CONCLUSION

Having critically examined an extensive number of texts which reinforce patriarchal ideology, and others which subvert it, one could conclude that literature and media have been used by patriarchy to impose upon women the idea that motherhood is their primary function in life. This has been done by depriving them of their basic reproductive rights, by projecting infertility as a curse, and by setting up for them an idealized image of a mother which all women may aspire towards. Needless to say, the texts have been successful in achieving their goals. Although there have been texts that have resisted or subverted the stereotypes imposed upon women, these are fewer in number and are often thwarted by the tendencies of the writers/filmmakers to succumb to the very stereotypes they set out to critique. This is not surprising since the creators themselves are victims of patriarchal conditioning.

The question to be considered at this juncture is – if motherhood has been socially constructed as the ultimate function of women, how can it be reconstructed so as to ensure that it becomes a free choice and not a social obligation; and what role can literature and media play in making this possible. Various feminist theorists have attempted to provide the answer to this question and most of them seem to point to the necessity of changing the role of the father in order to bring about any form of social change.

Denise Thompson (2001) claims that the very meaning of masculinity must change:

It must be divested of its contempt for and dread of the female (and of the reverence and adoration which serve as a superficial gloss masking the actual relations of power), of its competitiveness, aggression, violence and addiction to hierarchy, and of its erotic obsession with penis-possession, in favour of a genuine humanity which excludes no one from human rights and dignities. (88)
Her contention is that the glorification of women and placing them on a pedestal are as detrimental as the belief in male superiority; and that both must be eradicated. She further argues for a need to provide the necessary arrangements for women who are involved in mothering instead of the demand for self-abnegation. “If those mothering arrangements are to be changed in the interests of everyone, social resources, both material (such as adequate income and child care), and intangible (such as respect) need to be provided in abundance for the women who already mother” (89).

While Thompson examines the changes required from the perspective of women, E. Anthony Rotundo argues that if fathers are to participate actively in the parenting process, certain adjustments and changes would be essential in order to enable them to do so. In “Patriarchy and Participants: A Historical Perspective on Fatherhood in the United States” (1987), he asserts:

"[...] before men who want to participate fully and intensively in fatherhood can do so, the structure and timing of work outside the home will have to change. This would mean changes in the employers’ definitions of working hours and jobs – changes such as job sharing and flexible hours. Paternity leave and on site day care would also enable a participant father to engage himself intensively with his child as early as possible and then maintain regular daytime contact through the child’s pre-school years. (77)"

Changing the structure of the entire society and its work culture is not an easy task, and certainly cannot happen overnight. If such a change does occur, it will be a gradual process. It is important to remain optimistic and work towards such a society. As Sara Ruddick (1982) states hopefully:

"I look forward to the day when men are willing and able to share equally and actively in the transformed maternal practices... on that day there will be no more ‘fathers’... There will be mothers of both sexes who live out a transformed maternal thought in communities that share parental care – practically, emotionally, economically, and socially. Such communities will have learned from their mothers how to value children’s lives. (91)"
Ruddick’s views are reiterated by bell hooks (2000), but she points out that “men will not share equally in parenting until they are taught, ideally from childhood that fatherhood has the same meaning and significance as motherhood” (137). Moreover, she also explains that by designating the woman’s mothering role as superior to that of the father, “society reinforces the notion that the mother is more important than the father” (138). In order to change this situation, “women and men must define the work of fathering and mothering in the same way if males and females are to accept equal responsibility in parenting” (138).

Thus, the glorification of motherhood both by feminists and patriarchy has to end if a change is to be brought about. Moreover, the upbringing of a child must be shared equally by both partners. This change is a complex one, and cannot be brought about by individuals alone. Employers and the government would have to play a role in restructuring the entire system by providing not only a different work culture but also day care facilities to take care of children. Just as motherhood has been socially constructed through institutions like the family, media and literature, so also it can be restructured using these very tools that have hitherto been the source of domination of women for centuries. The reconstructed images of a new society, however, must outnumber the dominant versions and not the other way around if a difference has to be made.