



DECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL NARRATIVES OF MOTHERHOOD AND GENDER HIERARCHY IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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Abstract-Motherhood is a universal biological phenomenon that is influenced by cultural norms and practices in various societies. Motherhood is often viewed as a responsibility that deprives a woman of all other perquisites, and she is expected to forego her own life ambitions and endure all hardships in order to provide her children with social and financial security. By employing the theory of radical feminism, this article intends to critically analyze the narratives described in the novels: *This House of Clay and Water* and *It Ends with Us* in order to understand the construction of motherhood at personal and social levels as well as its implications on a woman's life. The article contends that women show invulnerability against patriarchal violence when they experience motherhood. The article concludes that motherhood provides women with strength that allows them to show resistance against oppression. In contemporary times, women who embrace and acclaim motherhood negate the tradition that having children constrains them to bear male domination. Although feminism has gained popularity, patriarchy still determines the position of women in Pakistani society, therefore, it is imperative to amplify their voices.

Key Words: Motherhood, institution, patriarchy, radical feminism, oppression, strength

INTRODUCTION

The question of whether the phenomenon of motherhood is biologically determined or culturally constructed addresses the meanings, characteristics, practices, roles, and expectations that are associated with a woman after she becomes a mother. Henrietta Moore (1988) considers motherhood a universal phenomenon asserting that a mother-child unit is 'naturally' a part of all cultures. However, the notion of motherhood as the 'naturalness' has been criticized by social constructivists who consider motherhood as a social and cultural construct. Generally, attributes of motherhood such as maternal love, nurturing, and so forth are linked to the characteristics of womanhood. The categories of woman and mother often overlap as the concepts of marriage, family, the house, children, and labor are all intertwined with attitudes toward women in a given society.

Motherhood, gendered egalitarianism, and cultural factors have long been part of academic discussions and research agendas for many social scientists including anthropologists. Anthropologists have believed for a long time that cultural conceptions of motherhood mirror larger cultural values, norms, and social systems. As a crucial component of women's identity and social function, motherhood is highly regarded and honored in many societies. For instance, motherhood is valued in some African societies as a sacred obligation and a source of female pride. In Nigeria, the Yoruba people celebrate motherhood with elaborate celebrations and rituals because they view it as the pinnacle of female achievement (Oyewumi, 1997). Similarly, motherhood is also highly valued and revered in many Asian countries, such as China, India, and Pakistan etc. where mothers are frequently recognized as the children's primary caregivers and nurturers (Dasgupta and DasGupta, 2010). Based on this association of mothers with their role as primary caregivers, Sherry Ortner (2005), a cultural and feminist anthropologist, relates women to nature and men to culture

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to explain male dominance. She claims that women are universally subordinate to men explaining the reason that women are regarded closer to nature due to their reproductive system and gender roles associated with this system.

Birthing and nurturing new life have always to do with a woman and for that reason stature of a mother has been exalted in every realm. However, Kristeva (1985) criticizes this consecrated position of women because it is given on the condition of maternity. She explicates that women have merely been reduced to their biological function of motherhood which is unfair to their existence. With the promulgation of the second wave of feminism, the notion of motherhood was questioned. Radical feminists, from the second wave of feminism, impeached and denounced the fact that ‘there is some natural difference between men and women which should determine their respective social roles’ (Graham, 1994, p.156). The claim radical feminists put forward is that women are no less than men—morally and intellectually—so they should not be considered inferior. That is the very reason they question gender roles and motherhood is one of them. A woman, besides a mother, plays multiple roles like wife, daughter, sister, daughter-in-law, and many more for which she has been oppressed by patriarchy for centuries. In that case, her role as a mother and innate affection for her children becomes a barrier to raising her voice against male supremacy. As a result, she bears all the repercussions of providing her children with social and financial shelter because they are economically dependent on their husbands. Witnessing such scenarios, we intend to introduce a different side of a woman as a mother. In this regard, the literary theory of radical feminism is an apt lens to explore the strengths of women who have been repressed by men. Radical feminism got the focus of attention during the second wave of feminism when it emerged as an economic and social theory. With the earnest efforts and struggles of radical feminists, women’s liberation appeared on the map got sexual politics was recognized as a public issue (Willis, 1984, p.92). It mainly addresses women’s oppression in the form of prostitution, pornography, rape, sexual objectification, motherhood, abortion and gender roles. The proponents of this theory believe that male supremacy ought to be eliminated which impacts women’s experience in every social division. Among all the tenets of the theory of radical feminism, our focus is on motherhood. Shulamith Firestone, a leading figure during this movement and a staunch radical feminist, is resistant to believing that bearing children is valuable to women, and ‘she compares giving birth to shitting a pumpkin’ (Graham, 1994, p.163). She calls for the termination of this particular gender role and suggests turning to artificial wombs through scientific means for the real liberation of women from male tyranny. Similarly, De Beauvoir (2011) broods over motherhood as a threat to a woman’s integrity (p.9). The women feel trapped in their status as mothers which complies with their submissiveness. She further expands this point by saying that a woman is afflicted by many problems and motherhood is one among those. For a woman, choosing motherhood is not an option and she is not given any right to give her opinion, she cannot choose whether she wants to be a mother or not. Like Firestone, De Beauvoir also wants women to shun the role of mother.

On the contrary, we have Adrienne Rich (1995) who provides us with a different perception of this notion of motherhood. She bifurcates this whole idea of motherhood into two; one as an institution that is run and shaped by patriarchy and the other as an enriching experience solely determined by women. She terms them ‘motherhood’ and ‘mothering’ respectively, and she wants women to affirm mothering as a positive good. Robin Morgan also supports this idea of Rich and extends her thoughts to women’s choices. In the introduction to *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (2014) she states that patriarchy controls women’s biology which intrigues women to rebel and announce their rights. The concept of the rights of mothers demands the affirmation of childbearing and rearing only if it is a woman’s choice (p.17). This is one of the major criticisms of radical theorists that they lack congruence and could not concur on whether motherhood should be abolished or celebrated with great reverence. Despite this conflict, “it at least raised the question of how motherhood affects women and whether modern women need to accept the role” (Whetmore, p.2). These questions have been addressed in this article and an attempt has been made to answer these questions.



Mother is one of the most glorified, eulogized and even sanctified figures in literature and popular media. Literature is not only replete with maternal ideals but also with monstrous and wicked mothers. Over the passage of time, the representation of a mother in fiction has taken many turns, however, in cultural and religious traditions, motherhood has always been quoted as a powerful and sacred path. In the light of these radical feminist thoughts, we intend to figure out how this perspective of motherhood emerges in two contemporary fictions and how do the female characters perceive it. The chosen novels are *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) and *It Ends with Us* (2016). The former novel is written by a Pakistani writer Faiqa Mansab and the latter is the work of Colleen Hoover, a New York Times Best Seller author. Both these novels have mother characters at their center who are in constant search of their actual identity. These characters of mothers, for their roles of wives and daughters, are victims of male supremacy and in the surge of patriarchal domination, they find their true selves. This research article assesses the notion of motherhood in both fictions and analyzes whether it is a form of oppression for women, as Firestone calls it, or a strength.

This research paper intends to probe into the idea of motherhood in two contemporary novels: Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* and Hoover's *It Ends with Us*. The theoretical framework of the study is established by employing the literary theory of radical feminism. Being a qualitative study, it offers a complete description and analysis of the subject. The prescient thinker and radical activist Shulamith Firestone has been taken as a literary theorist to evaluate the motherhood journey of female characters. Adrienne Rich's literary ideas has also been incorporated, where suitable, to provide sufficient references and to support the stance. Firestone (1971) targets the sexual disparity and argues that unless women renounce the obligation of reproduction, they will never become fully free. She supports the belief that women are limited by the need to have kids, and by the reproduction of offspring their individualistic approach is endangered. She submits that the bond between a woman and her child is nothing more than a "shared oppression" that cults patriarchy. On the other hand, Rich critiques that to beget and rear a child "mean the experiencing of one's own body and emotions in a powerful way" (p.37). She categorically denies patriarchal power and states that "power" and "centrality" is of women by nature and that "female [is] primary". Man, when born, are "tiny" and "helpless" lying horizontally in a woman's arm and sustained by her nurture (p. 94). Rich's doctrine of motherhood is comprehensive and all-inclusive, and she suggests that women ought to put an end to patriarchy and revisit motherhood in order to avoid male domination. Women should, on their own terms, reclaim and restructure motherhood and for this, the only action to take is to terminate the institution of motherhood.

THE HOUSE OF CLAY AND WATER: MAKING SENSE OF MOTHERING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The novel is altogether a depiction of women's suffering in Pakistani society. It explores the lives of two mother characters: namely Nida and Sasha. The novel gains momentum when Nida rebels against the male cruelty and facades of society. As the novel opens, readers are let into the life of Nida who is struggling in her marital relationship with Saqib. She lives a life of desolation and pain because she is trapped in a monotonous household. Her husband and in-laws treat her harshly and Saqib remains oblivious to all fears and worries that go in Nida's mind. Firstly, Nida's match with Saqib was set without her consent but she complied with her parents' wish because this is a duty of a good daughter. However, Saqib convinces Nida that he has fallen in love with her which Nida believes. Love is highly romanticized in literature, however, in feminist scholarship love is a patriarchy's armament to hook women in dependent relationships. Firestone (1971) infers that love keeps women subservient to their eroding roles as wives and mothers. She writes that "love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women oppression" (p.126). In Nida and Saqib's case, Firestone's implication is quite apt because Saqib misuses Nida in the name of love. After marriage, he bounds Nida into the subservience of his family and neglects her existence. He sees the individuality of Nida through the eyes of his own mother and sisters and as they ask him to treat Nida, he exactly does that. In a threatening tone, he tells Nida as long as he serves his family,



he will love her. Cécile Sauvage writes as De Beauvoir (2011) quotes it, “When the woman loves, she must forget her own personality. This is a law of nature. A woman does not exist without a master. Without a master, she is a scattered bouquet.” When a man loves a woman, he wants “a total abdication for the benefit of a master” from her (p. 773). Incontrovertibly, Saqib enslaves Nida by declaring his love. The character of Saqib is an archetype of an obstinate husband who thinks that a wife, besides being a wife, is subject to maintaining and supporting his entire family. So, Nida is suppressed twofold i.e., emotionally and verbally. De Beauvoir (2011) is convinced that women shall remain oppressed as long as there is this myth of family as family is an “elementary social cell, and woman is both worker and housekeeper” (pp.180-181). Likewise, Firestone (1971) comes to an understanding with De Beauvoir and writes that family is an institution that once was “loose” and “permeable” but now it has emerged as a tight and rigid “patriarchal nuclear family” (p.146). A woman’s role in family life and domestic constraints have made it difficult to discern the actual reality of womanhood. In the Pakistani context, a good wife is supposed to be a woman who is the epitome of tolerance and patience. She must be unselfish, calm, empathetic, reliable, hospitable, and have the ability to organize the house (Ali et. al, 2011, pp.2-3). That is why when Nida expresses her desire to be a politician Saqib laughs at him and turns it down. Men want to be the sole creators of culture and social ideologies; therefore, they confine women to their household chores and biology. “Male culture [is] built on the love of women and at their expense” (Firestone, 1971, p.27). Nida belonged to an eminent political family. Her father and brothers were renowned politicians. Making this background of Nida a trump card, Saqib asks her to canvass the voters, visit the houses of the political workers and narrate the stories of her veteran father. He also tells Nida to make contact with the wives of ministers and politicians because this friendship would help him to win. So, Nida is just a ladder for Saqib that helps him to reach the top. Firestone (1971) is critical of this ill-treatment of women and reflects that “... most women spend their emotional energy on men, whereas men sublimate theirs into work” (p.156). Therefore, in either case, women are at a disadvantage, nor do they earn love from men in return for their love, nor do they achieve the same accomplishments as men.

Moving on, Sasha, the deuteragonist of the novel, also faces male domination like Nida. She is a lively, free spirit and strong-willed woman. She was forced to marry Luqman against her choice. Sasha has expensive tastes and loves designer bags and clothes. Luqman cannot meet her expensive tastes so she decides to escort men. Luqman is the complete antithesis of Saqib but Sasha does not like Luqman for his average looks and lack of wealth. Therefore, she breaks the confines of her marriage and opts to become a prostitute. While seeking love from elsewhere, Sasha becomes notorious in the society. Despite being a strong woman, she could not save her name and character and people disdained her as a lecherous woman. The duplicity and hypocrisy of men are addressed by Mansab. She writes that ‘[men] would not hesitate to violate a woman’s body, but if [a woman decides] to utilize it for her own benefit, it [is] stigmatized sacrilegious, immoral and dirty’ (2017, p.135). Anyhow, Sasha realizes that she is being exploited in her profession. To be a prostitute was Sasha’s own choice on her own terms but gradually she understands that men (her clients) are subjugating her. Faheem, one of the clients of Sasha, asks her to call off her relations and commitments to the other men and escort only him because he loves her. Sasha, being deprived of love, instantly agrees. Later, when she does what Faheem asked her to do, he insists Sasha to accompany one of his own friends. This made Sasha think that all the declarations that Faheem made were just a bluff and he only wants control over her sexuality as Mackinnon inscribes that a man’s desire to control over woman’s sexuality is a definitive pursuit (Mackinnon, 1991, p.112). Sasha becomes skeptical of her job and torments herself that she bartered her body and dignity and gained no benefit in return. “Men like Faheem [do not] think of women as people. They [are] commodities, conveniences or problems” (Mansab, 2017, p.167). Moreover, Sasha’s daughter, Zoya, gets more prone to the dangers of the men because of her mother’s ill name in society. She gets raped by Idrees, a chauffeur in Sasha’s neighborhood. He rapes her numerous times on the grounds that she is an escort’s daughter and she will soon become one, too. Radical feminists are very involved in raising the problems of victimization and the patriarchal objectification of women.



From their standpoint, by victimizing women, men seek control over them. The way Zoya is raped by Idrees illuminates the fact that he feels himself superior as a man and assumes that women can be intimidated by the use of force. He considers himself “a real man,” and he cannot be carried by a woman on a leash. “I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear” (Brownmiller, 2010, p.15). Although motherhood is a deeply personal and subjective experience, however, in patriarchal cultures, men become the torchbearers and dictate the meaning of motherhood. Consequently, women remain unfamiliar with its true spirit. Radical feminists brought motherhood into the limelight and women began to build diverse perspectives about it. “We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood” (Rich, 1985, p.11). Motherhood is a deeply complex and multifaceted experience that encompasses biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects. It is traditionally associated with women due to their biological capacity for pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. It is important to recognize the concept of motherhood beyond gender constraints. In the preface of *Maternal Thinking*, Ruddick explicitly defies the traditional definition of a mother, which is often associated with being a woman, and asserts that “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” (1995, p. xii). Thus, it is not essential that a woman has to nurture her kids and bring them up, as it has been in practice for many years, but a man can also carry out the responsibility regardless of their gender identity. In *This House of Clay and Water*, Saqib is a quintessential example of the orthodox mindset of men that the duty of raising and caring for children is solely for women, and a man is exempted naturally from this role. In his opinion, it is not customary for men to take on the role of childcare. “It’s not a man’s job to look after children. That’s the way our society functions” (Mansab, 2017, p.204). Such a mentality of men engrosses radical feminists to think that motherhood is a form of oppression against women as it confines them within four walls. This is why they long to quit traditional gender roles. This very system of society based on patriarchy obligates women to raise children. Ruddick, as mentioned previously, attempts to clear this misconception that mothering is a woman’s identity and is associated with her biology. She preaches that the responsibility of looking after kids can also be performed by men. Although both Nida and Sasha have different tales of subjugation, they are both exploited by men in their respective lives. Nida, being an embodiment of a good daughter and a wife, did everything that patriarchal norms anticipated her to do until her chord of motherhood was hit and so did Sasha. When Nida experienced a phase of motherhood, she stepped on an excursion of change. Mansab’s mother’s character portrays a different side of the coin. Nida birthed a daughter named Fatima but soon lost her because of Down’s syndrome and faced the heartlessness of her husband and in-laws. Saqib neglects Fatima and does not give her the love of a father. Saqib’s mother is hostile towards Nida and terms her disease for bearing an abnormal child but this was the time when Nida started shedding the skin of an obliged wife. Her perception of the world was colored by the values her mother instilled in her until Fatima’s demise when she root out those unfair convictions. She ‘loved and hated, approved and disapproved with the neuron patterns sowed in [her] throughout the years’ (Mansab, 2017, p.35). Until the death of her daughter, she remained a tolerant wife who compromised all her desires and opinions, hosted Saqib’s family, hid her emotions, and sacrificed her dreams and did everything the patriarchy anticipated her to do. But soon after the demise of her daughter, she started recognizing the patriarchal injustice and all the mistreatment she and her daughter had faced. In the wake of the maternal experience, she could no longer take up the false social patterns that were laid on her. She starts visiting a dargah¹ in Lahore to pacify her haunted mind. For an escape, she used to stay there for hours. She meets a hermaphrodite, called Bhanggi, at the dargah and a soulful connection develops between the two. Since love between a eunuch and a woman is formidable for society, it takes the form of rebellion against the façade of society. Earlier, Nida covers her face with a veil to conceal her identity as a begum so that society cannot object to her presence at a dargah but later, she becomes courageous enough to meet him openly and does not hide her face with her cloak. The onlookers roll their eyes at them in disdain but Nida



cares for none. She transforms herself from a diffident cub to a wounded tigress. Nida, a woman who was so weak that she could not even dare to talk about her rights, started raising her voice against the false patterns of society. Her experience of motherhood and her diseased daughter proved a blessing in disguise that led to the metamorphosis of Nida. The character of Nida is dynamic and she evolves as a woman. She comes out of her cocoon, after becoming a mother, as a strong and courageous lady who has the audacity to shed the skin of male-oriented life. This transition in Nida makes Firestone's (1971) assertion invalid that the reproductive biology of a woman accounts for her original and continuing oppression (p.74). Nida played the role of a dutiful wife, a submissive daughter-in-law, an obedient sister, and an amenable daughter before her daughter was born. But as she had an experience of being a mother she could no longer reconcile with male subservience and domination. She says she is no longer a woman for whom roles have been demarcated and allocated to serve men (Mansab, 2017, p.221). For Nida, motherhood was not a burden nor an oppression rather, her child was her comfort that she lost because of the callousness of her husband. While the oppression was her deprivation, she was raised in a patriarchal family and patriarchal values were permeated within her. Being a woman, she was not given any choice to choose her spouse or pursue her career. She was just tamed how to be a perfect housewife. Nonetheless, she emancipates herself by redefining her boundaries and the terms of being herself. She becomes so daring that she does not allow anyone to defame her or raise a finger at her. Once, Nida was at Dargah with Bhanggi when a man approached and firmly instructed her not to sit in the company of a eunuch, emphasizing that her actions would tarnish the reputation of her family. Women are the honor of their men and people talk nuisance about such a woman. She boldly answers to this man, you 'said all this to me because I am a woman. And as a man you feel you can say anything to me' (Mansab, 2017, p.95).

In addition, in the face of losing her daughter, Nida gathers her strength and evolves into a woman with the competence to address the injustice done to her. She crosses a socially unacceptable threshold by falling in love with Bhanggi and not regretting it. Also, she valiantly questions Saqib for ruining her life and not appreciating her worth. Moreover, she puts her veil off. She switches to wearing a chaddarⁱⁱ instead of putting on a veil to hide her face. She casts aside the veil that had hidden her true self over the years and breathes unrestricted. It represents her inner strength that she no longer needs to hide her identity neither she is afraid of the people around her. In the patriarchal definition of motherhood, a woman who is a mother ought to be selfless and should have no identity outside of being a mother. But Nida challenges such male-fabricated ideas and makes her instincts of motherhood her strength. She goes on to discover her true self and leaves behind all the previously unquestioned teachings that focus on patriarchies placed on her by her mother and in-laws. When Sasha asks Nida about her estrangement from her husband, she says that "[a] part of me [] died with [Fatima]. How trite that sound[s]. Yet, after that, things [] changed. It was almost as if a spell [has] broken. The monsters, demons, goblins and gremlins that I [] held in check within the dark recesses of my being all came out, and there was no stopping them. The fragile thread of magic that [has] bound Saqib and me [has] snapped" (Mansab, 2017, p.159). In this conversation with Sasha, Nida pours her heart out revealing that the ill-treatment given to her daughter took Nida away from Saqib and she feels detached from him. Furthermore, Nida repudiates tolerating any injustice anymore. She tells Saqib "We lost each other along with Fatima, Saqib. We just didn't realize it" (Mansab, 2017, p.226). She has a dispute with Saqib for the first time since the death of Fatima and argues with him, and Saqib finds an obstinacy in Nida's behavior and changes in her actions. Her entire body appears to be rejecting him. She speaks for her rights and tells Saqib how inhumane and coldhearted he is. Later, when she falls in love with Bhanggi, she finally ends her relationship with Saqib and dissolves her marriage. When Saqib tries to stop Nida from going to the shrine she cautions him with fierce expressions and confidently says: "Who'll stop me? I'll go to graveyards, to the shrine, to Bhanggi" (Mansab, 2017, p.226). After being denied motherhood, she resolutely chooses to forge her own path and her own terms. In the end, she decides to leave behind that marriage that was just a 'dirty lie'.



Similarly, Sasha decides to quit her profession when she finds out that her daughter Zoya has been prey to the men's cruelty. She realizes the actual intentions of men who suppress women in every field and try to maintain control over them. The incident brings a profound change within Sasha, and she emerges as an entirely different individual. As a result, she stops discriminating between her daughters. She has two daughters namely; Alina and Zoya. She adores Alina because she is beautiful and social like her and disregards Zoya because she resembles her father. Nevertheless, after realizing her mistake she becomes a committed mother and a housewife. She develops an intense and equal love for Zoya, as she holds for Alina. She also changes her outward appearance and starts wearing a hijabⁱⁱⁱ. Mansab has portrayed her as a perfect example of redemption and vindication. After the incident with Zoya, she becomes conscious of the fact that her profession of prostitution was just a medium for men to exploit her. She starts appreciating the loyalty of her husband, Luqman and transforms herself into a more courageous woman. Initially, Sasha was satisfied with what she was doing because she thought that escorting men was her own choice and decision but eventually, she apprehended that her clients were violating her sexuality and trying to force themselves on her. As a result, she quits her profession and starts living peacefully without any patriarchal pressure.

It Ends with Us: Perplexity of Mothers Leaving Abusive Partners

Domestic abuse is the major highlight of the book *It Ends with Us* (2016). Hoover has attempted to illustrate the tragic nature of abuse and the human strength to cope with it. Lily, the protagonist of the novel, and her mother both face domestic abuse in their married lives. Unlike her mother, Lily marks a different ending to domestic violence. The factors that allowed Lily to break the cycle of this violence are analyzed in the further paragraphs.

Abusive relationships and domestic abuse are the major themes of the novel that Hoover endeavors to narrate through the character of Lily Bloom and her mother, Jenny Bloom. Lily, in her childhood, has witnessed her father at his worst because he used to sexually and physically abuse his wife. This misfortune made Lily hate her father. The studies have shown that domestic violence adversely affects children and it is the bitterest experience for them. They are more prone to suffer from anger, depression, anxiety, and aggression. Moreover, they can also go into a state of denial (Overlien, 2010, pp.82-83). Domestic violence is a global issue that not only harms physically but also mentally annihilates the victim. There are many factors that cater to the nature of violence but Xingjuan (1999), in the context of domestic violence, has listed four major variables in his research that arouses a person to harm another person which are: money, jealousy, sexuality, and excessive drinking and drug abuse (p.1498). Hoover does not give Andrew Bloom, Lily's father, any voice in the novel but the audience gets to know him through Lily's journal entries where she writes that her father always hurt her mother whenever he is drunk. One of Lily's journal entries narrates "[d]ad got home late tonight, which means he went to the bar after work. Which means he's probably going to instigate a fight with my mother" and a few moments later she hears her father yelling at her mother (Hoover, 2016, p.64). Jealousy is also one of the factors that Andrew Bloom inflicts pain upon his wife. As already indicated, the childhood of Lily and the violent nature of Lily's father come to the surface through Lily's journal, which she used to write as a teen. Hoover has used the journal as a flashback technique to allow the readers to peep into the character of Lily's father. One of the journal entries details a much awful incident of Lily's mother where Lily's father injured her badly because he thought that she was flirting with a guy at a party. After the party, when they returned home, Lily saw her father kicking and choking her mother and pulling her hair. He really gets hard on her and tries to rape her, saying, "[y]ou want attention? I'll give you some fucking attention" (Hoover, 2016, pp.153-154). Lily understands the situation as "a guy probably looked at her and it made my father jealous. My mother is really beautiful" (Hoover, 2016, p.153). So, jealousy and excessive drinking make Lily's father insane therefore, he abuses Lily's mother.

To great dismay, Lily's mother does not raise her voice against domestic violence nor does she leave that toxic relationship. She is a metaphor for an acquiescent wife. Despite being beaten and ill-treatment she finds some excuse to clear her husband's position like he was intoxicated or



upset. Even if he abuses her sexually and forces himself on her she has an answer for that too, that they are married and he has right over her. She appears so pathetic that being in a conjugal relationship allows a man to do whatever he desires. This enrages Lily and in hatred, she feels an urge to kill him. She also feels resentment towards her mother for not giving up on him. She feels so relieved when her father is diagnosed with cancer because he is too ill to physically harm Jenny. The novel is replete with tragic incidents of male supremacy and their barbaric behavior thus, making it difficult to quote each one of them here. In short, Lily's father exercises his masculinity upon his wife whenever he gets a chance. Millett (2000) contemplates that sexual dominion is the "most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power" (p.25). This power begets male dominance in every domain of a woman's life. The male privilege is so deeply rooted in the culture that it seems natural. Andrew Bloom, being a man, asserts his control over everything and showcases his sense of superiority by ensuring his dominance in every aspect. Lily observes a pattern where her father consistently parks his car in the garage while her mother parks hers in the driveway. Lily wonders why her dad always gets the garage and holds a high ground. Lily's mother once pulled her car into the garage to make it easier for herself to carry the groceries inside the house, and Lily's father became so annoyed that he grabbed her by the throat and choked her. Education, literature, and religion are mediums to sustain and perpetuate this whole notion of patriarchal dominance. It ultimately internalizes into both males and females, subsequently, females embrace their inferiority as Lily's mother does.

Other than domestic violence, sexual objectification of women has also been illustrated by Hoover in *It Ends with us*. She masterfully paints Ryle as an arrogant pervert. Lily meets Ryle at a rooftop of a large building in Boston. She messed up at her father's funeral so she was in search of a lone space where she can clear her mind. Likewise, Ryle needed to get out of the crowd to channel his anger. He was disturbed because he lost a patient that night. Ryle, professionally a neurosurgeon, feels drawn towards Lily. They make small talk and share their relationship goals and life aspirations. Lily desires an everlasting relationship, support, happiness, and children in her life whereas Ryle is the kind of man who does not need someone more than once. He is a playboy and pleasure seeker and only wants to satisfy his sexual needs. Unlike Lily, he is not in a search of a Holy Grail and they both need two different things from life. Ryle delineates himself as "I'm too selfish to have children. And I'm definitely way too selfish to be in a relationship . . . love has never appealed to me. It's been more of a burden than anything" (Hoover, 2016, pp. 22-23). Lily, on contrary, grows up with a notion that there is a perfect man out there for her and she is in an eternal quest for the Holy Grail. Ryle considers women as objects and exploits them to fulfill his own sexual urges. When he meets Lily, he feels the same and wants Lily to please him by gratifying his sexual cravings. But somehow, their meeting, that night, ends ineffectively. Six months passed when they accidentally meet again and this time Ryle desperately wants Lily to spend the night with him. He also knocked on the doors of twenty-nine apartments in a building to look for Lily because he was unaware of Lily's apartment. He begs her "[p]lease have sex with me . . . I want you so, so bad and I swear, once you have sex with me, you'll not hear from me again, I promise" (Hoover, 2016, p.71). Sexual objectification of women is so deep-rooted into the minds that women have started to look at sexual subservience and sexual objectification as sexual empowerment. Ryle's sexual advancements make Lily feel good and desired. That being the case, Lily agrees to fulfill Ryle's wants because she finds Ryle's yearning adorable. Women are entrapped, in that manner, and eventually devoured by the patriarchal cultural immunization. "Liberated men need [] groovy chicks who could swing with their new lifestyle: women tried. They need [] sex: women complied. But that's all they need [] from women" (Firestone, 1971, p.28). This theoretical aspect of Firestone is quite true for men especially for Ryle. He remains preoccupied with only sex. Ryle reconsiders his thoughts about relationships and decides to give a trial-run to his companionship with Lily despite this, he stays fixated on sex. Soon, they fall in love with one another and get into a real relationship. Unfortunately, Lily, like her mother, faces abuse and becomes a victim of Ryle's cruelty. The first time Ryle hits Lily was when Ryle visits Lily in her apartment to spend the evening together. While preparing supper, mistakenly, Ryle burns his hand with a hot pan. Seeing this, Lily



bursts into laughter that makes Ryle lash out in range and he thrusts Lily so hard that she hits the handle of the kitchen cabinet. The push injured her badly and the corner of her eye starts bleeding. She gets “shattered like a broken glass’ and when he starts apologizing, ‘[she doesn’t] hear Ryle’s voice this time. All [she] hear[s] is [her] father’s voice” (Hoover, 2016, p.186). Afterward, Ryle asks for exoneration because it was not his fault, he tells her it was an accident and he just lost his nerve. Lily, feeling hurt and confused about the incident, forgives him and her rage turns into a concern for Ryle for his whole career depends upon his hands. Lily like her own mother finds ways to mitigate Ryle’s act of abuse. “[She] want[s] to lash out at him and react like [she] always wished [her] mother would have reacted when [her] father hurt her, but deep down [she] want[s] to believe that it really [is] an accident. Ryle isn’t like [her] father. He’s nothing like him” (Hoover, 2016, pp.188-189). She curses herself that it was all her fault to laugh. Her love for Ryle takes over and she continues her relationship with Ryle reassuring herself that he’s not like her father and ‘he deserves at least one chance at forgiveness’ (Hoover, 2016, p.192). This incident sets the beginning for the upcoming abusive events. Up to that time, Lily blamed her mother that she did not take a stand against domestic violence but now she herself become like her mother. She reiterates everything that her mother did in the past. Firestone (1971) thinks that love, even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women’s oppression and we see here that it is love that blinds Lily and allows Ryle to recur the same in the future. Romantic love is not empowering and liberating for women rather it takes them to the abyss. The ‘*unequal balance of power*’ contaminates the emotion of love and women, being the lower sexual class, become the victim of this inequality (Firestone, 1971, p.130). De Beauvoir (2011) is no less than Firestone on the idea of romantic love. She calls love a curse for women because it restraints women in the feminine world for their unequal position in this universe (p.800). Millet (2000) states similar insights about romantic love and terms it an ‘emotional manipulation’ (p.37). She further illustrates that love is, in fact, a patriarchal trick to conceal gender discrimination and the realities of power hierarchy. It “obscures the realities of female status” (37). Ryle employs love as a weapon to hold onto Lily. Lily, being madly in love with Ryle, camouflages Ryle’s abuse to live her dream life with him.

In brief, all angles of women’s subjugation have been portrayed by Hoover. She, effortlessly, exposes the oppression and abuse blatantly that for a reader it becomes hard to digest. The oppressors have their explanations for their actions and the oppressed have their defenses to not leave. Nonetheless, Lily’s journey from being a victim to a warrior and then a survivor is elucidated in the further paragraphs.

Lily’s mother is a manifestation of a tragic mother who lacks the courage to stand up for her own good. The author based Jenny’s character on her own real mother who was also physically tortured by her husband. Hoover grew up in an abusive household and witnessed her father as an abuser. Lily’s mother makes Lily an excuse for not leaving her husband because she wants to give Lily an impression of a complete and happy family. For this, Lily holds bitterness for her mother as she says “I swear, sometimes I get so mad at her for staying with him (Lily’s father). I know I’m only fifteen and probably don’t understand all the reasons she chooses to stay, but I refuse to let her use me as her excuse. I don’t care if she’s too poor to leave him and we’d have to move into a crappy apartment and eat ramen noodles until I graduate. That would be better than this” (Hoover, 2016, p.64). In addition to financial and social security, Jenny does not want to bring her daughter up in a broken family. She wants enough money for her daughter to support Lily’s education and lifestyle. Besides, the importance of the love of a father for Lily is also one of the factors that Jenny continues to stay with her husband. Jenny makes an honest effort to keep Lily off when Andrew is at his worst. Appallingly, she does not even protest whenever Andrews tries to force himself on her. All she tries is that Lily does not get a smell of it. When Lily’s father assaults Lily’s mother she says that ‘[p]lease be quiet. Lily is here . . . Please be quiet while you rape me, dear’ (Hoover, 2016, p.154). Even if she is badly injured, she cautions Lily not to tell anyone nor to call the police. She constantly thinks about her husband’s career and does not intend to jeopardize it. She goes a long way playing the role of a wife and a mother. She endures her husband’s torture and her daughter’s anger to portray herself as a good woman in a male-centric society. “Men sought to protect their



reputations in the community, while verbally and physically battering their wives in the privacy of their homes. Women had a far more altruistic reason for keeping the violence hidden: they wanted to protect their children and other family members from learning of the abuse so as not to frighten them or to be a burden” (Wingert, 2007, p.7). Yet, she fails as a mother because she leaves a wrong legacy for her daughter. She could not become a role model for her daughter. Once, Lily got injured during a heated argument between her parents and she held onto the hope that this incident would lead her mother to leave her husband, Andrew, for causing her harm. However, she felt utterly defeated when her mother instructed her to make an excuse if anyone asked about the situation. Briefly putting, Lily’s mother harbors this notion that she will be called a good mother if she is successful in giving her daughter a perfect image of a good father. Andrew is a violent husband but a good father this is why Jenny sacrifices herself for Lily’s happiness. As a father, he loves Lily and at times, when they both are together, Lily sees glimpses of a normal relationship between a father and a daughter. This is one of the reasons that Lily’s mother becomes a deplorable wife to provide Lily with a good life. As Rich puts it that a conventional connotation of a mother is that she is ‘selfless’ and her love is ‘unconditional’ (pp.22-23). There lies Jenny’s mind that she wants to seek a title of a ‘good and selfless’ mother.

Talking about Lily’s married life, initially, she takes after her mother. Like her mother, she forgives Ryle each time he hurts her and finds excuses to satisfy her mind that Ryle is not like her father but as time passes and she becomes a mother, she finds the strength to say no to domestic abuse. She comes to an understanding that she allowed Ryle to hurt her by compromising every time he hit her. This fear of emulating one’s own mother is referred to as ‘Matrophobia.’ This phobia blurs the boundaries between a daughter’s personality and that of her mother, resulting in an overlap between the two. Hence, a daughter has to make conscious efforts to switch to her own distinct personality and act radically (Rich, 1985, p.236). As Lily has seen her mother victimized yet not giving up so unconsciously, she repeats the same behavior. But the moment she gets to know that she is pregnant, she reflects rationally on her life with Ryle. She feels remorseful that she loved a man who is an abuser and does not keep up his promises. But then again, she remains torn between two options; leaving him or forgiving him. At times she reasons that if she does everything that Ryle wishes then they will be fine together. Despite fearing and detesting him, she decides to move back to Ryle to share her pregnancy period with him. She remains uncertain and double-minded about her final decision. She is disintegrated between love and hate for Ryle. She is also fearful of having her baby alone. She ponders “[m]ay be I could put up with him when he’s at his worst just so I can have him when he’s at his best” (Hoover, 2016, p.335). In spite of Ryle’s several promises to not hit Lily again, he could not help to restrain himself. Wingert (2007) observes that a woman is subjected to violence as long as she is in the same house as the abuser. So, there is a risk that Ryle’s temper would affect their child. Till now, Lily fears that she might make a wrong decision so, she keeps on procrastinating. Also, she does not have the courage to stay away from the man she loves the most. Surprisingly, Lily’s mother bucks her up and firmly says “[d]on’t be like me, Lily” (p.335). She encourages her to be ‘brave and bold’. Her friend, Allysa also suggests her to leave Ryle and warns her if she chooses to stay with him, she won’t talk to her ever. Radical feminists call this support system as “sisterhood” which is essential to break the tyranny of patriarchy. It offers a collective sense of solidarity and unity and forms a mutual relationship among women. This term is used as “recognition of the shared struggle against patriarchy” (Evans, 2015, p.112). Jenny and Allysa’s remarks hearten Lily yet she delays in taking a decision until the birth of her child. She does not want to be biased about Ryle because she also sees the good in him. Since she is pregnant, she feels loaded under pregnancy hormones and mood swings which is why she puts off her final verdict till her delivery. Till this episode in the novel, Lily is finding excuses to stall the inevitable because still, a part of her wants the companionship of Ryle. She dreams of cherishing a complete family with her child. But finally, after the birth of her daughter, she comes to the conclusion that “five minutes of witnessing [Ryle] at his worst could not make up for even five years of him at his best” (Hoover, 2016, p.357). The emotion of being a mother gives her the final stroke of courage that she asks Ryle for a divorce. She says she did not know what choice she was going to make until this



moment when she takes her daughter in her hands for the first time. Motherhood is that phase of a woman's life that makes women realize their power and strength (Rich, 1985, p.67). She interrupts the pattern of domestic violence before it breaks her or her upcoming generations. The love she had for Ryle made her weak but the love she felt for her daughter made her strong and she sensed a different kind of energy seeping through her body. The emotion that motivated her is that of a mother. She chooses an abuse-free life for her daughter over the life she lived because she is well aware of how it feels to see one's father as an abuser. She does not desire her daughter to go through the same pain she went. In the end, she kisses her daughter and promises her "[i]t stops here. With me and you. It ends with us" (Hoover, 361).

Conclusion

The study was carried out to delve into the notion of motherhood and to know its subjective meaning. As radical feminists call motherhood a hindrance in the liberation of women but it cannot be generalized over all women. Our analysis of *This House of Clay and Water* and *It Ends with us* allows us to conclude that motherhood is not an oppression rather it is the patriarchal notion of motherhood that subjugates women and bounds them in gender roles. The subjective experience of being a mother enables a woman to call off men and raise their voice against male domination. Nida and Lily both are an incarnation of motherly strength. Their encounter with motherhood empowered them to redefine themselves and make a decision that marks their liberty. The analysis section clearly depicts that Nida and Lily faced oppression for no obvious reason. It is just male instinct that wants their other half to be subjugated and remain their slaves all life. But it is crystal clear that motherhood is not even a factor for Nida's and Lily's suppression rather it proved a powerful signal to provide an insight into their inner strength. Taking into account the textual analysis of both fictions, we find out that motherhood is not a cause of oppression for women. Firestone in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*, repeatedly suggests that women ought to be free from the "tyranny of their reproductive biology" if we, genuinely, are committed to empowering women and liberating them from oppression (206).

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ⁱ a shrine constructed over the grave of a God's devotee, usually a reverend religious figure

ⁱⁱ a cloak that is worn by women to hide their head and body but reveals the face

ⁱⁱⁱ a veil that hides the face, head, and chest practiced by Muslim Women in the presence of a male outside of their immediate family