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Women and the Ethics of Mothering the World in Daisaku Ikeda's Writings

Jhelum Biswas[1*], Dr Sunita Sharma[2]

[1*]Amity University, Gurugram
Email: jhelumb1980@gmail.com
[2]Amity University, Gurugram

ABSTRACT

The endeavor of this paper is to examine "mothering the world" as a philosophical ethic grounded in care, relational agency, and moral responsibility within humanistic Buddhist thought. Focusing on the writings of the Buddhist philosopher and world peace activist, Daisaku Ikeda, this research contends that motherhood is neither a sentimental ideal nor a biologically determined role. Instead, it emerges as a rigorous form of moral labor oriented towards peacebuilding, dialogue, and global citizenship. Engaging feminist ethics of care and maternal thinking, the discussion frames maternal practice as a mode of ethical universalism capable of transcending divisions of nation, identity, and conflict.

At the same time, the analysis foregrounds a tension central to feminist critiques of care. Feminist philosophers and sociologists such as Sara Ruddick, Arlie Hochschild, and bell hooks have shown that while women are celebrated for moral labor, this recognition rarely translates into structural power or equality. Drawing on this insight and recent scholarship on gender dynamics within the Soka Gakkai International, the paper examines whether celebrating feminine endurance supports equality or sustains traditional expectations. It concludes by distinguishing reflective care from imposed obligation, arguing that "mothering the world" fulfils its ethical promise only when dignity aligns with power and leadership.

Keywords: care ethics; feminist philosophy; humanistic Buddhism; maternal ethics; peacebuilding; relational agency..

1. INTRODUCTION:

Peace activist and Buddhist philosopher, Daisaku Ikeda's humanistic philosophy places ethical responsibility at the center of everyday life. Writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, Ikeda consistently links social transformation to the inner life of individuals. It is established through daily practices of care, responsibility, and moral courage. Central to this vision is Ikeda's recurring emphasis on women, and particularly mothers, as agents of ethical continuity. Their sustained presence and attentiveness protect dignity amid loss, uncertainty, and social fracture. In Ikeda's thought, motherhood does not function as a biological destiny or sentimental ideal. It operates as an ethical orientation toward life itself.

The endeavor of this paper is hence to examine "mothering the world" as an ethical orientation shaped by care, responsibility, and sustained presence, with Ikeda's philosophy as its primary point of departure. Across centuries and civilizations, women's lives have been deeply intertwined with the work of sustaining families, communities, and social relations. Much of this labor unfolds quietly through everyday acts of attentiveness, endurance, and relational commitment. These compassionate acts rarely attract formal recognition, even as they constitute the ethical and emotional infrastructure of social life. Ikeda's reflections bring this often-invisible labor into ethical focus, framing care as a disciplined practice rather than a private sentiment.

This paper engages Ikeda's humanism in dialogue with feminist scholarship that has critically examined the relationship between care, gender, and ethical responsibility. In her seminal work, *The Second Sex*, feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, identifies a central tension in modern ethical life. Women's care and self-sacrifice are valued, while women's autonomy and public agency remain limited by social structures (de Beauvoir 2011). From a sociological perspective, this paradox is examined by Arlie Russell Hochschild, an American sociologist of emotional labor, and Anne Machung, a sociologist of family and domestic life. In *The Second Shift*, they present how unpaid domestic and emotional labor sustains care through ongoing, often invisible effort, even within ostensibly egalitarian social arrangements (Hochschild and Machung 2003).

Within moral philosophy, feminist ethics of care developed as a response to ethical traditions that prioritized abstraction and autonomy over care and relational responsibility. Rather than locating ethical life primarily in abstraction, autonomy, or universal rules, care ethics foregrounds relational engagement, attentiveness, and responsibility. Within moral philosophy, feminist ethics of care developed in response to ethical traditions that prioritized abstraction and autonomy over care and relational responsibility. Sara Ruddick, a feminist moral philosopher, articulated this shift through her concept of "maternal thinking." In *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Ruddick discusses that care is neither instinctive nor sentimental, but a disciplined moral practice shaped by judgment, reflection, and accountability exercised over time (Ruddick 1989). Her work establishes care as a serious form of ethical labor grounded in lived experience. Read through this feminist ethical lens, Ikeda's concept

of human revolution gains further clarity. Human revolution is essentially an inner transformation through which fear, resentment, and despair are reshaped into courage, compassion, and wisdom. This process does not withdraw individuals from society. It deepens their capacity to act responsibly within it. Care, in this framework, becomes the outward expression of inner change—an ethical practice sustained over time rather than a singular moral gesture.

By placing Ikeda's reflections in dialogue with feminist ethics of care, this paper explores how "mothering the world" moves between the personal and the political. It examines care within intimate spaces of family life. It also considers how care extends into public action. Finally, it analyses leadership that is grounded in responsibility, dialogue, and ethical presence. The paper argues that mothering the world is not a gendered obligation confined to private life, but a shared ethical orientation through which social worlds are continually shaped and renewed.

2. Feminist Ethics of Care: Maternal Thinking and Moral Work

Any sustained engagement with the idea of "mothering the world" requires clarity about care itself. Feminist scholarship has been central to questioning ethical traditions that have long relegated care to the margins of moral thought. Within many dominant frameworks, ethical reasoning has been closely associated with autonomy, abstraction, and rule-based impartiality. Feminist ethicists have sought to reorient this hierarchy by bringing care into view as an ethical practice grounded in lived experience, relational awareness, and sustained responsibility. A foundational contribution to this reorientation is Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking." She approaches motherhood neither as instinct nor as fixed identity. Instead, she understands it as a practice shaped by concrete demands and ongoing commitment. In her account, maternal work responds to three enduring aims: the preservation of life, the nurturing of growth, and the initiation of children into a shared social world (Ruddick 1989). These aims call for discernment, reflection, and moral attentiveness, cultivated through long-term engagement with vulnerability and dependence. Ruddick's significance lies in her insistence that maternal thinking constitutes a disciplined mode of ethical reasoning. Care involves assessing risk, navigating uncertainty, and remaining answerable for the well-being of others across time. Ethical judgment emerges through practice rather than abstraction. Agency is shaped by attentiveness, responsiveness, and accountability, developed within ongoing relationships. Maternal thinking challenges ethical theories that equate moral seriousness with detachment rather than sustained responsibility. At the same time, Ruddick remains attentive to the risks of idealizing maternal practice. She acknowledges that care is shaped by social expectations, power relations, and fear. Maternal thinking can be distorted when care becomes controlling or when responsibility is imposed rather than chosen. Her framework therefore treats care not as inherently virtuous, but as a reflective practice requiring ethical cultivation and social support. Feminist inquiry has also examined the social conditions under which care is enacted. Hochschild's analysis of emotional and domestic labor introduces the concept of the "second shift" to describe the unpaid work of caregiving, household management, and emotional regulation that typically follows paid employment (Hochschild and Machung 2003). Even as women's participation in the workforce has expanded, responsibility for sustaining domestic life has continued to fall disproportionately upon them. The notion of the second shift draws attention to the temporal and affective dimensions of care. This labor extends beyond visible tasks to include planning, anticipation, empathy, and relational maintenance. Care work is often continuous rather than bounded, shaping the rhythms of everyday life and limiting access to rest, leisure, and self-directed time. Hochschild's analysis reveals that care is embedded within social expectations about gender, responsibility, and worth. The concept also complicates ethical affirmations of care. Recognition of caregiving as valuable does not necessarily lead to its equitable distribution or institutional support. Ethical praise frequently coexists with invisibility, fatigue, and constraint. Care thus occupies a space where ethical significance and structural neglect persist alongside one another. hooks extends this discussion by framing care and love as ethical practices grounded in agency and mutual recognition.

Love, in her account, is neither sentiment nor self-erasure. It is a commitment to growth, dignity, and justice (hooks 2000). Care becomes transformative when it is freely chosen and rooted in self-respect. When care is imposed, it risks reinforcing domination rather than enabling ethical change. Taken together, these strands of feminist thought present care as moral labor shaped by responsibility, choice, and power. They affirm its ethical depth while remaining attentive to the conditions under which it is sustained. Care emerges not as an essence tied to femininity, but as a reflective practice that unfolds within social constraints, institutional expectations, and unequal distributions of time and authority. This understanding also highlights the temporal nature of care. Care is not a momentary act or isolated decision. It unfolds through repetition, anticipation, and endurance. Ethical responsibility takes shape across time, often without closure or recognition. This temporal dimension distinguishes care from ethical models that privilege decisiveness and resolution. Care requires staying, returning, and responding again. Such an understanding opens a wider ethical horizon. If care is sustained presence rather than episodic action, its relevance extends beyond private life. It becomes possible to speak of care as a mode of public engagement and collective responsibility. The practices developed within intimate spaces may inform how individuals respond to social injustice, violence, and suffering at a broader level. This transition from private care to public responsibility requires an ethical imagination that does not confine care to domestic roles or biological motherhood. Feminist ethics makes this move by treating care as moral labor that can be enacted in many forms and contexts.

Responsibility, in this sense, is not defined by gender, but by relational attentiveness and commitment to the well-being of others. It is at this juncture that the framework

developed here opens onto Ikeda's humanistic thought. In line with feminist care theorists, Ikeda resists reducing care to sentiment or private feeling. His writings emphasize courage, compassion, and wisdom as qualities cultivated through lived struggle and sustained engagement with others. Care, within his humanistic Buddhism, appears as an outward-facing ethical orientation grounded in dialogue, responsibility, and peace. Read through the lens of feminist conscience, Ikeda's reflections on motherhood and agency resonate with the understanding of care developed in this section. His emphasis on inner transformation as the basis for social change parallels the view that ethical agency grows through practice rather than abstraction. This convergence allows "mothering the world" to be approached as a shared ethical horizon rather than a gendered role. The following section turns to Ikeda's writings on women and mothers, tracing how this ethical framework is expressed through concrete lives, literary narratives, and public engagement. In doing so, it moves from conceptual grounding to lived example, and from ethical theory to social practice.

3. Human Revolution: Individual Responsibility, Humanism and Social Renewal in Ikeda's Writings

Ikeda's humanistic philosophy offers a grounded way of thinking about care, responsibility, and social change. His writings repeatedly return to everyday actions through which people sustain life and protect dignity. For Ikeda, lasting change does not begin with abstract ideals alone. It begins with the inner life of the individual. He describes this process as human revolution, a gradual personal awakening through which courage, compassion, and wisdom are cultivated in relation to others.

Within this framework, care is not confined to the private sphere. Nor is it reduced to emotion. Care appears as an active way of engaging with the world. Ikeda's reflections on motherhood play a central role here. Rather than framing motherhood as a biological fate, Ikeda understands it as an ethical orientation formed through attentiveness, responsibility, and endurance over time. Motherhood becomes a way of understanding how people remain committed to life under difficult and uncertain conditions.

Ikeda's understanding of care is inseparable from his reflections on war and loss. While war is often narrated through strategy, territory, and victory, Ikeda consistently shifts attention to those who bear its most painful and tragic costs. Mothers emerge in his writings as among the deepest casualties of war. They live with prolonged anxiety, absence, and grief. They wait. They remember. They continue sustaining life even when their own lives have been irrevocably altered.

In *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 24, Ikeda recalls an episode from his youth during the Second World War that left a lasting imprint on his ethical imagination. After witnessing the capture of a young enemy soldier, he returned home and recounted the incident to his mother. Her response was immediate and unguarded. She did not speak in terms of enemies or ideologies. She said only that the soldier's mother must be suffering, wondering whether her child was safe. This moment revealed to Ikeda that maternal care does not recognize national

boundaries. It arises from an awareness of shared vulnerability and loss (Ikeda 2017, vol. 24).

Ikeda's mother herself lived under the constant shadow of war. Four of her sons were sent to the front. One of them, Kikuo, died in Burma in 1947. Ikeda recalls that this was the only time he ever saw his mother cry. She allowed herself a brief space of privacy to mourn her son's death, her shoulders shaking quietly as she held her grief within. This image recurs in his writing not as an act of stoicism, but as restrained sorrow shaped by responsibility toward those who remained. For Ikeda, this moment crystallized his lifelong opposition to war and his conviction that its most profound wounds are carried within families rather than borders (Ikeda 2017, vol. 24).

Motherhood in Ikeda's work thus functions as an ethical model rather than a sentimental image. Mothers are shown as individuals who sustain life amid scarcity, grief, and uncertainty. Their work is repetitive and often unseen. Yet it is this sustained responsibility that gives care its depth and strength. Ikeda stresses that peace is not created through dramatic gestures alone. It grows through quiet persistence and daily commitment to life. This understanding of care aligns closely with feminist ethics of care. Ruddick argues that judgment and responsibility emerge from concrete practice rather than abstract principle (Ruddick 1989). Ikeda shares this view. He understands care as a disciplined practice shaped by ongoing engagement with vulnerability. Agency develops through presence and attentiveness. It deepens through the desire to remain answerable over time.

Ikeda's idea of human revolution connects personal care to wider social change. Human Revolution refers to an inner shift through which fear, resentment, and despair are transformed. This process does not draw individuals away from society. It strengthens their capacity to act within it. Care becomes the outward expression of inner change. Personal effort takes shape as responsibility toward others.

This movement from inner transformation to outward responsibility is further illuminated through Ikeda's reflections on his wife, Kaneko. She appears in his writings as a figure of composure, attentiveness, and quiet strength. Yet her experience is often narrated through the observations of others rather than her own voice. In *Kaneko's Story*, her grief following the death of her second son, Shirohisa, at the age of twenty-nine, is described by relatives who note her calm presence and concern for others even on the day of his passing (Ikeda and Ikeda 2007).

Kaneko's composure has sometimes been interpreted as self-effacement. From a feminist perspective, such portrayals risk reinforcing ideals of silent endurance. Closer reading, however, suggests a more complex ethical posture. Kaneko does not deny grief. She contains it to continue caring for those around her. Her restraint is not an absence of feeling, but a deliberate form of ethical attention shaped by responsibility. Importantly, Kaneko herself acknowledges the costs of public life. She describes the day Ikeda became president of the Soka Gakkai as feeling like a funeral, marking the end of ordinary family life and the beginning of sustained public responsibility (Ikeda and Ikeda 2007).

The distance between how Kaneko is seen and how she

understands her own experience remains significant. Her voice, when it appears, reflects awareness rather than idealization. She names loss without dramatization. Her agency lies in choosing presence amid constraints, and not in erasing suffering.

Through these maternal figures—his mother and Kaneko—Ikeda articulates care as ethical endurance shaped by war, grief, and responsibility. Mothers in his writings are not elevated as flawless symbols. They are ordinary individuals navigating extraordinary circumstances. Their labor lies in holding families and communities together when social structures fracture.

Ikeda extends this understanding of responsibility into the public sphere by writing about women whose actions altered the course of societies. These women do not act through inherited authority or formal power. Their influence grows from conviction, sustained effort, and moral presence. Ikeda presents them not as isolated exceptions, but as embodiments of how everyday courage, exercised at critical moments, can reshape history.

Rosa Parks, a pivotal figure in the American civil rights movement, exemplifies this form of ethical action. In 1955, her refusal to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery was expressed through a single, quiet act of resistance. This act was not framed as protest in the conventional sense, nor was it motivated by personal grievance alone. It functioned as a catalyst for collective transformation, redirecting the course of the civil rights struggle and revealing how individual resolve can initiate broader social change.

Ikeda met Parks for the first time when she visited Soka University of America in California in 1993. He was apprehensive about what notions Parks would have about the Japanese people. His concerns faded the moment he met her. In his book *One by One*, Ikeda speaks about this encounter in 1993, and Parks' visit to Japan in 1994, in the essay, "Rosa Parks: Just One Word". It is an anthology of essays in which Ikeda writes about visionaries and global thought leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Valentina Tereshkova, and Fang Zhaoling among others. Ikeda writes that he found an immediate resonance, a recognition of two similar spirits, the instant he met Parks. A year later, honoring Ikeda's invitation, she visited Tokyo and spent some time at the Soka University campus. Parks' warm and motherly personality, along with sensitivity towards everyone, left a deep impression on Ikeda. Her act of resistance must be situated within the legal and social framework of racial segregation that structured everyday life in the southern United States during the mid-twentieth century. Jim Crow laws enforced racial hierarchy through legislation, custom, and the constant threat of reprisal. African Americans were legally compelled to yield space, mobility, and dignity to white citizens in public settings. Against this backdrop, Parks' refusal to surrender her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery in 1955 took the simplest possible form: she calmly said "No."

This refusal was neither theatrical nor aggressive. It involved no slogans, speeches, or public display. By uttering a single word, Parks interrupted the routine functioning of segregation and refused participation in its everyday enforcement. Her composure exposed the moral instability of a system that relied on habitual compliance rather than justification.

The significance of this moment did not lie in its immediacy, but in its aftermath. Parks' action set in motion a prolonged period of legal challenge, organized protest, and collective mobilization. Reflecting on these events, Ikeda notes that after sustained appeals and counter-appeals, the United States Supreme Court ruled segregated bus systems unconstitutional, a decision that accelerated the momentum of the civil rights movement and strengthened the struggle for equal rights. Her refusal thus demonstrates how a single, restrained act—rooted in moral resolve and enacted within a specific historical injustice—can initiate enduring social transformation.

Echoing Daishonin's beliefs, Ikeda states that it is women who will open the gateway of good fortune, hope, and eternal victory. In keeping with this belief, Ikeda has exchanged several dialogues or held similar views with women luminaries like peace activist Betty Williams, environmental activist and a pioneering voice of ethical economics Hazel Henderson, cosmonaut Valentina Tershkova, and political activist and environmentalist, Wangari Mathaai among many others. His interactions with them have been recorded in essays and in some cases, developed into books.

Ikeda, along with his wife Kaneko, met Williams in 2006 in Tokyo. In a dialogue—The Courage of Conviction—that resulted from this interaction, they discuss Williams' untiring efforts to stop the violence in Northern Ireland and mobilize 35,000 women for a peace march that caught global attention. Speaking of righteous anger and invincible courage, Ikeda likens this to the Buddhist belief that anger can be both negative and positive, and that anger at great evil is great good. Williams affirms the view and says, "Fear is contagious, but so is courage, passing from person to person and growing stronger along the way". She has a unique way of achieving peace, her words is to "love one's opponents into submission". Elaborating on this she narrates an incident:

I remember one situation in which a man was attacking me verbally. He was quite fierce, actually, and was standing so close to me that I thought he might bump me with his head or bite my nose off, but I just stood very still, without saying a word. Eventually, his mouth must have gotten tired. He started speaking more and more slowly, and then he backed away. And I looked at him and I said: "I love you." About two months later, that man became a peace worker. (Ikeda and Williams)

What stands out here is Williams' compassion, courage and humor. This ability to find light in the darkest of times is also a spirit that Ikeda noted in the Chinese painter Fang Zhaoling. In his series of essays called "Essays of Culture", Ikeda recalls his meeting with Zhaoling. What stands out in his writing is his admiration for her courage and hope. After her husband's death, Zhaoling was left alone with eight children in a post World War China. With her grit, determination and her spirit to never give up, she brought up her children, earned her own education in calligraphy and painting. She shared with Ikeda that it took her 50 years to establish her own style of art. Recording her struggles and her unflagging spirit with vivid metaphors, Ikeda writes:

Again and again, she reminded herself that she must go

on living. And yet . . . There is nothing more fragile than the human heart. At the same time, there is nothing more indestructible. She had reached the point that is known only by hearts that have been plunged into the very pit of grief, but have refused to die. It is there that we encounter a light that shines from the depths of life, from the compassionate essence of the universe. Only those who have known the biting cold of winter can truly appreciate the compassion and love of the sun.
Betty Williams, Hazel Henderson.

Zhaoling's struggle began as a struggle of a mother to provide for the basic needs of her children, but this single woman's battle became an inspiration for many lives that are faced with unending challenges and are at the brink of utter despair. As an environmentalist, Henderson's work towards a cleaner environment and better air quality stemmed from her concern for her daughter who was facing breathing difficulties. The dialogues between Henderson and Ikeda are compiled in a book called *Planetary Citizenship: Your Values, Beliefs and Actions Can Shape A Sustainable World*. What surfaces from this project is the power of "grassroots globalists", wherein ordinary individuals take up the responsibility to build a peaceful, harmonious and sustainable future. For instance, in Henderson's case, it started with the spirit of a mother fighting for cleaner air for her child to breathe. This personal struggle snowballed into a global movement. Much like Henderson, Wangari Maathai's activism and environmental work was shaped by her motherhood. Growing from her concern to provide her three children with a safe and sustainable world, Maathai started the Green Belt Movement, which was founded in 1977. She mobilized women to plant millions of trees to stop soil erosion and bring about improved landscape management. This plantation drive was to grow trees for fuel as well as for a safe environment. Speaking about his encounter with Maathai, Ikeda writes, "Dr Wangari Maathai is traveling around the world urging the importance of protecting our natural environment with the rallying cry *mottainai*. Why has this Japanese word—which means, 'What a waste!'—so captured Dr Maathai's imagination? The moment I saw her beaming, forthright smile at our meeting in February 2005, I understood immediately: because she is a mother—a representative of all the mothers of Africa" (Ikeda). Elaborating on this, Ikeda says that during the World Wars, provisions were scarce and mothers tried their best to not waste a single thing by creatively converting them to something new, whether it was food or even clothes. Hence, those who grew up in those times, the word *mottainai* reminded them of their mothers who wasted nothing.

Acknowledging the contribution of these ordinary women's extraordinary achievements, Ikeda records their life and struggles as a mother, in his poem, "To the Young Mothers of Kosen-rufu". In the poem he asks what ignited these women to create such movements and draws the answer that it all started from the spirit of motherhood. He writes:

What inspired Our friend Betty Williams to start a grass-roots movement for peace? It was her outrage at the brutal violence that had robbed innocent children of their lives right before her and her daughter's eyes Why did the futurist Hazel Henderson become involved in the environmental movement? Because she noticed how heavily polluted the air was upon discovering soot on her daughter's skin whenever she came home from school.
Betty Williams, Hazel Henderson.

Recognizing the importance of inner transformation in bringing about a change in society, Ikeda writes:
In our dialogue, the African environmentalist Dr Wangari Maathai asserted with a smile: "If you want change, you must first change yourself. I believe life is a wonderful experience that we should enjoy."
Betty Williams, Hazel Henderson. Ikeda's idea of "mothering the world" thus functions as an expansive ethical metaphor. It does not assign caregiving to women alone. Nor does it reduce responsibility to biology. It invites individuals and communities to adopt an orientation toward life shaped by attentiveness, perseverance, and compassion.

4. Imperfect Mothers: War, Loss, and Ethical Presence

Motherhood occupies a paradoxical position within narratives of war and nationhood. Nations are often imagined as "Motherlands," symbols to be defended, conquered, or sacrificed for. Feminist thinkers have long pointed out that such metaphors are not neutral. When land is feminized, conquest becomes morally legitimized, and the language of protection masks domination. Women, like land, are rendered property to be defended, violated, or claimed in the name of honor and survival (de Beauvoir 2011). Within this framework, real mothers are rarely visible as ethical agents. They appear instead as silent backdrops to political violence.

It is against this backdrop that Ikeda's reflections on motherhood acquire their depth and urgency. Ikeda does not speak of mothers as symbolic figures or idealized embodiments of sacrifice. He writes of them as ordinary human beings who live with fear, worry, anger, exhaustion, and love. Their ethical significance, in his thought, lies not in perfection but in persistence.

This insistence on imperfection is articulated most powerfully in Ikeda's poetry. In *A Symphony of Great Noble Mothers*, he writes:
Mothers! Clever mothers,
Mothers! Gentle mothers.
Mothers! Unlearned mothers.
Mothers! Nagging mothers!
Mothers! Wise mothers,
Mothers! Mothers of strong faith,
Mothers! Unaffected and talkative mothers.
Betty Williams, Hazel Henderson.

This catalogue is deliberate. By naming irritation, loudness, anxiety, and ordinariness, Ikeda dismantles the expectation that care must be quiet, graceful, or self-effacing to possess ethical value. Motherhood, in this vision, is not sanctified virtue. It is lived labor.

Ikeda further insists that motherhood is not immune to failure. In the same poetic sequence, he writes: There are occasionally mothers who commit terrible acts, but this springs from immaturity; it is not the true reality of motherhood.
Betty Williams, Hazel Henderson.

This refusal to idealize mothers is central to Ikeda's humanism. By acknowledging error and immaturity, he

resists turning care into moral perfection. Motherhood remains human, shaped by growth, struggle, and responsibility rather than purity.

Ikeda's poetic reflections on imperfect mothers remain grounded in everyday human experience. By naming irritation, failure, grief, and ordinariness, his poems resist the elevation of mothers into moral ideals or symbolic figures. This refusal of idealisation becomes especially significant when motherhood is displaced from lived reality and absorbed into political and national imagery. The movement from private maternal life to public metaphor marks a critical shift, one in which real women risk being obscured by symbolic demands placed upon them.

This perspective also exposes the ethical contradiction of the "Motherland" metaphor. While nations invoke maternal imagery to demand loyalty and sacrifice, real mothers are left to mourn privately. Sons are claimed by the state, bodies are sent to battle, and women are expected to endure loss without protest. Ikeda does not theorize this metaphor explicitly, yet his writing reveals its moral dissonance. The land may be called "mother," but real mothers pay the price.

Ikeda's reflections on Kaneko deepen this understanding. As mentioned earlier in this paper, her composure following the death of their son is often described through the observations of others, who note her calm presence even in moments of profound loss (Ikeda 2007, 133). Ikeda does not present this composure as moral superiority, nor does he attempt to explain it away. Instead, he allows ethical tension to remain. Silence may indicate strength, cultural restraint, or the weight of expectation. It may also conceal grief that has no sanctioned space for expression. By leaving this ambiguity unresolved, Ikeda resists romanticizing maternal endurance.

For Ikeda, motherhood exemplifies what he calls human revolution. Human revolution refers to the gradual inner transformation through which fear, grief, and despair are reshaped into courage, compassion, and wisdom (Ikeda 2022). Mothers enact this process daily as they continue to care without certainty or applause. Their ethical agency lies not in control or victory, but in persistence.

By foregrounding imperfection, grief, and historical pressure, Ikeda offers a conception of motherhood rooted in ethical reality. His mothers are neither national symbols nor idealized saints. They are individuals who worry, falter, grieve, and continue to choose responsibility. In doing so, they embody a form of care that challenges militarized narratives of conquest and sacrifice.

This understanding prepares the ground for the next section, which turns from individual maternal experience to collective practice. Ikeda's vision of imperfect yet committed care finds institutional expression in the leadership of young women within the Soka Gakkai, where responsibility, dialogue, and courage are cultivated as shared work in the public sphere.

5. Sisterhood of the Future: Young Women and Inclusive Leadership

Ikeda's reflections on motherhood do not end within the private sphere. They open outward into society and history. The ethical endurance cultivated through care, loss, and responsibility finds its continuation in young women, whom Ikeda repeatedly identifies as the protagonists of peace in the twenty-first century. If mothers sustain life under conditions of uncertainty, young women carry this ethic forward into public, institutional, and social spaces.

Within the Soka Gakkai, this conviction is not merely rhetorical. It is organizational. Ikeda consistently addresses young women as leaders in the present, not as aspirants awaiting future authority. His writings affirm that the vitality of the movement depends on their courage, initiative, and capacity for dialogue (Ikeda 61). Leadership, in this framework, is not conferred through rank or title. It emerges through ethical action sustained over time.

This trust finds explicit expression in the Young Women's Division and, more specifically, in the Ikeda Kayo Kai. The name of this group does not function as symbolic elevation or personal reverence. It signifies responsibility. By entrusting young women with the future of the movement, Ikeda emphasizes ethical succession rather than hierarchy. Peace, he insists, cannot be preserved through institutions alone. It must be renewed through people willing to shoulder responsibility without certainty or recognition.

Dialogue occupies a central place in this vision of leadership. For Ikeda, dialogue is not casual conversation or strategic persuasion. It is an ethical encounter grounded in listening, respect, and openness. In *The Creative Family*, he writes that dialogue nurtures trust, builds understanding, and allows difference to be engaged without fear (Ikeda 29). When women cultivate dialogue within families, they create ethical habits that extend naturally into communities and society. The private sphere thus becomes the seedbed of public responsibility. This understanding of leadership aligns closely with feminist ethics of care. Ruddick argues that ethical judgment emerges through sustained responsibility rather than abstraction. Care cultivates discernment, attentiveness, and accountability through long-term engagement with vulnerability (Ruddick 15–18). While her analysis begins with maternal practice, its implications extend beyond the family. Responsibility learned through care equips individuals to act ethically within wider social contexts. Ikeda's portrayal of young women reflects this extension. Care becomes political without losing its relational grounding. bell hooks further clarifies this movement from care to leadership by framing love as an ethical practice rather than a private emotion. Love, in her account, involves commitment, recognition, and responsibility toward others (hooks 36). When care is freely chosen and grounded in self-respect, it becomes a force for ethical transformation rather than self-erasure. Ikeda's vision of young women resonates with this understanding. Their leadership is not based on sacrifice for its own sake. It is rooted in agency, dialogue, and mutual respect.

Sociological research reinforces this reading. Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen's ethnographic study of Soka Gakkai in Japan demonstrates that women—particularly younger members—are far from passive participants. Drawing on interviews and group discussions, she shows that young

women have played a decisive role in shaping organizational priorities, especially by aligning SGI's humanistic values with global ethical frameworks such as peace education and sustainability initiatives (Fisker-Nielsen 465). While women remain underrepresented in the highest formal positions, Fisker-Nielsen identifies a clear generational shift. Young women increasingly claim ideological and moral authority from within the organization.

This shift is also visible in concrete initiatives undertaken by SGI and its affiliated bodies. International conferences organized through the SGI Office for UN Affairs have brought young women from diverse cultural and national contexts together to share experiences of leadership grounded in care, dialogue, and responsibility. Rather than celebrating positional authority, these gatherings foreground lived experience, ethical struggle, and service-oriented action as markers of leadership (Koek).

The "Young Women's Stories—Fostering Leadership" project emerging from this context documents narratives of young women who transformed personal challenges into social contribution. Collected globally through SGI and partner organizations such as the World YWCA and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, these stories reveal leadership as a process rather than a status. An independent analysis identified recurring qualities such as courage, compassion, perseverance, and self-awareness—traits that closely align with Ikeda's emphasis on inner transformation as the basis for social change (Koek).

These developments point toward a broader movement within the Soka Gakkai toward more inclusive forms of leadership. While the organization's highest formal roles have historically remained male-dominated, recent structural and cultural shifts suggest growing recognition of women's leadership beyond symbolic affirmation. In several national contexts, including India, organizational guidelines have expanded leadership pathways for young women, allowing them to remain in youth divisions beyond marriage and to continue holding positions of responsibility well into adulthood. This change acknowledges the complex realities of women's lives today and resists the earlier assumption that marriage marks the end of youth leadership.

Such adjustments indicate a gradual rethinking of leadership itself. Authority is no longer tied exclusively to age, marital status, or hierarchical rank. Leadership is increasingly understood as relational, service-oriented, and grounded in ethical contribution. Women are recognized not only as the emotional backbone of the organization, but as organizers, educators, and representatives in peacebuilding and international forums.

These developments remain consistent with Ikeda's insistence that leadership must be rooted in responsibility rather than position. He repeatedly cautions against equating leadership with control, arguing instead that genuine influence arises from trust, continuity, and ethical presence over time (Ikeda 2022). Inclusive leadership within the Gakkai thus reflects not a rupture from its founding ideals, but their ongoing reinterpretation in response to changing social realities.

The continuity between mothers and young women is crucial here. Mothers bear the hidden costs of war, loss, and displacement. Young women transform this inheritance into collective action. This movement across generations reflects Ikeda's concept of human revolution, understood as an inner transformation that deepens one's capacity to act responsibly within society. Human revolution does not withdraw from the world. It intensifies engagement with it.

Through his sustained engagement with young women, Ikeda extends the idea of "mothering the world" beyond biological roles. Care becomes a shared ethical orientation rather than a private obligation. Leadership, in this framework, is grounded in dialogue, courage, and responsibility practiced over time. The sisterhood of the future thus emerges not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived ethical project shaped by women who choose peace, repeatedly, within the conditions of their lives.

6. Conclusion: Reimagining Motherhood, Leadership, and Peace in a Changing World

This paper has examined the evolving concept of motherhood, ethical responsibility, and leadership through the lens of Ikeda's humanistic philosophy, feminist thought, and the contributions of women to peace and social change. Three key points emerge from this exploration:

a) The Ethical Depth of Motherhood:

Ikeda's view of motherhood challenges conventional notions of women as passive nurturers. Instead, he presents mothers as active agents of peace, embodying courage, compassion, and wisdom. His reflections on motherhood resonate with feminist ethics, where care is not an inherent role assigned to women, but a reflective practice shaped by vulnerability, responsibility, and sustained commitment. As Ikeda (2017) suggests, "there's no distinction between friend and foe in the heart of a compassionate mother who loves her children," a sentiment that underscores the ethical potential of maternal love as a transformative force for peace.

b) Feminist Reframing of Care and Moral Labor

Drawing on the work of feminist theorists like Ruddick, Hochschild, and Machung, this paper frames care as moral labor—requiring ongoing reflection, accountability, and social engagement. Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking" repositions motherhood as a disciplined moral practice, requiring judgment and engagement rather than idealization. These feminist perspectives provide the necessary conceptual foundation for understanding how Ikeda's work on human revolution and care aligns with broader ethical traditions while maintaining a distinctive focus on personal transformation leading to social change.

c) Shifting Leadership Models and the Role of Women

The paper also highlights the changing landscape of leadership, particularly within movements like Soka Gakkai, where women are increasingly seen as not just participants, but as leaders and architects of change. Ikeda's writings reveal a profound respect for women's leadership rooted in care, dialogue, and responsibility. The involvement of young women in SGI (Soka Gakkai International) reflects a broader trend towards inclusive leadership, where virtues such as compassion, wisdom, and collaborative action challenge traditional hierarchies

and open space for a more participatory, transformative form of leadership (Ikeda 2017; Fisker-Nielsen 2022). In conclusion, this paper asserts that mothering the world is not merely a gendered role, but an expansive ethical practice that transcends familial boundaries. Through the integration of Ikeda's philosophical teachings, feminist ethics of care, and the evolving leadership roles of women in Soka Gakkai, we see a vision of leadership that is inclusive, compassionate, and transformative. The future of peace and social justice will depend on the cultivation of these virtues—caring for others, taking responsibility, and remaining committed to human revolution—as essential pillars for a just and compassionate society.

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