



Jadavpur University
Department of Sociology

Title: - Portrayal of Mother - Child Relationship: A Sociological Study of Paintings

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Exam Roll No.- MPSO194006

Reg. No.- 142309 of 2017-18

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Philosophy in Sociology

Under the supervision of

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May, 2019

Acknowledgement

At the outset I would like to thank my supervisor, **Dr. Saswati Halder. Associate Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University** I am greatly indebted to her for taking me under her wings for this research work and continuously guiding me in varied ways to complete the dissertation.

I must also take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to our HOD and MPhil. coordinator Dr. Piyali Sur for making me aware of the UGC guidelines related to MPhil. dissertation. The West Bengal Government has also provided immense financial support through scholarship for the completion of this dissertation.

This project would not have been completed without the narratives of the mothers I interviewed and all the esteemed painters I had an opportunity to interview, who provided me with the much needed knowledge of art and artists, required for my dissertation.

Any shortcomings in this dissertation is entirely my responsibility.

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Introduction

In, *Stabat Mater* (1977) Julia Kristeva asserts, “A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language- and it has always been so” (The Portable Kristeva, 2002). The mother as a woman is detached from her voice as a subject, from the language which constructs her identity because it is through the speaking that self becomes self-aware and realised. Kristeva here through the loss of language states how women’s identity is merged with fulfilling duties as a mother through the release of tears and milk. She finds the fate of women analogous to the depictions of the Madonna in the mediaeval art- the figure who must suffer the disappearance of the self for the continuation of the human species. The woman gets alienated from her body and herself only to bear another body then to have him detached from herself. The child born out of the mother’s womb becomes the part of the patriarchal social structure on which she does not have any control. She just remains as a passive and silent mother to the child who is only meant to take care of his various needs. The “biological necessity to become a mother” (2002:307) for a woman is imperative in a society to bring in a new life when the old ends so the task of reproduction which has been given to women must be carried on even though the sadness of separation and loss of self looms largely on them. This has been explained by Kristeva through the weeping of mother Mary over the death of Christ, when she saw a part of her flesh which was once in her womb detached, a part of her self died too. A woman’s life reduced to nurturing and mourning; milk and tears. Kristeva laments that the Virgin here witnesses the creation as well as the destruction of her own product but her production is never acknowledged as even Jesus did not thank his mother who was present with him at both his entrance and exit from the world. Instead he cried to his father in his moment of weakness hence he failed to acknowledge his mother’s silent tears at his feet. The mother here asks her child “why art thou forsaken me?”. It is the mother who sacrifices her entire life for her children, yet here Jesus failed to thank his mother for all that she has gone through her entire life for his sake. The mother’s loss and suffering is not recognised here even by her own child, the loss that she has suffered multiple times from herself and also her child. Hence there remained “an abyss between the mother and the child” throughout (2002:324).

The sweet and sublime bond between mother and child has been a favourite theme amongst the painters for centuries who have mostly depicted this through the paintings of Mother Mary and Christ child. Almost all the painters have painted the most ideal bond between these two heavenly bodies. The renaissance period is known for the paintings of the Virgin and Child, which romantically depicts the images of nursing Madonna or Mother Mary lovingly looking at child Jesus. The paintings are glorified and celebrated as the ultimate depiction of pure love between a mother and a child. The paintings are a representation of the powerful biological role of a woman-to bear and rear a child; to become a mother. To fulfil this duty without any lacking the mothers were shown these images of the Virgin and Child, the Virgin as the ideal mother who would sacrifice anything and everything for her child. The figures in the paintings in the later centuries took earthlier forms but the bond between them remained the same that of an ideal mother and her child. But who forms the conception of the ideal mother and her duties? I say, it is the patriarchal society and the consequences of the pattern of socialisation that develops this unreal, idealistic standards of motherhood. The body of the mother in a patriarchal society is nothing more than a machine made for reproduction and then taking care of that product. All other identities of a woman are drowned in the ocean of motherhood. If we

look closely at the bearing and rearing process of a woman we would find all the paintings that depict the bond between mother and child as a trouble-free ideal one would appear to be superficial. A mother has to go through a lot to bring a child into this world and then to rear him to turn him into a capable human being. The initiation of motherhood that is, pregnancy begins with a sense of loss of self and the woman completely disappears from the body once the child is out of her womb- she is now a mother. There is nothing to eulogise in this as the paintings do, the loss of self means the loss of subjectivity, autonomy, agency and then finally the human being herself. Hence the paintings that depict the fantastic bond between the mother and her child is nothing but a product of patriarchy made out of misogynistic definitions of motherhood. There is no acknowledgement in these paintings of the hardships the mothers have to go through in the onerous task of bearing and rearing the child, the physical and mental trauma, the frustration of losing herself in the name of motherhood. The paintings only promote what the patriarchal society expects from a woman- to get married, bear children, stay at home to take care of them and the family so that men can go out and exert their independence and autonomy. A woman is expected to sacrifice all her desires and dreams only in the end to get a reward like Kristeva's Mary, who fails to even get recognised as a mother and for all her sufferings by her own child who remembers his father and not his mother at the time of crucifixion. Why do we then celebrate the everlasting bond of happiness between Mary and her child in the paintings, why should the mothers emulate the perfect Madonna? It is simple to assume here that the mothers are expected to dutifully perform their biological and social duties as a mother without any expectation of acknowledgement from her family members, the society and even her child. The paintings belie these painful and disturbing realities of mothering behind the smiling face of Madonna. In reality, women have always been subjugated and oppressed by the society in the name of motherhood. It is the society or the patriarchal society to be precise which has always defined what motherhood is and what it entails. The mother image of women has been politicised by men to achieve their own purpose thereby confining women to the domestic sphere, where women lost their individuality, selfhood and agency. Even today a child is considered a mother's responsibility where the woman is expected to make all kinds of sacrifices for the proper caring and rearing of the child, only to be identified by the father's name in the society. Hence these paintings only add to the myth associated with motherhood- that it is instinctive and the ultimate source of fulfilment and satisfaction for women, as if they have no other desire than to be a mother. The challenges, perplexities and pains of motherhood get no attention in these paintings as if they don't exist. The gruelling challenges, difficulties, melancholy, complexities and ambiguities are as much part of motherhood as the pleasures, satisfaction, joy and excitement are. Only few painters like Alice Neel, Kathe Kollwitz, Frida Kahlo have depicted the disturbing, difficult and mundane side of motherhood which subverts the many fantasies created around the mother-figure. By showing the stark reality of childbirth and rearing in their paintings they have not only challenged the biological essentialism and the patriarchal construction of the ideal mother but they have also acknowledged the sacrifices mothers make for their children and their families and the sufferings they go through for the same. From the beginning of feminism many feminists too have waged a war against the presumption that motherhood is an intrinsic part of a woman's personality and that they are only capable of doing that. Feminists have asserted that women are capable of many more things if they can escape from the patriarchal trap of maternity and use their agentic skills to achieve their autonomy. No feminist has ever rejected the maternal desire but they have only stated that women have various other desires like sexual,

economic independence, intellectual freedom and most importantly to have an identity of their own which is separate from a daughter, a wife and a mother.

The objective of my paper is to not wholly discard the emotions like caring and nurturing depicted in the paintings by most of the painters but to show how the sentiments of women are used as a tool of repression to subjugate and confine women in the domain of motherhood which silences their voices and kills their autonomy. The paintings too become a mode of dominance with which the society tries to impose unattainable idealistic standards on mothers. The carefree bond of mother and child depicted in the paintings in reality is not so untroubled as mostly the mothers alone have to take up all the rearing responsibilities of the child which makes it onerous, difficult, challenging and too exhausting for the mothers to be sweet, sublime and trouble-free. The paintings needless to say are very romanticised made for aesthetic appeal and are too far away from reality. In the backdrop as aforesaid my research questions are as to why most of the painters throughout the ages have depicted by their artistic creations primarily the aesthetic and romantic side of mother and child relationship and not the mundane and demanding side of this relationship? Is it not that the reality gets veiled behind the rich strokes of the painter's brush? Do the mothers share the same vision as the artists do regarding their relationship with their infants or they have a different picture to reveal? Does the society by imposing idealistic standards of motherhood on mothers ruin the relationship that could have otherwise been more akin to the proper spirit of relationship?

I would through my study also like to provide insights into the fact that though it is through the discourse of feminism topics of motherhood and mothering came into focus as an area of social research but with time the area has been declared unworthy of scrutiny. Noted feminists had questioned the social process that viewed motherhood in stereotypical ways and challenged the presumption of biological determinism and essentialist reading of the self. But now there is marginalisation of motherhood studies in feminism thereby neglecting mothers, their experiences and needs, desires and struggles, which were once central to feminist thought. My aim here is to usher in a new era of research in motherhood studies in the field of feminism which would help in ending the prevailing stereotypical gendered parenting style and to ensure structural and material equalities to the mothers of 21st century and beyond.

My dissertation is a theory-based empirical work. For the collection of data, I have chosen a qualitative method of recorded interviews with the help of semi-structured questionnaires meant for the two groups of participants- one the painters and the other middle and upper-middle class mothers of children aged between new-born to 15 years.

For the purpose of my study I directly interviewed some of the very renowned and reputed artists of Bengal like Prof. Manjari Chakravarti of Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan, Prof. Parag Ray, HOD and Dean of Fine Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata; Sri Debabrata Chakrabarty of The Statesman and Mriganka Law, formerly of Art College and now a freelance artist. The questionnaire was structured with some very poignant and articulate questions on paintings and culture to get an insight on what painters feel about the various representations of the mother and child theme in paintings throughout the ages. Apart from Prof. Manjari Chakravarti whom I had to mail the questions due to geographical distance, I had an opportunity to interview all the esteemed and respected painters directly. The questionnaire was an unstructured one and I had given all the painters the liberty to exceed beyond the scope and limitations of the questions to freely express their opinions. They not only helped me by

providing their valuable opinions on the mother-child theme, but they also introduced me to artistic sensibilities and vision while dealing with a particular theme. Their revelation of the knowledge of art and artistic techniques unique to them were of immense help to me to understand a painter's perspective.

Since motherhood is a sensitive and emotional aspect of a woman's life I preferred the interviews with the mothers to be a free-wheeling one while observing them in their domestic setting along with their child/children. Even though I had a semi-structured questionnaire in my mind I preferred to listen to the narratives presented by the mothers regarding motherhood, womanhood, self, identity, autonomy and agency. The mothers I interviewed are all well-educated belonging to the middle and upper-middle class stratum of the society. The participants are of different religious and linguistic backgrounds. Some are working professionals while others are house-wives. My respondents candidly narrated their trajectory of motherhood starting from the pregnancy, birth of their children to their rearing experiences which they described with a lot of enthusiasm as if they had been wanting to share their stories with someone who would bother to listen. I have also used some diary entries and letters of mothers of 18th and 19th century as my data and also some of the narratives of mothers I found on the internet which I assure are authentic. Interview was the best tool possible to gather data from the painters as well as the mothers. This method of data collection has been used in similar studies conducted before so the reliability of this method is tried and tested. I had an opportunity to interview fifteen mothers for my study which took the format of snow ball sampling, due to time limitation I could not exceed that number. I had also recorded the interviews of both the painters and the mothers for future reference and analysis of my data. The painters did not have any objection with mentioning their names in my study however, the mothers were a little hesitant. Therefore, I have purposely omitted the usage of any name in the narratives of the mothers I used in my study to avoid any coincidence. The interviewing as a method of data collection met with my requirement especially with the mothers. The objective was to elicit the personal details about mothering without hurting the dignity and the integrity of my respondents. My decisions to free them from any rigid set of questions proved beneficial to me as the narratives rolled without any hindrance in the absence of too much interruption. But it is important to mention the disadvantages I faced while using interview as my research technique. Taking personal interviews is very time-consuming and hectic. I had to visit the houses of the mothers to take the interviews which took a lot of time and energy. Since the interviews were taken in the natural setting that is, the participant mothers' houses, most of my respondents excused themselves several times to attend to their children and other household responsibilities, this clearly shows how difficult it is for mothers of small children to invest time in any other activity along with motherly role and doing domestic chores. But fortunately this did not affect the narratives as I have already mentioned they rolled freely as the mothers kept narrating their stories while doing their works. Again due to time limitation I could not interview women who do not have children, their experiences and stories pertaining to motherhood could have added a new and interesting dimension to my project. If I get an opportunity to work on this thesis again in the future, I would definitely add their narratives to my study to get a better understanding of motherhood from the perspective of both mothers and non-mothers.

The shortcoming in my opinion of this dissertation is that I have asserted that motherhood is a universal concept but based my project on western culture and traditions of motherhood and

interviewed mothers of an eastern country, India, in my home-city, Kolkata. The ideal sample should include narratives of mothers and painters of both- occident and orient. And also an analysis of the cultures belonging to both east and west would have been appropriate for my study, but that would have gone beyond the scope of this project.

For the purpose of my study I have divided my thesis into three chapters-

Chapter One- Evolving Ideas of Mother and Child Relationship in Paintings

In this chapter I have traced the history of mother-child themed paintings focusing on the renaissance period down to the present generation. The painters I have studied in detail are the three renaissance giants namely Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael. These painters painted theological images of Mary and the Christ Child and not real life mother-child. For these Renaissance painters the bond of affection and love that the Virgin and Child share is the example of an ideal mother-child relationship. According to them Mary is a perfect mother because she always loves and cares for her child, she never leaves him until they are separated by his death. The renaissance images of Mary and Christ mostly portrayed Mother Mary nursing her remarkably large and healthy baby with an expression of tranquil affection on her face as she watches her baby while feeding as can be seen in Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna Litta* (ca. 1490) and Michelangelo's *The Madonna of the Steps* (1489-90 or ca. 1495-96). The other theme of Mary and Christ Child painted by the artists was the child merrily playing in the presence of saints and angels while Mother Mary affectionately gazing at him as depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in his painting *Madonna with Child and Saint Anne*.

The two other painters of the later centuries who have excelled at the theme of mother-child and whose works I have discussed at great length are Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt to show how the evangelical and patriarchal influences have continued to dominate the paintings of mother-child. These women painters showed the mother and child in more contemporary circumstances, emphasizing and examining carefully the psychological relation between the mother and child. They mostly used their close relatives, neighbours and their children as models. Although these artists claimed that their paintings of mother and child are free from religious, mythological and historical constraints a tint and nuance of the Virgin-Child theme can be seen in them which reflect a happy mother and a cheerful child. They mostly captured the moments of affection and joy in a mother-child relationship in her paintings like a mother nursing her child, kissing, admiring or merrily playing with him or her, which is quite analogous to the images of the Virgin and Child of the renaissance period.

Lastly, I would be analyzing the paintings of Alice Neel, a 20th century painter, Manjari Chakravarty and Gogi Saroj Pal of the 21st century to depict the evolution in the mother-child theme in paintings. Alice Neel of the very few painters she is one such painter who in a very gripping manner captured and depicted mother-child relationship through her paintings in a realistic manner. According to her the Madonna-Child inspired images of romantic, artfully-staged portraits of mother and children- Cherubic, irresistible children and serene, smiling mothers are inviting to look at as they offer us the fantasy of a privileged ideal but these images belie the messy realities of mothering and raising children. Neel was never afraid to reveal besides the compassion and happiness that mothers experience, the fears, conflicts and ambivalences women face as mothers. Her portraits of mother-child unreservedly challenged the social norms and transgressed the art tradition of the Madonna and Child, she critiqued this over glorified and eulogized theme of mother-child painting and the social construct of mother

as it shifted over better part of the twentieth-century. She consistently made the real life experiences of mother-child relationship be it of struggle or affection as one of the most important subjects of her paintings. And through the analysis of the data I have collected from the interviews of the painters and the paintings of Gogi Saroj Pal and Manajri Chakravarti I have brought to the fore how the theme of mother-child is receding from the paintings especially of women artists who are now more keen on glorifying womanhood rather than motherhood through their paintings like 'Being a Woman and Relationship' and 'Female Bondage'.

Chapter Two- Paintings and Pangs of Childbirth

This chapter traces the trajectory of Childbirth from pregnancy to nurturing which I have analysed through paintings and various theories. The chapter also includes a comparison of the Suckling Paintings of the Renaissance painters and of the 19th century painters Morisot and Cassatt with some pre-existing literature on child-birth and nursing and with accounts of the real life experiences of nursing gained from the narratives of the mothers I interviewed. I have also used Julia Kriteva's theory of abjection to understand the maternal experiences of birthing and nursing and the projection of the maternal body as a site of horror in the patriarchal society.

Chapter Three- Autonomy, Subjectivity and Agency of Mothers

In this chapter I have re-established Lee Drummond's saying, "Far from being 'the most natural thing in the world,' motherhood is in fact one of the most unnatural". (Drummond, 1978: 31) This chapter goes on to explain how motherhood is a product of socialisation of the male-dominated society and not a spontaneous behavioural pattern. In her study of women's social and moral development, Carol Gilligan writes that "women's sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection". (Gilligan, 1982:171) According to her this reliance of females upon the connection with others and this subordination of selfhood arise from the social landscapes of childhood and not from an innate proneness. Women are socialized in such a way by the family and society that they consider looking after their child and husband as not only their duty but the sole reason of their existence. In the process women as mothers often lose their individuality, autonomy and agency. They forget or are made to forget that they have a life beyond their children and family to live for which is also revealed by the narratives of the mothers I interviewed. I have applied Beauvorian ideas of feminism to challenge the biological essentialism in the construction of female identity and the loss of subjectivity in women as a consequence of motherhood.

The Conclusion of my thesis is an analysis of the concept of autonomy in women and especially in mothers to understand how far women/mothers can exercise autonomy in a patriarchal set up. For this I have used Catharine MacKinnon's theory of 'dominance feminism' and Kathryn Abrams' theory of 'agency' to highlight how women use their agentic skills to exercise autonomy in the patriarchal society which tries to bind women/mother in the domestic sphere. In this chapter I also deal with the question why painters do not generally portray the difficult side of mothering, do the painters too lack agency and autonomy like the mothers or do they purposely wish to remain oblivious to the conditions of mothers in the patriarchal society?

I concluded my dissertation with an argument that the condition of motherhood has not yet improved much despite the many efforts on the part of feminists and the governments, women

still are subjugated, oppressed and dominated in the society. To bring an end to the coercive treatment towards women as mothers 'a new discipline of motherhood' has to be established in O Reilly's term for that new research studies have to be conducted in this direction which would aim to spread awareness and educate people and the government about the existing inequalities being practiced within the domestic sphere.



We Are the Same but We Are Different
Courtesy- Mother and Child in Art (1992)

Chapter One

Evolving Ideas of Mother and Child in Paintings

From the most primitive time down to the present age mother and child relationship is considered as the only selfless relationship, except this all the relationships among mankind are hinged on some reciprocity even in an inchoate form. Many painters of all ages and of all countries, since time immemorial undertook an eternal journey in the quest for finding this sublime, the most innocent and the perfect idea of beauty in its most selfless and authentic form. They have expressed and depicted this aestheticism through their paintings of mother and child.

The image of the mother and child invokes feelings of love, warmth, and protection. Throughout the history of art these mother and child images have been a symbolic idea of creativity, fecundity and maternity. From Paleolithic period representing maternity through the figure of the Goddess of Fertility to the present epoch the mother and child image has recurrently established the theme as empowering and symbolic. The *Venus of Willendorf* found in the Paleolithic age is a small, rough stone sculpture with rounded thighs and belly, her swollen, large breasts and curvaceous figure signify an abstract concept of fertility. The people of this civilization worshipped this mother-figure for continued prosperity and survival. With changes in the societies, the mother and child images became more nuanced but the meaning and symbolism attributed to the theme remained unchanged.

The essence of the mother and child relation is universal in nature where the mother is the bearer, protector and nurturer of the child. The sublime relationship of mother and child supposedly according to popular belief surmounts and transcends all barriers of caste, creed, race, religion, class and geographical boundaries as can be seen in the Painting *We Are The Same But We Are Different, 1987* by Charleen Touchette. The painting shows four women of different origins namely, Asian, European, African and Native American nursing their babies of different ages in the Shade of the Tree of Life, which stands beneath the Sacred Mountain with the River of Life flowing around it. Touchette's model for the Indian circle is the Indian Medicine Wheel which includes every shade of the human being in the world and features at the four key intersections the Four colours of people. According to Indian belief everything in the universe is arranged in an interrelated manner and everyone in the circle must contribute equally to the whole to preserve harmony. The mothers' role in this circle is to fulfil her duty as the carrier and protector of the progeny which will ensure the continuity of the world. Also Native Americans believe the human psyche needs art which is drawn from divine visions, inspiration and dreams which turns the symbol of reality into art to inspire the people to incorporate them into the behavior of everyday life. The idea of divinity in the mother and child relationship finds its expression in the theological paintings of Mary and Christ child which serves as an inspiration to earthly mother and child. This idea was widely accepted and prescribed in the Renaissance period. Even though the theme of mother and child is one of the oldest and continuously treated themes in the history of art the depiction of the bond between mother and child in paintings gained prominence in the Renaissance period (14th century-17th century) with the paintings of theological images of Mary and the Christ Child. In the Renaissance period women were expected to emulate the Virgin Mother in her response to her child. Renaissance women both-brides and nuns- were given dolls of the Christ Child with which to role-play as loving mother. (Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 1985:310) Renaissance parents were advised to display sacred images in their homes so that their children might be inspired by these examples of virtue. (Giovanni Bellini, 1989:94)



Madonna Litta (c.1490)
Courtesy- www.wikipedia.com

The Renaissance painters celebrated the bond of affection and love which the Virgin and Child share in their paintings. They considered their relationship to be an ideal mother-child relationship which they depicted in their mother and child themed paintings. Many famous painters of that time like Simone Martini, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo portrayed this ideal, typical psychological relationship between Mary and the Christ child in their paintings. According to them Mary is a perfect mother because she always loves and cares for her child, she never leaves him until they are separated by his death. The only apparent lapse in Mary's perfect understanding of her child which is depicted by Simone Martini in his painting *Christ Returns to his family after Debating the Doctors in the Temple* is in her inconsonant chiding of the twelve-year-old Christ who had gone to argue with the doctors in the temple without informing his earthly parents. This exception in Mary's exemplary motherhood was also exceptional in art. Simone's depiction of maternal annoyance and adolescent defiance was not how Renaissance artists chose to picture Mary's perfect motherhood or Christ's perfect childhood. The renaissance images of Mary and Christ mostly portrayed Mother Mary nursing her remarkably large and healthy baby with an expression of tranquil affection on her face as she watches her baby while feeding as can be seen in Leonardo da Vinci's *Litta Madonna* (ca. 1490), Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Suckling Madonna* (1340s) and Michelangelo's *The Madonna of the Steps* (1489-90 or ca. 1495-96). In these paintings what reflect through the conspicuous health of the infant are the best medical and theological assumptions about nursing. The child is well-nourished because he has been breast-fed and nursed by his mother. From Plutarch to Barbaro, authors asserted that the relationship between the mother and child will strengthen and a mother will come to love her child as she nurses. The mother's breast "gives a store of food that is comfortable for the infant's mouth and pleasant for it to touch and to grasp," as Plutarch explained, and Lorenzetti and Leonardo show us. "But," Plutarch continues, "there would be no benefit in [such] equipment..., if Nature had not implanted in mother's affection and care for their offspring... [W]hile the other animals have their dugs hanging loose beneath the belly, in women they grow above on the breast where mothers can kiss and embrace and fondle the infant, the reference being that the end and aim of bearing and rearing a child is not utility, but affection" (Plutarch, 1957:351). Plutarch's description of nursing seems to be a description of these paintings *avant la lettre*, in their association of nursing with love (Herlihy, 1985:120). Theologians and physicians believed that mother's milk is best for a child; it not only develops a child physically but also spiritually as milk besides nutrient also contains moral and intellectual ingredients to feed a baby and determine his development. The other theme of Mary and Christ Child painted by the artists was the child merrily playing in the presence of saints and angels while Mother Mary affectionately gazing at him as depicted by Leonardo da Vinci in his painting *Madonna with Child and Saint Anne*.

The renaissance painters I would analyze in this chapter for the purpose of my study are the three Renaissance giants- Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), born in the little Tuscan town of Vinci was awarded with a distinction for being the earliest High Renaissance Master. He was not only a painter, sculptor but was also an architect, scientist, geometrician, master of dance and music. Because of his numerous talents he is still recognized as a man of genius- a true Renaissance Man. According to the Italian art historian Giorgio Vasari Leonardo's art "...displays perfect rule, improved order, correct proportion, just design, and a most divine grace.... he may truly be said to have imparted to his figure, not beauty only, but life and movement." Leonardo da Vinci has drawn many images of Mother Mary and baby Jesus as he considered the Virgin to be the ideal mother. His Madonna exudes humility as he represented her in a mundane appearance by removing her crown and halo and the extravagant costumes which can be seen in the Byzantine paintings.



The Virgin and Child with St. Anne, (c.1503)
Courtesy- www.wikipedia.com

But of all his paintings of the Virgin and the Child the one which gained the most prominence is *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne*. The painting appears to be a pyramidal triangle formed by the figures of Saint Anne, her daughter Mary and her grandchild Jesus. The painting depicts two mothers gazing at their respective children with tenderness and child Jesus in turn looking back to smile at his mother while fondling an innocent lamb. According to art historian Cassandra Langer this painting, “mysteriously transcends what is natural and merely human. It is without immediate precedent and may be a psychological reflection of Leonardo’s own, rather than Jesus’s childhood.” The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud has scrutinized this painting in his psychobiography in great detail to understand how the painter’s illegitimate birth has affected his relationship with his mother in his early childhood. Freud’s view on Leonardo’s *Saint Anne with the Virgin and Child* reveals the painter’s emotional struggle for being illegitimate and abandoned by his mother, Caterina at a very early age to live with a wet nurse then with his father, Ser Piero da Vinci and his step mother, Donna Albeira. Leonardo was taken into his paternal home not soon after his birth but when he was about five years old because Donna Albiera could not have any child of her own.

Freud’s psychoanalytic interpretation of a childhood memory of Leonardo's suggest that Leonardo “spent the critical years of his life not by the side of his father and stepmother, but with his poor, forsaken, real mother, so that he had time to feel the absence of his father... At least three years of Leonardo's life, and perhaps five, had elapsed before he could exchange the solitary person of his mother for a parental couple. And by then it is too late. In the first three or five years of life certain impressions become fixed and ways of reacting to the outside world are established which can never be deprived of their importance by later experience” (1910:41-42). That "Leonardo spent the first years of his life alone with his mother will have been of decisive influence on the formation of his inner life" (p.42).

Freud takes interest in the painting *Saint Anne with Virgin and Child* by Leonardo as the painter in this painting has depicted two mothers- the Virgin Mary and her own mother. He suggests that Leonardo has recapitulated his own childhood in this painting because he had two mothers; first, his true mother Caterina and next a stepmother, his father's wife, Donna Albiera.

What art historian Bradley I. Collins inferred from Leonardo's painting of *St. Anne with Virgin and Child* is that it enabled Leonardo to both “recreate his past and transform it. On the one hand, he could return to a world dominated by multiple maternal figures and marked by unusual and unexpected births. On the other he could take the actual, humiliating reality of his childhood-an illegitimate birth by a peasant mother-and transfigure it. By identifying with the Christ Child, he could become the divine, not the shameful, product of an unusual pregnancy, and by identifying Caterina with the Virgin, he could undo her degradation” (Collins, 1997:167).

Collins further notes that in this painting "Mary tries to lift her son away from the lamb yet smiles as if she accepts his crucifixion. Her concerned gesture is further contradicted by St. Anne's wider smile” (p.155). As also in Leonardo's *The Madonna of the Yarn winder* which depicts the Christ Child holding the yarn winder (which is symbolic of the cross). His mother appears concerned, but she does not attempt to take the yarn winder away from him. In both the paintings Christ Child defies his mother and plays with the lamb and the yarn winder, symbolically embracing his own death. Maidani Gerard (1985) suggests that the Christ Child is enacting a sort of "fort-da" (gone-here) game with the yarn winder. Maidani Gerard here is referring to Freud's account in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud,1959). According to him, "Like the infant in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, who masters the trauma of his mother's leave-takings by throwing and recovering a reel, Leonardo's Christ Child grabs the winder in order to play with his fate”.

These paintings of Leonardo according to Collins suggest “the narcissistic defeat of Caterina's abandonment [of him] combined with a compensatory grandiosity reinforced by Leonardo's



Madonna of the Steps (c.1491)
Courtesy- Wikipedia.co

actual accomplishments as an artist" (p.156). If the Christ Child reaches for the yarn winder, in consequence of such abandonment, Leonardo will approach the artist's brush. Leonardo as a child may have suffered irreversible defeat, but, through his artistic sketch of the "gone-here" game, he will at least be able to depict the tale from his own point of view, for such are the powers of artistic projection. As Leonardo writes in a notebook entry, "If the painter wishes to see beauties that would enrapture him, he is master of their production... he is their lord and god" (da Vinci, 1989:32). The mother can abandon her boy, but her artist son can make her re-appear in whatever guise he chooses. But regardless of his psychological manifestations and symbolic meaning, to Langer Leonardo's painting is a glorification of motherhood and one of the first classic statements on the union of heaven and earth to emerge from the High Renaissance.

Michelangelo (1475-1564), is regarded as one of the greatest masters in the history of Italian art. Both his sculptures and paintings were inspired by the Greek and Roman tradition, which desired to capture the perfection of the human form, and the new humanist fervor of the Renaissance, which sought to permeate the human form with human emotion. What enhances the beauty of Michelangelo's subjects is the inner spirituality which he diffuses in them. Michelangelo's first representation of the Mary and Child is a nursing Madonna, *The Madonna of the Steps*. From his biography it revealed that Michelangelo too like Leonardo da Vinci has a tragic childhood as he was dispatched to a wet-nurse soon after his birth. Erik Erikson in his discussion on Michelangelo in his 1972 essay, *Play and Actuality* writes that "Michelangelo was given a wet nurse immediately after birth because his mother was too sick to take care of him. Erikson notes that "if Michelangelo had two mothers, he, alas, lost both early. He was separated from the wet nurse when he returned to his mother and then his mother died when he was six years old" (p. 317). Citing Hellmut Wohl's presentation of the sequence of the Madonna images that Michelangelo sketched, painted or sculptured, the first in his late teens (Madonna of the Steps, 1491) and the last in his late eighties (Madonna of Bruges, 1501-1504), Erikson observes that Michelangelo's Madonnas "always show a marked distance between, mother and child, ...the Madonna herself is looking away from her child, her eyes remaining inward, distant and almost sightless" (p. 317). Yet, "the very last of Michelangelo's preserved sketches of the Madonna portrays, in Wohl's word, a nearly 'conflictless' image of mother and child" as she "holds the child close to her face and he turns to her fully, attempting to embrace her with his small arms" (p. 317). Erikson concludes: "So it took the closeness of death for Michelangelo to recover what he had lost early in life". Thus, Erikson suggests that as "Michelangelo contemplated his own approaching death, the distance between the mother and her son was transcended, and the aging man regained the small boy's hope that he would never again be separated from the one who gave him life. Thus, the painting takes the old man back to the period in his life before the inevitable loss of his mother, whatever the circumstances might have been, to the period when mother and infant gazed upon one another -face-to-face -and neither turned away" (p. 318).

Raphael (1483-1520), was an Italian painter and architect and was one of the major figures of the High Renaissance who became a part of the trinity along with Leonardo and Michelangelo. He was the son of a renowned painter and poet Giovanni de' Santi, who was also his first teacher. His father loved him and wanted him to grow up to be a respectable man. In his infant years, his father made sure that he drinks only mother's milk and not that of a wet nurse. However, life was cruel to him when his parents passed away within years of each other leaving him orphaned at the age of 11. Though he had a step mother he grew up to have a nomadic life in various parts of northern Italy, spending a good deal of time in Florence which is evident from the influence of Florentine art in his paintings.



The Small-Cowper Madonna (c.1505)
Courtesy- [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Small-Cowper_Madonna)

Raphael was best known for his paintings of Madonna and for his figure compositions in the palace of the Vatican in Rome. He produced some of the most beautiful Madonnas in the history of art and his *Disputa* and the *School of Athens* have been stated as the finest examples of classical harmony in High Renaissance mural paintings. Critics have praised Raphael for the immaculacy of his designs, for the sublimity of his ideas, the elegance of his facial types, forms and drapery and also brilliance of his compositional groupings. Beautification played an important part in his paintings, especially in the Madonna and Child paintings. The gentleness and generosity of his nature got expression in the humanity with which he etched the paintings of mother and child as can be observed in his *The Small Cowper Madonna*. In this he portrayed a blond Virgin in a red robe with baby Jesus sitting on her lap grasping her neck gently while looking out at the viewers. The golden-fleshed Mary is as beautiful as the poetic landscape behind her. According to Langer, "Raphael's vision of the Virgin and Jesus and their perfect harmony with nature suggests something of the undeniable bond that all mother's share with Mother Nature. His interpretation of the mother and child theme, like that of the 19th century English painter Edward Burne-Jones, reflects a deliberate reworking of an older pagan tradition in order to make it conform to the conventions of Christianity".

From the biographies it becomes evident that none of the painters had a very romantic and ideal childhood as they were separated from their mothers either by sickness, death or social convention. Yet they chose to depict the romanticized and sublime version of motherhood in their paintings. Any society from the very beginning has liked to imagine a mother and child relationship as an innate, caring, loving, emotional, sublime and trouble-free relationship. The painters though by nature more emotional and distant were still a part of the society who subscribe to such lofty ideals of motherhood which is evident from their paintings of mother and child. Leonardo through his paintings of the charming and jovial Madonna and the playful baby Jesus shows that Mary is enjoying her motherhood. It can be suggested that behind the immediate charm of his artistic brilliance is a religious message pertaining to the ideal practices of motherhood which he wanted to spread. The bond between his virgin and Child expresses Church teachings and what it means to be a human and most importantly a mother. I have already mentioned how Renaissance mothers were advised to internalize the virgin Mary's response towards her child and in all probability the renaissance painters also propagated the same through their paintings of the mythological and religious figures of Mary and Child Jesus which idealized and romanticized the mother and child relationship. But they seem purposely oblivious to the real scenario of the Renaissance period. The paintings of the Madonna and Child were considered representations of 'exemplary maternal behavior'-what a child expects from a mother and what a mother should do to fulfill the child's expectations. But the experience of motherhood in reality was completely contrary to what renaissance people might have read or heard about it. 'The power of images is such that we forget, as perhaps their original audience forgot, the terrible disparity between the artist's vision and reality. By virtue of a (self-willed or unconscious?) suspension of disbelief, the beholder is led to accept the picture of motherhood presented by these works, an ideal picture that was often unreal.' (Rona Goffen, 1999:36) The truth is that women then considered their children as burdens; they impinged upon a woman's life at home, at court, and in the salon. (Elizabeth Badinter, 1981:58) The newborns were dispatched to country nurses who would suckle, wean and generally be responsible for their upbringing. This led to tragically high percentage of infant mortality rates, ranging from 25 to 30 percent in the half-century preceding the French Revolution. (Elizabeth Badinter, 1981:109) Therefore, the undisguised maternal tenderness and intimacy exhibited in the paintings did not apply to the real life picture of the mother and her child.

However, a change in the attitude of parents especially of mothers towards the raising of their children could be seen after the publication of Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), in which the French Novelist and Philosopher emphasized the importance of the mother as the baby's natural nurse.



The Cradle (1872)
Courtesy- [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.M.W._Turner#/media/File:The_Cradle_(1872).jpg)

Rousseau's idea of child-rearing gained importance only after a generation following its publication among the upper-class French women. Along with this the idea of maternal nursing also changed which was supported by medical opinion which advocated the usefulness and necessity of mother's milk for a child. The trend of nursing and raising their infants at home became a fashion for wealthy upper-class women which the middle-class women soon followed. Such ideas were also reinforced by the State at that time as it was believed that the politics of good motherhood and a stable family would bring peace to the State. Napoleon himself is reported to have claimed that the education of women was designed to form "mothers for their children" (Struminger). The emergence of this new phenomenon was alternatively termed as "cult of true womanhood" or "the cult of motherhood" which did not begin to diminish until well into the 20th century. This subject of 'Modern Motherhood' was used in paintings first by two woman artists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. These women painters showed the mother and child in more contemporary circumstances, emphasizing and examining carefully the psychological relation between the mother and child. These artists mostly used their close relatives, neighbours and their children as models. They also etched their own portraits with their own children. Although these artists claimed that their paintings of mother and child are free from religious, mythological and historical constraints a tint and nuance of the Virgin-Child theme can be seen in them which reflect a happy mother and a cheerful child, especially in the works of Mary Cassatt.

Berthe Morisot's paintings are a reflection of Carol Gilligan's study of women's social and moral development, where Gilligan writes that "women's sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection" (Carol Gilligan, 1982:171). According to her this reliance of females upon the connection with others and this subordination of selfhood arise from the social landscapes of childhood and not from an innate proneness. Women are socialized in such a way by the family and society that they consider looking after their child and husband as not only their duty but the sole reasons of their existence. The idea of women's role in family and for that matter in the society during the French Revolution gained momentum and came into more prominence in the 19th century Europe when women came to be regarded as domestic beings and their place in the family according to the then societal expectations was the home and the hearth. Women were expected to devote their time and energy in not only bearing and rearing the children but they were also responsible for the children's early education, moral development and training in societal values, norms and attitudes. Men in this society were for activities outside the home in their role primarily as breadwinners. They were also involved in political affairs outside the home and for such political and social activities of the men the women were responsible for maintaining and sustaining the peace and tranquility for their husbands and their children in the well-run households. This making women the domestic goddess was pretty much practiced all over the world around that time.

Morisot was an important figure in the founding of Impressionism as a movement and had been a strong and encouraging influence on other female impressionist painters like Mary Cassatt. She in her paintings carefully and sensitively portrayed the idea of women as the child's natural nurse. She is even today known for her delicate and serene paintings of mother and child. Out of her paintings which became the most popular is her first mother and child painting *Le Berceau (The Cradle)*, which depicts her sister Edma watching over her sleeping daughter, Blanche. If the picture is studied carefully then one can see the mother is affectionately gazing at her child, her left arm bent which is a mirror image of the child's arm while the baby is sleeping in her cot. Her gesture and drawing of the curtain between the spectator and the baby suggests a feeling of protective love and a cord of intimacy between the mother and her new born child. If we consider her depiction of the mother and child relationship in paintings it will



The Mother and Sister of the Artist (1867-1870)
Courtesy- www.nga.gov



Mother About to Wash her Sleepy Child (1844-1926)
Courtesy- commons.m.wikimedia.org

appear quite ironical that throughout her life she has fought against the preconceived notions of the society about women and their role. She struggled for recognition as serious artist against her parents' will just like Mary Cassatt. She refused to accept the strictures placed on women and the lack of professional opportunities given to them when many of her contemporaries gave up their career to become wives and mothers which includes her painter sister, Edma. She was highly unusual about her decision to be a commercial artist, a mother and a wife. She delayed her marriage till the age of 33 and became a mother at 44 so that her familial responsibilities as the guardian of the house does not interfere with her artistic endeavors. Her defiance of patriarchal subjugation and the suppression of women finds expression in her painting, *The Mother and Sister of the Artist*. This was painted at the time when her sister, Edma was expecting her first child. This picture shows Edma sitting on a white couch and leaning against a pillow engrossed in her reading oblivious to her daughter's pensive mood. This painting sheds a light on the constraints that marriage places on women which is poignantly and sympathetically portrayed through the melancholy felt by Edma for having to give up a promising career as an artist to become a wife and a mother. It is quite bewildering as to why in spite of resisting the essentialist roles of women that she most of the time chose to depict the mother and child relation as defined by the patriarchal society. Presumably because of this many people inevitably saw her primarily in her traditional female roles. She could go against the set norms of marriage and motherhood but could never muster the courage to influence other women to do so. She had an opportunity to enlighten women to rise up and fight against the oppressions through her artistic creations but instead she chose to reflect the regressive mentality of the society through her paintings.

Mary Cassatt is remembered till date for her arresting portraits of mother and child in the private sphere. According to Stewart Buettner, Cassatt closely maintained the conventional, religious ideal in the format she chose for her depiction of mother and child. Cassatt was highly influenced by Morisot's portraits of mother and child but while Morisot's mother and child were to some extent physically and psychologically distant Cassatt preferred to erase that in her paintings. Cassatt's Mature scenes of *maternite* is derived from the Renaissance conception of Madonna and Child. She mostly captured the moments of affection and joy in a mother-child relationship in her paintings like a mother nursing her child, kissing, admiring or merrily playing with him or her, which is quite analogous to the images of the Virgin and Child of the renaissance period. In her paintings the child can be seen as the goal of a mother's life. "This means that mother's self-interest, her self-consciousness as being more important than child is in a retreat of humility before the importance of this future life she feels obliged to help to develop. Mary Cassatt's mothers are really dedicated to the overall well-being of their children. The disappearance of mother's faces from Cassatt's paintings of mother-child togetherness is a metaphor of this unconditional yet sublimated dedication. Her mothers as if have chosen to subordinate their self-image to the priority of their children's being" (Victor, 2010). Cassatt during her early years of education was exposed to feminism and believed in gender equality. Pollock is of the opinion that Cassatt's images of mother and child rejects sentimentality and has nothing to do with maternity. Rather her paintings revealed the tragedy and beauty of women's lives in 19th century by giving voice to the often ignored domestic sphere. But from her paintings like *Mother About to Wash her Sleepy Child* or *Young Mother with Two Children* it can be assumed that Cassatt subscribed to maternal feminism which were later accused of propagating the agendas of the patriarchal society.

Alice Neel (1900-1984), a 20th century American Painter has an interesting oeuvre of mother and child themed paintings. But her representation of the theme is unconventional and realistic in nature. Now when I say realistic it means in Langer's words, "the realistic perspective ... that



Degenerate Madonna (1930)
Courtesy- www.arthistoryproject.com

show[s] the anxiety and difficulty in the mother-child interaction". According to Alice Neel the Madonna-Child inspired images of romantic, artfully-staged portraits of mother and children- Cherubic, irresistible children and serene, smiling mothers are inviting to look at as they offer us the fantasy of a privileged ideal but these images belie the messy realities of mothering and raising children. Neel was never afraid to reveal besides the compassion and happiness that mothers experience, the fears, conflicts and ambivalences women face as mothers. Neel's portraits of mother-child unreservedly challenged the social norms and transgressed western-art tradition of the Madonna and Child, she critiqued this over glorified and eulogized theme of mother-child painting and the social construct of mother as it shifted over better part of the twentieth-century. Her *Degenerate Madonna*, a painting of a disfigured bare-breasted woman and her deformed child with a distorted head expresses Neil's rejection of the romanticized Mary and Christ Child of the Renaissance. Neil consistently made the real life experiences of mother-child relationship be it of struggle or affection as one of the most important subjects of her painting. I would like to mention here some of her paintings in which she shows the difficult and mundane side of motherhood-childrearing and childbearing shorn of any trappings of romanticism and idealism. She has tried to bring to the fore the cynical sides of mothering through her painting "The Intellectual" (1929) where Neel illustrates "her childless, actress friend Fanya Foss, in the foreground, disproportionately larger than the other women pictured, languishing in a chair with her breasts hanging out over her dress. According to Neel, she is speaking with an attentive but smaller, equally elegant, high-heeled woman beside her, "of intellectual things" In a very witty way, Neel depicts herself looking on, with three arms and three legs, as she tries to manage her small child while also attempting to participate in their conversation. The contrasting life choices of these women are made very apparent. Foss's high-brow attitude-suggested in her larger size, her appearance in the foreground of the work, and in her exaggeratedly relaxed pose-appears arid and pompous beside the mundane physical struggle Neel is having with her small child. While Neel is clearly mocking Foss's pretentiousness, she is also expressing, in a whimsical way, her own frustration at an inability to pursue intellectual matters as the mother of a small child." (Denise Bauer,2002:107) In her other painting *Nancy and Olivia*, 1967 of her daughter-in-law and her newly born daughter she vividly depicts through Nancy's young and wide-eyes the fear, fatigue and perplexity of being transforming herself from a woman to a mother with the accompanying looming fear of a crying baby the art of handling whom she was yet to learn. The face to face embrace of Nancy and Olivia symbolized the demand placed on them by their forced mutual inter-dependence. Alice Neel through this painting endeavored to suggest the profound difficulties and struggles of Nancy in becoming a new mother. This painting in its own way broke away from the typically idealized trouble-free relationship between mother and child as depicted by other artists and painters through their creations. Neel was successful in depicting in her paintings the stark reality of motherhood-the pains, sufferings and delusion often experienced by mothers.

Neel's portraits were representatives of the cultural change and the shifting ideologies around mothering in the 20th century. Feminist critique E. Ann Kaplan in her book, "Motherhood and Representation" states that a major cultural change began after World War II (1992) due to some political and the first Wave feminist movements which won for the women voting, education and working rights. It also established the idea of "Voluntary Motherhood" through the means of birth control which made motherhood an option and not a compulsion. This marked the emergence of mother "coming into subjectivity" who for so long was hiding behind the subjectivity of the father. Imbibing this newly found freedom every painting of Neel's speaks of the subjectivity of women and mothers. In her painting *Hartley on the Rocking Horse* the subject is her son's pleasure in sitting on the horse but she includes herself in the painting through her reflection on the mirror in the background. Although just a minimal representation



Hartley on the Rocking Horse (1943)
Courtesy- www.pinteret.com



Being a Woman and Relationship
Courtesy- www.dagworld.com

of herself, her inclusion marks the existence of female subjectivity, where she fuses her identities as a painter and also a mother. Neel was a single but a very loving and caring mother to her two sons. Yet she never refuted the difficult sides of mothering which she very articulately portrayed in her paintings.

Women has always been inner-directed rather than outer-directed by way of playing the familial and societal role as determined by the norms, values, attitudes and practices of a male-dominated society. They were seen as domestic beings and the house as their domain of authority, unfit for the world outside. All possible means of coercion be it visual art, literature or the popular press was used to instill this idea in the women that they were biologically designed to bearing and socially meant for rearing the offspring of men. So the women were under subjugation physically, morally and ethically. They were socialized under the patriarchal set up in such a way that their individuality, agency and subjectivity were never allowed to gain prominence and importance in the society. Therefore, the mother-child relationship can be seen as a consequence of subjugating patriarchal socialization which imposed on women and not a spontaneous and smooth behavioral pattern. Therefore, the affection and care of the mother towards the child that can be seen in the paintings of Cassatt and Morisot is not natural and instinctual rather it is imposed upon the mother through the process of socialization. Though Morisot agreed with this fact of motherhood she never portrayed this social reality in her paintings rather she chose to paint the apparent moments of joy between mother and child. It took generations of war against the society by women to assert their freedom, independence and subjectivity. Though it is axiomatically true that throughout the world maternity part of womanhood is still predominant as even today the world is pre-eminently male dominated with minor variations, certain things have changed for women today because of the efforts on the part of the women activists. These changes get echoed in the paintings of the female painters today who unabashedly portray female subjectivity and selfhood in their paintings when even during the time of Alice Neel many women painters failed to become professional artists let alone paint pictures transgressing the prevalent patriarchal norms and value system. Even Alice Neel had to struggle a lot to portray fearlessly the womanhood aspect in her paintings. The female painters of the present century are making the most out of their independence, experiences and opportunities to promote gender equality, maternal subjectivity and womanhood through their artistic creations. They are women, daughters and mothers of a fairly progressed world who have become more self-conscious, they refuse to lose their individuality by equating womanhood with motherhood. They celebrate selfhood and individual identity as an individual woman rather than as a mother. As a result, women artists of today do not have any romantic hangover about child bearing and rearing as was the case in the past as is seen in the depiction of paintings *Being a Woman and Relationship* by Gogi Saroj Pal and *Female Bondage* by Manajri Chakravarti. Thorough their paintings they have tried to glorify womanhood rather than motherhood.

The mother child theme has not absolutely faded as it is still being depicted and painted by the artists even in the present generation as according to Prof. Majari Chakrabarty, "Mother and child is a favorite theme in that it is peaceful, beautiful, and upholds what society thinks is good- a woman bringing up a child, which is a duty allocated to her by society". So as far as the sublime side of such depiction is concerned the painters I interviewed are of common opinion that patrons and the viewers of the paintings no matter how enlightened and educated they are would not want to see unromanticised side of the depiction because of the inherent and deeply ingrained belief in the psyche the sacred aspect of such relationship. Any profanity is despicable and not desirable. Any painter or sculptor trying to present any real and unromanticised aspect of such a relationship attracts the wrath of the society as has happened

in case of Navjot Altaf's sculpture *Palani's Daughter* which was exhibited at the Jehangir art gallery in Mumbai. A "massive, very realistic sculpture of a woman who gave birth to her seventh daughter, then with the help of the elder daughter, killed the infant" (Women Artists of India, 1998). Many viewers expressed their abhorrence to such depiction and refused to believe that such depiction cannot be an object of art. Therefore, it is very clear that such kinds of art would not be appreciated and patronized by the audience which means economic loss or prospect of such loss for an artist since such paintings or objects of art would not find a market. The common perception about art in the society is the aesthetic side and not the realistic side because of such reality the artists have been constrained throughout the ages to keep suppressed their urge to depict reality in its dark and gory form- which again is a reality.

The mother- child relation as a theme has declined according to the artists I interviewed because of rapid strides made in photographic art. Debarata Chakrabaty is of opinion that the rise of photography marked a major shift in the form and types of paintings as the camera records everything more fast and accurately- landscapes, portraits, nudes, still lifes, and therefore also mother and child themed paintings hence painters became keen to form a new language of art which resulted in the decline in the painting of portraits as the painters thought that such portraits could better be captured by camera than through paintings. The camera can instantly capture the affectionate moments of a mother-child relationship as well as the messy realities of mothering which is seldom possible in portrait paintings. This is evident from the pictures posted by mothers on social-networking sites now-a-days like writer and a mother of two children Wendy Wisner's *Sleep Deprived Mom* (The Huffington, 20th April, 2016) selfie posted on facebook.com and a touching photo uploaded on *facebook.com* by a woman "cradling her sick baby in the shower" (Independent. ie., 28th May, 2016) brings to the fore the raw and emotive side of motherhood.

It is worth mentioning what Prof. Parag Ray brought to my attention that the mother child theme has taken a back-seat as according to him the mother and child and family equations have changed and there is not much reason to glorify it, some male painters still depict this theme but it is somewhat absent from the works of female painters. Debarata Chakrabarty says that the reasons for such omission of the theme in female artists' paintings are that many female art graduates fail to establish their career as painters due to family engagements once they get married and the reality of motherhood and the onerous burden of child bearing and child rearing process become so much a prosaic and numbing matter for such artist mothers that the glorifying and the romantic vision of the mother and child relation recedes and sometimes gets obliterated from their artistic consciousness. Prof. Parag Rai narrated his personal life experience when he said that even though his mother was a talented artist, being an art director in an art agency got lost in the vortex of family responsibility and calling, particularly in the responsibility of bearing and rearing children. In another remove this dilemma of female artists gets reflected in a letter written by a famous Canadian female painter Lara Muntz to her niece, an aspiring sculptor, when she writes "It is such a hard life for any woman, and I wanted you to marry and have children, but you can't do both - don't try to do both". (Paul Duval, 1990:50) This issue also brings into focus as to the reason why the theme has been so romanticized in paintings as they are primarily painted by male artists who according to Prof. Manjari Chakravarti do not experience the hard realities of pangs and anxiety of child bearing and rearing. Also in the Renaissance period the paintings and sculptures of mother Mary and Christ child were mostly painted and sculpted by male painters which were commissioned by the church where the intention and scope of transgression was limited and or impossible and the painters succeeding the renaissance who took inspiration from such theological paintings were

just following the footsteps of the Renaissance painters in catering to the sensibilities of their patrons and the society at large.

Paintings being the reflection of society, its practices, norms, values, attitudes and belief system portray the prevalent social scenario be it the reality or the fantasies created by people at large to hide a painful and tragic reality. With the evolution of the world and the perceptions of the people living in it, paintings too change in their pattern and representation of the various themes- mother and child being one of these. As we can find in this chapter how the paintings from the renaissance period depicting the essential maternity part of women in a romantic and eulogized form slowly transformed to the depiction of maternal subjectivity in Alice Neel's 20th century paintings. Within a generation the subjectivity of women took precedence over maternity completely in the paintings of the 21st century female painters which clearly resonates the evolving and increasing individuality, subjectivity and agency in women.



Caren Brooding (1982)
Courtesy- Mother and Child in Art (1992)

Chapter Two

Paintings and Pangs of Childbirth

In her painting *Caren Brooding*, 1982 Sue Ferguson Gussow, an American painter has drawn a pregnant woman alone with her private thoughts and feelings. This woman in the painting is the niece of the painter and a professional photographer. In the picture she is seen to be contemplating her new status as an expecting mother, exploring the unseen currents- biological and kinaesthetic, the course which a pregnant woman's mind and body goes through. In this painting in Langer's words, "What the artist finds is a complex dialogue that occurs between the unborn child and the mother, one that begins with conception" (1992:13). The calm yet thoughtful expression on the pregnant woman's face clearly depicts her anxiety about the upcoming changes in her life with the coming of the child. This painting pictorially defines Julia Kristeva's thought on pregnancy, "Cells fuse, split and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm; speeding up or slowing down. Within the body growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an Other. And no one is present within that simultaneously dual and alien place to signify what is going on. "It happens, but I'm not there". "I cannot realise it but it goes on". Motherhood's impossible syllogism." For Kristeva pregnancy and motherhood is the most human activity as it goes beyond mere biological functioning. It involves a gamut of emotions, feelings and passions unique to each mother. Pregnancy and motherhood unanimously declared as a feeling of joy is more complex than that. Maternal passion works through conflicting emotions of attraction and aversion, attachment and detachment. During pregnancy women go through myriad feelings from narcissism wherein "the future mother becomes an object of desire, pleasure and aversion to herself" and possessive the next moment which comes with the realisation that the "love-object" which is attached to her body will be detached from her to become a new subject. Kristeva calls this maternal progression the "miracle" of love as she says, "[It] begins by the passion of the pregnant woman for herself: her destabilised self," a loss of identity, because divided by the intervention of the lover-father, and, through the intervention of the other, inhabited by an unknown third party-an embryo, a fetus, then a baby, a child, though for the moment an indiscernible double..., but from whom the mother detaches herself to allow the child to become an autonomous being. This motion of expulsion, of detachment, is essential. Thus, the negative immediately inhabits maternal passion". Pregnancy is a difficult phase to be in where a mother experiences a heightened sense of joy, pleasure and attachment along with the fear of the unknown and the Other present inside her body. Along with the psychological fear and tension pregnant women experience physical discomfort and distortion. The looming horror of the presence of the 'other' which merges with the 'self' completely and the disfiguration caused by the swollen pregnant belly alienates the woman from herself. This losing of the identity can be depressing and traumatic, where the woman fails to decide if the child is a friend or a foe. Most of the woman I interviewed agreed that childbearing was an unpleasant and a terrifying process. It was like a physical and psychological trial which marked the beginning of their motherhood. Apart from the psychological fear which was more or less common to all the mothers, they also went through bodily discomforts like morning sickness, dizziness, acute pain in abdomen, swelling of body parts, increase in sugar and thyroid levels and other physical issues. Many women also talked about their miscarriages which were both emotionally and physically painful. An interviewee of mine expressed her fear of getting



Suckling Madonna (1330)
Courtesy- www.artpaintingartist.com

pregnant again when she said, “those nine months were traumatic for me. I would wake up every morning with a heavy feeling in my body and as soon as I would rise from my bed I would start puking. My morning sickness continued for more months than it is supposed to.” While some women complained of physical sickness others shared their experiences of anxiety and stress. Another respondent of mine who is a working woman talked about her sense of depression during her advanced stages of pregnancy, “I missed going to work, I missed my friends, I missed going out. I would sit at home the entire day while my husband was out doing his work. I would keep thinking about various things related to the baby and our future, so much so that I would get a head-ache”. Some mothers shared their episodes of maternal jouissance which they experienced when their baby kicked their belly, as a respondent said “he kicked so hard and so often that I would scream both in pain and joy”. Pregnancy is after all a subjective experience with some women disliking it, others liking it and some others both liking and disliking it just simultaneously, like breast-feeding-the very next stage after giving birth.

Breastfeeding is a task which could be alternatively pleasurable, stressful, painful, tiring, emotional, satisfying or all at the same time. Nursing mother is one of the most popular representations of maternal love found in paintings all over the world throughout the ages. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, how literary personalities like Plutarch, Barbaro and Rousseau to the theologians and physicians advocated and advised breastfeeding for the child’s moral, psychological and physical development. It also helps in developing the bond between the mother and her newly born infant. Nature has designed a woman’s breast in such a manner unlike other animals whose dug hangs beneath their belly, so that the mother and child can make eye contact while breastfeeding. In this way the mother is also able to not only feel the pleasure of nursing but also witness it through her own eyes. The mother’s bosom the only place which is a constant supplier of life and where the child feels safest in the world. The painters capture this moment of emotional and physical bonding which they like all the other members of the society find to be so pure and sublime. The Renaissance pictures of Mary and the Christ child who were considered to be the ideal mother and child were filled with depictions of Mother Mary nursing the infant Jesus. All the painters of that time depicted the Suckling Madonna images for the churches, people’s homes, king’s courts in various modes of artistic expressions from portrait paintings, murals to sculptures. Paintings like *Madonna Litta* by Leonardo, *Madonna Suckling the Infant* by Giampiertrino, *Suckling Madonna* by Lorenzetti, et al. portrayed Mary’s peaceful countenance looking affectionately at infant Christ as he drank milk from her bosom. These paintings were used as a medium to educate women of the time about the usefulness and importance of breastfeeding when mothers dispatched their children to country nurses soon after their birth to be fed. This loving, pure and sweet representation of nursing mother has still not lost its charm and inspiration. Centuries after renaissance till the present time many painters fancy this image of women composedly and lovingly nursing their children. The images are not only considered as sublime but also give a sense of empowerment to women, as it is in the female body the fluid of life can be found which ensures the continuity of the world.

Even though it is empowering that only woman has the capacity to sustain a life in her body, give birth to it and feed it through her own body part, but the pains she goes through in this process has seldom been acknowledged. The paintings of the mother nursing her child provides its viewers with a serene visual appeal as if the task of nursing is as smooth as the oil colours

used in the paintings. People often forget paintings are a make believe world where fantasies come alive, they always hide some truth behind the smiling faces.

Breastfeeding is indeed vital for a new born baby and most of the mothers realise and accept that but their experiences range from pleasure to pain. Breastfeeding does give a momentary feeling of closeness with the child, a sense of pleasure and satisfaction to the mother but for most part of it, it is an exhausting and a demanding process involving a lot of pain. Apart from the biological factors there are psychological factors of embodiment and 'self' involved in breastfeeding. In the renaissance period it was said that breastfeeding is natural to women and is the right of the child to be fed from his mother's breast, while mothers usually hired wet-nurse for the task. One possible explanation of this could be that they were mentally and physically tired of the continuous circle of birthing and nursing in the absence of any birth-control mechanism. From the diaries and letters of the women of the 18th and 19th century which they either wrote for themselves or to some close female members of their family it is revealed that nursing was very painful and at times life-threatening. Here I would mention some of the diary and letter entries I found from a chapter of the book *Maternal Bodies: Redefining Motherhood in Early America*, by Nora Doyle (2018) to shed light on the reality of nursing. In 1771 Mary Holyoke made entries about her breast-infection caused by nursing. She wrote about a "violent pain in my breast" and after a week reported that "the Doctor opened my Breast." And even after a week she noted "Left off the poultice. Put on a frog Plaister. In a good deal of pain". In a letter written to her mother in 1803 by Eliza Haywood reported: "Dr. William lanced my Breast on that Day week on which you left me, I had suffered great Pain from the rising with Fevers, Cough and Inflammation, I has Excruciating pains in my Shoulders, Breast and Stomach-the Discharge of Matter was great with much Blood, it still runs a deal twice a Day Night and Morning". In another entry in 1822 by Laura Randall of Florida a horrific description was given by her about the consequence of breastfeeding. A friend of her who was suffering from "gathered breast" is reported by her: "mortification has taken place. . . One of her breasts is entirely off, leaving nothing but the bare ribs. . . And the other is in a dreadful state. Pieces of flesh as thick as your three fingers will sometimes drop off." The friend of her did not live long after that. Such gruesome cases clearly states that the physical danger of childbirth did not end with that.

From the narratives I gathered from the women I interviewed I got a mixed reaction towards breastfeeding. All the interviewee mothers said that they were looking forward to this part of maternity. They had a romantic idea about breastfeeding, which included a feeling of pride, that they are capable of breastfeeding a child which is unique to mothers only. A respondent who is a young mother said, "I was excited. The first time gave me a tingling sensation. It felt good and different. That was my first time." But most of the after-a-week of breastfeeding reactions were more practical. One mother said, "it was not bad, my supply of milk was good, but the only part I hated about it was the waking up at night and feeding him as he would always wake up hungry and crying, demanding milk no matter how much I fed him before going to bed." Another respondent expressed a sense of attachment and unity which she felt while she was pregnant in the act of breastfeeding: "his warm skin felt so soft against mine. He would drink and I would cuddle him. But after 6months he had started biting my nipples, that is probably because he was getting his milk teeth."

Though these women had some practical difficulties related to nursing their experience was pleasurable to some extent. They were comfortable with the idea of the merging of the self with

the other in the act of nursing. Cosslett in her literary writings on childbirth mentioned about this intimacy and embodied connection between the mother and the breastfed child which should be celebrated according to her. It is an act that should be articulated and experienced as a sense of intimacy and continuity between the mother and the child, the separation which occurred at birth could be restored through the dependence fostered while breastfeeding. The uncertainty experienced by mothers while pregnant due to lack of acquaintance with the baby can be eradicated through the transfer of bodily fluid which builds a connection and familiarity between the mother and the child.

The loss of autonomy and agency due to nursing combined with the physical difficulties were a major concern for some of the mothers I interviewed. They complained about the constant physical presence and act of nursing was very exhausting. A respondent said, "I was even afraid to go to the bathroom, what if she feels hungry and starts crying. I felt I needed to be with her constantly. Time-management becomes difficult. You have to arrange everything according to your child's need. As she was completely depended on me for food I had to always be there for her". Breastfeeding demands constant physical proximity between the mother and her child. The thought of their babies and their dependence on them for their survival occupies the mind of the mothers constantly along with their other personal and professional work, this whole amalgamation of the world of an individual woman with that of a mother is a vexing and perplexing experience for women.

Breastfeeding in public is also a concern for the women I interviewed. Many respondents said they feel, embarrassed and awkward to breastfeed their child in open. Whenever they go out they have to find a place to hide and feed their children. An interviewee mother said, "I do not go out much. How can I? There are not many places where I can breastfeed my child if he feels hungry. They do stare weirdly if you are nursing your child in the open, especially men. Also I feel wet and sticky after feeding my child." Such narratives presented by the mothers reveal the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society where they eulogise nursing in various visual arts and propagate and promote the benefits of breastfeeding and on the other hand stamp it as obscene by giving lewd glances to women engaged in the act of breastfeeding. Sometimes women too are critical of breastfeeding in public. Because of such irresponsible and shameful attitudes of people in the society nursing mothers are subjected to house-arrest. The nursing mothers I interviewed grieved deeply about their confinement. These complications in breastfeeding have resulted to loss of self, autonomy and agency in many women. Suddenly they realise their life has changed and is dictated by the needs of some other entity in their life. The mothers I interviewed declared that nursing and breastfeeding is a part of the private world and they craved to go out in the public life, away from their baby even if for some time. A working mother shared an experience of embarrassment, "I had weaned my baby when she was almost two years of age. I was in my office I suddenly felt a wet feeling around my chest area. I realised I was involuntarily milking. I had to take extra precaution to prevent such thing from happening again." Breastfeeding poses many challenges on women which they have to handle with patience and care. Though the physical pain experienced by women has minimized to quite an extent compared to what it was in the 18th – 19th century and before. This is due to the easy availability of birth control measures and family planning. Neither do women get pregnant frequently in middle and upper-middle class families nor do they have to breastfeed multiple children. But physical problems associated with nursing still persist as few of my respondents complained of swelling, rashes and itchiness of their breasts due to breastfeeding.

Nursing mothers suffer from depression and insecurity because of breast deformity caused by nursing. The swollen, loose appearance of their breasts sometimes gives them a feeling of dissatisfaction. The changes in the shape of their breasts due to nursing are permanent for some women. This negative change in their appearance heightens the sense of alienation and loss of self in the mothers. Pregnancy and giving birth also at times leaves permanent marks and does permanent damage to many woman's body. They fail to identify their maternal self with their former self, transition in the psychological and physical attributes often become traumatic to deal with, especially along with the onerous duties of mothering. Also women who are incapable of breastfeeding their children due to some physical lacking or ailment and or if they fail to enjoy the act of breastfeeding often consider themselves as "bad-mothers". This feeling also engulfs women who complain about the adverse changes in their figure due to pregnancy and breastfeeding. They are scared to discuss these issues in public where they can be easily termed as "bad-mothers" who give preference to physical beauty over the baby. This dichotomy of "bad-mother" and "good-mother" is pressurising for many mothers. A "good-mother" is one who sacrifices her entire life for her children and is always attentive to her child's need, in my mind, is a utopian concept thrust upon women to make them feel guilty so that their independence, autonomy, individuality and agency can be crushed for the smooth functioning of the patriarchal society. The fact that women while giving equal or more preference to themselves get a feeling of guilt and abnormality is because of this idea of self-minimization that has been put in their head from their very childhood. Daughters are raised to be mothers, to be the epitome of sacrifice and devotion without any expectation of being awarded or even acknowledged.

Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects* states that she believes every representation "cheats;" it lies on the fantasy that truth and visibility work together, but in reality there is always more to the experience than the image can show. This is particularly true about mothering and its various aspects; only a mother knows about her maternal experiences and sacrifices. Even a woman who has been receiving training to be a mother from her very childhood and sees her own mother fight with the daily struggles of motherhood cannot comprehend in full what it takes to be a mother. This experience is quintessentially known to mothers only who has to live it every day and very moment. The paintings of healthy cherubic babies suckling the breasts of the mothers who look as fresh as a freshly bloomed rose belie the messy and painful realities of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding in reality is nothing more than a necessity which is not pleasurable most of the times for the mother. The romanticised images of the mother nursing her baby is far from the truth of the everyday phenomenon of a nursing mother's life. Feeding a child through her own body part is indeed a heroic act which should be recognised in all its reality, only then can breastfeeding be empowering to women. The pictorial depictions do acknowledge the maternal act of life-giving through breastfeeding but it seldom shows the physical and psychological sacrifices women make selflessly to bring up the man's progeny.

Breastfeeding like pregnancy obscures or challenges the boundaries between the mother and the child; the 'self' and the 'other'. Some feminist theorists argue that this blurring will enable women to traverse a new and a positive form of femininity and sexuality. But this thought of connectedness appears to be an excessively sentimentalized discourse on maternal identity. As can be comprehended from the narratives of the mothers that pregnancy and breastfeeding cannot be generalised. While some women find the experience pleasurable and surreal; their body, mind connect with the Other to become a whole which forms their identity others merely

tolerate the process of maternity, constantly trying to resolve the tension occurring between the self and the Other.

The lacking of boundaries between the self and the other due to the transfer of fluid has projected the feminine body as unclean, uncontrolled and lacking defined boundaries, which makes the body of a woman inferior. In the work of Douglas (1966), Kristeva (1982) and Grosz (1994) we find mention of the “horror” or acute discomfort sensed in terms of permeable, leaking and absorptive feminine body, where the boundaries between the self and the other that is, the inside and the outside is completely blurred, forming “a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order” (Grosz, 1994:203). The female body secretions like breast milk, menstrual blood and the amniotic flow have been portrayed as uncontained and uncontainable which are culturally defined as dangers, dirt, pollutants and contaminants. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* has stated that the dirt and disturbance to order is the ‘abject’ which transgresses borders and ambiguous in nature, hanging somewhere in-between. The feminine and particularly the maternal body is the personification of the abject which disrupts system, identity and order. Female embodiment and subjectivity are seen as threat to the pure and the proper. The maternal figure arouses both fascination and ideation and fear and anxieties because of its ambiguous status as ‘two bodies in one’. In this context Kristeva defines “A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh”. In this ambivalence women are subjected to many cultural taboos and is marginalised as the Other in relation to the flawless, contained and autonomous male body. The mother is abject so is the menstrual blood and the milk flowing from her body. The blood and milk inspire a peculiar horror of the female or the maternal body which renders the body as monstrous. This concept of abjection of the maternal body along with the fluids discharged from the body can be traced back to the mediaeval period to the present age. The presence of the blood and the milk identify a body as maternal which is distinct from the other bodies, it is then marginalised and presented as an Other, the production of fluid transgresses the bodily boundaries of the flesh and causes disruption in the normal functioning of the social order and cleanliness. The mother’s milk and the menstrual blood when observed symbolically induce a sense of horror and is thus associated with monstrous form of maternity. Everything related to maternity is mystical- pregnancy, giving birth, the flow of milk and blood, the power of bringing the internal to the external, the dissolving of the borders between the flesh and the world is identical to the supernatural qualities of a monster.

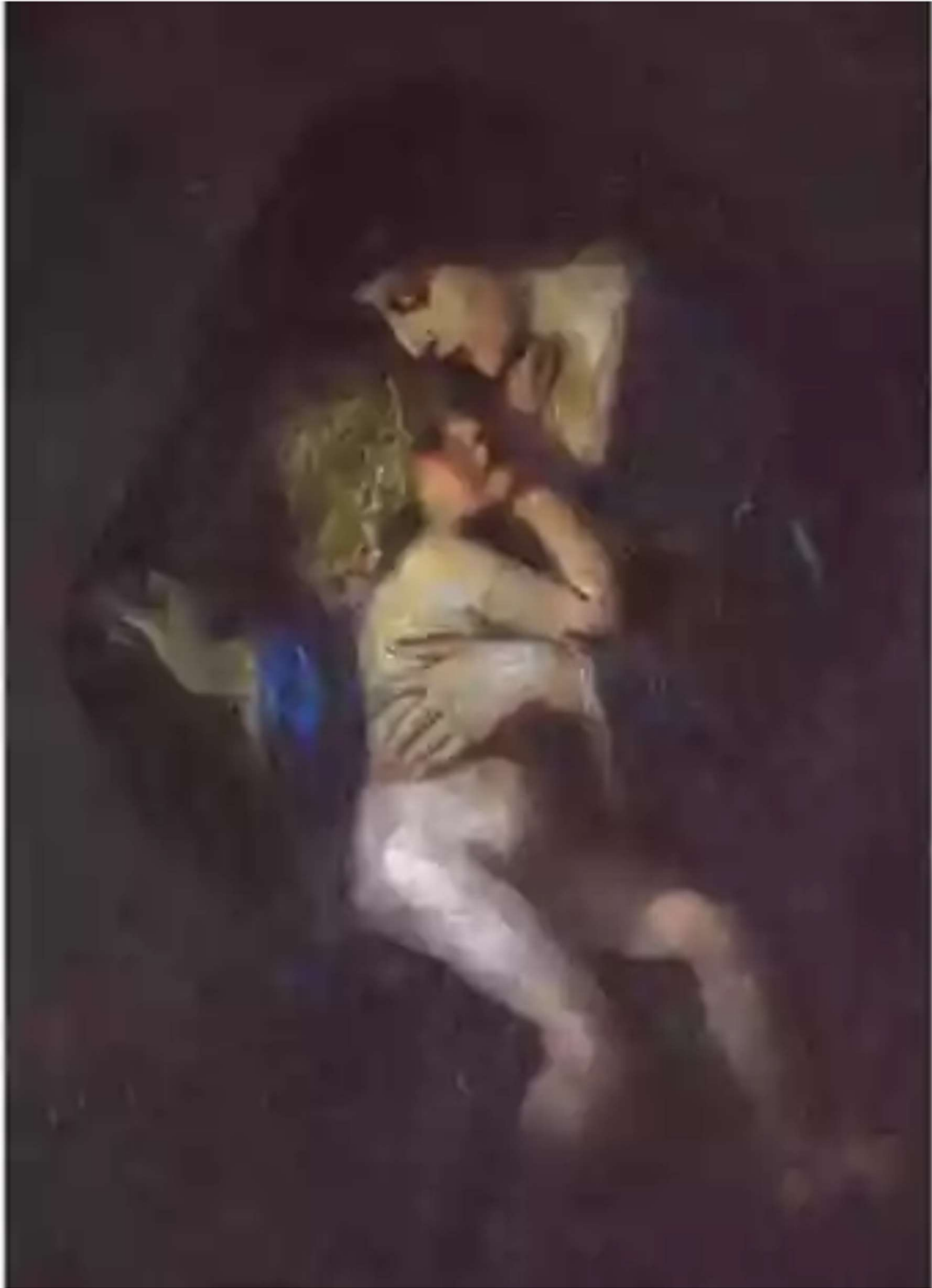
The discursive positioning of women as the monster or a symbol of abhorrence can be traced in the Aristotelian theory of human reproduction. According to his theory women are imperfect or inverted form of the male body; a deviation from the male norm. the woman is portrayed as irrational and inferior who lacks both mental and physical capacity. She is the essential negative to the male positive. In this context Braidotti says, “the topos of women as a sign of abnormality, and therefore of difference as a sign of inferiority, remained a constant in Western scientific discourse. This association has produced, among other things [. . .] the horror of the female body”. The words “excess” and “lack” associated with the female were repeatedly used to ridicule the “abnormal” feminine and to draw parallels between the monster’s and the woman’s body. It was the mother who could be easily considered “morphologically dubious” in Braidotti’s term because while pregnancy and childbirth the physical shape of the mother’s body changes which is a sign of instability, temporality, irrationality and mysterious. Women

in their reproductive stage become an incarnation of monsters and death which falls in the area of the unknown and hence should be feared.

Kristeva's theory of abjection is important as it talks about social and psychic states of identity formation and self-awareness. The moment of birthing and weaning away is important for the self-identification and identity formation of the child as it releases itself from the abject mother's blood and milk which transgresses the boundaries of the self and the other, turning it into one. To release oneself from the previous bonds of the maternal the abject fluids must be removed so that a clear boundary can be formed between the child and the mother so that the child can have a separate identity in the society which is purged from the abject blood and milk to maintain the order of the society. The mother who carried her child in the womb for months to show him the light of the world, now became abhorrent, the blood which wrapped his body while birthing became loathsome and the milk that gave him life became despicable which he has to expel as soon as possible. He now will establish his own identity as his father's child, when his mother has to still struggle to find her own. This vividly depicts how the patriarchal society reduces a woman to just a womb, a place where the future member of the society can be built and her bosom a place where he can be fed and nourished before he is ready to spread his wings and fly far away from the nest.

It was believed in the mediaeval ages that women were capable of purifying their inappropriate lustfulness through menstruation. Therefore, blood was considered to be both generative substance and also a fluid that is abject. Blood is a fluid that has acted as a controlling mechanism depending on its production internally or it being expelled. Upon it being discharged from body it procured symbolic transitional qualities that represented its monstrosity; the emergence of breastmilk reminds one that female body has converted the blood into milk in her body; the blood being the symbol of excessive lustfulness of the female now can be equated with her milk. This feature of transforming one kind of fluid to another has been associated to female gender whose representation can be found in many late medieval paintings of Christ. In the painting "Man of Sorrows" Christ has been considered as feminine body, that of a mother. The painting is of Christ pouring blood in a wine glass from his wounds while angels flying in the background. Here the blood of Christ is associated with a woman and his body has been transformed into a female body due to the presence of blood. Many consider this image of Christ metaphor of consoling mother while others associate eroticism with image due to the presence of blood which signifies female lust. These pictures in the mediaeval period were considered inappropriate as they evoked horror and eroticism due to its feminine symbolic association with the blood.

A distinction between the maternal body and the sexualised female is very important in any society. The western society has always tried to maintain a division between the Madonna and the Whore. The women who find breastfeeding a sensual or pleasurable experience is considered to be crossing the boundaries between motherhood and sexuality. I have already mentioned that milk is equated with blood and blood signifies women's lust. Hence to find breastfeeding pleasurable can easily be associated with feminine eroticism. The abject is here attached to the maternal Jouissance of breastfeeding thereby sexualising it. The paintings that we see of the breastfeeding Mary and Christ Child and also the contemporary ones inspired from such portrayal appear to be very complex if read from this angle. The mothers in the paintings are seen to be enjoying breastfeeding, their calm and composed smiling faces suggest so. The bond that they share with their children is sublime and pious but if analysed from the



Madonna and Child
Courtesy- www.artnet.co

perspective of abject fluids coming out of the body of the sexualised female monster then the very pure act of breastfeeding can be considered as debauched. But if a woman does not enjoy breastfeeding, then she can very conveniently be labelled as a bad mother; a woman who is not fit to be a mother. The society does not know how to contain a woman's sexuality and individuality. Contradictory theories are conceived to hinder women from achieving freedom. A woman especially a mother has to rid herself of all the desires and cage herself in the house to protect its decorum and sanctity. It is surprising that the act of breastfeeding which is so romanticised and glorified as the purest form of love in all forms of media be it painting, sculptures, photography or literature can also be eroticised by the patriarchal society.

The female was also considered to be a 'vampire' which represented the monstrous side of women. She is vampire without any outward display of otherness such as fangs or red eyes, the particular features of the mythical creature. Her gender was enough to term her as an alien and ambiguous like a vampire. The female vampire was associated with 'death' and 'sexuality who would lure men for their thirst for physical intimacy then would suck their blood and kill them. Women were thought to be corrupting men's purity and destroying them. The concept of femininity and death became central to many of painter Laura Muntz's paintings like *Madonna and Child, Protector*. Muntz was a leading artist of English Canada of the last decade of the 19th century and first of the 20th. She was widely known for her paintings of mother and child, which she exhibited extensively in Toronto and Montreal and in various exhibitions in France, England and the United States. In this chapter and for the purpose of my study I would be analysing her painting *Madonna and Child* where she has used the discourse of death and maternity to give an alternate reading of the usual Mary and Christ Child paintings which depicts the life giving potential of a mother. Another interpretation of the painting apart from death and maternity is the overprotectiveness of a mother towards her child that can be assumed as her sexual attraction towards the child. The painting is scarcely documented, may be for obvious reasons that is, the painting depicts the distorted, sexist, biased and derogatory mentality of the society towards women and also because it transgresses the loving and caring image of a mother and child constructed by the society which the mothers are advised to practise. The painting was displayed under various names like in 1988 as *Mother and Child* and in 1926 it was grouped among "three studies in child life". Since *Madonna and Child* will be more appropriate for our study we will stick to the title *Madonna and Child*. The painting depicts "mother love in the sad-faced, hollow-eyed woman who draws back her black veil protectingly about the chubby child on her knee." (Toronto Star weekly, 21 August, 1926) At first glance, this painting seems to depict the Madonna caressing and protecting Christ Child. However, specific details complexify this reading: the black robe and in particular the woman's finger slipped through a loop in the veil. Since neither the colour black nor a looped veil is conventional features of Marian symbolism, their inclusion implies a specific purpose. A parallel context of death, however, can convincingly absorb the dark robe, the mournful expression, and the shroud-like veil. Here Muntz represented death in the form of maternal role. Death is here depicted as a gentle and sorrowing mother, bending her grave face down towards the child. To personify death as female was not unusual. G. F. Watts, like Muntz, pictured death as a consoling and gentle mother, who cradles the infant Innocence consigned to her care in his painting 'Death Crowning Innocence'. In the context of *Madonna and Child*, the intimate nature of the mother as symbolic to death (vampire) suggests a parallel to passionate maternal love and protection. "On a physical level Muntz's female protagonist remains human, but everything else suggested by her presence functions, on the level of the

psyche, as a sign of intensity and otherness. As vampire, she represents consuming intimacy, shared blood - much like the passionate feelings of a mother for her child which, as maternal mythology has it, exceeds the normal bounds of everyday human emotions” (Elizabeth Mulley, 1998:91). Muntz’s mother here is both a giver and taker of life. This concept echoes the particular concern of her period (19th century) of increasing child mortality rate. It corresponds to the fact that in a patriarchal society the mother is entrusted with the whole responsibility of rearing the child, if a mother is caring and fulfils all her responsibility the child can sustain and if the mother doesn’t fulfil her maternal duties the child is bound to suffer and die. So It is the society or the patriarchal society to be precise who has always defined what motherhood is and what it entails. The patriarchal society if considers mother as symbolic of life and fertility it also equates her with death. In patriarchal culture woman is positioned culturally as being closer to death than to life, described by Sarah Goodwin and Elizabeth Bronfen as "radically other to the norm, the living or surviving masculine subject. She is Mary and Eve, life and death; she is "the original prenatal dwelling place [...] and as Mother Earth, she is the anticipated final resting place"(Goodwin and Elizabeth, 1993:13). It is imagined that mother and child dyad embody wholeness and security, but a further paradox constitutes motherhood itself as ambivalent and contradictory. Although it is characterized by passionate feeling and is promoted as the paradigmatic cultural model of protection, it also contains the potential for destruction.

In the other interpretation brought forth by the painting which represent “the vampire as the incarnation of the forbidden passion of the sexual female, the child then becomes a problematic figure” (Elizabeth Mulley, 1998:91). The mother in her overprotective nature takes sexual pleasure in her infant’s body, which crosses the border of motherhood and sexuality, giving rise to incestuous relationship. To swerve the sexual connotations, the body of the child has deliberately been pictured as androgynous, neither male, which will indicate heterosexual love, nor female which will signify erotic love between women. The religious association of Madonna to the painting, protecting the exposed body further desexualise the child and shields it from any sexual reference. The presence of Madonna, a strong maternal figure will dispel all sexual connotations. As she is the epitome of maternity there cannot be any outward sign that her love includes any sexual component. But the mere inclusion of Christianity and the image of Mary has been unsuccessful in eradicating sexuality from such representations as Leo Steinberg in *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* has pointed out that sexuality has long been an element in representation of the Christ Child, also John Pultz, in his discussion of Victorian photographs has suggested that, “the depiction of the nude child in the deeper allegory of domesticity is disturbing” (Pultz, 1995:41).

Work of art especially paintings can have multiple interpretations as an image leaves so many things unsaid. It depends on the eyes of the beholder to interpret and give meanings to the image before them. As Donald Peroziosi in *Rethinking Art History: Meditation on a Coy Science* suggests, “it may be more fruitful to ask what object may be evidence for, rather than recirculate the traditional question which seeks to resolve what art objects are evidence of”. Any portrayal of a visual representation is more than a secret language system; a code that is waiting to be unravelled once and for all. Once a meaning is created out of the image the painting can again be ‘reframed’, not to abandon the past meaning but to bring out another message suggested by the image. Mieke Bal has proposed that the interpreter should not view the art “tautologically as proof” but rather take it as “questioning itself;” to create a theoretical

space in which it is free to accommodate “all possible questions it might challenge viewers to raise” (1996:30). These explanations by Periziozi and Bal can be seen as a simple suggestion to attach myriad meanings to works of art to keep them alive. But the problems arise when these art works become a mode of dominance and repression, created by one group to suppresses the other. The patriarchal society expects women especially mothers to be the exact replica of the images of Mother Mary as presented in the paintings. They are advised to emulate her maternal virtues by sacrificing themselves in the name of motherhood. Her constant presence around the child is necessary for the protection of the child hence her entire life should revolve around her child. Even if the mother is capable of going out in the public, earn the bread for the family she is shut indoors as a glorified servant. The age old process of socialisation decides who is meant for which role without evaluating the capabilities. If a woman can be a goddess of the private she can be a conqueror of the public too, what is needed is just an opportunity, which is being denied even today, most of the times. To repress and confine her the society attaches dichotomous features to her identity, sometimes she is identified as the strong maternal figure and again also as an inverted, inferior negative to a male; her milk is life giving as well as abject; she is a desexualised mother and also a harpy siren who cannot control her lust; she is the protector but also the destroyer; a bearer of life and also an incarnation of death; she is the alien; she is the Other. The painting “Madonna and Child” of Muntz which appears to be a simple representation of a mother loving her child if read carefully then the depiction of black robe and the looped veil (the anti-Marian symbols) will reveal how maternity is also identified with death by the society which gets its reflection in the painting. The male-dominated society is afraid to fully acknowledge the qualities and capabilities of women, they are sacred if women realise their true potential and come out of their confinement then the female-sex will rule the world just like men are ruling now hence they decided to turn women’s greatest boon-maternity into their greatest bane.

Chapter Three

Subjectivity, Autonomy and Agency of Mothers

At the centre of the discourse concerning female subjectivity is the image of the mother. Many psychoanalytic studies say that identity is something which is fragmented, never complete and unified. Likewise, the maternal is a subject position surrounded with ambivalence and conflict. In Rozsika Parker's *Torn in Two* she vividly assesses the contrary and passionate feelings of loss and fulfilment which reside in the mother and child relationship. The mother's identity is in innumerable ways linked with the emotions and the unconscious as sites of longing and desire, with the numerous and alterable cultural constructions of the maternal role and enduringly, with the discourses of biology. But Lee Drummond was of the opinion that "Far from being 'the most natural thing in the world,' motherhood is in fact one of the most unnatural. For one thing, a cultural analysis of mother can neatly invert the ethological argument: rather than going on about the universal, biocultural innateness of something called a 'mother-child bond', the process of conceiving, bearing, and rearing a child should be viewed as rather a dilemma that strikes at the core of human understanding and evokes a heightened, not a diminished, cultural interpretation. The birth of a child is a dramatic intrusion of a non-cultural being at the heart of the domestic sphere. A woman, in nurturing and protecting that being, establishes a perilous conjunction between opposites: a fully human adult becomes intimate with a nonhuman, even antihuman form. My point, which cannot be developed further here, is that the process of investing a foetus with a human identity is cultural – it gives meaning to the world – and so, correlatively, is the process of identifying a woman as mother". (Drummond 1978: 31). The Painting *Nancy and Olivia* by Alice Neel, (mentioned in the first chapter) where she depicts the emotions and struggles of a new mother as she is unable to handle her crying baby, their face to face embrace symbolises the demand placed on them by their forced mutual inter-dependence suggests that motherhood is an art which is taught and which is learnt through the process of cultural socialization and is not an inherent, intrinsic characteristic of one particular gender. As Carol Gilligan holds in, *A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* that the sense of integrity in women is attached to an ethic of care. Women are dependent on the connection with the relationships they build with others. Gilligan asserted that women's moral judgement essentially includes feelings of empathy and compassion for others, and also concern for commitments that emanates from relationships. Women believe in "care reasoning", and not "justice reasoning" thus they consider their own and other's responsibilities to be based on social context and interpersonal commitments. Gilligan in her book talks about two moral voices that emanate from two distinct developmental courses. According to her. The male voices stress on independence ("separation") and responsibility for oneself whereas the female voice asserts interdependence ("connection") and responsibility to others. When males are motivated to be active agents, girls are told to be passive recipients. Women when faced with some moral problem they seek solutions that are benevolent and caring on the contrary males seek just and fair ways of solving problems. The males find moral wrongness is linked to the violation of rights and justice while for women it is linked with the failure to respond and communicate. The interactions of the male take place mainly at the legal and political level, in the realm of social constructs and abstract laws, for the female moral interaction is limited to the level of personal relationships, in the family and the social network in which they live. The difference



Nancy and Olivia (1982)
Courtesy- www.artsy.net.com

in the approach of men and women is because they are socialised differently for different environments. Therefore, both the genders have distinct perspectives regarding “morality”. Boys are socialised for work environment which is why, they analyse morality on the basis of rules and laws. Rules help them to function properly in the work environment. Women on the other hand are socialised for domestic environment, where resilience allows for peace care taking and nurturing. The ideas of socialisation that Carol Gilligan puts forward is somewhat analogous to that of Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex (1949)* in which Beauvoir says the social construction of masculinity involves preparing the male child for a future that lies outside the home, that of femininity involves getting the female child ready for her future role as wife and mother. In contrast to the boy, the girl stays more closely tied to the mother and to the body and evolve a sense of self, as Linda Singer asserts, “in a context of mirroring, . . . [that is,] through the refractions of approval, recognition and affinity with others” (1990:329). Singer has rightly pointed out Beauvoir’s mindful analysis of the difference between the girl’s and boy’s self-development and their respective relations to the mother and hence the whole question of genesis. To Beauvoir, the achievement of masculinity is through the denial of origins and the bond of the girl with the mother, which makes her sense of self reliant on the approval of others. As Singer notes, “The woman who is not recognised by others begins not to recognise herself” (331). Beauvoir in addition to the mother-daughter bonding also states what drives the daughter away from her mother. The girl is scared of the mother figure because in her she sees “her entire destiny” (336). The girl feels frightened about her own body upon looking at the mother’s which represents the girl’s adulthood, “a finality which sweeps her away from selfhood” and “dooms her to man, to children and to death” (345). Beauvoir explicitly shows that how the social reasons of this fear, ambivalence and even hatred towards her mother and becoming her mother during her pregnancy and childbirth is rooted in patriarchal culture and that feminists should take a note of it. When the intense struggle of separation of a male child from his mother becomes the focal point, the feminists run a risk of viewing maternity from the romantic and nostalgic viewpoint, which can unintentionally uphold the masculinist representation of the loving mother. But if the feminist wants to address the question of female subjectivity then the anger even the rage of a girl towards the maternal figure is something that they have to confront. Beauvoir gave voice to the reality of female contradictions. She said that the mother-daughter is a social relation created in the horrible context of the patriarchal culture rather than as a natural relation already given in every woman’s biological destiny. In doing so, the *Second Sex* maintains that the shift in the mother-daughter relation must involve political and personal struggle and that its vow consists precisely not in achieving peace but in acknowledgement of conflict, of difference, of ambiguity.

For Beauvoir motherhood is ambiguous and her attempt was to demystify it. As Yoland Patterson puts it, Beauvoir wanted to “debunk[ing] the myths and idealisations that conceal motherhood’s more complex and troubled reality. These myths run deep in Western culture: at their centre the iconic figure of the Virgin Mary, cradling the baby Jesus in countless depictions, serenely happy to protect him and nurture his growth. This imagery feeds into the broader ideology that women’s supreme happiness lies in the maternal role for which (supposedly) they are naturally destined (1986). Partrice Di Quinzio terms this the ideology of “essential motherhood” – that women’s absolutely necessary nature is to be mothers, motherhood makes women happy and content. This ideology of essential motherhood has played the key role in the construction of women as the men’s Other. When men enjoy

transcendence (an activity of self-creation in which we remould and surpass the situation given to us), women have been cast as natural beings, who finds happiness not in projecting their transcendence but in following nature's commands and being mother as their nature hints them to. Beauvoir's rejection of this discourse of maternity shapes her account of motherhood, which she insists is- like everything in human existence- a matter of choice and activity, not nature or instinct (1974:386). Invariably women choose the meaning they give to maternity- although generally these choices are not outcomes of any conscious deliberation but flow spontaneously from women's entire attitude to their lives and relationships (1974:346). It is the situation that leads women to adopt this attitude towards motherhood. Since their girlhood they have been allowed little scope for transcendence as they were usually first dominated by their own mothers and then by their husbands. In a situation like this a woman may feel that pregnancy in the end has allowed her to exercise some freedom by creating the fetus. But she might alternatively also feel that she is once again dominated by an external agency which is the fetus or the species or both- "Often it no longer seems marvellous but rather horrible that a parasitic body should proliferate within her body; the very idea of this monstrous swelling frightens her ... pictures of swelling, tearing, hemorrhage, will haunt her" (1974:336). For Beauvoir pregnancy is horrific (not to be confused with men's horror of the pregnant body) because it gives her a sense of existentialist anxiety about the loss of individual agency and autonomy. The collapse of the Self and the Other is not a cause of joy like Kristeva sees it to be, but to her it obliterates female subjectivity and hence women should refuse maternity. She sees maternity as a process which is devoid of female agency which challenges the sovereign subject's claim to unity and mastery. Beauvoir maintains Susan Hekman's view of, "an existentialist epistemology grounded in a conception of the subject as rational, autonomous and self-constituting" (1991:46). According to Beauvoir posits Hekman, "if women were to claim their right to the status of this subject, they must reject the feminine, up to and including the practices of motherhood" (46). Pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood to Beauvoir pushes women to immanence that is, women remain within the given. maternity does not provide women with the scope to come out of her biological and social role and do something different and individual for herself. She remains trapped in her pregnant body and then in fulfilling her responsibilities of a mother. Her individuality fades, subjectivity obliterates and agency and autonomy get lost in the process of maternity.

Julia Kristeva celebrates motherhood as in, her concept of maternity is the pregnant woman's location on the "threshold between nature and culture, biology and language" (1986:297). For her the merger of the mother and child is a moment of joy, even if that silences the self that is, the mother. In "Women's Time", Kristeva argues that the maternal is analogous to Plato's notion of the precocious womb or 'chora', defining it as "matrix space, nourishing and unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and consequently, defying metaphysics" (1986:191). This space, heterogeneous and prelinguistic, throws into question the linear time of history, identities and languages. Kristeva also recognises that, motherhood has been the "seat of social conservation" (1980:237) but she also maintains that women's 'natural' role in the biological reproduction of the species also places them at odds with the temporality of the sociosymbolic order: "Female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization. On the one hand there are the cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison of what is experienced as extra-

subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*” (1986:191). In this passage Kristeva talks about the biological cycle of maternity which women go through, this phase might be confusing and strenuous but it fulfils maternal desires of becoming a mother. But to Judith Butler, “Kristeva understands the desire to give birth as a species-desire, part of a collective and archaic female libidinal drive that constitutes an ever-recurring metaphysical reality” (1990, 90). In the similar vein Kaja Silverman argues that “Kristeva fails to provide a language for questioning female destiny because she denies the mother the very possibility of speech by relegating her to the silence of *chora*: The mother is either fused or confused with her infant, and in the process comes both to be and to inhabit the *chora*” (1988:102) her maternal body is consigned to a prelinguistic state which can never be radical. But Beauvoir’s discursive strategy was created to speak and to write even when the blank page contains the oppressive spoken and written. It involves dealing within what Theresa de Lauretis calls “the modes of enunciation and address” that organise “the dominant discourses” of western culture and insists on women’s absence as speaking subjects even in the face of their presence. So “well- established are these modes says de Lauretis, “that, paradoxically, the only way to position oneself outside of that [any master] discourse is to displace oneself within it- to refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviously (though I its own words), even to quote (but against the grain)” (1984, 7). Hence for a feminist author then the discursive strategy may be one of self-displacement, a speaking “deviously” in the words of a dominant discourse- say, of motherhood. Beauvoir exactly wanted to do the same, give a voice to female subjectivity and agency in ‘The Second Sex’ to resist in any discourse. The enclosure of mother “within an ‘enceinte’ separating her from the world of everyone else,” an “elsewhere ... [where] woman loses communal meaning, which suddenly appears to her as worthless, absurd, or at best, comic” (1980:240) for Beauvoir this woman has no reason to laugh as she has been turned into a mute subject; placed in a place outside language. Beauvoir did not want to submit women into the ‘fatal teleological’ discourses of reproduction and sexual difference but rather give them a place in a secular and sacred narratives of struggles that decisively alters their meaning. The maternal body-the very place where the priests, the philosopher, the physician and the male scientist carve the blissful co-existence of the mother and the would be child, Beauvoir engraves difference and conflict. She turns the maternal body into a battleground where the fight for female subjectivity is fought. This notion disrupts the cultural assumption about woman as the passive bearer of a species teleology: “Woman is of all mammalian females at once the one who is most profoundly alienated (her individuality the prey of outside forces), and the one who most violently resists this alienation” (1974 :36)

In “Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini”, Kristeva says “the maternal body is the place of the splitting, which ...remains a constant factor of social reality. Through a body, destined to insure the reproduction of species, the woman-subject although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolising, speaking subject and like all others), [is] more of a *filter* than anyone else- a thoroughfare where ‘nature’ confronts ‘culture’. To image that there is someone in that filter- such is the source of religious mystifications, the font that nourishes them: the fantasy of the so-called ‘Phallic Mother’” (Kristeva 1980:238). In this again, Kristeva seems to assume that female anatomy is women’s destiny and she equates all ideas of the motherhood to a status of subject with religious mystifications and infantile fantasy. She admits here that gestation does not involve an act of will and hence “the Mother as subject is a delusion” (1980:242) and that patriarchy must affirm the mother as a subject to secure the humanist idea of the subject. Beauvoir agrees with Kristeva that mother as a subject is indeed delusional as



The Intellectual (1929)
Courtesy- www.pinterest.com

she is deprived of speech and has to wait for the patriarchal society to confer her own subjectivity to her. Beauvoir further argues that the maternal body is not a natural body or a biological referent, therefore also not “destined to insure the reproduction of the species”. The biological meaning given to the maternal body is a cultural construction through its inclusion in discourses of motherhood, the ones which uphold mothers as subjects by denying as subjects. Politically, it is imperative to maintain a difference between the mother and her masculinist representation and also for feminists it is necessary to distinguish between the mother-to-be as a speaking subject and the maternal space as a ‘filter’, that vast and subjectless ‘thoroughfare’. As, if the mother becomes voiceless then we would be left with nothing but ‘delusion’, which can have a dangerous consequence for women like the mute Phallic Mother of the infantile fantasy and the muffled loving mother of the masculinist representation. Hence Kristeva’s “mother as subject is silenced by being shut up in the unsignifiable maternal space” (Silverman 1988). Through her writings Kristeva revived the ‘masculine myths’ of maternity by reducing mother’s claim of subjecthood to infantile fantasy. Beauvoir was against this romanticised notions about women who experience pregnancy as a pleasant forgetfulness of self: “against the light of the mind they oppose the fecund darkness of Life; against the clarity of consciousness, the mysteries of inwardness; against productive liberty, the weight of this belly growing there enormously without human will (1974:561). Beauvoir identifies this maternity of infantile fantasy akin to religious mystification as a political problem of highest order. For a mother to realize that she makes the baby is an understandable and deeply troubling response within a society in which woman is denied the status of a subject. Then the problem is to find out the ways in which this scenario can be contested that amounts to a false sense of subjectivity. Hence it can be said that Beauvoir’s discourse on motherhood is based on essentialist notions of agency and liberty. It is, according to her, for the feminists to realise that the problem is not ‘mother as a subject’ but ‘women as non-subjects’ in the construction of the ideal mute maternal. If the patriarchal order has to be challenged, then women cannot be assigned a place outside discourse but her place has to be altered within it. For this project the entire renunciation of motherhood is not required but it must clearly involve a refusal of eternal maternal on the part of women.

Beauvoir’s feminism was not based around a rejection of motherhood instead she provides a multifaceted and complicated assessment of motherhood rather than simple hostility. What Beauvoir rejected was not motherhood but the idealized idea of it in which mothers are expected to devote themselves exclusively to motherhood at the expense of other activity in which they exercise creativity and freedom; in that society and culture encouraged girls and women to look to motherhood for their sole fulfilment; and in that mothers are expected to do all the housework. Beauvoir’s concept of transcendence and immanence is vividly expressed in Alice Neel’s painting “The Intellectual” about which I have already mentioned in chapter one. In the painting she has depicted that she wants to take part in an intellectual discussion but cannot as she has to manage her child for which she needs three arms and three legs while her childless friend, Fanya Foss seems to be very comfortably engaged in the discussion without anyone disturbance. The mention of three legs and arms clearly signifies that motherhood is not an easy task to accomplish and at times a woman has to give everything up to raise a child which is indicated by Neel’s failure to participate in the discussion. Here she lost an opportunity to add something new to the intellectual discussion and hence in Beauvoir’s term she failed to achieve transcendence and remained in the condition of immanence.



Protection (before 1911)
Courtesy- The Canadian Magazine

Beauvoir's *Second Sex* was a critical response to 'enforced maternity' in post-war France where women were reduced to mere wombs. When men participated in legal and political affairs to build the nation the role of women were to produce babies and run the household. Women were denied the rights of abortion and contraceptives were unavailable. In *Second Sex* Beauvoir argues for both legal abortion and easy availability of contraception, which "would permit woman to freely assume her maternities" (:1974:343). She reveals that abortion can inflict deep emotional and bodily wounds on women. In her opinion contraception should freely be available to spare women from going through the mental and physical agony, and also abortion should be legalised so that women can avoid burdens of secrecy, shame and danger. Beauvoir condemned the Catholic Church for opposing contraception and abortion when contraception would generally reduce the need for abortion. This hegemonic imposition of enforced maternity for the project of nation building was prevalent in many other countries in the span of 19th to 20th century be it in the Weimar Republic of Germany, Eugenic in Canada and also in post-independence India, where women were seen only as mothers taken birth to fulfil her biological role of reproduction and continuation of the world. The glorification of motherhood ideal was actually a mode of ideological control on women in which only her reproductive function was glorified. This in turn was served to justify their exclusion from more productive contribution, education and professional life which were when available were wrapped in the ideology of nurturing and caring. This strategy of projecting women as spiritually and morally stronger than men was a façade which actually made them emotionally and economically dependent on men. The social responsibility on women which was intrinsically related to building a stronger nation with increased man-power was a nationalist ideology which bound women to a legitimate subordination, where they were deemed fit for only bearing and rearing children and no other activity. This idealised and also idolised figure of women as a mother in reality deprived them of authority and agency, all women were clubbed under the category of mother which throttled their individuality and subjectivity. Nationalist discourses are entangled with questions about gender as with the 'woman question' so intricately linked with the agenda of social reform it was inevitable. But these social reforms of the 20th century instead of touching the actual lives of women carried on the same traditional conception of women equivalent to mother. The real life experiences of women differed enormously than what it was imaged under the nationalist program. But the nationalist discourses in their own style decided to uphold the maternal figure as symbol of power, which in truth was a powerless dominated body.

Apart from restricting a woman's identity, subjectivity and autonomy in the garb of motherhood, the female body was also desexualised. Having a child for a woman meant renouncing her sexuality and submerging herself in the domestic chores and maternal devotion. During the times of 'enforced maternity' women were pictured as the epitome of purity whose sexuality was only meant for the purpose of social welfare. The representation of a desexualised mother during the times of eugenics in Canada could be found in one of Laura Muntz's paintings called *Protection*. In this painting of mother and child she has depicted the maternal angel's sensual face, her cascading hair and outspread wings. The mother like Madonna is a strong maternal figure and therefore, there cannot be any overt sign that her desire includes any sexual component. Even though she looks sensual she does not have anything to do with sexual desire. In the picture the body of the angel whose gaze is averted is covered to the neck, defying any sexual reference to the body. The mother's virtual absorption of the children's body into her own suggests that all her passions are directed towards the selflessness of maternal protection; the infants' heads have visually replaced her breasts, now preoccupied solely with

maternal function. She has abandoned her sexual identity and redirected her desire into the sphere of the domestic. But desire may rebel against such restraints.

Though Beauvoir's *Second Sex* was based on the conditions of women of post-war France, it's relevance has not died, still today. Leaving the 'enforced maternity' bit the conception of motherhood has not yet changed, mothers still suffer from lack of agency and autonomy as they are still expected to be the apotheosis of self-sacrifice who would devote their entire existence to her family and especially her child/children. This is not to say that certain things have not changed for better with time regarding maternity, which includes sharing of parental duties, paid maternity leave and acknowledgement of the consent of women to become a mother, but the changes are not all pervasive and are most of the time taken for granted. This half-baked evolution in maternity has been revealed through the narratives of the mothers I interviewed as one of my interviewees, a mother of two children and a lawyer by profession is of the opinion that because of the socially determined and defined role of a woman as a mother, it is the mother who has to make a balancing act between childrearing and a professional career when ideally it should be a shared responsibility, since if a child belongs to the mother it also belongs to the father. But the reality tells a different tale as even though her husband and she is in the same profession, her husband does not have any contribution so far as the rearing of the children is concerned. The homemaker mothers talked about a slowly changing scenario regarding the role-sharing at the domestic front regarding rearing of children as one of my house-wife respondents said "my husband is very supportive and helps me to raise my child, he even stays awake at night when I am not well to take care of our daughter. But it is always not possible as he has to go out and earn money". So this sharing of parental duties happen on special occasions when the mother is either too exhausted or too till to take care of the child. On the days she is fine the child becomes her responsibility again. The mothers I interviewed also expressed a sense of gratitude and obligation towards their husbands for the little help and support the husbands provide to them for child caring and rearing. What comes out from these narratives of the new mothers is that no matter how much the world progresses child caring and rearing remains in the domain of the woman.

The mothers also said that the transition from womanhood to motherhood is a very difficult phase of life involving huge sacrifices at personal level in the form of career and independence which in fact has happened with some of the mothers I interviewed. A respondent who despite having a brilliant academic record and career opportunities had to sacrifice both to fulfill the socially expected role of a mother at the expense of her individuality and independence. she was working when she was pregnant but had to go on a temporary leave as she was unable to carry on with her work any further with the expectation that she would be able to rejoin her work when her son becomes 6 months old, now he is two years of age and she is a housewife. Another respondent, now a mother of an eight-year-old girl-child narrated a similar experience of quitting her job after her child was born. She said, "I took leave from my job when I was eight months pregnant, and joined back again after my child was seven months old. I could continue with my job only because I had an unmarried aunt to take care of my child also I had started to bottle feed her so that I can work again. I was 19 when I started working so I had to go back to work as it has become my habit and is also important for my mental piece. But as my child had started going to school it became difficult to continue with my work. I had to quit my job to take care of my daughter's education. In the beginning I consoled myself by saying that I have done this for my daughter but as time went on I became depressed, I would cry when I was alone or do things unmindfully, the idea of sitting back at home and doing nothing

productive was horrific and it made me feel really unhappy. Now since my daughter is eight years old and she is a smart and an obedient kid who can take care of herself I have with the help of my brother started a small business, it is new and small but still I am happy that I am at least doing something for myself”.

This idea of restricting women to the private as a care-taker of men’s progeny has started long before in all most all the counties and is still being practiced in the liberalized and globalized era. For instance, as I have already mentioned, in the span of 19th to 20th century in Germany, Canada, France, and also in India there was an upsurge in nation building which resulted in politicization of women’s role in the home as a home-maker and the idea of motherhood became synonymous with the idiom of devotion and suffering. For this women became more of a part of the private sphere rather than the public which arena were dominated by men. Women were allocated the duty of bearing children and looking after them to prepare them morally and educationally for the service of the nation. This idea has not undergone any change with the passage of time but has all the more strengthened which is revealed from the responses I received from the interviewee mothers who are to rear and care for their children and bring them up in a manner in which their children would be equipped to succeed by receiving proper and appropriate training at home under the care of the mother. In this context a respondent said, “I don’t get much time for myself, I plan my day in accordance with my daughter’s routine”.

Hence, from waking the child up in the morning, looking after the child throughout the day, to putting the child back to sleep again at night is a mother’s responsibility and to prepare herself for the next day to follow the same routine. After hearing such accounts from the mothers I interviewed I showed them the sublime and romantic paintings of Mary and Child Christ. Their initial reaction was that they liked the pictures and found them sweet but when asked how much could they relate with the representation of motherhood in the pictures as a mother they said the pictures showed an expression of momentary feeling of being a proud and loving mother but that momentary feeling of sublimity could not be a perennial experience given the stark reality of life. The societal and familial pressure seldom gives them this chance to enjoy such romantic and affectionate moments with their children and also without much help from their family members or husband child rearing becomes so tiring that it gets too difficult to even imbibe the beauty of motherhood.

The mothers I interviewed said that rearing children is a troublesome and exhausting process. A respondent mother laughed while she confessed that her children are constant trouble-makers, they are always up to some mischief and a constant watch over them is mandatory to keep them safe. She complained, “a minute’s peace is difficult to afford when they are around, only when they go to school or tuition classes I can concentrate on my other works”. If seen motherhood in this light it completely deviates from what has been depicted in the evangelical paintings or paintings inspired from evangelical representation of mother and child relationship as in Morisot’s or Cassatt’s paintings rather the daily humdrum of motherhood gets reflected in the way mother and child relation is represented in the paintings of Alice Neel. When I showed them the two very realistic paintings *The Intellectual* and *Nancy and Olivia* by Alice Neel every mother I interviewed narrated similar instances as has been depicted in the paintings by the painter. The painting ‘The Intellectual’ became an instant hit among the mothers I interviewed. They could very easily and clearly relate with the painting as one of my respondent mothers narrated a very recent similar happening, when she told me, “I met my school friend after a long-time, as she came to Calcutta from Delhi for a short visit we planned to meet at Park Street, Dominos. We had to take our children along with us as there was no one at our homes to take care of them. I generally don’t like to take my daughter along when I go to meet

someone, but that day I had no other option. We hardly sat at the eating joint for some minutes discussing about our school days and our future plans, we saw our children running around here and there in the restaurant and throwing pizza at each other, bothering other people present there. We had to spend most of our time managing our children, we could hardly talk”. Another narrative by an interviewee reveals the same plight of motherhood when she said, “when we were in Hyderabad for my husband’s job the entire responsibility was on me to take care of my son as my mother-in-law was not there to help me out with it. Whenever there used to be any gatherings of friends I had to always excuse myself from there as my son was able to walk by then and he would sometimes go to the kitchen or the bathroom and I had to run after him excusing myself from the middle of a conversation”. The mothers said that they have stopped going to any family or friends gathering, restaurant, movie hall or any other social gathering. They lamented that their social life has been sacrificed at the altar of motherhood.

The narratives presented by the mothers when I showed them the *Nancy and Olivia* painting busted the myth that mother-child bond is a very natural and intrinsic one. After seeing the painting, a respondent mother told me, “for a month after my child’s birth I couldn’t realize that I am a mother now, I was too busy with myself, trying to get back to my normal life post-delivery. After a month my responsibilities towards my son made me realize that I have a child now and I have to take care of him. After a month or so I started developing my bonds with him by meeting out my duties towards him”. This realization of the maternal duties was not intrinsic then as it is believed to be, it takes time to soak in. The socially hegemonic, biologically innate concept of maternity has been formulated by the society to produce the ideal and desired family system and child rearing process. Thus we can say that socialisation is at the core of motherhood which also becomes evident from the narratives of the mothers I interviewed when they said that a feeling of responsibility towards their children makes them realise motherhood. This feeling of responsibility later develops into a bond between a mother and her child which then gives rise to the feelings of affection and compassion in the mother towards her child.

It is true, motherhood is complicated and ambiguous, any straitjacket explanation of maternity would be foolish. Maternal desire varies as it has come out from the interviews, some mothers see the hard work they put into the rearing of children as their duty while others see it as a burden which their husbands do not want to take up. Some were absolutely fine with sacrificing their career while others got into depression. Whatever the experiences are every mother admitted that both childbearing and child rearing are difficult and demanding jobs coupled with household responsibilities. Most of the mothers get little to no help from their husbands or family members. They do feel stuck at times with motherhood. Though none of the mothers I interviewed had any romantic idea about mothering but they never expected child rearing to be this tiring and mundane that it is. These candid narratives by the mothers demand us to spare a thought, that rearing and caring of children would still be this strenuous and exhausting for women which takes away almost all their time and energy, had the fathers been a little more helpful by realising their duties towards their children and wives apart from financially providing for them? Like Beauvoir said no matter what meanings the mothers want to attach to motherhood it would still be a product of socialisation depending on the social context, and the meanings they give to motherhood would be influenced by the social structure they are in, which is generally patriarchal. This appeared to be correct as most of the mothers I interviewed were consciously oblivious to the matters of their individuality, subjectivity and autonomy while others passively accepted disappearance of their agency. In middle class and upper-middle class families the coercion is subtle, sophisticated and nuanced, which very calmly indoctrinates the ethics of motherhood in the minds of women, even before realising they

surrender their agency and autonomy to maternity. Beauvoir never supported the idea of women making motherhood the exclusive vocation and be stay-at-home mothers. She argued, "When a mother cannot achieve transcendence in other fields, she may well resort to dominating her child, trying to make the child into her double" (1974:372). If the mother loses her avenues for achieving transcendence this can make her unhappy and frustrated the anger of which she might take out on her children through arbitrary rules and cruel punishments. These patterns can produce tyrannical mothers which can harm the mother-child relationship, where the child would try to exert his/her independence to move away from the mother. But what Beauvoir did not realise or was not ready to accept is that most of the time motherhood and career cannot go side by side as has been revealed by the interviewee mothers who had to sacrifice their career for their children. Beauvoir says if the mother seeks her life's entire meaning in her child then she would ultimately doom herself to unhappiness so the child "ought not to be the limit of his mother's horizon" (1974:388) because one day unavoidably, the child would grow up and leave her. Reverse to the idea of motherhood giving greatest joy to the mother, Beauvoir asserts that exclusive motherhood is bound to leave women unfulfilled and unhappy. This is the reason why Beauvoir tells Friedan, that mothers should maintain other activities besides motherhood and that a "properly organised society" would help mother to raise kids where "the child[ren] being mainly cared for by the group" (1974:388). Hence it is important in the societal and the familial level to arrange rearing of children in such a way in which it becomes a collective responsibility to relieve the mother from the entire burden of child rearing. In this way every member of the family and society can exercise their autonomy, subjectivity and agency without any hindrance. Provisions like paid maternity leave should be implemented properly, families should be open to the idea of crèche and play schools so that women do not have to quit their jobs and fathers should contribute equally to the task of child rearing and other domestic chores. For achieving all these the pattern of socialisation has to be changed where girls are prepared for the private and boys for the public. In *A Different Voice* Carol Gilligan says, humans are social beings and are interconnected with others through relationships and it completely makes sense to incorporate this style of thinking in a girl's education but the same has to be done for boys too. Parents can instil balanced ethics, inclusive of humanist interconnection in both boys and girls by showing they are deeply linked to their family and community, and their success need not come at other's expense. Addressing gender inequality in the process of moral development can lead to a stronger vision of ethical development in boy's and girl's education. "Don't worry if little Johnny cries when he gets in a spat with his best buddy, or tiny Sally is determined to become a hard hitting lawyer steeped in justice morality" (motherhoodinpointoffact.com) because it is okay for a boy to cry and show his emotions and also it is okay for a girl to contest what she finds to be wrong and vice-versa. It is only right to let the moral approach that develops spontaneously in children to grow unhindered. Combined, feminine and masculine ethics can be the building blocks of complete moral system. The combination of rights and responsibilities when synthesised within a child's moral universe, a powerful tool can emerge which can be used for fighting with some of life's toughest realities. We can find a similar thought in Beauvoir too in that, she does not give importance to transcendence over immanence but regards them both as equally worthwhile and fundamental dimensions of human existence. Even though historically transcendence and immanence have been dived along gendered lines it cannot be denied that both sexes share in both sides of existence which makes every human being ambiguous (Bergoffen 1997). Hence Beauvoir's ideal mother is one who exerts her independence and also let her child do the same to develop a bond of recognition, by not being a servant to the child nor dominating him or her. For this the mother needs to exercise transcendence in the public world so that she can inspire her child to transcend too in the future. This will expel any feeling of frustration and destruction in the mother due to the presence of the child in her life, which will let her freely achieve

immanence in relation to her child when she “shapes his flesh ...supports him ...cares for him” (1974:388). Thus a woman can be a good and a contented mother only if she is happy herself which is possible if the society we live in can make some progressive changes in the regressive age old thought process related to motherhood and in the mode of socialisation to recognise the subjectivity, autonomy and agency of the mothers.

Conclusion

The choice of Motherhood is one of the most important decisions of a woman's life. "To be, or not to be" a mother is influenced by a lot of factors and the sociocultural context the woman is living in. The family being the core of the moral situation and the social structure the women are placed in has the most bearing on the women's decisions regarding maternity. Since the family is not isolated from other social systems the decision of motherhood has direct impact on the woman's extra-domestic aspirations. Since families generally comprise of heterosexual couples, the decision of taking children cannot be that of a mother's only but the decision impacts the woman's life more than that of a man's. The woman's motherhood decision is crucial for her physical, mental and also economic well-being as it is the mother who has to make most of the sacrifices when she decides to be a mother. From being pregnant when she goes through physical transformation which can be painful and distressing, to giving birth and nurturing her child which can result in loss of her identity, individuality, autonomy and agency. Women lose their economic independence too which makes them financially dependent on others even if they have the desire and capability to provide for themselves. Motherhood can be a binding process in many ways that can have severe impacts on a woman's life that's why feminists have long struggled to secure women's autonomy over the decisions of motherhood. Demanding that woman's right to procreate be respected, feminists have opposed coercive methods of curbing fertility such as forced sterilization and withholding welfare supplements for babies and they have also campaigned for the rights to choose to not to procreate by advocating fully funded contraception and unrestricted access to abortion. Even though the right to give birth or not to are tolerably secure, a woman's decision regarding childbearing and motherhood are seldom autonomous as they could have been. The winning of these legal judgments though a great achievement but still falls short of achieving feminist emancipatory goals. According to Catharine MacKinnon's theory of 'dominance feminism' women have the capacity for autonomy, but pervasive system of gender inequality does not allow them to exercise it while Kathryn Abrams' 'theory of agency' says that women's autonomy is not totally non-existent but they are partial or constrained. While Abrams' theory focuses on women's struggles to exercise agency within systems of oppression, MacKinnon offers an explanation of the patriarchal system that create and maintain those conditions. The autonomy theorists say that patriarchy prevent the self-originating, self-sufficient and the self-interested women to exercise their autonomy freely but it is important to note that women as human beings stay in a society and the circumstances they come across within that are unavoidable hence women have to find ways to freely exercise their agency within the system they are in so long the existing patterns do not change, in this case Abrams' theory holds true. Elizabeth Spelman and Maria Lugones says that it is important to have a voice as it is "integral to leading a life rather than being led through it" and that "being silenced in one's own account of one's life is a kind of amputation that signals oppression" (1986:20). Silencing disables agency, which makes it difficult for women to articulate their own experience and goals in their own way which makes living life on other's terms and in someone's else's version of you. The voice theorists say that women are systematically denied the opportunity to discover themselves, to interpret themselves as they want to and to live their lives on their own terms. When women exercise their repertoire of agentic-skills to voice their opinion about their experiences and desires then it shows that women have agency which they try to exercise to gain autonomy in

their oppressed setting. But it is also important to note that their narratives can be contaminated due to years of internalisation of patriarchy. As Kathryn Abrams' have argued in *From Autonomy to Agency Feminist Perspectives on Self*, autonomy or "liberal theorists have developed their conceptions on autonomy at some distance from those attributes of human subjects, such as emotional or relational interdependence and strong gender related socialisation that bear heavily on the lives of the women". MacKinnon too share Abrams' view as she thinks that women are not fully aware of the extent to which they are oppressed which results into false consciousness. The idea is that women are not conscious that their choices are truly not their own but are determined by gender ideology, this means that the systematic subjugation of women does not allow them to make their own decisions. The women are unwilling slaves to men, whether they realise it or not and opportunities to exercise autonomy is not available to women under the present societal condition they are only available to the ones in power which is in this case, the men. The women by internalising the masculine ideologies form a false consciousness and make decisions based on them which only contributes to and prolong the cycle of their own oppression. This masculine ideologies dominating a large group of people as 'all women' did not go down with all the feminists as they think women can be divided along the lines of race, class, caste and sexual orientations. In her defence MacKinnon said, "Many women ... believe that gender is a crushing reality from which no women is exempt. They also believe or rather act out a belief on a daily basis, that they are or can be exempt. If every tacit "present company excluded" exception I encountered on the road were excluded from my analysis, an analysis would remain that everyone accepts as generally true, but that almost no one- meaning nearly everyone- acknowledges applies to them in particular" (1987:218). MacKinnon's understanding of women's experiences ends up being "categorically preferred" to women's perceptions of their own experiences so it can be said that the analysis applies to everyone. And also that women are unable to view gender oppression from an objective perspective it renders them incapable of critiquing the system itself. It is not the intention of MacKinnon to say that women lack agency in all aspects of their lives, but she claims that some of their choices are heavily influenced by ideology which calls their autonomy into question. But Abrams thinks women have the capacity for autonomy which they exercise in forms not traditionally recognised as autonomous actions. Abrams calls her perception of autonomy as agency- which is the autonomy people have within the theoretical framework of socialisation- the process by which people are constructed by social norms, practices and images. The system of socialisation are so complex that it becomes nonsensical to talk about distinguishing internal influences from external influences, and agency is the ability of people to be autonomous in this complex structure. MacKinnon's and Abrams's theory in reality is related to each other and also analogous at times which I will be discussing later in this chapter but before that how autonomy and agency influences the decision of motherhood should be discussed in detail.

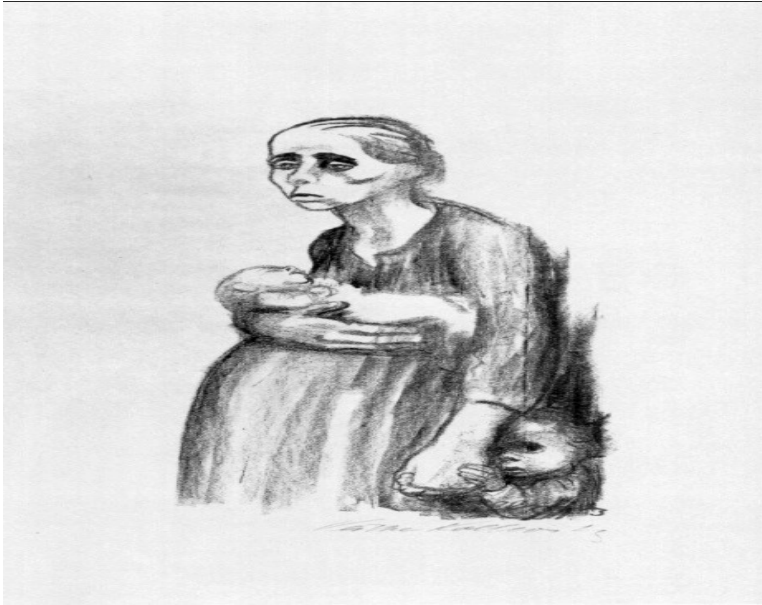
The decision about motherhood is so intense and ambiguous with daunting consequences that it goes against the idea that these decisions can ever be autonomous. Along with the invisible tenets of socialization and the influence that it has on women's autonomy seems impossible. "Darwinian mandates seem to hold sway, yet the relation between genetic coding, on the one hand, and subjectivity and desire, on the other, seems unfathomable" (Diana T. Meyers, 2001:752). It becomes important to disentangle the desires and values from internalised social ideology but any line drawn between them seems arbitrary and artificial. The fact about motherhood is also that the decision is irrevocable, and also "no one can accurately anticipate

and fully appreciate the consequences of this choice” (2001:752). The possibility of autonomously determining whether or not to become a mother might be rejected, as women are biologically designed to procreate, because motherhood is considered to be an irrefutable value, because of the lifelong consequences of the decision seem to be beyond individual power of understanding, or because the individual is thought to be too trapped in her social situation or too driven by her unconscious motives to be self-determining. Even after all these constraints autonomy with respect to motherhood is both possible and desirable. Even Instinctual behaviour does not lie outside the preview of autonomy. Despite the fact that motherhood is biologically programmed many women can refuse maternity or dislike nursing and childrearing even at the cost of inviting criticism shows agentic skills can override instinct. While some feminists think that motherhood is equivalent to subordination and therefore motherhood should be refused others cherish maternal desires but no feminists accepts the pronatalist belief that motherhood is essential to fulfilment as a woman and there are many reasons to make women’s autonomous control over motherhood decisions feminist’s prime object. Not all women are same, their personalities and attitudes vary so motherhood cannot be universal way of personal fulfilment for every woman, for some motherhood it is a bliss for others it is a burden and a source of frustration and depression as it was also proved by the narratives mentioned in chapter two and three. Motherhood can lead to economic dependence in women, childbearing and rearing most of the time forces women to quit their job and remain unemployed at the mercy of their husbands which can prove to be dangerous in the aftermath of divorce, most of the mothers I interviewed had to quit their job or education after the birth of their children. Even if things start changing like fathers realise their child rearing and domestic responsibilities and put in their share of hard work in it or employers become more responsive to maternal policies like paid leaves and on-site day care autonomy associated with motherhood would not cease as many women would not be perfectly fine with sending their children to an on-site day care and instead would want to be responsible for their children wholly. Whatever the style of parenting is, if it is not harmful for both the mother and the child then the mother’s autonomy regarding it must be accepted and respected. Motherhood also involves the health of the women as childbearing and rearing can be harmful for the mental and physical well-being of the mothers, like many respondent mothers of my study complained of health issues during pregnancy and child rearing. If there is any indication that childbearing or rearing can prove to be detrimental or fatal to the mother’s health, then mothers should have the autonomy to say no to pregnancy. Also, if a woman is infertile she is stigmatised by instilling feelings of inadequacy and shame in her the advantage of which is taken by the reproductive technology industry by peddling painful, risky and expensive treatments which most of the time are ineffective. In such cases women have to realise that motherhood is not ultimate goal of a woman’s life and if she really wants to go through such procedures to become a mother or simply adopt a child, which can also make a woman a mother. In a heterogeneous relationship this decision has to be mutual, but one should never forget that the body would be the woman’s so the final decision should rest with her. These are the reasons why women can deny motherhood and question the desirability to become a mother. The fact is that women are capable of making autonomous decisions but the point is can they make? Well few women can but majority of women cannot tear open the envelope of socialisation and come out of it to make autonomous decisions about motherhood in a patriarchal set up. Abrams’s theory of agency may be applicable to few but majority of women fall under the theory of dominance feminism by McKinnon in my opinion.

Many factors contribute to the lack of women's autonomy and agency associated with motherhood. Many culturally entrenched tropes and images that bond womanhood to motherhood and eulogise it can usurp women's voices and endanger their autonomy. Like I have already discussed in detail how the images of Mother Mary and Christ Child in the Renaissance period were used to inculcate biological essentialism and the ideal role of a mother who is an epitome of self-sacrifice. Even in the centuries after renaissance many painters drew mother and child images depicting their harmonious bond as if child rearing is the easiest task and woman are made for it that is why it comes so naturally and smoothly to them. These images have only added fuel to the fire by hiding the difficulties mother face in bringing up their children. Feminist psychoanalysts argue that the key figurative culprit in matrigynoidolatriy-the trope that undergirds the familiar imagery inventoried so far and the trope that ultimately carries the weight of manufacturing the "choice" of maternity-is the image of mother-child fusion (Kristeva, 1987:234-36; Bassin 1994:163). In the recent years the images of mother and child in paintings have been replaced by technical and 'scientized' images in the form of sonography. This image of the mother-fetus bonding fills the mother with a romanticized feeling of harmony, succour and bonding taking her far away from the realities of mothering by giving her a utopian notion about motherhood. These images also make the mother believe that she is all-powerful and perfectly beneficent and that the gift of biology is only given to women and not to men. Sonography is meant for practical purposes so any romanticism surrounding it is vague and misleading. The images can provide unrealistic ideas of motherhood and when they fail to meet the unrealistic standards of mothering they have a lot of trouble articulating the plausible reasons of their choice. "The siren song of fusion forecloses autonomy and marshal's antagonism to the very idea that autonomy with respect to motherhood might be a good thing" (2001:761). Families generally comprise of heterosexual couple and the decision of motherhood is taken in that setting. For MacKinnon heterosexual relations are mainly coercive and women continue this trend by taking part in it where the consent of women are seldom given importance. Even though desire is considered as natural or biological for McKinnon it is created by the hierarchical social relations between man and woman. The conception of women in a heterosexual relation becomes clear from Freud's narrative where he says the emergence of femininity is at the same time the story of women's amorous attraction towards men and the story of their desire to bear children. Many religious traditions castigate non-procreative heterosexual marriage as barren and sacrilegious. They promote procreative heterosexual marriages by saying the offspring born from such marriage is pious and the mother-child relation that it creates is the most sacred relationship. Even for this purpose they use the Marian imagery which identifies womanhood with motherhood and represent the mother as the euphoric, generous giver of forgiveness and love. The doctrine of true womanhood which are represented in the paintings of Morisot and Cassatt which relates childbearing with women's destiny and the 'cult of domesticity' which translates this destiny into child rearing functions have a deep history into the politics of coercive maternity. In the recent years the popular media has taken over the responsibility of this propagation from clergymen and they propagate through advertisements, televisions, movies or magazines that only motherhood is a source of fulfilment for women. This religious propaganda now in a more secular forms lure women towards motherhood through the idolised motherly figures represented in these forums. Sadly, many feminists have also promoted the idea that women are born to bear and rare children. Margaret Sanger was of the opinion that contraception should be made available for women only if it is prescribed by the doctor on the grounds of health

issues. Luce Irigaray's misogynistic declaration, "it is necessary for us to discover and assert that we are always mothers once we are women" (1991:43) cannot be considered feminist from any perspective. Also on Veever's analysis of voluntary childlessness is also shocking where she condemns such couples by calling them child-haters, anti-parents, narcissistic life-negating 'rejectors'. (1980:158-59). The negative social image that the society forms of childless women vividly portrays how the misogynistic idealisations are supported by people at large. The barren women are considered to be witches associated with black magic, if we go by this imagery of infertile women then we are at odds with men's horror of the pregnant body which changes shape like a body of a witch. So no matter pregnant or not women are always witches- a blood sucker of men. The women who do not take children willingly for the sake of their career are termed as cold-hearted, 'corporate bitches'. Parents usually advice their children to stay away from such childless women as they are considered to be failures and bad examples which might ruin their children too.

By inculcating the patriarchal concept of the sublime, loving, forgiving and self-sacrificing image in women's self-narratives and self-portraits through various mediums the society chokes the voice of women which results in loss of autonomy and agency. These imposed teachings interfere in the self-knowledge production in women whereby they cannot autonomously decide about motherhood as they see motherhood through the tinted glass that they are shown from. The patriarchal influence in the imagery of motherhood as a beautiful and heavenly feeling makes women hind sighted which eclipses worries, doubts, misgivings and fear pertaining to motherhood. In this regard, Donna Bassin has to say this, "if motherhood is taken on for nostalgic reasons, ...the mother can experience herself only as an object" (1994:172). Indeed, if women fall into this trap and embraces motherhood based on some fantasy then they really lose autonomy, and a voiceless entity is nothing but an object. The trope of misogynistic figuration of women is then not only used by the patriarchal society to convince women that the reproductive role is the most precious gift of their life, but it also glorified by some feminists as we have seen. This reminds me of Abrams' assertion that not only women but every individual is a part of the patriarchal social structure and that no one can exclude themselves from these influence and separate themselves from these constraints. Like we have seen that some of the feminists share the patriarchal ideology related to motherhood, the same can be said about the painters who since time immemorial have been painting the sweet and sublime images of mother and child reflecting the patriarchal dogma in their art work. The painters too lack autonomy and agency who through their brush cannot portray the difficult sides of child bearing and rearing. Painters too are a part of the world women are living in so it impossible for them to be unaware of the present conditions of mothering yet they refuse to depict such representation of motherhood in their paintings. Either they live in the fantastic, illusionary bubble of the patriarchy or they are too afraid to reflect the reality on their canvas in the fear of ostracism and criticism- in both ways they lack autonomy. Not many women can come out of the snare of patriarchy but some definitely do who can as Abrams' said that have the capability of exercising their agency within the constraints created by patriarchy, in this study we can see how feminist writers Simon de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva could so unabashedly and fearlessly bring to the fore the complexities, ambiguities, difficulties and the realities of childbearing and child rearing. It is through the initiatives of Beauvoir and women like her that abortion had been legalised in a time when it was considered to be a crime she also made the availability of contraception easy so that women do not have to go through a mentally and physically harming process like abortion. Contraception and abortion is absolutely



Down with Abortion Clause (1924)
Courtesy- www.everypainterpaintshimself.com



Henry Ford Hospital (1932)
Courtesy- www.fridakahlo.org

necessary for a woman's autonomy as motherhood is a huge responsibility and an unwanted child can have severe impacts on a woman's mind and body. Beauvoir never supported the idea of reckless abortion and that is the reason why she demanded for the free access of contraception so that pregnancy could be avoided. Kristeva was not very stern in her approach to maternity like Beauvoir, she celebrated joys of motherhood yet she fully acknowledged the complex and ambiguous aspects of being a mother, the union of the mother and child, the loss of self though was beautiful to her but she also accepted that it is confusing to the mother also. The paintings of Alice Neel give us another example of a woman who could exercise her agency through her paintings to gain autonomy in a patriarchal society. At a time when most of the painters, male and female were depicting the idealised and idolised mother and her child, the perfect innate bond between them Alice Neel chose to depict the other side of mothering which was more real and earthly. The paintings *The Intellectual*, *Nancy Olivia and Hartley on the Rocking Horse* (which I have discussed in detail in the previous chapters) are a process to give autonomy, agency and subjectivity to mothers by making them realise that their hard work and individuality is acknowledged and portrayed to the world. Alice Neel was a favourite amongst feminists because her works clearly portrayed feminist ideals of equality, autonomy and agency for women. Also in the works of Kathe Kollwitz's painting *Down with the Abortion Paragraph*, 1924 depicting a worn out and exhausted mother with two children one holding her hand and the new born in her arm while she is pregnant with another, was a political propaganda against the abortion laws of 20th century Germany and in the painting *Henry Ford Hospital*, 1932, a depiction of the painter herself suffering miscarriage, we witness how these female painters have given a voice to women by depicting how ugly and painful motherhood can get. But paintings like these fail to get wider recognition because they hamper the patriarchy's project of creating a world full of idealised self-sacrificing, obedient mothers who see in motherhood pure bliss and fulfilment and nothing else. It took several years of hardship and struggle for Alice Neel to gain recognition as a painter, her painting *Degenerate Madonna*, 1930 which is an unpolished depiction of Mother Mary and Christ Child in the form of a disfigured, bare-breasted mother and her deformed child was removed from the Washington Square Park annual outdoor art exhibit in 1932 by the Catholic Church on the ground that it was a monstrous and sacrilegious representation of Madonna. Paula Modersohn-Becker's painting *Reclining Mother and Child*, 1906 of a naked peasant mother lying flat horizontally with her child drawn to her bosom was inspired by the painter's observation of peasant women at child birth was a figure of mother in a coarse and unattractive form as opposed to the glowing and beautiful images of mother drawn by other painters. The painting was purged from the German Museum in 1930s by the newly empowered Nazi Socialists because they found the painting to be lacking in a "sensitive maternal quality". Also in chapter two I have mentioned that very little information can be found on Muntz's painting *Madonna and Child*, depicting Mary in a form of death and it does not even have a proper title as it has been represented under various titles in exhibitions. The removal of these paintings had a purpose as in my interview when I had shown the paintings of Alice Neel to the mothers almost all of the respondents could relate their experiences of motherhood with them as opposed to the paintings of Mary Cassatt and Morisot and also the Renaissance Mary and Christ Child paintings. The patriarchal society will never let these types of paintings have large audience, especially women spectators, fearing that their objective will be undermined if they open the issue of maternity to such unrestrained reflection, they thought it would be better to have them removed behind the gaze of the people. Paintings of these sorts never get their due credit nor do they get patronized which discourages



Reclining Mother with Child
Courtesy- www.artsy.net

many painters from depicting such representation of motherhood or mother and child relation in their paintings. But even at the face of such wide intolerance and despair these women writers, activists and painters actively and determinately protested against the oppression, coercion and subjugation of women by the patriarchal society proves that women have the capacity of agency to achieve autonomy. Their agentic skills impeded patriarchy.

MacKinnon's theory of dominance feminism has been criticised by many feminists as they considered it to be disempowering women by portraying them as victim. But McKinnon is of the opinion that it is important to recognise victimisation within the system of gendered subordination and try to act upon it rather than turning face away from it by avoiding the oppressive situations. For her to realise that one is oppressed and considered as weak to be subordinated is not a character flaw but it is the strength which makes one understand it and then try to reverse the entire system of subjugation. MacKinnon points out that, "it is validating to comprehend oneself as devalidated rather than as invalid" (1983:100). The present condition of women can be subverted by women themselves if they help to raise each other's consciousness which will make them realise powerlessness is not inevitable but it only encourages them to change their existing situation. If women start believing they are equal to men in all aspects then, "it becomes clear for the first time that women are men's equal, everywhere in chains. The chains become invisible, the civil-inferiority-the inequality-the product of subjection and a mode of its enforcement" (1983:104). We find a similar thought in Abrams' 'collective aspect' of self-definition where she said women should be aware of how the social influences affect them and this cannot be done individually so women need to communicate with each other to realise how those influences bear on their self-perception. When a woman realises that she is not the only one to feel a certain way can be empowering to the woman and also many other women which can lead to supporting each other and then eventually aid in making a huge change in the patriarchal structure. This many feminists have termed as "consciousness-raising". As Kristeva, Beauvoir, Alice Neel and other female painters have used their agentic skills to help raise consciousness among women in spite of all the hurdles they had to face. They recognised their oppression and decided to act upon them through their skills to find a voice for themselves and for other women going through the same situation. Acts like these on the part of women also some men who truly understands women's misery can help women discover their own agentic skills which will ensure their autonomy. A feeling of having someone beside to support them will provide enough courage to women to stand up and protest against the oppression that has been going on for so long in the name of motherhood. Many such forums have been arranged like talk shows, social media, journals etc. where women can freely express without any guilt about their joys and woes of motherhood. In the websites like *hipmama.com* or *literarymama.com* prove a space for mothers where they can talk about their experiences of diaper changing, to puke cleaning and the awful smell of their children's poop. Here mothers talk in a funny, honest and raw voices about their shocking and pleasant experiences of being a mother. Serious issues like faulty socialisation pattern is also discussed among women here like I recently came across a narrative of a mother on *facebook.com*, stating, "when I brush my daughter's hair and elaborately braid it around the side of her scalp, I am doing the thing that is expected of me. When my husband brushes tangle around bedtime, he needs his effort noticed and congratulated- saying aloud in front of both me and her that it took him a whole 15 minutes. There are many small examples of where the work I normally do must be lauded when transferred to my husband. It seems like a small annoyance, but its significance looms larger. My son will boast of his clean room and any other

job he has done; my daughter will quietly put her clothes in the hamper and get dressed each day without being asked. They are six and four respectively. Unless I exchange in this on emotional labour and actively change the roles we inhabit, our children will do the same. They are already following in our footsteps; we are leading them towards the same imbalance” (source:facebook.com). We also find the mothers talking about their mundane household responsibilities which they would like to evade for a wee or so like leaving the dirty dishes in the sink to be cleaned later or let their children go to school with unironed clothes, all these according to them do not make them a ‘bad mothers’. By sharing their experiences and desires so candidly on these platforms women certainly dislodged the concept of ‘good mothers’. But there in an image of ideal mother that would emerge from these narratives of the mothers: mothers can somewhat succeed in becoming a perfect mother so long they can enjoy leisure, have the economic capacity to buy and consume and exercise their autonomy, agency and subjectivity, without these a living being ceases to be a human let alone a mother. We can find Beauvoirian ideas of feminism here where women say they need transcendence to enjoy immanence. Beauvoir’s demand of autonomy and subjectivity for mothers is still relevant after so many decades of her work, this amply shows that despite few changes the condition of women as mothers has still not changed, they are still oppressed and subjugated in a patriarchal society. The concept of ideal motherhood is still being thrust down their throats.

Feminists’ contributions have been of immense importance to shed light on the various aspects of motherhood and in bringing the narratives of mothers into mainstream disciplines. The discourse of motherhood in the feminist study has helped in eradicating many practices that were oppressive towards mothers. By creating a place where the voices of real mothers can be heard the feminists ensured that these women get their autonomy and subjectivity back. But of late, the focus of feminism has shifted on other issues of women which has marginalised the study of motherhood in the discipline. In my opinion the concerns revolving around motherhood are still real and problematic hence they should not be neglected. In this light it is pertinent to talk about O Reilly, an associate professor of Women’s Studies in York University, who has committed her career in institutionalising the study of motherhood. She has written, edited many books and journals on feminist motherhood studies and has organised numerous seminars in Canada and the United States. Her *Journal of the Association of Research on Mothering* began publication in 1999 and was, the only journal dedicated to the field of motherhood studies still it ceased publication in 2010 due to lack of funding from York University and support of other scholars. O Reilly advocated feminist mothering that is a more liberal, feminist perspective of mothering as opposed to the institutionalized, patriarchal ideals motherhood. She argues, through the practices and theory of the feminist mothering, women can consciously choose ways of mothering that moves outside and beyond the cramped confines and demands of patriarchal motherhood. Research studies on motherhood have lost its significance in the present century, is it because everybody has lost their motivation in bringing about any change in the conditions of the mothers or are they assuming that already enough has been done to better the condition of mothers? But in my opinion, which this study has shaped largely, it is still imperative to focus attention on the issues of mothering along with other problems faced by women as maternity till date is a big impediment for women to achieve their autonomy in life, without which a human being is capable of doing nothing. Research like these help in formulating government policies and also to keep a track on their implementation. Some policies have already been formulated like paid paternity leave so that fathers can share part of the responsibility of infant rearing and also extended maternity leave and setting up of

crèche in various organisations. But it is also important to make sure that the narratives of women should not remain confined in the academic domain only it should reach out to the masses through popular media so that the world becomes aware of the different aspects of motherhood, it's challenges, complexities, ambiguities and differences.

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