Rose points out that the emotional demands imposed on motherhood are often impossible and make ambivalence inevitable (Rose, 2018)[16]. There is an introduction of maternal ambivalence into literary representations based on this knowledge that show maternal ambivalence as an act of candor and emotional reality instead of inability.

Maternal ambivalence can be an effective tool of challenging patriarchal and cultural myths that shroud motherhood, through such narratives. The reclaiming of the maternal voice through women literature inserts the truth of emotional contradiction and opposition to silencing the maternal discontent. The defiance of the stereotypes about the ideal motherhood makes the modern day literature widen the definition of the maternal experience by including such aspects as vulnerability, resistance and individuality. Maternal ambivalence thus emerges not as feeble, but rather as a critical prism that makes motherhood to be understood as complete human, emotional, and socially constructed.

VI. Motherhood and Women personality.

Female identity is altered significantly by motherhood, and is creating a feeling of loss and a new possibility of self-construction. In the canonical literary images, motherhood is often described as the fulfillment of the feminine identity, thus limiting individuality to the maternal one. In 21 st - century women prose, this paradigm is challenged by depicting the process of motherhood as a complex, morphing problem that confounds, breaks, and even destabilizes the self of a woman. Modern narratives, as opposed to portraying identity as static, prefigure its dynamism and constant flux in relation to the maternal experience.

The motif of losing and reconstruction is repeated in the contemporary women literature. There are also plenty of stories that have created an image of motherhood as a discontinuity in the personal identity of a woman, whereby the mother loses control, space, and pre-existing self-concepts. This loss, however, is by no means always cast in negative terms, it frequently appears the point at which re-imagination crystallizes. There are texts that explain how mothers spend time negotiating collective identities of their pre-parental selves and emergent identity created by motherhood. Feminist research argues that these representations play off with essentialist womenhood by reinforcing the idea that maternal identity is produced via experience not through biological fate.

One of the major conflicts in modern literature is the conflict between womanhood and career choice. Moms who struggle to juggle domestic and intellectual, professional, or creative life ambitions are frequently depicted in the works of women writers. This tension prefigures the going on tendency of social structures to privilege maternal sacrifice more than female ambition. Using a powerful feminist analysis, Susan Stanford Friedman states that the creativity of women is often

[16] Rose, Jacqueline. (2018). Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty. London: Faber & Faber, pp. 12–14.

constrained by cultural norms about motherhood, thus constructing the idea of ambition as being incompatible with motherly homage (Friedman, 1985)[17]. This criticism is reflected in literary stories that show the mothers who feel guilty of their career ambitions or creative activities but are not ready to give up these dreams completely.

The intersection of motherhood and creativity gains a certain importance to the writing of women. The previous literary traditions used to place motherhood in the way of creativity, which presupposed that the creation of any artistic work needed to be freed out of family obligations. In order to break this dichotomy, contemporary authors expose how motherhood may be both inhibiting and encouraging to artistic expression. Writing, art as well as intellectual work are displayed in materials where mothers gain control and voice their fragmented identities. Maternal subjects fight against erasure and insist on their continued existence as desiring, thinking beings through creative practice.

Furthermore, the prose written by women explains the reconstruction of identity through the process of motherhood which is characterized by gendered expectations and power relations. According to feminist scholars, there is no solitary formation of maternal identity but rather a cultural scaffold where the time, work, and emotional distribution of women is determined. According to Ellyn Kaschak, the identity of women is relational, social, and this makes motherhood a highly acute location of identity negotiation (Kaschak, 1992)[18]. Such complexity in relationships is represented in literary work, as it shows the concept of motherhood as a continuing conversation between selfhood and responsibility.

Overall, the writing of women in the 21st century is a redefinition of the concept of motherhood in the context of identity formation in lieu of loss of identity. Through the theme of ambition, creativity, and emotional negotiation, modern literature confirms the statement that maternal selfhood does not have to extinguish individual desire and intellectual development. These stories question the limiting categories of culture and provide a more encompassing view of the female identity which is based, though not determined by motherhood.

VII. Body, Sexuality and Motherhood.

Female body is at the center of modern discourse in motherhood, especially in the 21 st century women literature. Mothers have to manoeuvre not just the physical needs of pregnancy and childbirth but also the social norms of appearance, sexuality and control of their bodies. Literature is progressively questioning the way of how motherhood shapes, spaces and changes the relationship of women with their bodies, which highlights the conflict between the cultural standards and reality. These stories make the maternal experience human by offering the body not as a site of reproduction, but as an agentic, vulnerable, and defining site.

The concept of bodily autonomy is an important one in the contemporary depiction of motherhood. Women authors predict how mothers should have dominant control over their bodies but in many instances they are curtailed by cultural, medical, and family pressures. The choices related to pregnancy, birth and postpartum services are often influenced by outside forces, including those of medical workers or the existing social conventions. In a study of the medicalization of childbirth by feminist scholar Emily Martin, it is revealed to be a rather contentious arena where the autonomous power of the female body is challenged and argues that the practices within a hospital often

[17] Friedman, Susan Stanford. (1985). "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse." Feminist Studies, 11(1), pp. 1–19.

[18] Kaschak, Ellyn. (1992). "Engendered Lives: A New Psychology of Women's Experience." Journal of Women in Culture and Society (Signs), 17(1), pp. 66–68.

undercut the power of the female (Martin, 1987)[19]. Literary texts reflect this conflict through narratives of mothers who oppose, bargain or imaginatively rewrite social domination of their bodies thus claiming personal agency within the restrictive calculations.

Pregnancy and control in the body also form a critical thread. The modern discourse of pregnancy is empowering and challenging and provides women with a complicated experience of physical and emotional involvement with their offspring, at the same time emphasizing vulnerability, pain, and exhaustion. Mothers who have to balance the needs that belong to themselves physically and those that society (or pregnancy, health care facilities) or family requires of them are a common theme in literature. These representations are problematic in that they challenge the idealized idea of pregnancy as something unproblematic and instinctual, prefigure its actuality and the necessary ability, patience, and endurance.

Another meaningful field of study in modern day literature is sexual identity after motherhood. Motherhood may reinvent the experiences of desire, intimacy and sexual expression among women, sometimes creating a new relational knowledge and in other cases creating tension or alienation to the formerly possessed sexuality. According to literary critics, the prose of women is increasingly concerned with sexual identity continuation beyond the reproductive role, therefore, undermining the narratives of mothers as the nursing or asexual animals. According to feminist theorist, Andrea O'Reilly, the recognition of sexual identity and maternal identity allows to use a more holistic and realistic understanding of what women are going through with their lives (O'Reilly, 2010)[20]. Modern literature portrays this balance as a subtle one and shows how a woman recovers intimacy and enjoyment as a post-mom-selfhood.

Finally, female literature of the 21 st century shows the maternal body as a site of negotiation, resistance and identity. Offering the perspectives of autonomy with the body, control in pregnancy, and sexual identity in the aftermaths of motherhood, the modern stories reject the simplistic cultural scripts that limit women to the roles of childbearer and childcaregiver. These literary figures assert that mothers are independent, sexual, and embodied individuals who are able to exist within the realm of biology, society and the personal desire.

VIII. Socio-Cultural Contexts

It would be wrong to consider motherhood as an independent experience; the phenomenon is carefully interwoven with socio-cultural, economic, and geographic material. In the literature writing of the twenty-first century, the co-construction of maternal realities between and among class, race, caste, and locality are increasingly challenged, according to which motherhood is a construct of social category as much as it is a biological or an affective category. Through maternal stories found in these wider settings, modern literature sheds bright light on the various stresses, demands, and obstacles faced by mothers living in various sociocultural environments.

The lived experience of motherhood as well as the representation of it in literature is greatly influenced by class and economic determinants. Not only the pragmatic but also the affective aspects of the maternal life are determined by such factors as financial stability, access to healthcare, and the availability of social support systems. Women with economically marginalized backgrounds are often subjected to secondary stress, lack of resources, and social judgment, which are reflected in the literature in subtle ways of motherly suffering and resilience. Arlene Skolnick, a sociologist, has observed that the maternal self cannot be disconnected with the socioeconomic

[19] Martin, Emily. (1987). The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 24–27.

[20] O'Reilly, Andrea. (2010). Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering. Toronto: Demeter Press, pp. 42–45.

environment as structural disparities directly shape the parenting experiences (Skolnick, 1992)[21]. Modern stories, in this respect, are about the role of class not only in the day-to-day caregiving, but also in autonomy, decision-making, and self-conception.

Hierarchies of race and caste and cultural identity as well affect maternal identity by establishing specific social norms and expectations. In multicultural societies mothers have to live in parallel prescriptions about behavior, morality, and family requirements. The literary material is enlightening about the ways in which racialized or caste-specific expectations form the maternal behavior, emotional expression, and opportunity. As an example, authors belonging to the subordinated groups usually depict motherhood as both a place of oppression and strength, balancing between the conventional set of norms and establishing control. Feminist sociological thought argues that these interlocking identities lead to differentiated experiences of motherhood, which cannot be homogenized across the people (Bhattacharya, 2005)[22]. Therefore, literature acts as a key intermedia operation of multiplicating values of different voices of mothers and challenging monolithic images of motherhood.

Maternal experience is also moderated by geographic and environmental context including rural vs. urban dichotomy. The city mothers might struggle with the demands of their careers, nuclear family settings, and social alienation, the country mothers are used to managing the community, have to face the lack of infrastructure, and work with traditional gender scripts. The juxtapositions of women literature mirror these foregrounding, distinct challenges, mechanisms of coping, and support systems that are inherent to specific places. These descriptions show that motherhood is mediated by physical space in the same manner that it is mediated by social expectations, thus it requires a sensitivity to context in order to examine maternal identities.

Overall, the socio-cultural determinants, the class, economic conditions, race, caste, culture, and geography intersect in a complex manner and influence the contemporary maternal experiences. The twenty-first century literature on women explains the role of these variables on maternal labour, autonomy, affective well-being, and social perception. In such a manner, by attending to these contextual layers, literary texts do not just humanise motherhood, but make it unstable, a universalised or idealised story, offering it as a socially and culturally situated phenomenon. This analytical position anticipates the need of the intersectional examination to comprehend the diversity and complexity of maternal life in the modern literature.

IX. Literature Representation and Textual Analysis.

The prose of contemporary women has provided an interesting and diverse landscape to explore the question of motherhood, using maternal characters as multiplexed beings, whose emotional, social, and psychological conditions swing. The fiction of the 21 st century continues to reinforce the stereotypes of ordinary awareness by giving the mothers narrative agency of their own, focusing on interiority and examining the interaction between social expectations and self-identification. This part will analyze how the characters of mothers are brought out with their modalities, the voices of narration through which their experiences are expressed, and some comparative analysis between authors.

Moms in these works are often portrayed as nurturers and as independent people, skillfully combining family obligation with personal dreams. The idealistic attitude to maternal devotion prevalent in the earlier literature, which promoted this as self-sacrificing and homogenous, has been

[21] Skolnick, Arlene S. (1992). Embattled Families: The Impact of Class on Motherhood. New York: Basic Books, pp. 59–62.

[22] Bhattacharya, Sangeeta. (2005). Motherhood in Postcolonial India: Social, Cultural, and Political Perspectives. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 14–16.

replaced by the modern literature which confronts the idea of mothers who are ambivalent, weary and conflicted as well as loving and satisfaction seeking. As an example, female authors tend to make maternal labour a physically and emotionally demanding process, which presents the truth of the so-called second shift, which mothers have to face when balancing between the household and the workplace (Hochschild, 1989,)[23]. These images make mothers more human, and not moralised or sentimentalised as in the previous centuries.

Narrative voice is an important tool used critically in shaping the representation of motherhood in literature. The authors of the contemporary period use first-person, interior monologue, and fragmentation in narration as a way of predicting the subjectivity of mothers. Offering the mothers the narrative authority, the writers grant their readers direct access to their thoughts, feelings and difficulties, which helps to empathize and have a well-developed understanding of the maternal condition. It is also noted that these narrative techniques enable mothers to exercise ambivalence, resistance and agency and thus challenge the past marginalisation of maternal voices in literature (Merish, 2007,)[24]. This kind of approach makes maternal identity a highly negotiated and deeply personalized phenomenon and not a fixed social role.

A comparative study of female authors demonstrates that the cultural, social, and ideological environment affects the images of motherhood. Western writers can anticipate personal independence, careerism, and imaginative self-expression, but non-Western writers often place motherhood in family, community, and sociocultural contexts that place greater emphasis on classes, caste and gender labour roles. Nevertheless, in spite of these deviations, a similar tendency occurs: mothers are no longer silent or idealised beings but producers of narrative meaning as co-constructors. The literary text thus offers a space upon which to interrogate intersectional aspects of motherhood and the many facets of the maternal experience.

In addition, the modern women literature also tends to contrast various maternal views in one piece of literature or in different works, allowing a reader to see differences in emotional, social, and cultural knowledge. This comparative modality sheds light on the intersection of motherhood with gender, class, and identity as well as highlights the topics of world care and sacrifice and selfhood that are universal. As a result, the literary representation serves as the account of life of a mother, as well as a critical glass through which we can examine the expectations of the society.

To summarize, the literary portrayal and textuality of mothers in modern fiction displays subtle reenactment of maternal identity, affections, and social negotiation. The women writers empower the mothers and disrupt the stereotypes attached to them by giving them the narrative authority and also by examining their different experiences, the women writers add to the literature knowledge of women who are mothers. Comparative research also sheds some light on how these representations are conditioned by different cultural, social, and ideological contexts, and consequently, contribute to a more inclusive and more real understanding of maternal life.

XI. Conclusion

This question explores the characterization of motherhood in twenty first century women authors, presupposing the heterogenic, polyphonic, and unstable character of the maternal experience in the contemporary literary culture. In the sections we have established that motherhood is not a monolithic or idyllic archetype; it is more aptly understood as a multidimensional, socially constructed and affectively complex phenomenon.

[23] Hochschild, Arlie Russell. (1989). The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home. New York: Viking Penguin, pp. 15–18.

[24] Merish, Lori. (2007). "Maternal Voices and Narrative Authority in Contemporary Women's Fiction." Women's Studies Quarterly, 35(1/2), pp. 112–114.

The main findings prove that modern female writers are systematically challenging the reductive images depriving mothers of individuality, sexuality, and complete devotion. On the other hand, maternal figures also appear as self-reliant within the conflicts between personal aspiration, creativity, social demands, and family relationships. Motherly ambivalence is revealed as a characteristic feature of these texts delineating the ecstasy and the burden involved into maternalhood.

The contribution of this study to the feminist literary criticism and the emerging disciplines of motherhood studies further increase the relevance of this study. Incorporating feminist literary theory, gender and identity scholarship, and social constructivist approaches to motherhood, the analysis shows in which ways literature functions as a reflection and as a critique of the current societal views on maternal life.

Besides that, the study demonstrates that literary portrayals of motherhood provide valuable analytical resources on the emotional and psychological repertoire of mothers, including anxiety, guilt, exhaustion and postpartum mental health issues. The voices of mothers are presented as narratives that have the authoritative quality and the necessity of authenticity and verisimilitude in narrative storytelling.

Future academic activities must delve into the cross cultures variation in an attempt to identify the location of motherhood in different linguistic, national, and postcolonial literary societies. Furthermore, such studies as interrogation of marginalized maternal identities, including women with disabilities, queer parents, and migrant or diasporic mothers, will inform us. Interdisciplinary research that combines literature, psychology, sociology as well as cultural research is likely to enhance understanding into the interaction of maternal identity, mental health and social expectations.

To sum up, the writing of the twenty first century women reinvents the concept of motherhood as a participatory, socially constructed and affectively profound experience. Describing mothers as multidimensional negotiators of joy, burden, ambition and cultural expectation, modern literature demolishes stereotypes, extends feminist discourse, and provides a fine-tuned understanding of the identity of a mother. This work is a confirmation of the relevance of literature studies in recording and questioning the experiences of mothers and directing the way forward in the future.

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