

Summary

As someone who is planning on pursuing research and overly enthusiastic about feminist activism and gender studies, a lot of things can create hurdle in choosing a researchable subject. To be familiar with the works of feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Kamala Markandaya, Maithrayee Krishnaraj, Radha Kumar, Nivedita Menon, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and others opened the doors to think about the sundry inequalities and institutionalization of oppression from a new frame of mind and perspective. In the contemporary times a lot of engaging debates are centered around the issues of gender, sexuality, identity, violence, nationalism, honor and migration. And how all these intriguing and complex concepts intersect, complement and supplement with one another to define the irrational and brutish realities of all the societies and how these ideologies stood the test of time and is still standing tall amidst all the criticism and hullabaloo. So these were some of the socio political causes that initially interested me. At the heart of the big debate regarding motherhood and empowerment is the crucial question of reproductive rights- access to contraceptives and the fast declining rate of sex ratio which is getting out of control. And how this inequality has emerged in a strong corporate sector which is a night mare of women. In the present times motherhood and bareness are two complicated realities; it comes with a lot of conditions of purity and gender choice and cultural baggage of bareness and inauspiciousness. Not only this the subject of motherhood is something which has profited several markets and industries and most importantly the market of religion, people performing expensive religious rituals to get a baby boy is something that funds the economy and propaganda of religious men to get more sons, expensive rituals to cure barrenness and other related things.

‘Choice for one woman is coercion for other’, this statement holds true for women in matters of reproduction and sexuality. It’s not like that there will be an extensive research on the female foeticide and related issues, rather I would be touching upon it because its exclusion from the research would mean an incomplete research, the brutal realities related to whole question of female foeticide and procurement of a male progeny is a reality for a lot of women and how this often shapes the conscious and identity formation of women and sometimes also for the coming next generation as well. The curious yet very tragic cases of millions of girls ‘missing’ from the womb. “Gender relations throw a spanner in the works. The parameter of gender complicates numerous explanations and analyses that may otherwise hold. What triggered the alarm bell was that despite the overall improvements in mortality situation, and a greater increase in life expectancy of women compared to that of men, the deficit of girls has increased over the past three decades.¹ The conundrum here pertains to the statistics of sex ratio, with 35 million girls in India falling short of the expected number in the 2001 census or 83 girls aged 0-6 years for every 1000 boys of the corresponding age. It is ironical that in the last two decades the sex-ratio figure

had to fall as low as they are now before arriving at a general agreement that sex selective abortions are largely responsible for it. It is widely agreed that sex ratio is a powerful indicator of the social health of any society. It conveys a great deal about the state of gender relations. Internationally speaking, socially as well as economically advanced societies has shown a sex ratio favorable to the female. But for many South and South East Asian countries this relationship has not been so straightforward. Neither education nor affluence has brought about any significant change in attitudes towards women. Since the early 1980s, the southern states of India had relatively favorable sex ratio figures, have also been showing a decline in sex ratio. Do statistics convey what they project? Why and how has this trend of decline in the number of girl children occurred? Has this attitude towards the daughter altered? What is son preference and has it got heightened in the past couple of decades? Is the birth of a son the only way to increase parents, especially a mother's status in the household as well as in the society? How does one understand the political economy of emotions towards progeny and reproduction? Is sex ratio really an issue of numbers or is it reflective of the social behavior towards the female? Sociological and hypothetical propositions need to be put forth in a comparative and historical perspective. The practice of legitimating pregnancy and birth within the wedlock, and its inverse of abandoning babies born outside wedlock, existed alongside the institution of celibacy" (Tulsi Patel, 2007).

My research work is not an aggressive attempt to glorify motherhood and the process of begetting a child because both of them are two different aspects. Unlike the popular belief (which blossoms on the fact that the women find their true salvation in the birth of their child), women and girls have different views regarding the motherhood, it can only be a fulfilling experience if it is not forced upon women and the consent of women is also involved.. It would be a crime on the part of research students to not capture the positive changes that have taken place over the years. Study of motherhood in relation to the conscious and identity of women gives deep insight into other gender and identity related issues. By this research study it is not my intention to down play the serious gender and violence related issues, neither it is my intention to cover up the inequalities and barbarity a lot of women face in real life, but it is rather a small attempt to capture the changing nature of mother daughter relationship and how with the changing times women are being aware of their anatomy, conscious and identity formation and how they are slowly and gradually taking place and is affecting the views of people around. Also there's more to the study of motherhood than just analyzing the periods of conceiving and giving birth to the baby.

Traditional Hindu goddesses such as 'Kaali', 'Ganga Maa', 'Durga' and 'Dharti maa' are evoked from time to time and often their nurturing nature is highlighted and how they are marketed to be ultimate ideals of women, and how every women should only have the ambition of being the mother of a 'son', the chapter of 'Mata Yashoda' taking care of 'Bal Krishna' is something that has been mentioned throughout the Indian culture in the context of motherhood and how 'Mata Yashoda' was the epitome of sacrifice and motherly affection towards a child who was not her

own. “Goddess abound in India varied and diverse, they sometimes contradict each other. There are those who are consorts, those who have consorts, and there is the one who is alone. She is bedecked with jewellery or with a garland of skulls; at other times, she is the nude goddess, Many- armed and wielding weapons, she sometimes disarms you with just a lotus in hand, and uses the ‘abhaya’ and ‘varada hastas’ to dispel fear and grant boons. Then there are those other goddess- with no arms or arms that end in stumps; repulsive, angry or gracious, or expressionless with no facial features, sometimes not even a head; riding ferocious animal like a lion, tiger, leopard, or seated in tranquil equipoise on the lotus. Portrayed in vivid anthropomorphic detail or expressed symbolically, she could be a pot with eyes scratched on it, a cowrie shell, or a piece of stone smeared with vermilion. Sometimes the goddess is also abstracted into a flash of energy, colour, sound and geometry. Who can say which of these represents the ‘true’ goddess tradition? Which is the ‘essence’ and which is ‘derived’? How does one invest chronology, historicity, linearity- qualities that the goddess cuts through in her many layered presence in ritual, cult, icon, art, text and philosophy? The mother goddess can be interpreted as expressing ideas of power, autonomy, and primacy in the widest sense of the term. She conveys not so much the idea of physical motherhood but a world view in which the creative power of femininity is central; the goddess mediated between life and death, and contains in herself the possibility of regeneration. The ‘mother’ aspect of goddess is open to interpretation, and indeed has been developed in different ways at different points in time for various purposes. The modern iconography of India as mother goddess is a particularly interesting example of the use of the goddess for end goal of nationalism. The Indian mother goddess is more than five hundred years old and there is a continuous tradition of imaging and worship of the goddess as a mother, though there are many diversities in form and material” (Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 2010). Comparing a woman to that of the greatness of goddess takes away her right to be a human being, it becomes very difficult for women to report the violations. The main question is how do modern women deal with the strong belief ‘Aurat maa hoti hain’, ‘Aurat patni hoti hain’ because with changes in the marriage fixing rules and delay in the age of marriage, women have managed to establish themselves as individuals with strong bent towards identity formation. A lot of women have to juggle a lot of responsibilities, the job, the in laws, the husband and the children and each one of these individual can be very demanding and sometimes non cooperative and sometimes helpful. Radical Feminists such as Kate Millet, Judith Butler, and Shulamith Firestone view pregnancy as a serious and lethal threat to the health and progress of women and how it has undermined their development in every way possible.

Parents are parents, they are a guiding force for an individual, they are not the owners of children. This problem needs to be identified, especially in the case of ‘toxic’ and ‘manipulative’ people.

The above mentioned statement can be easily taken out of context but the problem needs to be identified and accepted. True there a lot of people who do their best for their children and put in a lot of effort, but seldom do the issue of toxic and opportunistic parents is put forth and

discussed. A prominent reality that proves my point is the existence of child marriages all over the world (even in developed countries like USA), and in some countries it is legal if the parents agree to marry off their children. Motherhood and parenthood are the two faces of the same coin. At the end of the day women are also flawed human beings and sometimes their transition into motherhood (which requires a strong sense of responsibility and dedication), does not turn out to be foretold in the mainstream societal folklore. Motherhood and Parenthood are two intimately related emotions, and cannot be radically differentiate (this is something which I discovered in some of the case studies which I did for the Chapter 4 which explains the family part). Before I set out to do real field work on the family set up, a lot of my assumptions were false, like motherhood is not just a linear process of bringing up children, it's multilayered and it has complicated phases. Not to mention that it is hugely underpaid and underappreciated job ever.

Humans are not scientific and rational, and to do a rational research on the motherhood and how it defines or undefines a woman has a disturbing history and statistics of its own. Coming to a scientific conclusion in a qualitative based research is puzzling and somewhat cathartic as a woman. And since it's my preface I will take the liberty to discuss some of the important women who gave me perspective in different aspects of life. Starting with my mother, and how her conviction in me produced this thesis, but more about her maybe later.

'Kiski Ladki Adhika Hai'

This is a very interesting phrase that I came across when I was doing my research on the ways women affect the set up of the patriarchal family, especially amongst the folks of small towns and village who later migrated to big cities. I am mentioning this phrase here because this is something which is not directly related to the thesis as much as it is related to the issues of domestic violence, 'gender selective avoidance parenthood', and parasitic parents of the girl. Basically the phrase means a situation where the girl is married off intentionally by the parents of the girl in a family where the groom's side already has a known reputation of being violent, uncaring and parasitic. It can very easily be associated with the phenomenon of surplus girl child, where the parents try to get rid of the extra girl either through early marriage or through marriage to a undesirable violent man in the marriage market. This is where the over glorified parenthood, their decisions are highlighted and ultimately how the arranged marriage proves lethal for the girls. Girls all throughout their age are conditioned to agree to their parents and how whatever decisions they take are always right.

different aspects of motherhood have been explained as per the experience in the field. Like any other aspect of being a human, being a mother has its own share of a grey area and complicated emotions. To mother a child and to nurture it comes with its own sets of difficult heavy sacrifices that a woman has to make. Moreover, over time, the different aspects of motherhood come to the forefront. Aspects of motherhood can very simply be defined as those human qualities (or

sometimes categorised as womanly quality) that comes out in a woman from situation to situation when raising a child. There may be one or more than one Aspect of Motherhood in a mother.

Women as mothers have different aspects in different scenarios in different stages of life when dealing with their children. Although oftentimes one aspect of motherhood (among the several aspects of motherhood mentioned above), can be dominant in a mother and this shapes up the personality and behaviour of the children. We cannot ignore the fact that motherhood is demanding work and needs heavy sacrifice on the part of both parents, but most of the time, this responsibility of sacrificing falls on the mother. But with the spread of awareness and gender sensitivity, the outlook towards women is changing, and this is a welcoming change. Even though there were several other subjects who had their share of struggles and hardships, these few subjects were selected as they explain the categorisation of Aspects of Motherhood more clearly. Women are not homogeneous groups, there may be a lot of similarities in the problems they face but what sets them apart is the way they tackle these problems. Especially after the marriage and on the way they raise up their children.

Generational ‘Degenerating’ Patriarchy

The Generational ‘Degenerating’ Patriarchy simply means a decrease in the toxic patriarchal values over the course of a generation (or generations or by the second or third upcoming generation). Here it is important to mention that both men and women can be patriarchs and sometimes can take enough time to change. Unlearning the values that have been fed to us over time is a time taking process, but it happens eventually. Though it is too early to say that this is a phenomenon (because of the lack of quantitative-based scientific study), this change has steadily crept into the way society functions especially the perception towards women and their choice and welfare. In a bid to understand this terminology better a group of women (constituting 11 elderly women in the age group of 62 to 70) were asked only two simple questions, ‘What are your thoughts on the changing scenarios of women's education and women going out to work?’ These two questions were specifically asked because both getting an education and going out to work and make a career is something that runs ‘parallel to being a woman or stay at home mother’, at least this has been the mentality (and it still persists) within the society . Because irrespective of religion, caste or ethnic background, they all have a whole theory on limiting the mobility and education of women. Those two questions that were selected were quite apt to see

the mind set up (or to observe the changes in their mind set up). And here are their responses in brief and to the point. Also the subjects selected to study this part of the chapter were completely different from the earlier batch of subjects that were selected.

Beneath the shade lies the darkness, beneath the glorification of mothers and women lies the truth about violence and a serious lack of access to reproductive health which has its own limitations and success as per the rules of caste, class and globalization. All the ground realities of reproductive health is even more keenly felt when it is accompanied by the rampant practice of child marriage, forced marriage and early pregnancy. And the stormy debate of reproductive health does not end here, it also includes safe and easy access to contraception and abortion (which is not always the case), with more than half of the world against the idea of safe abortion and contraception, more than seventy countries have made strong legislations especially against the practice of safe abortion, and access to contraception and choice. In this regard the celebrated French Feminist Simone De Beauvoir very rightly points out, “There are few subjects on which bourgeois society exhibits more hypocrisy: abortion is an repugnant crime to which it is indecent to make an allusion. For an author to describe the joys and suffering of a woman giving birth is perfectly fine; if he talks about a woman who has had an abortion, he is accused of wallowing in filth and describing humanity in an abject light. Forced motherhood results in bringing miserable children into the world, children whose parents cannot feed them, who become victims of public assistance or ‘martyr children’. It must be pointed out that the same society so determined to defend the rights of the fetus shows no interest in children after they are born; instead of trying to reform this scandalous institution called public assistance, society prosecutes abortionists; those responsible for delivering orphans to torturers are left free; society closes its eyes to the horrible tyranny practiced in ‘reform schools’ or in the private homes of child abusers; while it refuses to accept that the foetus belongs to the mother carrying it, it nevertheless agrees that the child is the parents thing”.

Patriarchs in their glorification of women as mothers not only stifled the strong protests against inequality but at the same time they brushed away the disturbing and staggering statistics relating to Female Genital Mutilation, Child Marriage, Marital Rape, Women dying every second due to severe complications during child birth. Elevating the honour of ‘Bharat Maata’ at the cost of the body integrity and honour of common women is bound to cause serious complications socially and culturally. Especially in today’s time when different women from different walks of life view motherhood in their own understanding instead of being dictated by the patriarchy. Here the problem arises when the elite patriarchs fail or refuse to accept the changes in the power structure of the society.

One of the major issues with defining motherhood in relation nationalism is that it restricts the mobility and reproductive rights of women. Continues glorification of women as the potential mother mentally conditions young girls to aim to be a mother. Religious ideals dominating the political arena is bound to affect the women’s rights especially their decisions regarding

reproduction and life choices. And there are ample evidences and reports to strongly suggest that religious fundamentalists are one of the major barriers in ensuring planned parenthood. Even in the modernized world and the even with the availability of planned parenthood kit available in the market and with all the medicines, advertisements and fertility centers, religious fundamentalists refuse to step down or back away from giving unwanted suggestions regarding motherhood, sanctity of marriage and the importance of son in the family. Reproductive rights of women gets snatched away when the motherhood as the topic of Nation's pride gets into the political arena, this in turn gives religious fundamentalists a chance to sway the public opinion in the favor of stereotypes.

Women who go to college or university encounter society in one of its most sophisticated forms, but their socialization at home, in the family, prepares them for marriage, motherhood and traditional patterns of work at home. Conservative home environment and coming out into the world (which is not necessarily always progressive) and then again facing the laid down stereotypes of marriage and motherhood is quite chaotic and is bound to create clashes.

Laxmibai Rajwade in her work, *"Indian Mother"* (see *Sanjam A*) goes on to write, "Motherhood might have inspired poets to sublime flights of fancy or led theorists to philosophies but to the human race, it means existence and growth, and individually to the mother the cries in her life-her greatest sacrifice for the family, the nation and the race; very much like the candle which burns itself to give light unto others." Rajwade questioned the myth of motherhood and challenged its representation as a "natural" phenomenon highlighting instead what historians have identified as maternal fears among women, especially during times when maternal mortality was high and birthing was a near- death experience for women"

Originally the title of this chapter was supposed to be, 'Lessons on Abortion and Choice', but from my field study I came to realize that abortion is often a last painful resort. Now how to put the entire dilemma and complexity in words! When I set out to do field work for this chapter, I came to realize that it was more easy to find fertility centers, or the IVF hubs, who are an expert in creating designer babies, those big hoardings in bright pink and blue color, giving a hope to couples that they can have a healthy baby as well, and then the airbrushed sweet and breezy picture of a mother and child smiling and in all bliss. On the other hand trying to find a safe abortion center is a next level distressing challenge all together, yes abortion is legal in India, but the taboos and religious stereotypes continues, also for the married women, and in the context of India abortion unfortunately is allegedly linked with the poor sex ratio in the country, and thus there have been demands made that abortion should be banned altogether, which is a dangerous proposition.

When it comes to reproductive choices, at the other end of the fertility and fecundity spectrum lies the trauma of infertility and the social stigma that comes with it. Either ways the market makes profit off them, especially the market that has opened up new and hassle free ways to cure 'female infertility' and give the blessings of 'children in the house's backyard' (preferably a

baby boy). These fancy clinics with colorful hoardings and a strong promise of an offspring is what pulls people towards them despite it being an expensive affair, and such a feat is often accomplished at the bodily autonomy of the woman concerned and not to mention that each cycle is exhaustive and takes a physical toll on the woman concerned, not to mention the way cure for infertility affects the hormones and the functionality of woman. The amount of familial pressure and the societal pressure that married woman have to face to conceive and to deliver a healthy child is quite enormous. Even though the population of this country has multiplied at a rapid rate, yet there still remains a lot of couples who are childless, and these fancy clinics come to the rescue. Moreover often times the families are over zealous to have a baby in the family as soon as possible, no matter whatever the cost. Infertility and IVF related clinics are a recent phenomenon to happen and have still managed to hold a strong position in the market. These types of clinics are what happens when patriarchy, religion and capitalism step together into the modern world, and the amount of profit they earn should not be surprising. But at other side of the argument also lays the fact that these doctors and clinics provide a beacon of hope to the childless couples, interacting with the couples gives an overview of the desperation they are going through to conceive. One very important point to be noted is that these fancy clinics claiming on curing infertility and providing designer babies via IVF are a boutique of services in modern day maternal care and reproductive choices. They were a feature of metropolitan cities once but gradually they have seeped into the small towns and cities and very quickly they caught the attention of the audience they were targeting.

There is more to the debate and narrative of female anatomy than what meets the eye. The dominant ones being, 1) the patriarchal 'biological female' anatomy, 2) the political perspective (attempts to control it) and lastly, 3) the social construct, which ultimately defines gender. But here's an interesting fact that I learnt because I did research for this chapter, apparently the name of the Father of Modern Gynecology is James. Marion Sims and I could not find mother of gynecology which is very ironic and tragic. Now the problem with this father of gynecology is that he was racist to the extent that he did horrible experiments on black women without anaesthesia. So he is not only the father of modern gynaecology but also the initiator of patriarchal medicines that will be administered to the women for decades. Undoubtedly he gave valuable contributions in perfecting the gynaecological treatment but his cruelty on his black slaves cannot be overlooked. This chapter was necessary because in the recent years the debate about body positivity and need of women to accept their body has taken the centre stage. And nothing makes a woman physically more vulnerable the way pregnancy does- the way belly pops out and the difficult hormones that are released into the body. The debate on the anatomy of women and the right of women to her body is important especially when the developed countries of this earth are bent on making regressive laws restricting the reproductive choices.

Paula Nicolson in her work, 'Post-Natal Depression-Psychology, Science and the Transition to Motherhood', goes on to write, "Patterns of fertility and the decision to become a mother have a

complicated connection with women's lives overall. Better educated, middle-class women appear to have ensured greater control over when, if and how many children they have than have those women from less privileged backgrounds. Further, control over fertility means more scope for education and employment for women, which in turn provides opportunities for independence and autonomy. However, what women do and social beliefs about what women should do are sometimes at odds with each other. Motherhood and womanhood stand in a complex and contradictory relationship, despite the fact that this relationship appears to be changing. While motherhood is still central to women's identity, recent demographic changes appear to suggest that motherhood alone no longer dictates the pattern of women's lives, and may not be such a popular choice for women as it once was (Church and Sommerfield, 1995). The reality of mother's lives, however, often fails to match these aspirations. Motherhood is a challenge; although potentially enjoyable, it is also hard work and routinely stressful (Richardson, 1993). It affects relationships with men and other women, and changes occupational, domestic and sexual arrangements."

The choice to woman to abort, produce or not produce offspring has always been a matter of sensitivity both culturally as well as in the societal aspect. The choice for one woman is a coercion for another- some women may opt for many pregnancies while some women opt not to have children-but either ways they are bound to face stereotyping and are often judged in the society. Abortion and reproduction are the two extremes of the spectrum of motherhood. Abortion laws in some of the religious countries are a still an ideological threat to the abortion laws of those countries which are liberal, or where the laws are relaxed. Womanhood is often haunted by the dilemma of the Motherhood-irrespective of the feminist or non feminist view of the womanhood and their rights, motherhood is a complex web in its own way. Women are either resisting unplanned pregnancy, or trying desperately to conceive, or trying very hard to locate a safe abortion space or trying to locate a safe and economical birthing space. In the context of India, despite all the modernity and changes in the social outlook towards women and motherhood, a lot still needs to be done to change the narrative.

Post Partum or post Natal depression often engulfs women after the child is born. To be very precise Post Partum depression is the intense feeling of emptiness and incompetency that women feel strongly. Also in the present times having a child cuts off a woman from her career growth (this may not hold true for some exceptional cases). Post partum depression can especially be severe if the woman in question has a record of mental health issues or has previously suffered from depression. In the Indian context, this feeling of anxiety and chaos can take a completely different form owing to the fact that there are lot of rituals related to the birth of the child and her mother, celebrating motherhood-which means a constant flow of relatives and neighbors and friends coming and going. Also a lot of people don't give importance to the well being of the mental health of women, which often times leaves the post partum depression often untreated. Also the fact that for a long time it was believed that motherhood is the ultimate

aim of being a woman and thus motherhood should come naturally to woman and this makes it even more difficult to explain the enormity of the post partum depression. Deciding to be a mother comes with a lot of sacrifices which a woman has to do, and almost always have to put their careers, bodies and lives at stake. So much precious things of life at stake that depression is bound to happen. If that much sacrifices weren't enough, a baby needs constant attention and care for the next six or seven years. It is only recently that post partum depression has been recognized and talked about and there is an attempt to come to a solution.

The debate about the autonomy of women over their bodies is not a new one; it has always been there, since the inception of the patriarchy. But the right of the woman to her body is not just in the context of sexual violations but also against forced and unplanned pregnancy as well. Invasive medical procedures to treat infertility and to enable the fertilization and gradually conceiving is something which is physically, emotionally and financially a demanding process.

The 'Phenomenon of Illegitimate Benefactors': The 'Phenomenon of Illegitimate' benefactors of science, technology and modernity. That part of human race which does not contribute anything substantial to the science and modernity or for the betterment of society, yet they enjoy the fruits of modern inventions and technology. On the contrary, their religious and orthodox ostrich beliefs not only threaten the peaceful evolution and modernization of the nation but also they take the society a few steps backwards. When religion failed to defeat science and rationality, it tried to infuse itself into science. The most lethal myth often justified is that religion and science are the two side of the same coin, and that how some of the religious practices are actually scientific and how each and every religion claim this (often with 'proven facts' and manipulated historical facts). It is Irony when religious leaders (for whatever maybe the religion), try to defend even the evil aspect of religion using science. I got this idea of 'Illegitimate Benefactors' one evening when I was watching documentaries on honor killing and how the families especially from the middle east who were settled in Europe and how these families from Middle East and South Asian take the concept of honor seriously, who take great steps to ensure that if the 'honor' has been compromised it must be restored even if it comes at the cost of killing their own family members. In one of the documentary about honor killing, the parents of the girl's used every aspect of technology they could to track down their daughter and kill her!

For whatever maybe the demographic statistics and opinions of the experts on this subject matter, one important thing that remains constant is that it is the womb of the women that have to bear the brunt of it. Because be it institutional delivery or non institutional delivery, it is still very much a painful task to bring a life alive and well outside of the womb. And lastly women are not baby producing machines and this fact needs to be presented to the religious hard liners from both the major communities. It is the twenty first century where women are making space and an identity for themselves and they view the motherhood perspective in a very different light.

