

Portrayal of Motherhood by Female Authors in American Literature in the Light of *The Awakening, Herland and The Narrow House*

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgment	03
Abstract	04
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	05
Chapter 2 Sexuality and Motherhood.....	13
Chapter 3 New Mother.....	26
Chapter 4 Conclusion.....	37
Works Cited.....	42

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Abstract

The societal claim that skills and passion come naturally as soon as a woman becomes a mother is where my research interest begins. Besides, my personal experience of pregnancy and holding a life inside my body, intrigued me to do research in this topic. Due to the word limitation I am only allowed to finish my research by looking into a few aspects of motherhood with the help of literary texts. I have decided to work on three American female novelists and their works namely, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House*. I want to know how motherhood was acknowledged and portrayed in the early 20th century American literature. I have mostly used Adrienne Rich and Sara Ruddick's theories related to motherhood to give the theoretical structure of my research.

Motherhood has always been seen as a sacred duty in all cultures. Not all women are willing or able to carry out this sacred duty, owing to the fact that an immense amount of resources; time, energy, attention; and a lot of sacrifices are required in this rank. That is why the image of a mother always being a selfless caregiver is an incomplete one. There are women who want to reach out to other big dreams in life. However, the position of mother being the only caregiver creates hindrance in the way to realise one's other dreams in life. My analysis focuses on how three female writers have challenged this established notion of motherhood as women's sacred duty. In addition to that, I depict the image of "New woman" as well as new mother as explored in the novels and how these "New Woman" are not satisfied only by being a mother. I will also be looking at the different ways in which the novels also address the importance of shared motherhood as it creates opportunities for the "New Woman" to flourish in many ways. Moreover, with the help of these three novels I will be busting the myth that women's sexuality does not vanish into thin air with the experience of motherhood.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Motherhood has always been one of the vested topics of feminist consciousness. This issue is intertwined with feminist consciousness from its early days. It has a central role in the feminist question. The question of motherhood has changed along with the progress of feminism. Therefore, certain ideas of motherhood dominant in the “first wave” of feminism, or before that, may have been quite different from those during the “second wave” or “post-second wave” of feminism. Early American female writers like Anna Bradstreet, Mary Wollstonecraft and many who have advocated for female rights have also concentrated on the issue of motherhood. However, their approach of viewing motherhood is radically different from the later established feminists like Virginia Woolf, Sara Ruddick, Adrienne Rich and others. For instance, for the first wave feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, being a good and skilful mother was important and one of the main reasons of women's education was to make them "good mothers". In her book, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* she rhetorically questions, "Can they expect to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babies whom they bring into the world?" (Wollstonecraft 68). Here she is implying that, a woman without proper education and opportunities cannot be expected to be a good mother and a home-maker.

With the emergence of the second wave of feminism, the issue of motherhood has gained different perspectives. However, during this second wave motherhood has been questioned even more critically than before. Motherhood is viewed as a socially constructed responsibility for women. This idea challenges the traditional notion that motherhood is "natural" to women. Moreover, they blame the institution of motherhood to be an oppressive institution that powerfully controls women's position. During the 1960s, motherhood was studied as one of the core reasons of women's powerless position in the society. According to the key feminist of the second wave movement, Simone de Beauvoir, women's supposedly natural position as a mother is the main reason behind their oppression in the society. In a article *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood*, Yolanda Astarita

Patterson mentions an interview of Simone de Beauvoir by Alice Schwarzer, where Simone de Beauvoir says that women drag themselves into slavery by making the decision of getting married and having children (Patterson 87). Beauvoir's decision of remaining childless confirms her firm belief that motherhood is a hindrance in a woman's path of achieving a liberated position in the society.

However, during the 1970s the mindset of feminists about motherhood had started to change. An anthology of woman's writing, add a disclaimer in their preface that, "We are not against love, against men and women living together, against having children. What we are against is the role women play once they become wives and mothers" (Babcox and Belkin 106). It was not until the 1980s that feminists had started to theorize motherhood and start talking about the diverse dynamics of motherhood. Feminists like Adrienne Rich, Sara Ruddick and Julia Kristeva developed theories of motherhood within larger social, political and psychological framework. Some of their references will be used in the essay.

To being with, Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born*, depicts women's real life experiences as mothers in the society. She argues that, the nuclear family structure and the institutionalized rules of motherhood can be oppressive to women. She is one of most well-read female poets and she started getting fame in the last half of 20th century. She was born at Baltimore in 1929 and died recently in 2012 in California. She is a poet, essayist and a feminist. Her book *Of Woman Born* was published in 1976 and it consists ten chapters. Each of the chapters have a series of interviews and letters about women's experience of motherhood. Based on those real life experiences Adrienne Rich labels motherhood as an institution controlled by patriarchy. The study of motherhood cannot be complete without reading this book.

Contrary to Adrienne Rich, another one of the theorists that I am referring to in this paper, Sara Ruddick is both a sociologist and a feminist. She was born in 1935 and died in 2011 in New York. Adrienne Rich and Sara Riddick are contemporary feminists who talk about motherhood from the

"second wave" of feminism. While Adrienne Rich talks about the sufferings of motherhood, Sara Ruddick has labelled this suffering and sacrifice as Pacifism and suggests using it in politics. She has recognized the peaceful approach of motherhood and she wants to apply this approach to the state level. She has mentioned in her book *Maternal Thinking*, "I believe mothers do have a tradition of peacefulness that can be strengthened and mobilized for the public good" (Ruddick 71). Her approach of viewing motherhood is related to peace and politics. Her book *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics and Peace* was published in 1989 in Boston. The book is divided in to three parts.

On the other hand, Julia Kristeva, an influential Bulgarian French feminist argues that, the journey of motherhood starts from the moment you are certain of carrying another body and soul within your own. Like other women's experience of motherhood, my experience of motherhood has also brought about a change in my body, mind and surroundings. In spite of being guided by a religion which has given mothers the highest value and respect in every space, I was not completely free from the thought similar to that of Simon De Beauvoir. That, motherhood can put so many restrictions on a female body that it eventually diminishes her subjectivity. However, with my first experience of pregnancy I have realized how theories should talk more about the enormous happiness women get through this experience. Moreover, I want to see if skills related to motherhood come naturally or whether a mother needs to work hard to achieve these skills. Lastly, I want to look into literature and see how experience of motherhood has been portrayed there.

My interest to work on the representation of motherhood emerged from my reading of different literary texts in different English literature courses. In the begging year we read Jane Austen, Charlotte Bone, Charles Dickens and many more. The portrayal of mother figure in their novels can be considered as a typical portrayal of motherhood. For instance, through Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* it is evident that the traditional and middle-class Victorian experience of motherhood is limited to petty thoughts. In the novel Mrs. Bennet has five young daughters and like a traditional

mother she is worried and trying hard to marry them off. Her desperate attempts to pair up her daughters with suitable men reflects how her whole life revolves around them. Besides, there was no traces of sexuality in the portrayal of the mother character like Mrs. Bennet. After that in my second and third year I got acquainted with novelists and poets who tried to breakdown the image of traditional and ideal mother. For instance, in my Modernism course I read *Sun* by D.H Lawrence. In this short story *Sun* for the very first time I discovered a mother who is open about her sexual desire. In the same year, I read *Herland* in my Feminism course. My main interest of working with the various notions of mother and motherhood peaked from the utopian mothers depicted in *Herland*. The novel addresses many contradictory notion of motherhood. The author of the novel, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, suggested a perfect model of mother and at the same time showed those mothers as women with no sexual desire. Therefore, I thought of exploring the issue of breaking the image of traditional mother and sexuality of mothers. As the main interest has grown from American novel *Herland*, I searched for two other novels that have equally, if not more, interesting mother-characters. In that process I came across Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*; as it has a controversial mother character Edna; and Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House*. The mother character Winnie, in *The Narrow House* creates the scope of looking into the life of a modern ailing mother. All of my authors are from the early 20th century in America. In spite of living in the same era and being subject to similar historical incidents, their take on mother and motherhood are radically different from each other and that is one of the reasons why I have chosen to work with them – as this will help me to study mothers with diverse characteristics and I am also interested to explore the agents behind this diversity.

By looking at American literature we will see how in the age of Anna Bradstreet motherhood was completely moulded with strict code of Puritanism and after that, how the age of Enlightenment had impacted American literature. This also brought about radical changes in female writing about mothers and eventually constructed the idea of "New woman". Therefore my study explores the notion

of this "New Woman" who eventually become New Mothers. Moreover, it also explores the issue of woman's sexuality in relation to motherhood as sexuality is one of the main attribute of "New Woman".

My study is carried on through the help of Evelyn Scott's novel *The Narrow House*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. Three of the novels have mother figures who are young. However, each of them open the door for the readers to experience three radically different characters. Their philosophies of life and action are what make their experience of motherhood so different from each other. In other words, three of the novels talk about the modern figure of mother. For my theoretical framework, In the next few paragraphs I shall introduce the reader with the novelist and novels I am working with.

First of all, *The Awakening* was originally titled as *A Solitary Soul*. The central character Edna Pontellier has spent her childhood at the old Kentucky bluegrass country and later married wealthy Mr. Lawrence Pontellier. He is a wealthy French Creole man and lives in New Orleans. They have two sons, Etienne Pontellier and Raoul Pontellier. Both of them are still in their boyhood and are self-sufficient. They are self-sufficient because their mother Edna is "not a mother-woman" (Chopin 9). "If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing" (Chopin 9). The Pontellier family is on a summer holiday at Grand Isle resort where Edna gets acquainted with Robert Lebrun. His mother Mrs. Lebrun is the owner of the resort. Gradually Edna grows a strong romantic affection towards Robert and vice versa. Throughout the vacation Edna gets to know many people like Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. Adele is the epitome of an ideal mother and Mademoiselle Reisz is a musician. Both of them play a great role in Edna's self-awaking. During the vacation Robert leaves Grand Isle and goes to Mexico in order to seek his fortune. After the vacation the Pontellier family returns to their mansion in New Orleans. After coming back Edna engages herself fully with her painting and later buys a small

house for herself. Moving to a solitary house bought by her own money was an expression of freedom for her. The protagonist Edna has unorthodox views about femininity. Her views create conflicts within her desire and duties and eventually she becomes a solitary soul as neither her family nor the society welcome her unorthodox life. That eventually compels her to commit suicide. Being a 19th century American writer Kate Chopin perhaps tried to depict the changing views about woman and motherhood in America. Since the first publication of this novel in 1899 to this era readers and critics have mixed response about the novel, mainly the creation of Edna Pontellier. Moreover, the novel is considered to be the first southern modern piece of literature which has a strong essence of feminism in it. Kate Chopin had been highly criticized after the novel was published. She was criticized for creation of a female character who is open about her sexuality. Moreover, her novel is also thought to be very much inspired by Henrik Ibsen's drama *A Doll's House*. As the main female character from *A Doll's House* also abandons her husband and children in order to live life only for her self-enjoyment. For Kate Chopin it was a deliberate act of creating a character like Edna Pontellier as she wanted to create the "New Woman" image who wants to be sexually and economically independent.

Herland is the second novel I am working with. It is the second book of the trilogy written by prominent American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This novel does not talk about any individual experience of motherhood of any character. Rather it depicts an unusual experience of community motherhood. This is also called a utopian feminist novel which shows that the possibilities of women is a different world without any men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman has tried to make a world through her pen that may ensure women's freedom in very sphere. This novel has been highly criticized for the conflict within it. The author's attempt is to show a free world of woman without the domination of man. However, eventually the novel welcomes three men who have come to unfold the mystery of Herland. After the three men Jeff, Terry and Vendyck reached Herland, they were amazed by the organized and well administrated city of women. The women of Herland captures them and train them for fatherhood.

They exchange information about their history and culture. Eventually three women of Herland Ellador, Celis and Alima marry Vendyck, Jeff and Terry respectively. Before the intervention of these three men, the women of Herland used to give birth through the natural process called Parthenogenesis. After the marriages, we see that the women of Herland are not interested in sexual intercourse with their husbands for the purpose of pleasure, but rather only they want it solely for the purpose of reproduction. They are portrayed as women with so sexual desires. Though Herland has been one of the least popular works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, recently the novel became a great interest for feminist consciousness. One of the most celebrated works by her is *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

The third and final novel I am working with is *The Narrow House*. *The Narrow House* is produced by one of America's hidden talents Evelyn Scott. She was the contemporary of William Faulkner and was a well-read modernist writer. However, soon her fame and popularity was overshadowed by the fame of William Faulkner. Andre Powell Jenkins in one of her articles wrote that, "She circulated with some of the most prominent writers of the time; in fact, her work was so well respected that William Faulkner's publisher used her review of *The Sound and the Fury* to promote the novel. Ironically, Faulkner's career ultimately overshadowed Scott's" (Jenkins 78). Later, she was discovered by a University researcher. *The Narrow House* is also the first part of a trilogy by Evelyn Scott. The time Evelyn Scott was writing, there was a strict separation between the work space of man and woman. Men were working outside and women inside homes. During that era the subject matter of man, world war, politics, industrialization was widely written on. However, the author thought of writing from a different point of view and she portrayed the inner workings of a home and family in her novel. Lola Ridge wrote that "*The Narrow House* is like a fork of lightning. It probes into hiding places and shows your life — ugly, terrible, impotent — flayed of its last covering" (Tyrer 55). The protagonist Winnie is an ailing mother. She has two children, May and Bobby. She lives with her husband Laurence and in laws. After the birth of her second child Bobby she gets afflicted by diseases

and the doctor asked her to go for an operation. If she conceives without the operation she may die. Through the fragmented narration of the novel we see how her sickness has affected her maternity. Later we find her pregnant with a third child without the operation being done and it is during the process of delivery that she dies. Later, the grandmother of the children takes care of Winnie's three children. The father of the children takes no direct responsibility of the children and that goes to show how only women are associated with the responsibility of taking care of and nurturing children.

My paper consists of four chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The second and third chapters are the analytical chapters. In my first analytical chapter the association of sexuality with motherhood is explored. The next chapter is about the representation of the new mother in America. Here the idea of New Mother is inspired by the notion of "New Woman." Lastly in chapter four I have concluded my representation by talking about some of the contemporary events related to motherhood.

Chapter 2: Sexuality and Motherhood

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word sexuality means, "Capacity for sexual feelings". Here, it is the desire of a mother to be physically intimate and seeking sexual pleasure. Sexual desire and its fulfilment has been seen as an impure act, while the image of a mother is promulgated to be pure and innocent. The idea is very contradictory itself as a women cannot be a mother without engaging herself in a sexual intercourse. Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Women Born* claimed that "it is in the interest of self- serving patriarchal society to promote the notion of mothers being asexual and only a pure soul who is complete dedicated to her children" (Rich 156). In this chapter I will try to show how the issue of sexuality has been dealt with in relation to motherhood in the three texts I am working with.

An ideal portrayal of the 19th century American mother would be very domestic. On top of that the mother's world ought to revolve around her husband and children. She needs to be a submissive wife and a very caring mother. She should be immune of any sexual desire and pure. Anything other than this strict code of "womanhood" was seen as unwomanly and improper. In one word she should be 'The Angel in the House'. In 1854 British poet Coventry Patmore published a poem named "The Angel in the House" and there she give a picture of an ideal model of a wife and mother. One of the vital characterises of the 'angel' is its asexuality. However, 19th century American female writers like Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Evelyn Scott tried to show the dynamics of motherhood and they incorporates sexuality with motherhood. While Kate Chopin faced controversy because of creating a character like Edna, who prioritized her own dreams and sexual desires over the duty of a mother, Evelyn Scott tried to show the diverse psychology of a mother through the character of Winnie. On the other hand, Charlotte Perkins Gilman produced *Herland*, where women are portrayed as asexual. In the process of showing a utopian world for woman, she did not deal with women's sexuality. Many feminists have objected her portrayal of women without sexuality. Hayley Cavataro, a student of

Literature and Woman Studies, criticized *Herland's* portrayal of asexual woman. According to her, Gilman portrayed the mothers of Herland as asexual in order to please the patriarchy. She said, "Even once the women of Herland marry, they are still depicted as desexualized. Their focus is on motherhood, which is historically viewed as the antithesis of sexuality" (Cavataro 1). On the other hand, we can also see this portrayal of Perkins as a subtle satire of the gender construction of the society. One of the reasons, as to why I am exploring motherhood in relation to sexuality is to show the real experience of mothers with sexuality and desire. In this chapter I will try to show, how three authors have challenged the established notion of 'The Angel in the house' and how the three novels have portrayed the complicated relationship between women's sexuality and their self as mothers. Besides, I will also try to show that, an ideal image of mother as an asexual identity is a myth in the light of *Herland* and *The Narrow House*. After that, in the light of *The Awakening* I will show that, not necessarily every woman can submit to this overly idealized epitome of motherhood and can give up own their dreams and sexual desires. Lastly through the character of Winnie from *The Narrow House* I will depict the pathetic experience of being a mother in an era when contraception was not legalized.

In the late Eighteenth century, America was full of aspirations and there were many scopes for American civilization to flourish. French author Jean de Crevecoeur wrote an utopian letter describing America and its people. In the letter "What Is An American" he stated America as a free, liberal and classless country. However, a close reading of the letter will give the reader an understanding that his notion of classless and liberal society has a huge gap with contemporary notions. In the letter he talked about religion, nature, society, men etc. However, he did not feel the necessity of writing about the women of America. There was no mention of their roles and position in the society. He described the new American by saying, "The American is a new man, who acts upon new principals. He must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions" (Crevecoeur 4). Unfortunately, the women of the late Eighteenth century did not witness new men who are flexible towards women. As history suggests,

during late the Eighteenth century, women of America were losing their right to vote state by state. In 1777 women of New-York first lost their right to vote. Meanwhile, motherhood was also deprived of flexibility and understanding from men. Adrienne Rich in her book “*Of Woman Born*”, talked about motherhood being an institution which is controlled by men. She has argued that there are two meanings of motherhood. In her words, "Throughout this book I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich 17). Even though only women have the power to bear children, they are not fully in control of deciding what to do with their bodies. It is man who manipulates woman whether to choose motherhood or not.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* can be considered as an answer to this institution of motherhood constructed by society as she attempted to create a world where the choice of motherhood is determined only by woman themselves. Where outside Herland men like Terry choose to respect women if only they are agreed upon working inside home as housewives and mothers, on the contrary inside Herland woman like Somel and Zava consider motherhood as a work:

[Terry] squared his broad shoulders and lifted his chest. “We do not allow our women to work. Women are loved—idolized—honoured—kept in the home to care for the children.”

“What is ‘the home’?” asked Somel a little wistfully.

But Zava begged: “Tell me first, do no women work, really?” (Herland 196)

The women of Herland do not need men in order to conceive; rather, with the help of Parthenogenesis, they become pregnant. This process of getting pregnant without any sexual involvement with man was criticized by many critiques as women of Herland are portrayed as asexual. I personally believe it to be a satire of the society's notion about mothers. We tend to believe that as

soon as a woman becomes a mother she is free from her ambitions and sexual desire. She is highly criticised if she chooses to pursue her passion, career or become a person who does not suppress her sexuality. Chinese author Liang Ying also sees *Herland* as a satire and wrote in one of his papers named "Herland — An All-Female Women's Utopia" that "Herland is a mildly humorous or seriocomic story" (Ying 667). I think the author of *Herland* has written the novel very carefully. As on the surface, it may seem that her portrayal of asexual mother is to avoid criticism and to please the publishers, however many careful readers will read it as a satire.

Moreover, Terry and Vendyck's initial understanding of the woman of Herland and their conception of motherhood is seen as unfeminine and less motherly. The asexual nature of Herland's women was the main reason behind the men's thought. Generally, a mother is considered more motherly if she has many children. However, women of Herland do not have more than one child each. Here, the ideology behind having just one child or less children is to create healthier and a more beneficial life. According to Terry he has never seen something so unmotherly. Eventually Vendyck shares feeling similar to Jeff, "Van discovers a new definition of home and feels about staying with Ellador is like coming home to mother" (Ying 155).

The history of the formation of Herland tells us the reasons behind the women of this land being so motherly and asexual. First of all, the women of Herland have not encountered any man for the last 2000 years. Upon investigating on the history of the Herland, the three men get to know that once upon a time there were men in this land. It was a society practising polygamy, slave-holding and heterosexuality. However, it became a land without man by going through natural disasters and social upheavals. In a war, the land lost majority of its population. After that, they have again lost a number of people among the population while trying to settle in Herland. After that a volcanic eruption killed a big chunk of them. The people who survived were mostly slaves. Later the slaves had revolted against their masters and killed male masters, children, and woman. Those who revolted took over the land and

the remaining woman and turned them into their own slaves. The table again turned and the young subjugated women strongly revolted in order to free themselves from suppression. In that revolt they had managed to kill all the men and form a land purely of women.

Gilman shows that the women of Herland have forgotten the essence of romantic sexual intercourse as they have not lived with men for the last 2000 years (Ying 670). After all these years the reason behind collaborating themselves with men has just one sole purpose. The women of Herland now want to taste fatherhood too. According to Ying, "They also want to experiment with fatherhood to find out what motherhood has been unable to accomplish" (Ying 668). Therefore, three women of Herland have been paired up with the three intruders from other lands: Vendyck with Ellador, Terry with Alima and Jeff with Celis. Pairing up these three couples and marrying them off was the first step of this experiment of reviving fatherhood in Herland. However, three of the couples went through difficulties with their marriages as the girls of Herland have completely different views about marriage and love. When the men from other land seek sexual love from the Herlanders, the Herlanders showed more motherly love towards them. "To them, love is not sexual; love is comradely, warm, sisterly, and motherly instead. So even after the heterosexual marriages, friendship and mutual respect should come before sexual expression." (Ying 672). After the marriages, the men tried to educate the women about the relation of sexual intercourse with romantic love. However, the Herlanders only wanted to mate with their husbands for reproductive purposes. For them, sex must have this one purpose which is breeding children. In the process, we see Vendyck and Ellador were able to develop a romantic relationship without the intervention of sexuality from any side – as Vendyck agrees to Ellador's rules and regulation regarding their marriage and sexual life. On the other hand, Terry finds it difficult to see his wife remaining as an asexual being and eventually gets accused of raping his wife Alima. Besides, Jeff finds solace in the motherly love and care provided by Celis and does not even demand anything out of that. Here, men are reduced to the vehicle of reproduction by the women of Herland.

Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood wrote a dystopian novel named *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985 and portrayed a similar picture, where sex is allowed by the government only for reproductive function. In the city, “Republic of Gilead”, which is situated in America, most women have lost their fertility with the intervention of sexually transmitted diseases and sterility of pollution. Only few women have the ability and they are seized by the government. Those women are given assignment of reproducing child with a comrade selected by the system itself. In both the novels women are seen as bodies who have the ability and power of reproduction. In *Herland*, they suppressed their sexuality by choice and in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is controlled by the government. Only for the sake of their children's wellbeing the women of Herland change their mode of reproduction, which is now through sexual intercourse. However, their intention was not to explore their hidden sexuality. Both of the representations in *The Handmaid's Tale* and in *Herland* have showed how the female body is only restricted to reproduction. The female figures are only portrayed as mothers.

Another kind of sexual mother who seeks sexual pleasure outside her marriage is shown by the controversial author Kate Chopin in her novel *The Awakening*. Her creation, Edna Pontellier is an American and she is married to a Creole family. She is a Presbyterian from Kentucky but married a Creole Catholic. “I was running away from the Presbyterian service, read in spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of” (Chopin 20). Subtle sexual openness of the Creole Catholic's women is a new experience for her. Before coming to Grand Isle, she knew that her body and soul were longing for an unknown. However, several experiences at Grand Isle help her to find that missing piece of the puzzle of life. It was her understanding of her own body and desire. Everyone around her finds no reason of Edna being unhappy in life. For them she has a perfect life – with a husband who is wealthy and responsible and two charming sons. For the society, she was a complete woman as she has both roles to play. Role of a wife in a financially stable household and role of a mother towards two beautiful sons. However, Edna always knew deep inside that these things are not enough for her. She

had a self-exploration and individuation in her time at Grand Isle. Robert Lebrun, Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz are the people who time to time helped her find those missing pieces in her puzzle of life. Edna's character portrays the ways in which individual passion is restricted by the society.

Firstly, it was Adele Ratignolle who evoked Edna's sexuality in the process of "othering". Mrs. Ratignolle apparently seems to be a perfect picture of a mother. She is the epitome of "Mother Woman" according to most men. Her whole life circles around her husband and children and this is what is expected out of her. She takes pride on her being a wife and a mother. Her nature and action towards her children makes Edna intimidated. Although, according to Edna, Adele is doing things which are unnecessary. According to Edna, "[The mother-women] were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (Chopin 10). In comparison to Adele, Edna just remains a foil character. Observing Adele, Edna is sure that this is not what she wants from life and is not ready to give away herself for. She states to Adele, "I would give my money, I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin 53). Moreover, it is Adele who makes Edna realize for the first time of her suppressed sexuality. Both the woman goes to sea for a bath and after that they sit side by side and Edna gets a bit nostalgic remembering a summer from her girlhood. At one point Adele touched Edna's hand and addressed her as "pauvre Cherie" which means 'My Dear' (Chopin 20). Touching a woman or man with affection is not what Edna had grown up with. "She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others." However, when Adele touches her hand with affection for the first time she feels a sensuous openness inside her and becomes more open to others and herself.

Furthermore, Mademoiselle Reisz's music completely moves her. After hearing the music, she feels all her senses are opening up more. Though Mademoiselle Reisz inspires to be an artist, Edna is not a complete follower of her. She does not desire for an asexual life like Mademoiselle Reisz. Rather,

she longs for sexual intimacy, which is termed as masculine sexuality by the society. She started earning money by gambling and selling her painting. She even rented a house for her own, where she won't be questioned for her actions. She wanted to live a life of a man. Where she won't be questioned for not being the caregiver of children. She fulfilled her sexual desire like men by having more than one man in life. Her choice over her own sexual fulfilment over being a dutiful mother was not acceptable by the society. She was called insane by her husband, "It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally" (Chopin 71). Besides, Edna's death also reviles her suffering of being a mother and a lover of Robert. According to some she died of depression. After freeing herself from the duty of motherhood she was not fully happy. However, according to the deconstructive theory it was the loss of Robert's love that made her commit suicide. She felt more fulfilled in her wild relationship with Robert rather than the feeling of being a mother. Therefore, we see Edna giving more priority to Robert than Adele Ratignolle's desperate request of considering Edna's children over everything. Adele makes this request when Edna goes to visit her friend in sick bed. Adele makes this request because she knows Robert is back in town and Edna and Robert may take drastic steps like running away. Adele does not want Edna to fall into a more controversial life and tried to persuade her by reminding Edna about her children. She says, "Think of the children Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (Chopin 137). Even though Adele's advice keeps hovering around Edna's mind, she wants to forget everything for that one night. "She [Edna] meant to think of them [children]; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound - but not to-night. To-morrow would be time to think of everything" (Chopin 139). The night Robert came to visit her in her pigeon house, Edna had to leave Robert as she had to visit sick Adele. Upon leaving Robert, Edna promised to come back and begged Robert to wait for her until she comes back. However, her decision of forgetting everything and only thinking of coming back to Robert went wasted. Because, Robert already left her house before she was back and he left a note that he loved her.

He also said he is leaving because he loves her. Robert also wanted to make Edna's life less controversial. Here we see, if she would choose motherhood over her complicated relationship with Robert, she would live for her children; rather, leaving them without the shade of a mother. This is one of the reasons behind the novel being highly criticized as it completely breaks down the image of a Victorian angelic mother, who would sacrifice anything for her children which Edna did not.

Though ultimately she chooses to free herself from her despair by drowning in the sea and not deciding to live her life for her two sons. "The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them." (Chopin 142). Death was her way to elude her children. However, she was never immune of the pull and love she felt for her children. One night when Leonce was in New York and her children were at her mother's, she was missing them so much that she starts to talk with her dog about her sons. Moreover, after living on her own in her new house, she was frequently thinking of her children. After expressing her love for Robert she was not fully consumed by his love, rather she tried to compensate her children by sending the Bon Bon with a note, "An abundance of kisses" (Chopin 91). Similarly, her husband used to compensate Edna by sending Bon Bon and gifts when he could not give time to her. Just like those gifts were never able to compensate Edna's desires, Edna's gifts for her sons are also not enough to compensate the negligence she had towards her sons. Her long hug with her two sons in her first visit to Iberville after moving to her independent house again reminds the reader that Edna has a natural pull for her children like any mother. "All along the journey homeward, their presence lingered with her like the memory of a delicious song. But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul" (Chopin 105). However, she was not ready to leave the new Edna she found with the help of Robert, for her children.

The Patriarchal world creates boundaries between womanhood and motherhood. They are not

ready to see womanhood within motherhood. According to Adrienne Rich, man's urge to subjugate woman derives from the realization that only women have been given the power by God to create a new life inside her body. Besides, they fear women as a "sexual temptress" and her role of being the "consumer of his sexual energies" (Rich 56). Therefore, the portrayal of motherhood is best depicted through the establishment of an ideal image of women. In this 'maternal' portrayal there should be no essence of woman's sexuality, which we see in the portrayal of the Herlandean mothers. They are respected and have a glorious society because those women of Herland only have motherliness but no sexual longing. On the other hand, we see the portrayal of a sexual mother in Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House*. She is referred to as sexual because in a way she willingly exchanged sexual desire with her own death. Her death in the novel can be symbolic to the treatment of mothers who are sexual. As Adrienne Rich said in her book "*Of Woman Born*", 'motherliness' is split off from both sexual attractiveness [the temptress] and 'motherhood' [the powerful Goddess] and is acceptable in its "nurturing, selfless, self-sacrificing" form, thus, in the fourteenth century, the Virgin Mary would be worshipped while living women were brutalized and burnt as witches. (Rich 115)

According to Adrienne Rich the parallel representation of motherhood and Virgin Mary is an outcome of patriarchy and that has immortalized the institution of motherhood. As it is the institution of motherhood through which the patriarchal society displays its power. What we understand by the institution of motherhood is the decision of men who decide motherhood for women. In the book "*Of Woman Born*", Adrienne Rich also said that men feel intimidated by women's power of reproduction and therefore they have created the institution of motherhood to show that they hold more power than the power of reproduction. If we go to literature written by male writers, we will see their representation of the experience of pregnancy and motherhood is very ideal and overly glorified. They only talk about the happiness and satisfaction a mother feels by bringing a child on earth and raising it up. According to Bommarito, "Educated and informed men like Sperry never experienced the hormonal

fluctuations and pain that accompany pregnancy and childbirth, but they still recognized and understood that women go through biological changes that affect their moods during pregnancy". She claims that only a woman writer can do true justice to depict a woman's experience of pregnancy and motherhood. Therefore, we see the female writers' representation of pregnancy and motherhood can be more diverse than the depiction of motherhood by male authors. They do not just stop mentioning about fulfilment a woman feels out of pregnancy and motherhood but depicts the true experience. Unbearable pain of childbirth and enormous sacrifice are included in that true representation. Female emancipatory writers like Kate Chopin, Evelyn Scott and many others felt the need of writing about the "New Women". A new woman rejects the social norms if she pleases, she is sexual and capable of thinking about her own self. This "New Women" can contradict her own views and thoughts over the time. She is not framed or structured. She is new and modern. One of the reasons Evelyn Scott is known as a modernist writer is because she looked into the inner-troubled psychology of a mother and created a character like Winnie. She used the technique of streams of consciousness in her novel *The Narrow House*. Therefore, we, the readers, see Winnie's depression and despair when she gets pregnant with an unwanted child for the third time. She is constantly thinking of death. Her pregnancy is like a death voyage of her life and she is aware of it the whole time. The foetus in her womb is like a death angel to her. Therefore, after the doctor informed her that she is in a complicated pregnancy with her third child she began to cry in pain, "The shriek was against Laurence and against the living child that had come to consume her" (Scott 154).

In the novel, we discover Winnie's miserable position of a woman living in the era of no legal contraception. The novel was published in 1921 and it was not until March 22, 1972 that contraception was legalized throughout America. It was Margaret Sanger who fought for the legalization of contraception in America all her life and finally through her organization Planned Parenthood she established her fight. Adrienne Rich in one chapter of her book named "The Sacred Calling" talked

about a letter sent to Margaret Sanger from a woman seeking advice about birth control. She wanted to have a fearless intercourse with her husband and wanted to be natural without worrying about getting pregnant again. She also wrote that this constant fear is an obstacle for the many roles she has to play in life. In the novel, Winnie is an ailing mother. The doctor advised her to have an operation before she can try for her third child. She can die if she conceives for the third time without the operation done beforehand. In spite of being aware of her complication, she does conceive for the third time. However, she had no intention or desire of another pregnancy. Her last pregnancy and the birth of Bobby is what caused her current illness in the novel. Her sickly body did not immunize her from her desire to be loved by her husband, though her sickness made her husband feel less attracted towards her. Most of the time he responded to Winnie's sexual invitation, with just one or two kisses and a cold reminder that she is unwell. In her book *The Second Sex* Simon de Beauvoir talks about a similar issue, where a woman thinks pregnancy and children create distance between husband and wife, "...it is very difficult to remain desirable with chapped hands and a body deformed by pregnancies; this is why a woman in love often feels resentment of the children who ruin her seduction and deprive her of her husband's caresses...(Simon de 646). In the novel *The Narrow House* it is Winnie's complication with pregnancy that made her undesirable and unattractive to Laurence. Further to that, Winnie can sense her husband's passion towards her is dying and she did not want that. "He was unrelated to Winnie, sick and tense in the bed" (Scott 103). Therefore, she chose to forget the dreadful consequence of becoming pregnant again and made her husband to have sexual intercourse with her. Before that, several times in the novel we see, she tries hard to make her husband love her sick body against his will. As her sickness made her believe that everyone must be hating her for being sick. The intimacy with her husband without contraception and at the risk of her life can be seen as a form of rebellion. She wanted to defeat her sickness through her sexual desire.

In a nutshell it can be said that, in the three above mentioned novels there were roughly two

kinds of mothers. Sexual and asexual. Edna and Winnie fall under the first category and the mothers of Herland falls under the second. In the next chapter, I will talk about the idea of “New woman” in relation to motherhood and will also talk about the concept of shared mother in the light of the three novels I am working with.

Chapter 3: New Mothers

In this chapter I explore the theme of motherhood through the lens of “New Woman”. To begin with, it can be said that the emergence of new mothers can certainly come with the emergence of “New Woman”. On March 1894 Sarah Grand published an article, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," in America's first literary magazine *The North American Review*. Here, for the first time, she coined the term "New Woman" and defined the term as well. In the article she has talked about the ways that men can create hindrance in women's lives and do not let them come out of their cocoons. According to Sarah Grand, women who do not consider marriage, and, motherhood as their only outlet are New Women, "...she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-woman's sphere, and prescribed the remedy" (Grand 271). Here the remedy she is suggesting is the urgency of becoming a "New Woman" for the betterment of both the sexes. Later, in 1993, American historian Ruth Bordin in his book *Alice Freeman Palmer: The Evolution of a New Woman* said, "The term New Woman always referred to women who exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic" (Bordin 2). Moreover, she claimed that the "Flappers" from the "Roaring Twenties" are also the New Women. They were open to sexuality and would involve themselves with as many men they would like outside their marriage. The word Flapper is coined by sensational American Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. Basically, short hair, party lover and sexually open women of that decade are called Flappers. Maternity and motherhood was the last thing they wanted to think about. To put it in another other way, they can be seen as a complete contrast to the "Angel in the House". As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of "Angel in the House" comes from Coventry Patmore's idealistic poem "The Angel in the House". In this poem, 19th century British poet Coventry Patmore described his wife Emily and suggests that she should be a model of an ideal woman. She should be a submissive wife, a self-sacrificing woman, a very dutiful mother and best at maintaining servants and households. In Coventry's words,

"Man must be pleased; but him to please
 Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
 Of his condoled necessities
 She casts her best, she flings herself"(Patmore l.1 1-4).

The poem was published in 1854 and gained much popularity throughout the nineteenth century and further. In an article named "*No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women*", M. Jeanne Peterson said, "For some the angel in the house is evidence of a "golden age" of family life, an era when men and women had separate roles in the social hierarchy. For others, she is a symbol of oppressed women trapped in the gilded cage of Victorian male domination"(Peterson 678). Virginia Woolf is someone who belongs from the second thought group. She thinks women cannot have a professional life outside the household if the image of "The Angel in the House" is not killed. This image is highly associated with motherhood, the image of "The angel in the house" suggests a devoted mother figure. Therefore it can be said that, this image "New Women" and "Flappers" are born by killing the image of "The Angel in the House". The "New Woman" wants to make her own identity besides the identity of a mother and a wife. They have great sense of subjectivity. Besides, Sara Ruddick in her book *Maternal Thinking* said that a mother daydreams about her children's future and about her children's morality. However, this New Mother is not overly obsessed about the future of her children but trying her best to uphold her individuality to the world. In this chapter I shall talk about the concept of "New Woman" in relation to New Mother in the light of the three novels I am working with. I will try to show that The New Mothers seek the help of shared motherhood in order to fit into the concept of "New Woman", both consciously and subconsciously. After that, I will show how "New Woman" become new mothers by not limiting themselves to motherhood but considering professional life for themselves.

To begin by defining motherhood or who can be referred to as a mother, we will see the

definition of motherhood is quite broad and is not exclusively limited to the biological mother. Though our society has conditioned our minds in a way that, as soon as we mention 'mother', a female figure appears in our minds. We do not distinguish between a mother and a birth giver. Though there are philosophers and feminists who have re-defined the scope and definition of motherhood. The biological feature of a woman gives her the ability to be a child bearer and eventually a birth giver. However, that does not necessarily make her a mother. According to Sara Ruddick, "Nor is there any reason why mothering work should be distinctively female, anyone who commits her or himself to responding to children's demands, and makes the work of response a considerable part of her or his life, is a mother" (Ruddick 12). This definition of a mother given by this 20th century feminist suggests that a man can also be a mother. By sharing similar thought Julia Kristive said in one of her essays called *Motherhood Today*, "...it is not impossible that through psychoanalysis, self-analysis or sublimating work a woman can also live out her maternal passion without gestation and giving birth (through adoption, surrogate mothers and other fertility techniques to come, or on another level through care-taking, teaching, long-term relationships or in communal/community work)" (Kristive 1). To add to that, being a good mother is not a natural process like being a birth giver. A woman becomes a birth giver under many circumstances. It can be her own choice, it can be a compulsion, it can be the institution of motherhood and she can also be a birth giver being a victim of rape. All these do not make her a mother. In order to be a mother a person needs to work on the skills of being a proper mother. The new concept of motherhood dismisses the gender-constructed notion of motherhood. This new notion of motherhood provides the scope of motherhood to all genders.

Moreover, the concept of shared motherhood was always there. A child is not brought up only by the woman who gave birth to it. The child's aunt, grandmother, sister, wet nurse, nanny all play important roles in its raising up. However, those helping hands are not labelled as the mothers of that particular child but only the biological mother is generally labelled as the mother of the child. Though

in the previous paragraph we see both prominent philosophers and feminists Kristeva and Rudich acknowledge those helping-hands as mothers.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her novel *Herland* portrayed a picture of community motherhood. In the novel, the responsibility of bringing up a new born child is not necessarily vested on the biological mother, rather the community chooses a suitable mother for the child and the responsibility of the child is given to the skilled mother. This also proves that woman does not magically gain the power of bringing up a child as soon as she gives birth to it. Rather Sara Ruddick thinks, women should go through some process of maternity training along with her natural instincts, in order to be a good mother. (Ruddick 107). Edna Pontellier from the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin is another character who believes this concept that being the birth giver of her children does not make her a mother. Many times, she left her children to Mrs. Adele Ratignolle and in her mother's house in order to pursue her own dreams and desires. Moreover, being a wife of a rich Creole man, she always had nannies to attend her children. While Edna is comfortable with community motherhood Adele Ratignolle is completely opposite of her. Here, she is portrayed as an ideal mother, who has devoted herself fully to the caring of her husband and children. She is there to fit into the image of "The Angel in the House". Therefore, it can be said that both the mothers of *Herland* and Edna took the benefit of shared motherhood consciously in order to pave their way for other goals in life.

Though both the novels *The Awakening* and *Herland* address the importance of shared motherhood and how it plays a great role in their life and create opportunity for becoming "New Woman". However, we see both the novels only is addressed to limited class of mothers and only that certain class can relate to this concept. For instance, the mothers of *Herland* are Arian breed. They are strong, fair and wealthy. One of the great privileges they have is that, the whole community sees the work of a mother as a professional work. And it is in their governing policy of state that only skilful women will work as mothers. On top of that we see these skilful mothers are also engaged in other

important roles of their state. However, the general notion in America about motherhood is addressed as a sacred duty, not a professional work. A work that all biological mothers shall play and also that, for which a women ought to feel successful if she has played the role by following the idealistic model of "The Angel in the House." Where utopian Herland addresses the hard work of mothers and thus calls it a professional work, disoriented and fragmented narrow house of Mrs. Farly from the novel *The Narrow House* shows the reality. For instance, throughout the novel she plays the role of mother to each and every member of the family. She is the caregiver of her daughter in law, her three grandchildren and nonetheless her own two children. She does not have any servant or house maid nor any nanny that can take care of the children. The financial condition of her household does not provide her with the facilities that the other mother from *Herland* and *The Awakening* are provided with. M. Jeanne Peterson in her article "No Angel in the House" has talked about this issue of class. The lower-middle-class and lower class women of America have to do all the household work and rearing up of children without any help of servants, like the upper class or upper-middle-class. Jeanne Peterson said in her article, "...the problem of being an angel in the house was radically different for the lower-middle-class woman keeping house on \$200 a year than for the upper-middle-class woman whose husband earned upwords of \$700 a year" (Peterson 678). Just like we see in the novels.

A child is a demanding person. It is not an easy job to meet all those demands. A person needs both physical and mental stability in order to maintain children properly. If one biological or legal mother of a child fails to meet all those demands and is not able to bring up a good human being, she is accused of being a bad mother by the family and society. Here Sara Ruddick in her book *Maternal Thinking* suggests that, those mothers should not even be identified as mothers as they are failing to deliver the labour they should deliver towards the children. In her words, "Mothers are not identified by fixed biological or legal relationship to children but by the work they are sent out to do" (Ruddick 11). In the novel *The Narrow House* the biological mother of two children, Winnie, cannot be identified as a

mother according to this understanding of motherhood. From the very beginning of the novel we find her physically ill, who herself is in need of care and nurture. She does not willingly choose the option of shared motherhood but her physical inability made her choose it. She is aware of her inability and is afraid that her two children May and Bobby would hate her for not being able to take care of them personally. Winnie is in her room most of time and only sees her children when they come to her room. Her communication approach with her children reviles the horror of being dependent on shared motherhood. Her children are deprived of her care and love but she does not want to be deprived of their love and devotion towards her as a biological mother. In the first part of the novel we see that Winnie's encounter with her two children is very desperate and confusing. She asked her eldest and only daughter May, who she loves more from among the parents. Her insecurity of not being loved by her children goes rampant when she helplessly requests May that, she should only love her mother and not sharing this love even with her father. Winnie says, "Then you love papa best? Oh, May that's cruel! You mustn't love him best!" (Scott 24). Later, Winnie asked the same question to her first son Bobby and Bobby never answers her directly but assures her by saying that he does not love his father. However, when Bobby declares that he does not love his father, Winnie did the opposite of what she did with May. Instead of being satisfied with Bobby's declaration she started to teach him that he must love his father as well and starts crying. Her bizarre behaviour with her children illustrates her troubled state of mind – how her sickness has made her vulnerable and selfish at the same time. She is always crying for love from all of her family members. "There was a sob in Winnie's voice. She was sick, she said to herself. That was why she wanted to be loved" (Scott 27). Shared motherhood was not a choice for Winnie but it was her fate. Belonging from an era where Modern American girls were making their lives as "New Woman", Winnie felt trapped within her sick body. As other women like Edna and woman of Herland chose shared motherhood in order to reach out for other goals, Winnie had no command over it. In one sense, Winnie showed that a woman is not free and independent until she is

the one who is making the decision of her life. She can be perceived as a full contrast of a New Mother while she cannot be called a traditional mother either. She is trapped in between like a fragmented soul similar to T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock. She lacks a healthy body which is required in order to be a successful mother just like Prufrock lacks many masculine features. Besides, both of them long for love and affection and at the same time fully aware of being unable to achieve it.

On the other hand, it was Winnie's mother-in-law Mrs. Farley and sister-in-law Alice playing the role of mothers for her three children. They are the ones who are providing care and nurturing to the kids. Mrs. Farley again proves that a role of a proper mother cannot be played well until one is ready to sacrifice many things in her life. She is not only a shared mother of her grandchildren but also a traditional mother of her own two children, Laurence and Alice. She is a complete contrast of a new mother. She has devoted all her attention towards her household and children. Her marital life is not content and normal because her husband Mr. Farley has an affair with another woman called Mrs. Wilson. One night when Mr. Farley does not return home, Mrs. Farley loses all her patience and strength and attempts to kill herself. As a woman she could not bear the pain of sharing her husband with another woman even if there is no love and passion remaining between them. This was the time Mrs. Farley was reminded very coldly by her daughter Alice that she has a duty towards Winnie's children and therefore she cannot choose to escape like this, "You've got to brace up. You don't care what I think of you or what you do to me, but you have to have a little pride and a sense of responsibility towards Bobby and May" (Scott 139). This is the only incident in the whole novel when Mrs. Farley tries to react on her pain and trouble. Otherwise, in the rest of the novel we find her relentlessly doing all the household work and taking care of the family as a silent caregiver. Depending upon her sacrifice, we see other characters living a duty-free life. For example, after Winnie's death her husband Laurence never had to worry about his three children. As the grandmother of the children was there for them, Laurence had the luxury of planning a venture abroad. "The children had his

(Laurence's) mother and Winnie's parents and required no sacrifice of him. He tried to stir himself to rebel against the children he might go abroad and leave them and do some of the things which had been impossible before" (Scott 220). Though it should be the father's responsibility of being the caregiver in the absence of the mother, we see Laurence play no role of being the caregiver. Rather the duty of caregiving is vested on the grandmother as she is a woman.

Moreover, Mr. Pontellier from *The Awakening* denies to call Edna a successful mother as he observed that Edna was not putting any effort to nurture her children like Mrs. Adele Ratignolle was putting. "He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, who's on earth was it" (Chopin 637). This accusation of Mr. Pontellier again proves that a biological mother should be naturally caring is a myth as being the biological mother of her children, Edna is unable to show compassion towards them like a traditional mother (Ruddick 11).

While the "New Women" are breaking the concept of a traditional mother and being more subjective. There are women who feel this new concept is also, in a way, limiting them. Maybe this is the reason one of the critics termed Emma Wolf "New Woman". In her book *The Joy of Life* she said "I hate that phrase 'New Woman'" (Wolf 12). I think the reason she expressed hatred towards the term is because of its limitations and the pressure that comes along as a by-product with the process of asserting oneself as a New Woman. In one hand, "All healthy, 'normal' women have been assumed to desire motherhood—after all, the achievement of motherhood has been understood to represent the primary purpose of a woman's life." (Powell Jenkins 5). Here Jenkins wants to say that motherhood became an implication on woman rather than a choice for her. From the decision of bearing a child and its way of raising up is always shaped by the people around the mother and the societal norms. A feminist, who considers this pressure, of being a mother, from the society as a way of oppression, has simply denied to give birth and experience motherhood. This gesture of protesting against the pressure

of choosing motherhood is not a fully liberated movement. First of all, that rejection of motherhood eventually loses its main essence, which is to liberate the woman's body, and gradually imprisons the mind. As rejection of motherhood becomes a parameter of liberating woman's body, many, who actually desire to experience motherhood, again feel the pressure of not choosing motherhood. This pressure is created by the feminist who avoids motherhood and also from a girl's maternal family. Just like the feminist, most of the maternal family of a young girl thinks that the responsibility of motherhood is a hindrance to her formal education and professional life. I have personally experienced this paradox, while in the first year of my marriage I wanted to be a mother but my parents were terrified of the thought. They saw my pregnancy and responsibility of a mother as a hindrance to my educational life. My brother did not even congratulate me as, according to him, being a mother at this early age will restrict my freedom of life in many ways. Julia Kristeva, to some extent, talked about the same issue of living in a paradoxical life in "*Stabat Mater*". She wrote,

“When feminists call for a new representation of femininity, they seem to identify maternity with this idealized misapprehension; and feminism, because it rejects this image and its abuses, sidesteps the real experience that this fantasy obscures. As a result, maternity is repudiated or denied by some avant-garde feminists, while its traditional representations are wittingly or unwittingly accepted by the "broad mass" of women and men. Again shared motherhood can be used as a solution to this crisis. Through shared motherhood a woman can work on both motherhood and her other ambitions in life.”

(Kristeva 7)

Moreover, there are women desiring for more. They do not want to limit themselves by just playing one role. Which is either of a mother's role or the role of a scholarly or a financially independent woman. However, they want both. They want to blend both professional and family life and they may not think that motherhood is their only outlet. This patriarchal society thinks women are

not capable of experiencing this wholeness. Moreover, they think women are not intellectually and physically strong, thus they do not see women's potential for wholeness. However, Charlotte Perkins Gilman could see this potential of being whole and living a life which is larger than life. Her creation of Ellador is a complete contrast of any Victorian ideal woman or idea of femininity, however she is not masculine either. She has motherliness in her and she is a forester as well. Her intellectual power is not only invested protecting the forest of Herland but she also has a strong understanding of motherhood and the greater good of the civilization. She is the one who realizes that the children of Herland should experience fatherhood too. Anytime, she could focus on so many important aspects of life as she lives in a community that practises shared motherhood. Shared motherhood opens up many doors for women to succeed and Herland is built upon this concept of community life and shared motherhood. Therefore, the concept of living in a separate house after getting married seemed like an alien concept for the women of Herland. Thus Van said, "All the time we knew that to these large-minded women whose whole mental outlook was so collective, the limitations of a wholly personal life were inconceivable." (Gilman 155).

On the contrary Edna Pontellier could not experience the wholeness like a Herlandean woman. She could not be a mother and an artist at the same time. Mr. Pontellier being an epitome of a patriarchal man constantly reminded Edna of her duty towards her children but never created a scope for Edna to make a balance between her two lives. As soon as she started her artistic expedition she was labelled as an irresponsible mother and housekeeper by her husband. After returning from Grand Isle, Edna kept spending most of her time at the attic of the mansion and did painting there. At one point she expresses her love for painting to her husband and her husband immediately said, "Then in God's name paint! But don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter." (Chopin 56). Furthermore, he compared Edna with Mrs. Ratignolle who is an epitome of

motherhood. Again the pressure of reaching the epitomes of motherhood is seen evident in Mr. Pontellier's expressions.

In this chapter we saw how, through the help of shared motherhood, Edna, Winnie and the mothers of Herland asserted their identity of "New Woman".

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The world would have stopped at Adam and Eve if there was no mother to bear children. In one hand a female cannot deny the enormous amount of joy she feels out of motherhood and on the other hand no female can, also, deny the amount of responsibilities she is vested with through motherhood. The experience of motherhood is both sweet and sour for every mother. Some women have enormous patience and selflessness to devote their whole attention to their children and some do not. However, I personally think women should prepare themselves mentally and physically before stepping into motherhood. They cannot seek happiness from motherhood if they are not conscious of the sacrifice and hard work a mother might have to make for her child. However, as we have seen in the three novels, not all women have the freedom and scope of giving herself the time and space to think about her future experience of motherhood.

For instance, in Herland motherhood is very well planned and organized. They were conscious and meticulous about stepping into the world of motherhood as well as fatherhood. With strong determination and plan they trained Jeff, Vendyck and Terry for fatherhood. Besides, their healthy way of living also indicates that they are very much careful about being the best mothers. Even among those strong, caring and beautiful women the leaders of Herland select the best mothers and only they are allowed to raise the children of Herland. These perfect mothers and their ways of raising children is what makes Herland a utopia.

However, the other two novels *The Awakening* and *The Narrow House* depict the real condition of American mothers in the 20th century, where many women have entered into motherhood without knowing the basis of marriage, sexual intercourse, pregnancy and, lastly but most importantly, motherhood. They were simply carried away by those bouts of events without even comprehending each of the experiences consciously. For example, in *The Awakening* the protagonist Edna rushes herself and marries French Creole Leonce Pontellier against the will of her father. She thought she is in

love with Leonce and wanted to tie herself with him before she might fall out of love with him. Besides, the author did not provide any description of Edna's feelings about pregnancy and what her state of mind was when she conceived for the first time. Though many modern critics claimed that Edna was metaphorically pregnant with her new self. According to the claim she conceived metaphorically with her new self at the beginning of the summer in Grand Isle and it is the touch of sea that impregnated her with a new soul (Lippincott 55). Kate Chopin's attempt of presenting the theme of pregnancy in a metaphorical way is seen as immoral. As she used this metaphor of pregnancy to show the difficult journey of becoming a "New Woman, who prioritizes herself and her painting career against her role of a mother. Her lessened attention is what made her two sons "abnormally independent" according to Mr. Pontellier.(Chopin 71). Kate Chopin brought out this metaphorical image of pregnancy in an era when even female writers were very much careful about not including any indecent or immoral description of pregnancy and childbirth in their novels. According to Madeleine Riley, "The novelists were on their guard to ensure that no charge of immodesty could be made against them" (Lippincott 56). This is the reason Kate Chopin faced a huge amount of criticism as she did not guard her writing just to avoid controversy.

Moreover, Evelyn Scott's creation Winnie had a similar rush and a romantic marriage to Edna's. Like Edna, Winnie also married against her parents will. However, we can distinguish between Winnie's life from Edna's by their financial and physical condition. Compared to Edna, Winnie has a poor household and unhealthy body. Winnie was very young when she had her first child, May. In this novel the author did not provide any description about the birth of Winnie's first two children. However, it is her third and most complicated experience that keeps the novel going. As I mentioned in chapter two, even though the doctor warned Winnie not to even think of having another child without curing her illness, we find her conceiving a third child with much oblivion. As if she had completely forgotten about the doctor's advice while engaging herself with her husband Laurence. Her surprised

and horrified reaction after knowing about the pregnancy, gives the reader an understanding that she stepped into this situation mistakenly. As if, she chose not to think about the bad consequences while with Laurence. This shows her powerless condition of not being able to control herself for the sake of her health nor being able to seek the help of contraception – as contraception was not legalized yet, at that time, in America.

Now we shall take a look into the literature with the theme of motherhood by both men and women because they happen to perceive motherhood very differently. First, let's talk about female emancipatory writers who wrote about the experience very critically. They tried to separate womanhood from motherhood and tried to show all the pros and cons of motherhood through various fictional characters. For example, a woman who advocates for the New Woman can certainly relate to the character of Edna Pontellier. While on the contrary, many people unaware of this new concept of New woman, will label a character similar to Edna Pontellier as a selfish, irresponsible and an immoral mother. If we stretch the issue of this immoral and inadequate motherhood further, we will acquaint ourselves with infanticide. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, the word 'infanticide' means a crime of killing one's own child within a year of the birth and it originated in the mid-17th century. The origin of the word suggests that it is not a new a phenomenon for the western world. Besides, Adrienne Rich invested a whole chapter in her book "*Of Woman Born*" titled "Violence: The Heart of Maternal Darkness" to this and, there, she talks about many individual stories of American women who killed their child.

As the concentration of my paper is on motherhood, news related to this has been grabbing my attention ever since I have started working on the paper. In the process of my research I read Adrienne Rich and from her findings I got to know about the term infanticide for the first time, in her book "*Of Woman Born*". I was very shocked to know that the phenomena of mothers killing their own children is recurrent around the world and, especially in America, it is very rampant. Therefore, I was not as

shocked when I saw people around me being shocked by the recent phenomenon of infanticide on the 29th of February, 2016. People on social networks tagged it as the most “Heinous act”, so did my family members. For them it was something very difficult to swallow – the act of a middle-class Dhaka resident Mahfuza Malek Jasmine, who killed her two minor children. According to the appointed case officer, she killed them out the anxiety about their future as they were not doing well in studies. The motives behind this murder do not stop here. People around the city created many stories in order to show her depth of cruelty. People’s various reactions, especially, the reaction of my mother and mother-in-law, again reminded me about the diverse psychology of mothers. For example, my mother-in-law highly criticized and cursed the murderer mother like most social-network reviewers on this matter. On the other hand, my mother acknowledged the fact that a mother can go through extreme pressure of producing perfect children who should do their best in every sphere of their lives. This extreme pressure can compel her to commit a crime like killing her own offspring.

Moreover, this current event again proves that the task of being a proper mother is a very difficult one to carry on. If we think in the context of Dhaka City and the three novels I am working on, we will see there are roughly two kinds of mothers. One is a home-stayed mother and another is a mother with children and a professional life. The first kind of mother is fully attending her household, husband and children. These are the roles in her life and it is very likely that she will get frustrated if in spite of her full devotion she is not producing the best household and set of children. Mrs. Farley can be an example of this category of mothers. Even though, in the beginning we see her as a silent caregiver, at some point of her life she loses all her patience and tries to kill herself. However, reasoning, condition and depth of depression is not the same for all mothers. While some like Mrs. Farley and Edna think they can free themselves from all these losses and chaos by taking their own lives, the other kind tries to free herself by killing the reason of depression. It can be her husband; it can be her children. In a way my mother is someone who falls under this category. Whenever we, her three

children do not fit into the social parameter of successful life, she starts to murmur to herself with slight lamentation, “What is the meaning of my life if my children are like this?” While these first type mothers are doubting their capability of raising great children, the other type of mothers are sometimes overpowered with guilt. The guilt of not being able to provide care and attention towards their children. Again, we can say their guilt and depression are similar to that of the ambitious painter Edna and the ailing mother Winnie. All together they can be called the New Women who want to fulfil many roles at the same time. However, the question is: How flexible are our families and social policies towards the “New Woman”? The journey of Edna and Winnie again proves that the social policies are not flexible towards mothers who want to assert their identity as “New Woman”.

I would like to conclude my paper with the hope of expanding my horizon in the field of motherhood. I would like to see motherhood from other lenses too. Hopefully one of them would be through the lens of Islam.

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