

The War of Survival and Maternal Power in Emma Donoghue's Room

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Abstract

Room is a very prominent novel by Irish Canadian woman writer Emma Donoghue. It was published in 2010. This novel narrates the story of a five years old small boy and his 26 years old mother. Room is narrated by Jack in his own perspective. This novel deals with the sufferings of captive mother and her little son in a small room by an unknown old man. This paper highlights the power of motherhood and need of every human. Also deals with resistance, violence against woman, Patriarchy, regaining the identity and agency and very strongly exposes the maternal power in the mood of captivity. Donoghue had written this novel in the basis of real incident so many of the situations are in the novel illustrate the real scenario in the life of Protagonists. Feminism consists many branches but the very power branch of feminism is maternal feminism because the mother can do all the things for the sake of her child at any situation. This analysis also highlights the revolutions of captive minds and logging for freedom and how the slave mother can become the ultimate hero of her child. Also emphasizes significance of mother in child's life.

Keywords: maternal power, feminism, agency, resilience, identity.

Introduction

Emma Donoghue is a very popular Irish Canadian novelist, screenwriter, dramatist and a literary historian. Donoghue was born on 24 October 1969 in Dublin, Ireland. Donoghue has a literary background that her father Denis Donoghue was a great Irish literary critic of his own time. She is the youngest of eight children. Donoghue was attended Catholic Convent school in Dublin. She did her Bachelor of Art degree (in English and French) in University college, Dublin in 1990 and received Doctorate degree from Girton College, Cambridge in 1997. Many of her personal experience will be the source of her writings. Donoghue had submitted her thesis was on friendship between men and women in 18th century fiction. At present Donoghue is living in London, Ontario with her husband Chris Roulston and their two children.

Donoghue's first novel *Stir Fry and Hood* was published on 1994, *Slammerkin* (2000), *Landing* (2007), *The Sealed Letter* (2008), *Room* (2010), *Frog Music* (2014), *The wonder* (2016), *Akin* (2019), *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), *Haven* (2022), *Learned by Heart* (2023) these are some of her works. All

of her works are shortlisted and longlisted for several prizes and awards. Donoghue was the winner of Irish Book Award in 2010 for her Magnum Opus *Room*. Her writings are always reflecting the Irish touch and Canadian culture. All of her novels are having different themes like human relationships, history, war, human Psychology and motherhood.

Room is a very successful novels of Donoghue which was published in 27 July 2010 and longlisted for the Man Booker Prize also got Roger Writer's Trust Fiction Prize. *Room* also shortlisted for Governor General's Award and Orange Prize for Fiction in 2011. It had been awarded with Irish Book Award in 2010. *Room* is a very peculiar creation of Donoghue, here she handed the most skillful way of narration. It had been narrated by an immature small five years old boy called Jack. Donoghue had drawn up the story of *Room* from real life story of a woman named Elisabeth Fritzl in Australia had captive by her own father for 24 years in underground cell. This novel is also adapted as a film in same name which was released in 2015. This film also received four Academy awards for Best Adapted Screen play written by Emma Donoghue, Best Director, Best Actress and Best Picture.

Maternal Feminism as a literary theory:

Maternal feminism is a branch of Feminism that examines the work of art in the perspective of Motherhood. It concentrates that how the female authors had shaped and evaluated a women's life as a mother. According to this theory, Motherhood as the full view of self-sacrifice. It only the source of child's life and its world. Maternal Feminism is believing that woman as a mother, a caregiver and she plays a very vital role in society and in politics. It comes from the idea of social feminism and it is a fusion of the notions of maternalism and feminism. An another related phrase 'matricentric feminism' considered as a feminism for mothers. It emphasizes the mother oriented feminism. It tells that mothering will play the immense role in the society. Many women western writers like Rachel Cusk, Margaret Drabble, Toni Morrison, Angela Carter, Jacqueline Rose, Torrey Peters, Katie Gutierrez, Rachel Yoder and Buchi Emecheta and an Indian women writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sarojini Naidu, Ismat Chughtai, Ratika Kapur, Anuradha Roy and Geethanjali Sree. In *Room* Donoghue also employed all the aspects of maternal feminism, role of mother and her sketches about the character and life of Ma could made this novel as the suitable illustration of matricentric feminism.

Well Furnished Prison

This novel is started with the 6th birth day of the narrator Jack. Ma is the mother of Jack. Ma and Jack both are being under captive by an old man called Nick. They are living in a 11*11 small

room which is located at the back of the house. Jack does not know anything except Ma and the room. Here Donoghue draws the character of Ma as a whole strengthen mother which means she is living in captive by old Nick and daily she suffers lot by physical abuse of the old man. When Ma was a nineteen years old girl at that time she was very charm and beautiful that was her misfortune, her beauty disturbed Old Nick. One day when Ma went for a walk in a park at that time she was kidnapped by an Old Nick. From that day onward she had been under captive in a small chamber. Because of several rapes by Old Nick she delivered Jack in that room. Now Ma and Jack both are being imprisoned by Old Nick in a locked room. In that room there is a corner for cooking and bathing, there is a TV and a small hole in their room. For last five years that Ma, room, TV and a small mouse only the world of Jack. In her confinement Ma is very much dutiful and she could understand her role as a mother.

Ingenuity in the tackle of Hardship

Ma and Jack both are suffering lot in the room. But Ma never worries about that, she wants to bring up her child with what she has in the room. Getting a baby is a very thing for all woman by rightful but Ma got Jack by rape. She never shows any regret to Jack for getting him in a wrong way. Ma thinks that Jack came from her womb so he is her treasure. So she safes gourd him very passionately. Ma daily and often abused by an Old Nick. Whenever Old Nick comes to room that time Ma hides Jack in the wardrobe because Old Nick never shows love on Jack. Getting abused in front of son is a very painful thing for a woman but Ma's misfortune she faced that by hiding Jack. Even Jack is a small boy so he could not understand that. Jack does not know anything except Ma and room but Ma knows all the things about outside world of room. Ma is very happy in captive because of her son. She understood her role as a mother. Ma sacrifices her life for her son after the birth of Jack Ma did not worry about that she had been in captive. She stared to enjoy her motherhood and she dreamt about her son. For five years she has been bring up Jack with love and care. Old Nick comes daily and bring some essential thing. Ma should depend on that for her daily life. She has so many limitations in her life at the room. But Donoghue depicts Ma as a clever and very powerful mother. Though Ma is living an unhappy life, got baby by rape. She is very intelligent and loves her child very much. She thinks that Jack had come from her and she did not consider about Jack's father.

Mother as a Master Hero

Mothering is a very precious characteristic of a women. "I can imagine no heroism greater than motherhood" said by the writer Lance Conrad like that Donohue draws the character of Ma as a super hero can fight against all evils and being very potential to tackle all the situations. Ma and Jack are living in a very small room but Ma had arranged all the things in it. She sets the kitchen, dining area,

wardrobe and bathroom. She wants to teach her son with the help of available thing at room. She makes Jack to understand about the world through TV in the room and by a book she taught language and words to Jack. She is very much aware of health so she feeds her son with good healthy diet. Ma gives practice of doing physical exercise in room. There is a hole in the room through that Ma taught about the nature and about climate of the earth. Ma teaches Language, Mathematics, Science and Politics to Jack. Ma is a source of Jack's life and Jack is the world of Ma. Ma took very much effect to protect Jack from Old Nick. At certain point of time Ma took a brave and very needy decision to go out from the room. That was not easy because the room had number lock, Nick only knows the number of the lock. Ma came to know about that Old Nick lost her job he is in financial trouble so that she could predict that hereafter Nick could not take care of them they have to go out of the room. So she made a plan that ask her son to be pretends like dead. Asking her son to be pretends as dead is not a simple thing for mother but she did that with hard heart for the Jack of her son's future. So that Maxim Gorky the Russian-Soviet writer and proponent of socialism wrote that "Only mother can think of the future". Mother only give birth to a baby so that she can design her child's future very well. Donoghue's Ma is the best example of the above-mentioned quotation. Hero must have a strong heart and clever brain Ma is a hero here with a strong heart rapped her son with a carpet and make up her son to face the outer world. Ma told that to Nick Jack was suffered by terrible illness now he died because of lack of medical treatment. Nick afraid about the death of Jack if it will be shown out means he could be arrested. Nick took Jack and throw him into a garbage bin.

From Birth to Life

For the first time Jack sees the outer world. He came out from the garbage and fell down near a park there he could watch whatever Ma had taught him by TV and book in real. Jack can connect all. Jack is keeping her mother's broken teeth instead of her mother. Ma believes that Jack can save her. Jack met one police woman and with her help Jack saves her mother from room. According to the instructions of Ma, Jack kept the way of the room in his mind so that he could save her mother and sent Nick to prison. Jack and Ma admitted in a hospital. During the absence of his mother Jack left under the care of his maternal grandmother. Jack suffered lot without her mother. Ma advised to left Jack and get into a new life. But Ma does not accept that, so there a controversy between Ma and her family members. Ma's family informed that to Ma Jack had died. Ma terrible ill like dead without her son. Jack felt very much strange among their cousins and world outside of the room. Ma and Jack affected more by the media and gossips from others. Jack could survive with her mother's teeth in her

absence. In Jack's life his living inside the room is like his life in Ma's womb and life in outer world that is like his new birth in the world. Jack observes outside world and says

In the world I notice persons are nearly always stressed and have no time.... I don't know how persons with jobs do the jobs and all the living as well. In Room me and Ma had time for everything. I guess the time gets spread very thin like butter over all the world, the roads and houses and playgrounds and stores, so there's only a little smear of time on each place, then everyone has to hurry on to the next bit. (*Room*, 358)

Like that Jack could understand the outer world. In very young age Jack could understand everything cleverly because of the trainings of Ma at room. After Ma's family can understand that Jack is the only remedy for Ma's illness. They show Jack to Ma. Ma recovers immediately and back to normal by physically and mentally. Now Jack saves her mother at second time and he saved Ma from room that is his first rescue of her mother. Donoghue Shaped the character of Jack as very dutiful son who could played his role well in order to be gratitude to his mother.

Conclusion

According to Jacques Lacan's theory of Psychoanalysis Jack's life inside the room is like the stages of the real, the Imaginary, the Mirror and his life outside world is like the Symbolic stage. Nellie McClung was a Canadian author and a politician had written that "The woman's outlook on life is to save, to care for, to help. Men make wounds and women bind them up". By the relation of above quotation in this novel Old Nick is the reason of the wound in Jack's life Ma is the healer of the wound. In this world there is talk that women are the weaker sex but really they are the stronger than men. Because they only carry the baby in their womb for ten months and very bravely ready to face the pain of baby birth. Men can't even imagine that. Motherhood will give the immense power to woman and it only complete their life as a woman. Even the motherhood is a basic trait of a woman whether she has baby or not. Thus Donoghue's *Room* is a battle of survival of mother and son and they won the battle by Maternal power.

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