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The Maternal Dilemma And Nuptial Ordeals In Jodi Picoult's Fiction: The Lens Of Maternal Feminism

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Abstract

Choice is an illusion non-existent in the lives of mothers; and selflessness to them, is not a decision but an encumbrance. This case is proficiently presented by Jodi Picoult in her novel *Handle With Care* (2009). Dealing with the issues of motherhood and nuptial ties, the novel raises a few important questions in the backdrop of mothering children with special needs. The novel introduces us to a helpless mother fighting for the survival of her dying daughter and gradually moving towards a troubled marriage and dissatisfied relationships. She is committed to saving her daughter's life by whatever fair or foul means she can think of. This study examines why motherhood, is still the least valued and what are the factors that make motherhood suffer in the hands of other familial roles a mother plays. Another supplementary source *My Sister's Keeper* (2008), by the same author, has also been taken into account since it also deals with an identical maternal crisis. Under the theoretical canopy of maternal feminism put forth by Andrea O'Reilly(2007, 2010), an exhaustive critical analysis of Picoult's plea in question is done.

Keywords: Jodi Picoult; Motherhood; Nuptial; Maternal Feminism; Maternal Theory.

تلخیص

ماؤں کی زندگی میں انتخاب کا لفظ ایک سراب کی سی حیثیت کا حامل ہے اور ایثار اُن کے لیے پسند سے زیادہ مجبوری ہے۔ یہ نظر جوڈی پکوٹ کے ناول "ہینڈل ود کیئر" (۲۰۰۹) میں بخوبی پیش کیا گیا ہے۔ یہ ناول مامتا اور ازدواجی معاملات سے نبرد آزما ہوتے ہوئے، خصوصی بچوں کی نگہداشت کے ضمن میں چند انتہائی اہم سوالوں کو جنم دیتا ہے۔ یہ ناول ہمیں ایک ایسی لاچار ماں سے ملواتا ہے جو اپنی قریب المرگ بیٹی کی زندگی کے لیے کوشاں ہے اور ساتھ ہی ساتھ اپنی غیر مطمئن ازدواجی زندگی اور ناہموار ازدواجی تعلقات کا سامنا کر رہی ہے۔ وہ ہر قیمت پر اپنی بیٹی کی زندگی بچانے کے لیے تیار ہے۔ یہ مطالعہ اس نکتے کی جانچ کرتا ہے کہ کیوں مامتا، جو دنیا کا مشکل ترین فعل ہے، آج بھی غیر اہم تصور کیا جاتا ہے اور ایک عورت پر مختلف رشتوں کا بوجھ اُس کی مامتا پر کیسے اثر انداز ہوتا ہے۔ اسی مصنف کا ایک اور ضمنی حوالہ، "مائی سسٹرز کیپر" (۲۰۰۸) کی صورت میں لیا گیا ہے، جو زیرِ بحث مادرانہ

کشمکش کے نقطہ سے مماثلت رکھتا ہے۔ ماؤں سے متعلق نظریاتی تھیوری کے دائرے میں، جو کہ اینڈرئیہ او رائلی (۲۰۰۷، ۲۰۱۰) نے پیش کی ہے، پکوٹ کی استدعا کا انتہائی اہم تجزیہ کیا گیا ہے۔

کلیدی الفاظ: جوڈی پکو، مامتا، مادریت، مامتا سے متعلق خواتین کے حقوق، مادرانہ نظریہ۔

Introduction

The present study seeks to highlight and argue the existence of an inherent clash between a woman's parallel roles as a mother and as a wife, caused by the societal expectations of selflessness and altruism from her in both domains. The study therefore aims at addressing a fundamental question that why a woman as a mother and a wife encounters severe collision between both these most critical domestic roles she is bound to play. The context of this question is further darkened by the fact that the motherhood in question is not normal and ordinary, rather it deals with mothering a special needs' child, suffering from a rare genetic disease Osteogenesis Imperfecta, commonly known as O.I. as depicted by Jodi Picoult in her novel *Handle With Care* (2009).

Picoult in her fictional narrative highlights conflicting situations by putting women's roles on trial. These unusual circumstances lead to unstable marital bondage and broken commitments. Hence, motherhood takes over the nuptial role of a woman in the narrative. This research delves deep into Jodi Picoult's work and identifies the factors that lead to an "irrational mother" and a "failed wife" stigma on women who are already struggling for the survival of their chronically ill and dying children. This conflict can be seen in Picoult's other novel *My Sister's Keeper* (2008) too, which will be used as a supplementary reference to strengthen the case.

Feminists over the centuries have voiced their concerns regarding women's rights in all walks of life, in every possible role she performs. What has always been left unaddressed, however, is the most basic and the most important role she plays, namely motherhood; and the emotional upheavals she goes through while trying to effectively perform the task. Another issue that has been left unattended over the years is the battle, struggle and emotional trauma faced by mothers of severely disabled or diseased children. Jodi Picoult is probably one of the few contemporary writers to have tackled these basic moral questions and presented the true picture of a challenged motherhood in many of her novels. The challenges faced by mothers are deep-rooted in women's responsibilities as wives and as mothers of other normal children they have.

Jodi Picoult, the author in question, has skill fully depicted the emotional burden a woman carries as a wife and a mother in normal nuclear homes and further complicated it with motherhood of special needs' children. Her novels use incidents and situations from real life that usually revolve around a troubled motherhood of children with special needs, which makes it an even rare case. In *Handle with Care* (2009), the protagonist child is a patient of rare genetic disease, Osteogenesis Imperfecta (O.I.) while in the other complementary reading, *My Sister's Keeper* (2008); the child suffers from acute Leukemia. Both mothers in the said novels deal not only with motherhood but a 'troubled' and special kind of motherhood that is far more demanding and challenging.

The word motherhood in itself is open to many interpretations, which can be influenced by culture, religion, geographical location and economic well-being. The novels under review are both set in the West, which leads to the notion that women in this part of the world are independent, head strong and educated and are aware of their rights. In this geographical background the novels introduce us to Charlotte O' Keefe (*Handle With Care*) and Sara Fitzgerald (*My Sister's Keeper*). It is no wonder that motherhood suffers romanticized notions. Women are fed with the idea that motherhood is noble and serene, wrapped in beautiful colours, but the scenario changes when it is about being mother of a child suffering from rare genetic disease and disability, and that too, incurable. In such a case, the mother, who at the same time is also a wife, is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. A child with special needs requires extraordinary care and attention. Instead of seeing her child dwindle slowly, a mother strives to make her child's life better by finding every possible solution. A woman does not choose to be a mother of a special needs' child and even if she does, she does not choose its adverse consequences like marital misunderstandings, non-cooperation of rest of the family members and emotional trauma. It is antithetical to feminism and even womanhood to demand such extremes of self-abnegation from a woman.

Jodi Picoult presents the case in front of her readers very skill fully. Her mother characters have a life and role that they have never questioned to anyone. They face fatal demands of motherhood, the hard paths of personal growth and the generosity of spirit required by their husbands. The price of motherhood hence seems to be the emotional and spiritual death of those other relationships most endeared to them.

The research builds its stance of clash of motherhood and marital relationships, based on the works of contemporary American writer Jodi Picoult and demonstrates how the feelings of guilt and sacrifice are inculcated in women as mothers and wives by the patriarchal set up. Picoult vividly evokes the challenges and trauma that a severely sick child imposes on a seemingly normal family through an upsetting and heart wrenching series of events.

Problem and Questions

Jodi Picoult's novels serve as nifty contrivance in the contemporary maternal feminist school of thought and help explore the ethical issues concerning women as mothers and wives. This statement can be elaborated by taking certain questions into consideration, for instance, what are the effects of a troubled motherhood on a woman's marital quality as depicted by Jodi Picoult in her work? Does Picoult suggest that a mother's relationship with her children is richer and complex than a father's or is it a mere representation of an over-zealous motherhood? Has the price of motherhood declined over time? What is the maternal feminists' standpoint in analyzing the role of a mother and a wife?

Significance of the Study

As discussed earlier, there has been much hue and cry about feminism in general since the 19th century onward, but very little work has been done on the issues that women come across as mothers and wives. There is particularly very less to be found on the very basic ordeal that women face in their everyday lives, i.e. the clash between their maternal and nuptial duties. Beginning from the olden days to the present day, these trials are faced by women universally. The present research is peculiarly very significant in a way that it deals not only with challenges of motherhood in general but the turmoil of special needs' motherhood, which is often left unspoken of. Toni Morrison has rightly explained her work as, "I wrote the books I needed to read" and this research has a very similar philosophy instigating it. It addresses the issues that are scattered around us in the society and go unnoticed on daily basis. This research takes the plunge for further research on the said concern, which needs to be confronted solemnly.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research and the researcher has used other pieces of literary texts in order to support her arguments. The feminist theory in general and the maternal theory in particular is used to study the case presented by Jodi Picoult in *Handle With Care* (2009) and *My Sister's Keeper* (2008). Both electronic and print sources are used to examine the evidences. With the help of comparison and contrast, the researcher has critically analyzed and explored the demands, expectations and conflicts between motherhood and marital commitments. Besides the broader Feminist Critical theories, the researcher has based this study on the collective works of Andre O'Reilly, Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada; who has written and edited eighteen books on the topic of motherhood and mothering. In this work, data has been collected through the written texts only since this is a theoretical research venture.

Theoretical Background and Framework

Feminism emerged as perhaps the most significant and revolutionary social movement, which aimed at attaining equality between both sexes and left a continuing impact on global scale. Primarily a movement led by and for women for their emancipation, in response to the subordinate status they held throughout history, Feminism emerged as an advocacy for women's rights over an equal political, social and economic share. As women's discourse on the issues of gender and sexuality, it insisted upon taking them as individuals and not mere commodities, the chief interest being the eradication of male chauvinism. Since ages, keeping women under male dominance was a generally accepted trend, both by men and women. There was a novelty attached to this movement, as it spoke for half the population of the world.

The first attempt towards making a difference emerged through literature produced by women writers, who raised their fingers upon the atrocities of male chauvinism. Mary Wollstonecraft became the first advocate of women's rights when she voiced her opinions in Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) in which she held two major stances: first, an utter disapproval of the patriarchal society that snubs women's rights to healthcare, education and economic independence; and second, women buying the notion of femininity that turns them into mere 'spaniels' and 'toys'. For her, the ultimate solution lied in women's education and not merely in their equality of rights. Feminism could not win full equality between genders until the last two decades, even after getting women the right to cast the vote, besides Juliet Mitchell's claim that it is the longest revolution. However, many would still claim that Feminism has not yet obtained its full ends. It is however, customary to divide the feminist movement into the First Wave, Second Wave and the Third Wave, which are the time frames indicating different trends and struggles in different eras, the chief end being the same, to attain equal rights and liberation for women. Different feminists and theorists have split the movement into three waves, from which the actual feminist theory is usually derived.

Feminism and Motherhood — The Maternal Theory

Motherhood and Maternal Theories have emerged as a unique and individual branch of study under the umbrella of Feminism and Motherhood/Women Studies in the recent years. The work of many feminist authors over the past three decades has proven to be very useful in making the readers aware of the broad tradition within the Maternal Theories. The writers like Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich, Kim Anderson, Julia Kristeva, Judith Warner, Sara Ruddick and many more have contributed their invaluable share in

the motherhood studies. Andrea O'Reilly, professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University and the founder of Association of Research on Mothering is an author and editor of twelve books on Mothering and Motherhood alone. She has also given an extremely useful anthology on Maternal Theories by more than thirty writers, beginning from 1970's to date, covering at least three decades of scholarship, titled as "*Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*" (O'Reilly, 2007). These works have enabled the readers to understand motherhood as an ideology, experience and identity. O'Reilly, in her anthology, celebrates sufficient scholarship that has been written on the world's most important yet taken for granted role of mothering and motherhood. Such work on motherhood was not always appreciated, like it is now. O'Reilly points out that when the influential text on feminism and motherhood *Of Woman Born* (1976) was presented by Adrienne Rich, such writings on motherhood were scarce and were not encouraged to be brought forward. They were considered a threat and challenge to patriarchy as an established institution. It was a taboo to talk about mothering and motherhood as a revolutionary step towards feminist mothering in the academics (O'Reilly, p.1). Fortunately, when O' Reilly started collecting valuable work on Maternal Theory, there was an established genre and field on Motherhood and Mothering. O'Reilly, in her *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (2007) puts forward the theme and purpose of the book and states that it is important for the propagation of ideas, concepts and models on the maternal theory. Covering all authors from the established to the emerging maternal theorists, O'Reilly brings readers the first anthology on the long ignored subject, as she wants to ensure the variety and diversity. The only disappointing factor, however, in O'Reilly's anthology is the focus on White, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, North American born mother only. Some critics and readers argue that she could have involved mothers and maternal activism on a larger and global level. In the introductory part, Andrea O'Reilly promises three themes in her anthology of Maternal Theory, i.e. Motherhood as an experience, identity and ideology (O'Reilly, p. 2).

In a general sense, Maternal Feminism is a belief held by many theorists and feminists that mothering and motherhood experience is the most influencing, life changing and noble of all human experiences, which can influence society and politics on a ground scale. These activists consider motherhood to be a natural occupation that can save the society from destabilization. Contrary to the general theories of feminism, the Maternal Theories have never been static; rather they keep changing with the demand of time. It lays its claim on the active social and political participation of mothers, influencing more than just the domestic lives and working on a bigger and larger scale. The early twentieth century women's rights movement brought the first waves of maternal feminism with it. The first wave feminists argued that women should have their own voting rights so that they could become better wives and mothers, not only because it would earn them their

individuality. The more contemporary and modern version of maternal feminism lays its stress on empowering women so that they may achieve whatever goals they want in their lives. For centuries till now, all cultures have ascribed the maternal ideals with a meek, humble and self-sacrificing mother. A patriarchal society has always seen mothers as a reproductive being, responsible for life on earth. With the passage of time, the issues of motherhood and mothering became a problem of identity and individuality. The idea of reproductive function as an ascribed duty to mothers was further socially reinforced through the images that define women in terms of fertility, Virgin, Mother Earth and Venus. It lead women to thinking that their main part in the evolution of earth was the reproductive function that they had to perform without any resistance. These reinforced myths, for centuries, have imparted the idea that motherhood is the most important part of being a woman, resulting in the social and emotional handicap of those women who either did not wish to become mothers, or could not become a mother for some reason, or were homosexual.

Even in the Western cultures and societies, especially in the post war years, women were socially encouraged to maintain large families and give birth to as many children as they could, to celebrate their pride and satisfaction in motherhood. Ironically enough, full-time motherhood was still considered as inferior to the male pursuits, resulting in a simultaneous idealization and belittlement. The cultural images were further invoked by the artists and writers by constantly depicting perfect motherhood through the images of Virgin and self-negating being. The writers and artists, for ages, valourized the images of a typical mother and also contributing to the myths of a "bad mother" as the ones who feel anger, pain, frustration and resistance towards their moral duties; strengthening the stereotypes of "good mothers" as the pain bearing, nurturing, self-sacrificing angels who bear all with patience without complaining. Thus patriarchy defined the good mother role and condemned the negative maternal feminine image. The statistics however have proved with time that motherhood cannot be determined universally. Every mother is an individual first and foremost with dreams, ambitions, desires, longings and then is she a mother.

Maternal Feminism, as a term, has been used by different feminists and scholars to identify the subjugation and pressure inflicted upon women as mothers. The maternal feminists stressed upon mothers' role in the public sphere of life apart from their domestic role. It was an extension of their role in household, the feminists argued, as women found no contradiction between their domestic and public roles. Women believed that they could bring their own unique perspective into politics that they learned from their domestic roles of mothers, wives and daughters and from the concrete and bitter realities of their lives. This movement started as mothers/women felt a strange urgency due to upsetting changes

in their domestic lives. They stood for liberation, better divorce and property laws and better education for themselves. Their maternal duty became a motivational factor for the reformation and motherhood attained a higher level than just being a biological phenomenon. It became a social function. One of the best articulations of maternal theories is found in Nellie McClung's In Times Like These (1915), a collection of speeches and essays from the Political Equality League, an important suffrage organization.

Review of Literature: Maternal Feminist Critique around the Cultures

Starting from the 1970s to date, the feminist theorists and critics have developed a body of literary criticism that probes into the psychology of relationship between mother and child and also questions the maternal instincts and its nature. This body of literary criticism was common to all the varied countries and civilizations, ranging from the United States and Europe to Japan and India. The Japanese feminists argued in 1970s that the "bosei" or innate maternal instinct is nothing but a socially constructed phenomenon. They intended to demonstrate that the Japanese conception of motherhood as something innate and instinctive to women had its history back to old centuries and could be questioned. Modern Japanese writings like Child of Fortune (1983) depict the dilemma of a woman struggling to identify herself between the realities of motherhood and the social expectations of an ideal good mother. Works like these present a pinching critique on the stubborn and conventional constructions of motherhood and mothering. Following the same route, Marianne Hirsch's work from the late 1980s projects the soul of Western feminists' focus on the matrilineage literature and the revival of subjective view of maternity. The mother-daughter voices represented in literature paved the way for matrilineage narratives and also allowed the mother figures to be seen as individuals and subjects. This new trend smoothened the path for the feminist maternal scholarship and the rational study of the subject.

In Latin America, the feminist critique has rejected the local assumptions and implications of woman related myths that prevail. The feminist study of La Malinche (Virgin of Guadalupe) clarifies that the symbol of virginity that depicts purity, passivity and chastity, is central to the conception of womanhood and motherhood in Latin America. The reason of this "virgin myth" is the convenience and satisfaction it provides to the order of patriarchy. La Malinche is depicted as despised and hateful because she is head strong and chooses her own destiny freely, which brings threat to patriarchal set up. Through this distorted "bad woman" image compels women to accept the virgin myth of "Mexican Eve" and repel the La Malinche figure. The Virgin hence becomes the symbol of Mexican motherhood and La Malinche a symbol of moral corruption and sexuality, which provides enough justification for women's oppression.

The women's movement in North America also stated the fact that the so-called maternal notions are socially constructed and are a product of social and racial hierarchies. The African-American and white women in North American, for instance, were convinced to see the notion of motherhood as a national and racial obligation. Patriarchal discourse anchored and reinforced the "mother-nation" symbolism. Literature depicted the mother-nation as protector of the nation that also demanded sacrifice and protection from its citizen and children, fused with the idea of proving progeny to the land. Mothers were shown as limiting but racially essential in the sexually awakening novels by Edith Wharton (1862-1937) and Kate Chopin (1851-1904). Women writers, thinkers and feminists retorted back to these notions by awakening the debate over politics, gender, sexuality, reproduction and race.

On the other hand, it has been argued that in the early twentieth century American literary context, women from the African-American origin have been depicted as active agents and not merely child bearing and rearing machines. That too, as shown by some narratives of that time, came with a price of its own that patriarchy had set in the shape of cultural and social expectations from motherhood. The sinister and brutal depiction of slavery ruined the face of Black motherhood. These early twentieth century narratives also show an American struggle to bring up debates on feminism, birth control and other issues related to motherhood and maternity and associated them with both social decline and progress. Further established by these texts was the opinion that the universal notions and depiction of motherhood are reinforced by the hierarchies of society and race.

Feminist activists, writers, thinkers and theorists reject the valourized ideal of motherhood projected by patriarchy. This is however very important to understand that maternal feminists, by no means, devalue or disapprove of motherhood or child bearing and rearing on part of women at all. Their goal is only to shed light on the myths and assumptions related to motherhood and bring the real struggle to light so that the most important and noble task in this world does not go unnoticed and taken for granted. These feminists seek to voice the opinions of mothers and get them liberated from the narrow confines of strict family lives and seek them their separate identities too.

Virginia Woolf and Simon De Beauvoir (1989) are also among the pioneers of the First Wave of Feminism. Woolf compared the status of women to those of Greek Athenian salves whom she considered to have lived in better conditions than free women over the centuries. The primary reason for the poor state of women in her opinion was economic dependency, however, it was a state in her view still curable. Other feminist writers such as Kate Millet in her work Sexual Politics (1970) called for women's sexual liberation. To her underlying reason behind women lack of progress and oppression were double

standards associated to women's sexuality and behaviour in general. Millet's argument was not confined to the sexual liberation but rather expanded over the horizon of history, literature, psychology, sociology and many other areas as well. She argued that natural gender differences and bilogism phenomena were fundamentally political. She argued that the root cause of women's oppression was the intimidation in terms of economic, political, social and religious dogmatization. Socialist feminists see women as a victim of patriarchy who are exploited by every possible mean, may that be child rearing, domestic violence, marital rape or any social exploitation such as prostitution resulting in devaluation of their substantial contribution in society.

Further study of the feminist theories has given us an in depth understanding of how the social, political and economical exploitation has defined motherhood. Japanese feminists argued in 1970s that the "bosei" or innate maternal instinct is nothing but a socially constructed phenomenon. In their writings like Child of Fortune (1983), Japanese feminists have depicted women struggling to identify themselves between the realities of motherhood and the social expectations of an ideal good mother. These theorists have brought into limelight the sensitive issue of motherhood and mothering, rejecting the valourized ideal of motherhood as projected by patriarchy. They challenge the myths and assumptions related to motherhood and bring the real struggle to light so that the most important and noble task in this world does not go unnoticed and taken for granted. These feminists seek to voice the opinions of mothers and get them liberated from the narrow confines of strict family lives and seek them their separate identities. This sense of powerlessness is described by a New York feminist group as power-less responsibility. This powerless responsibility is a heavier burden on a woman than even earning a livelihood for the family. Many women work full time and at the same time fulfill their responsibilities as mothers and wives really well; however, the burden carried by mothers in the novel is not comparable with anything else. Being able or not being able to provide a living to the family, in case of a male earner, is usually associated with the socio-economic and political instability but for a woman, failing to provide sufficient mothering to her children is equated to her failure as a woman and mother.

Jodi Picoult, the author in question uses incidents and situations from real life that usually revolve around a troubled motherhood and that too dealing with children of special needs which makes it an even rare case. In *Handle With Care* (2009), the protagonist child is a patient of rare genetic disease, Osteogenesis Imperfecta. The mother in the said novels deals not only with motherhood but a 'troubled' and special kind of motherhood that is more demanding and challenging. Andrea O' Reilly's *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood* (2010) has a separate mention of the issues faced by the mothers of special needs' children, as contributed by Ara Francis.

It is observed in the said research article, that the genetic diseases of any sort of medical chronic issues among children have a deep and intense effect on mothers themselves and their experience of mothering. One of the most challenging tasks for such mothers is providing a life long medical care for their sick children. Such children with special needs require double attention, care and are more demanding in their nature and needs. They may need, as stated, a life-long care and look after, depending on their limitations and disabilities. Such mothers not only provide everyday care like bathing, cleaning and feeding their sick kids but are also responsible for their behavioural and attitudinal problems (Francis, p. 836). The researcher very accurately asserts that such mothers regularly switch between the roles of a mother, nurse, attendant, therapist and a physician (Francis, p. 836). It is further advocated that mothers often get in a disagreement with the physicians regarding appropriate treatment or public service for their children that they think is necessary but unavailable. Their concerns for their sick children lead them often to a long dispute with educational, bureaucratic, medical and other professionals, as they are also often dismissive of mothers' concerns regarding children. This life-long battle that these mothers fight in the public domain is often termed as advocacy care (Francis, p. 836).

Caring and rearing a child with special needs consumes a lot of mother's time and energies. According to researches, special needs' children mothers are less likely to be working outside their homes even if they are qualified professionals, because the duty they have to perform at home is far more important and crucial than their careers, and it is very difficult for such mothers to find appropriate child care for their children. This unfeasibility of working outside may then lead to such mothers' financial instability in expensive countries like the U.S. (Francis, p. 836).

Elizabeth A. Sharp (2018) is a more recent scholar who deliberates on the meaning of being a wife in the post-feminist age. In her article "Betty Crocker Versus Betty Friedan: Meanings of Wifehood Within a Post feminist Era", she provides an analogy between a fictional character Betty Crocker with a prominent feminist figure Betty Friedan in order to trace the changing definition of the perfect wife over the decades. Betty Crocker symbolizes a more traditional and house-oriented wife-figure, while Betty Friedan contradicts that image. Sharp (2018) in the article, poses an important question; that is, are the familial values and women roles as lenient in the 21stcentury, as they are considered to be? Sharp's probe directly aligns with the ongoing research issues that claim that the place and position of post feminist woman, mother and wife, still struggles with the glorified notions of motherhood and wifehood. Sharp's inquiry, however, does not move beyond the scope of wifehood; whereas, the current research investigates the issues in question both with reference to a woman's role as a mother and a wife.

Jean-Anne Sutherland's work on "Mothering, Guilt and Shame" (2010: 313) is another related piece of inquiry into the issues of motherhood and the dilemmas attached to it. Sutherland has spotted out two social spaces that reinforce mothers' experiences of guilt and shame. These spaces are the workplace and household. Mothers, asserts Sutherland, are made to believe that their mothering is good only if they are stay-at-home mothers. The society, in short, has provided cultural mandates for mothering and anyone deviating from it is considered a bad mother. Sutherland notes, "…the model of motherhood that asks women to give full of themselves at all times, physically, emotionally, psychologically and intellectually. These works capture the current motherhood paradigm that presents women with a model of near impossible standards". The ongoing research is in agreement with Sutherland's research since she also highlights the conflicts that are thrust upon a mother, both from her workplace and her own household in the name of good or bad mothering ideology.

Elizabeth K. Laney et al. (2015: 127) have also contributed their share in the domain of maternal feminist inquiry, although from a different dimension. Their article titled "Becoming a Mother: The Influence of Motherhood on Women's Identity Development" discusses the issues of women experiencing a shift in identity during the process of motherhood. Laney et al. further argue, "The practice of mothering furthers identity changes, particularly because women are faced by the realities of motherhood in juxtaposition with their ideals of motherhood". The ongoing research takes the study of Laney et al (2015) as a supplementary source, since it addresses one of the strands of the current research, i.e. mothers and their identity issues. However, the cited article bends more in favor of women eventually regaining their identities as mothers, than highlighting the clash of their mother-roles with other roles they play.

Another worth-citing source is "The Importance of Motherhood among Women in the Contemporary United States" by Julia McQuillan et al. (2008) that moves around the cultural and societal notions of motherhood among the non-mothers and mothers of the United States. The researchers note, "Consistent with feminist explanations for delayed fertility, valuing leisure is negatively associated with valuing motherhood for non-mothers" (p. 1). This research is not directly linked with the ongoing debate; however, it can be seen and consulted as one of the very few available resources on the motherhood critique and field of inquiry.

Another valuable source is contributed by Dr. Syed Hajira Begum in the form of her article titled "Motherhood Paradigm in African Fiction: A Study" (2016).Begum probes into some fundamental questions about the African male writers glorifying the image of mother as a self-sacrificing and pure human entity, devoid of any needs and wants of her own. Such images propagated through fiction further perpetuate stereotypes about

motherhood and mothering. She further notes, "This ideology perpetuates male domination in patriarchal society and asserts that woman could achieve happiness only through marriage and motherhood which implicitly relegates women to become the slaves to men in the name of marriage" (p. 1). This research is important as it stresses the need to change the mindset of contemporary writers, of both genders, since fiction is an effective medium to either make or break ideologies.

Discussion and Analysis: Emotionally Handicapped Motherhood in *Handle With Care* (2009)

The novel introduces us with Charlotte, a desperate mother of Willow who is a patient of Osteogenesis Imperfecta—a brittle bone genetic disease. Willow is born with multiple fractures and would continue to suffer fractures and micro fractures throughout her lifetime; a windfall that comes with her disease. Willow's bones are prone to fracturing with a sneeze, with a push by her sisters or peers, with a bump into furniture while walking, all the tiny hazards normal children face while they explore the world around them become 'dangerous' and 'life threatening' for Willow. A family that can barely feed its children faces financial and emotional challenges when it comes to providing appropriate medical healthcare to Willow that includes special wheel chairs, Pamidronate infusions, abrupt visits to the hospitals and a hundred other things. For Charlotte, it is a lifetime of painful mothering, mounting bills, scarcity of resources, sleepless nights and pitying glances of the luckier parents of other normal children. People ask her all the time how she is doing but the truth is they never really want to know it. "They smile at me, because they want to be polite… but the whole time they are thinking… Thank God it was her, instead of me" (Picoult, 2008: 43). This general attitude of people towards Charlotte and her family makes her doubt their intentions and she believes that people offer help because they want to make themselves feel better not Charlotte or her family (Picoult, 2008: p. 44). Life for Charlotte is about waiting on the phone call from Willow's school all day, telling her if she has broken or got hurt. Life, to Charlotte, is a never-ending series of what ifs. What if Willow was born healthy? What if life had been different? What if they had enough money to provide for a lifelong health care to Willow? The turn of events, however, force Charlotte to face the most heinous of these what ifs in her life--- What if they had known about Willow's disability earlier? What if her obstetrician Piper Reece who was also her best friend, had told her earlier about Willow's disease? What if they had opted to terminate the pregnancy? Charlotte loves her daughter dearly besides all her disabilities, but is also human enough to be surrounded by all these what ifs day and nights. Charlotte recalls, "I had been so busy wishing for your survival that I hadn't given much thought to the challenges it would present" (Picoult, 2008: 8). She used to be a passionate and professional pastry chef, which she could not continue

seeing the demands of her special motherhood. She is the one who stays up all night when Willow is hurt. Charlotte is not only a mother but a fierce savior of Willow. During her pregnancy when she comes to know of Willow's fractures, she wishes that Willow had remained inside her body because "You were safer inside me than you would be once you were out" (Picoult, 2008: 3). Charlotte names her daughter 'Willow', even though her husband Sean O' Keefe does not agree upon it, because she wants her daughter to carry a message with her; willow trees bend themselves but do not break. Charlotte's unconditional motherhood meets a life altering emotional upheaval when she is made to choose between her daughter's life and the rest of her family.

Handle With Care (2009) hence explores all the twisted knots of challenged motherhood, morality and medical ethics. It also interrogates a very basic but critical question that how far a mother can go to save her children; and would one alienate one's family in order to save that one child? This is a series of life altering circumstances and questions that are not only difficult to answer but also difficult to live with.

Motherhood and the Pangs of Conscience in Handle with Care (2009)

Charlotte's motherhood is fierce and intense but it is not without its guilt as explained by Ara Francis in Encyclopedia of Motherhood. Francis rightly comments that the disabled and chronically ill children do not suffer alone rather take their mothers into that suffering too. The mothers face the stigma of 'poor motherhood' and hold themselves responsible for the illness of the child (Francis, p. 836). Willow is born with many pre-birth fractures and the guilty Charlotte keeps trying to remember the times when she might have made Willow break a bone while she was inside her body. She remembers a time during her pregnancy when she bent to pick a stack of butter from the floor so that somebody wouldn't fall accidently, "Now I wonder: Is that when those seven breaks happened? When I kept someone else from getting hurt, did I hurt you?" (Picoult, 2009: 7).

Charlotte even suffers a negative impression in the eyes of other family members, even her elder daughter Amelia. The time, energy and stamina demanded by Willow's disability is far greater than Charlotte's own strength as a human being. Amelia feels ignored by her parents, specifically mother, because she thinks her mother is too busy making sure that Willow is all right (Picoult, 2009: 19).

Good Mother, Bad Wife?

In *Handle With Care*, the reader meets Charlotte, an exceptional mother of disabled Willow, who is always ready to protect her and fight all her battles where necessary.

Overlooked is a fact that besides being a full time mother of special needs' child, Charlotte is also a wife. She is married to a cop Sean O' Keefe who apparently loves her dearly but is a pure patriarch when it comes to decision-making. Charlotte who is seen as not only an excellent mother but an extraordinary wife also throughout the novel, has to face the conflict between these two roles when her motherhood instinct starts weighing heavier and when she is alarmed about Willow's well being. Charlotte is given an option by the lawyer that if she sues her obstetrician for wrongful birth of Willow, she may receive enough money in compensation which can take care of Willow even when Charlotte is not around to look after her. This highly conflicting situation puts her into a moral dilemma, as the obstetrician Piper Reece is her best friend also. After episodes of self-accusation and denial, Charlotte decides to be Willow voice and sacrifice her own life and image in front of the world.

Sean, who is famous for suing everything and everyone that offends him, does not support Charlotte in this case, rather goes against her. He thinks he is the better parent by saving Willow from listening in the court that she is not wanted. Charlotte is heart broken and pleads that just because she is trying to help Willow in the long run, Sean shouldn't make her a villain in everyone's eyes (Picoult, 2009: 85). Even while deciding the best for Willow and asking the lawyer to proceed with the legal action, Charlotte thinks to herself that she wouldn't tell Sean what she has done (Picoult, 2009: 89). The wrongful birth lawsuit, which stands like a wall in between Charlotte and Sean, changes into a gulf with the passage of time. Sean keeps opposing and Charlotte alone fights the whole world. On one occasion she puts a moral question to Sean, "Where's the we Sean? You go off to work. You go out with the guys for poker night. You make it sound like you're with Willow twenty-four/seven, but you have no idea what that's like" (Picoult, 2009: 113). On every argument that Sean makes, Charlotte has one answer, which indeed is true to the very core, "Oh, Sean. You're the best father. But… you're not a mother" (Picoult, 2009: 113). Charlotte is the one who leaves her passion for baking and stays with Willow all the time, she is the one who has learnt how to take Willow to the bathroom with a Spica cast all over her body, she is the one who has learnt all the first aid techniques to apply when Willow is hurt. Charlotte tells Sean that she is going to lose her best friend in the process of doing what is best for Willow; and she doesn't want to lose her husband too (Picoult, 2009: 119).

Sean is shown as a protective father but a self-centered husband. After sending divorce petition to Charlotte, he exclaims "A year of wishing you'd put as much effort into our marriage as you do into taking care of Willow" (Picoult, 2009: 342). He does occasionally acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices Charlotte makes but never practically shows that. Charlotte recalls that on her wedding day with Sean, he made a vow that he will save

Charlotte from a bullet and she knew he was expecting the same vow from Charlotte too, but she couldn't make it; because she would have saved her daughter first instead of her marriage (Picoult, 2009: 232). Sean admits to himself on an occasion that he was too busy saving the lives of other people as a cop that he had forgotten to protect his own family, that duty had fallen on Charlotte (Picoult, 2009: 266). He confesses on another occasion when Willow hurts herself and Charlotte takes over the situation without panicking, "For a fraction of a second, as I looked at the two of you, I believed she was the better parent" (Picoult, 2009: 362). On the issue of lawsuit, Charlotte tells Sean that she is well aware of the fact that people are going to think and talk ill of her. She is doing what is best for Willow and does not care about her image as a mother (p. 119). He drags Charlotte to the verge of questioning her wifehood besides all the sacrifices she has made over the years; she painfully thinks to herself, "Did that make me a very good mother, or a very bad wife? It was an oncoming train, and the cost of saving my daughter was throwing myself onto the tracks" (Picoult, 2009: 232-233) Charlotte also testifies in the court that having a child with a trillion special needs and demands has affected her marriage a lot and she is going through a divorce (Picoult, 2009: 402).

Conclusions

The principle aim of this research was to gauge a better understanding of feminist view of woman as a mother, daughter, colleague, friend or a sister. Is it very clear from examining these works of theorists that they have not been kind in their criticism of how society at large and men in particular have exploited women since the Stone Age. Some have also criticized women for accepting the dominance of men resulting in oppression of women for centuries. In accordance with these theorists the in despicable plight of women is to be blamed on patriarchal society who has deliberately nurtured women in order to exploit them for their advantage. It can be concluded that the work by theorists has highlighted significant evidence to prove how men have treated women over the ages and how women have contributed towards sorry state of their own affairs.

Our examination went one sublevel further to examine how the feminists view role of women as a mother and a wife. This was further bifurcated to review how motherhood is viewed by feminists and in particular troubled motherhood, which is associated with being a mother to a disable, chronically sick or dying child. The work done under this context clearly shows that, feminist see role of a wife as mere 'service provider', that is, women in marriage role is to cook, clean and maintain their husband's house, to provide them with offspring and sexual gratification.

As a mother, her role is to breed next generation of patriarchal norms and obedient females, ready to be exploited by the next wave of egoist males. However, apart from some harsh criticism of women's role as a mother, significant majority of feminist writers and thinkers appreciate motherhood. They conclude that motherhood whether nurtured or natural is a sacred role. Motherhood is a place where all love begins and end. It is not an easy task yet women do it proudly everyday no matter what is asked of them. It is pure form of selflessness. Motherhood is a choice that women make every day to put someone else's happiness ahead of theirs and to find themselves guilty of not doing a good job every night before falling asleep.

In the light of this mindset in which motherhood is held on a high pedestal by contemporary and traditionalist feminists, we explored the depiction of motherhood in relation to sick or dying children and how it clashes with other roles that women play in the house specifically how it collides with nuptial vows. Jodi Picoult's argument is evidently clear in her novel under review that motherhood is a feeling over which a mother has no control over, especially when it relates to the mothers of sick or dying children. People around her may see her motherhood and her behaviour as overzealous and irrational. They view her judgments or decision making in her miraculous fight against fate to save her child as dismissive or delusional. However to her it all makes sense. As a mother it is her right to try and pull all stops in order to save her child. This is the most rational objective and goal; and in her mind she fails to understand how people around her do not come to the same rational conclusion.

When a troubled motherhood collides with friendship, careers or nuptial vows, it will emerge as a winner. We saw in the novels under review that both characters lost their friendships, gave up their careers and also lost their husbands during their quest to save their children's lives.

It can be concluded after this detailed study that troubled or special needs' motherhood is a lifelong commitment to the welfare of sick children. In such tiresome circumstances, motherhood is not about how much they have struggled in the face of adversity, turmoil, emotional burden and guilt but rather about not giving up during the struggle.

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