CHAPTER-5

MOTHERHOOD – OPPRESSION AND DELIGHT

The ambivalence in maternal experience and attitude is reflected in a variety of poems, which focus on the theme of motherhood. Imtiaz Darker’s poem “Zarina’s Mother,” (see appendix for full poem; pg-xliv) reflects Marxist Feminism in an even more powerful way. The poem depicts an elite woman who is also a mother, watching another mother who is poor, has four children and facing poverty and related hardships in life. The speaker becomes aware of the gap between her own experience and that of a mother living in the slums. From being a distant onlooker at the misery of poverty, the speaker moves from guilt to pity, and feels a sense of identification with the other mother. The opening lines of the poem correct the prejudice of having judged as callous numbness a mother’s fortitude towards the fatal illness of her daughter ‘Zarina’. As she observes;

It’s not that Zarina’s mother is callous –

more that she is preoccupied.
There are so many things to do.
Just living is hard enough, when you
have four children,
a drunken husband, and a clawing
hunger tearing you inside.                          (l.1-7)

Initially the elite mother is intrigued at the callousness of the mother from the slums. But as the predicament of the poverty stricken mother becomes clear to her, she empathies with Zarina and her mother, and perhaps experiences a sense of identification with the other mother, because she is herself a mother and can understand the emotions and limitations of a helpless mother. Zarina’s mother is shown as suffering from a fatal disease, probably leprosy. She is preoccupied with the fear of having her disease transmitted to her children. But probably Zarina is already ill; she does not play with other children, and is just an onlooker.

‘Yes, I know what it is she’s got.
The doctor told me. Not tomorrow,
not next week, but one day
ten years from now
the disease will flare inside her.’              (l.7-11)
Her mother’s apparent callousness towards her is a defence against their collapse, because survival is a daily struggle for the mother. It is perhaps her poverty that has forced her to set priorities.

In this place, everything speaks.
The difficulty is, having spoken, to be understood.
She lifts her hand to make a leper’s claw.  

Could it be that she like most other mothers, who are pushed by extreme poverty, keep one of their child extremely malnourished and sickly, so that they can beg and earn a livelihood for the family. Generally in such a case the female child is sacrificed. One may not be entitled to call these mother’s ‘callous’ or ‘unnatural mothers’. Such a judgment cannot be pronounced on them without keeping in mind their extremely compelling situation and their concern about the welfare of their other children. Even if such a mother is asked to take care of her child’s health she feigns helplessness, and says that the child does not like to eat, but if a biscuit or some eatable is offered to the child, it instantly grabs it. The mother may be compelled by the fact that undernourished and impoverished looking children attract more alms and therefore she makes sure to keep at least one of her child that way.

This poem bears a strong resemblance to, and can be better understood, in the light of this article “Thinking about Mother’(1990) by Janet Montefiore. This article is a review of three books. Alongside a work of literary criticism and a psychological study of mother/child dynamics, she writes about “Death without Weeping: The violence of Everyday life in Brazil”(1992) by Nancy Schepet-Hughes. This is based on a long-term anthropological study of poor women in a sugar-processing city in the north-east of Brazil. These women are expected to rear a statistical average of 3.4 children out of fifteen or sixteen pregnancies. Most of their babies die of malnutrition and related diseases in their first year of life. Since breastfeeding is incompatible with wage labour, the mothers are forced to feed their children with powdered milk and starch fillers dissolved in polluted water which starts the vicious circle of diarrhoea and dehydration. Janet Montefiore admits that: Schepet-Hughes’s book makes the liberal or socialist feminists of English writers, appear steeped in the unconscious assumptions of privilege. “It has therefore
interrogated my own beliefs and my own notion of what it means to be a mother, in a way no other book has ever done [...] And I do not think that even non-essentialist feminists can be exempt from these strictures if they concern themselves only with the lives and writings of their own culture.”(1990,3003-3004).

It can be an uphill task for a mother who fights the two mighty monsters, poverty and patriarchy, to raise her children. The institutions of motherhood are oblivious of the social pressures that such women face - multiple pregnancies, which in turn leads to malnourished kids , the outcome of which is disease and suffering, under the given circumstances the mother has to make a choice between her children. She is compelled by the harsh circumstances she is in to choose from her children. She decides the ones that will live and the ones that can be ignored, as is the case of Zarina’s mother, who knows that Zarina is terminally sick and since she cannot afford treatment for her, she is perhaps resigned to fate , that she might ultimately lose her daughter for lack of treatment. Dharker’s beautiful portrayal of another woman an looker, who belongs to the upper socio- economic class , and has difficulty in comprehending Zarina’s mother’s attitude, depicts how motherhood differs with difference in economic class, culture, social status, race , ethnicity and so on. Such institutions transform the experience of motherhood into an oppressive one. This is what has lead perhaps to the Socialist and Marxist Feminist theory, which corroborates with social reality and its affect on maternal experiences. Darker has dealt with the socio-cultural aspect of motherhood in a number of her poems, and also with a variety of maternal attitudes. Another poem where she focuses on the economic aspect of motherhood is, “Adam’s Daughter.”

Dharker’s persona in the poem, “Adam’s Daughter,”(see appendix for full poem; pg-xliv) similarly challenges our assumptions of mothering and the poem resonates and echoes the one discussed earlier. The claim of Marxist feminists is reiterated when one sees how change in a mother’s attitude can be forced upon by circumstances like poverty and depravation. In the face of social injustice and acute poverty, Dharker’s poem, “Adam’s Daughter” where Dharker has drawn a beautiful comparisons between a hungry child and a hungry bird;

Her eye is watchful, twisted
bird-like at me, her mouth
busy at the bread,
tooth frantic at the crust
as small animals
worrying the dread.  

Dharker relates the plight of a three year old slum child, to a bird, both
hungry and the similarity between both of them being about the uncertainty of
how much and when they will get their food, is vividly portrayed in the following
lines;

At three years old
she has seen enough
to live in dread.
Hands give and often take away.
There is no pattern to it.

at three years of age this child lives in the dread of losing the morsel that she
has been given to eat, perhaps she is either threatened by her mother’s presence or
is unsure of this documentary film-maker who has come to photograph her, as she
busily eats her bread. The child, a three year old is in reality scared that the speaker
might take ways the bread. The speaker describes a child in the slums, for whom
food is a luxury because at times the mother snatches away from her the morsel that,
have been given to her as alms for begging, to feed the child's siblings or at
times to purposely keep her malnourished, so that she can draw the sympathy of the
people while she begs. Can the mother be blamed for this?

Her mother's hands
are often kind and suddenly rough,
knowing that the scraps she brings
will never be enough.

coming back to the child and the food that the child is busily eating, the
speaker persona in the poem has not been identified, the persona is perhaps a
documentary maker, the ones who come to make documentaries on slum children
either to sell these films, in the affluent countries or perhaps for the NGO’S they are
associated with. That distribute charity and alms and for this they want to picture
these children while they receive donations. For the narrator further says;

Her mouth works busily,
but her mind is still,
waiting to see
what my next move would be.
Out of her eyes, I see myself,
crow black, vast, blocking out the sun (l.23-29)

The spectator observes the growing distrust in the child’s face. It reveals the child’s uneasy feeling and the speaker’s awareness that her well-minded intention is also an intrusion, which is both, “needed and aggressive.” Just like the child isn’t sure of her mother’s tenderness as well as harshness, and also the presence and lack of food, similarly she is confused about the spectator as well. Now the camera focuses on the child’s face and the spectator reveals her uneasy feeling and her awareness, that her well-minded intention is also an intrusion. Though in this poem Dharker hasn’t spoken directly about the mother, but her actions and mothering are depicted through the actions and reactions of the child. The way the mother withdraws the food from the child after the people who have donated it leave. In order perhaps to serve this food, to her other could be older and healthier children, her husband and herself as well. Sadly in this poem the little child of three is a breadwinner for his family. The role of the mother is shown as harsh and cruel towards her child but for this she may not be solely to blame. In her given circumstances she has to make difficult choices between how to run her family and how to follow her maternal love for her child.

Another very striking poem by Imtiaz Dharker on the same theme is her poem, “Adam from New Zealand,”(see appendix for full poem; pg.xlvi) she underlines the fact that mothering and motherhood in all its hues and aspects is superior to any circumstance or situation. Here the mother is shown to fight against all odds to provide security, dignity and privacy to her children. As motherhood is a very personal and innate experience, a mother’s love for her child does express itself in a variety of forms.

Adam is a journalist newly arrived in India, here Darker, seems to suggest that the human world in very similar, as are the names of human beings. The journalist who has come to take pictures of the poverty stricken children also incidentally bears the name ‘Adam’ which is also the name of a child here in Dharavi, a down town slum in suburban Mumbai.

But Adam’s mother, who belongs to Dharavi, protects her child from the prying eyes of the camera lens, as she does not want her son to be a source of
entertainment and satisfaction to these people from the developed world. She doesn’t want them to rejoice and bask in the satisfaction of having provided them some alms and gifts by way of charity and in return amusing themselves with the pictures of the smiling faces of these poor children, or else to satisfy their souls that they have done a good deed, or else may be just to pity have them pitied even more the mother is not sure of this. The mother persona says;

But I will keep him out of reach
Of your greedy camera.
He is too precious for you to see.  

which shows that the mother feels that “to make a slide-show of their poverty”, is to but remain oblivious of the human being affected. Therefore she does not want her son to be an object of mere entertainment and provide superfluous sense of benevolence to these visitors.

but everyone in Dharavi will know
the world has
come with cameras
to make a slide-show
of the poverty.  

She further adds;

Adam, your namesake
lives in Dharavi.
But I will keep him out of reach
of your greedy camera.
He is too precious for you to see.  

The mother persona here strongly protests against the mere irrationality and sensational dealing with suffering, which these advanced nations by way of charity, try to give to the third world countries and the poor children. The poem sarcastically hints at the photos that show poor children fraternizing with charity workers or soldiers always with their thums up. Mothering means protection in many different ways. One of these is the defence of dignity and intimacy. In all the poems discussed above by Dharker, the predicament of the mother persona seems to be similar. The mother in “Zarina’s Mother,” is forced by poverty, disease and helplessness, to behave in a manner that she has. Similarly in “Adam’s Daughter” the mother persona is shown to be harsh and rough with her daughter. But in “Adam from
New Zealand,’’ the mother not only does not allow the photographer to shoot her son, she also does not want to have her son face the camera lens so that his soul is not “sucked in” is it basically the difference in the maternal instinct, from individual to individual of is it that here it is her son whom she is protecting, because preference for the male-child is deep – rooted in the Indian culture. Carrying forward the discussion on the influence of the socio-cultural aspect on motherhood, the grandmother persona in Kamala Das’s poem, “Nani,” seems an apt example of motherhood impacted by class and cultural values.

Kamala Das in her poem ‘Nani’,(see appendix for full poem; pg-xlvii) apparently brings out the role of class oppression and male dominance in the suppression of women. The speaker, who is perhaps a small child, recalls the suicide of a pregnant servant in her grandmother’s house and how the tragedy was very conveniently silenced. The maid commits suicide by hanging herself from the tree. The seducer of the woman treated her like a doll and ironically, she remained a doll in her death as well. For the children who could not understand the situation, she metaphorically even appeared to be like a puppet hanging on a rope.

Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself
In the privy one day. For three long hours
Until the police came, she was hanging there
A clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew
Turning her gently on the rope, it seemed
To us who were children then, that Nani
Was doing, to delight us, a comic
Dance....

Here in lies the irony. Men of class and status can get and use women, especially those that belong to the underprivileged lower economic strata, according to their whims and fancy. This corroborates with the Marxist feminist theory (refer to chapter two, pg), which sought to explain class oppression as the outcome of the ‘powers of wealth and social status.’ It displays how the powerful oppress their poor and powerless subjects. Here Das portrays how a child persona is mothered in the form of the grandmother a pregnant woman, a maid who is obviously underprivileged and over and above that a weak prey to male lust and caprice, as she is a woman, and therefore doubly oppressed.
The speaker in the poem notices that yellow flowers had overgrown the place where the corpse of the maid was laid to rest. The speaker, a little girl is reminded of the maid upon seeing the yellow flowers, grow and she asked;

...............Another
Year or two, and, I asked my grandmother
One day, don’t you remember Nani, the dark
Plump one who bathed me near the well? Grandmother
Shifted the reading glasses on her nose
And stared at me. Nani, she asked, who is she?
With that question ended Nani. (l.13-19)

With that question ends Nani’s existence! The grandmother who is a mother figure to the speaker answers the speakers question with a question. The language changes from an affirmative statement to the rhetoric of sermon. But this initiates wide –ranging meditations about the truth, the sisterhood of women and the impact on the young child of impressionable age. The grandmother turns a fact , that is ‘mortality’ by pretending not to remember with a quality or conditions , that is immortality, moving from something precise and certain to something vague and comfortable. Kamala Das was brought up by her grandmother, and therefore perhaps the mother persona is the grandmother in this poem. The grandmother persona, who is supposedly mothering the speaker here, not only brushes aside the vague and uncomfortable question, but in so doing she inculcates wrong values in the child, she teaches her not to have any concern for women of the lower strata, because their issues don’t concern the women of their class. Thus preaching the speaker, a child, that women of the lower strata don’t matter and are easily forgotten and replaced. Marxist feminism, revolts against precisely this class-oppression of women, where even women of the upper social strata participate in oppression of their economically poor counterparts rather than empathise. The poem Nani becomes a powerful indictment against complacency, indifference and rigidity, where the very practice of remembering is an act of resistance and suggests a reconsideration of existing social callousness;

Each truth
Ends thus with a query. It is this designated
Deafness that turns mortality into
Immortality, the definite into
The soft indefinite. (l.20-23)
That is so deep rooted in the social fabric, because it gets passed on from generation to generation. The stratification of the economic and social classes, which has been so vividly depicted here, and the sarcasm with which the oblivious behaviour of the grandmother has been highlighted, states how the society is trained into this kind of indifference by none other than the primary preacher, the mother-figure. Das in a masterstroke highlights the social injustices and inhumanities when she says that all the uncomfortable queries are brushed aside as, either as deafness or oblivion. The grandmother too who feigns oblivion, becomes a part of the deaf and dumb institutions, which are apathetic to the democratic rights of the weak and helpless. Thus making one thing clear that it is a crime in this society to be powerless and weak! To heighten the sense of indifference and selfishness, Kamala Das, depicts the pure innocence of the child, and also the tender undoubting nature, which trusts the grandmother totally;

In a blue silent zone, unscratched by doubts
For theirs is the clotted peace embedded
In life, like music in the Koel’s egg,
Like lust in the blood, or like the sap in a tree.... (l.26-29)

Kamala Das’s poem Nani, leaves a carry home message with the reader that perhaps, those who regard themselves as being in possession of the truth inhabit a peace similar to death. The last lines depict images of polarity between life and death.

The image “clotted peace” provides negative reference to coagulated blood, which implies to the end of life, but it is also compared to “music in the Koel’s egg”. In image of Lord Krishna in the Indian mythology, is symbolised by the Koel or the cuckoo. They both symbolise vitality. The Koel always usurps the nests of other birds. The implication applies to the symbols of “lust in the blood” and “sap of the tree” which promises life when it is revealed and used. The poem Nani carries the message of the powerful indictment against complacency, indifference and rigidity. The very practice of remembering is an act of resistance and suggests a rethinking of society itself

Though Marxist Feminists balance class distinction and economic disparity as a cause for female suppression, they do agree that feminism shares some elements
of socialist feminism; they go a few steps further when they say that women’s subordination was there even before class based societies were formed. This leads to and concurs with the observations of the Radical school, where the main focus, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, is to exhort women anywhere, to guard their feminity and take pride in being a woman and mother, and also associate with other women.

Motherhood is not only affected by issues related to sociological, cultural and economic aspects of life, but the psychological aspect of the mother–child bond, and more specifically the mother-daughter bonding is highly influential in understanding motherhood. Based on a strikingly similar strain, yet different is Christina Ama Ata Aidoo’s poem, ‘For Kinna II’ (see appendix for full poem; pg-xlviii). Christina Ama Ata Aidoo is a teacher in Ghana University, and is a political activist, writer and teacher. She is probably one of the best African women writers who have influenced a large number of other African women writers.

In her poem, ‘For Kinna II’, Ama Ata Aidoo discusses the limitations of a woman, and single motherhood. This poem plays a very specific role in this study as it is contextualised in a matrilineal society. Since so far, all the poems that have been analysed belonged to the patriarchal society, this poem provides a picture of the other side of the world. Very pertinent to this topic is an interview between Ama Ata Aidoo (A) and Dr. Nana Wilson-Tagoe (NT), an African scholar and a critic of Caribbean and African literature, about the former’s understanding of gender roles and feminism. Since this interview directly addresses the current issue under discussion it has been quoted at length:

WT: You talked of a generational gap in the understanding of gender and feminism. [...] Can you elaborate a little on the social and global dynamics which created this gap?

A: Some of the dynamics that have helped the growth of this gap are outside the Academy, outside humanity. We are talking about a world where fundamentalisms of all sorts have arisen. Certainly from this side of the world, from Europe, it is almost as though the only fundamentalism in the world is Islamic fundamentalism. But we know very well that we are coping with Christian and other
fundamentalism. None of these fundamentalisms differ in how women are regarded. [ ] So it is almost as though, outside their prescribed traditional spaces, women are looked upon as some kind of threat to society. As far as I am concerned, it is almost as if our very existence as the other human being is regarded as something that has to be watched and possibly organized outside of ourselves. It is a very complex issue [ ]. The pressure on younger women to take grooming seriously as if we never came out of the 1920s. The fact is that whatever the feminist movement gave to the younger generation was not enough for them to withstand some of these pressures.

WT: [ ], you have always located a discourse on gender in the context of changes.[ ] there seem to be no rigid polarities between men’s roles and women’s roles but rather a dialectic which sets up several perspectives with which transformation may take place. So was there anything about your understanding of gender in Akan society which made you envisage this view of fluidity?

A: [ ] Akan society is matrilineal and that is its major departure. I mean I did not say matriarchal because this is very different and people mistake the two. Matrilineal as in the simple business of the inheritance of material wealth and who matters:

your grandfather or your grandmother; and within the Akan society it’s your grandmother. And it is unbelievable. I have known women who have had up to four sons and who still consider themselves ‘infertile’ because they didn’t have a daughter. [ ] I grew up in my father’s house [ ] and I definitely knew that being a woman is enormously important in Akan society. [ ] In terms of women standing on their own feet, within or outside marriage, mostly from inside marriage, living life on their own terms. [ ] Of course, the head of the family is still a man and we are taught that men are ruling in proxy for women in Akan society. [ ] For me the past few years in Ghana have been an eye-opener because that matrilineal thing has not gone away anywhere. [ ] The child in Akan society has something of a double inheritance, the father’s and the mother’s. You belong to your father’s paramilitary organization but then you belong to your mother’s clan. (Nasta 2004, 292–300).

The gender question is a major source of concern in all the various forms of society, irrespective of whether it is a matrilineal society or a patriarchal one. Only
the preferences change. In her poem, ‘For Kinna II’, the mother persona says that for her the choice to be a mother alone and single was a deliberate one:

But
He said:
Princess,
– and remember royalty
are
made
not born –
it is not for lack of what
you
could
have
had.  (l.1-12)

The poem opens on a note that there is something that precedes it; these questions though remain unanswered in the latter part of the poem as well.

Step up this way and see
these valleys of
green grass that
the winds
the rain and
forever-sun have
rooted so firmly,
fanned up and
levelled down
as though it was a
UN,proto farm.
All that
can,
should,
must be yours.  (l.13- 26)

Aidoo, here very artistically entwined the dual theme of oppression of the women and the colonisation of Africa, in this poem. The suppression of the weaker sex on the one hand is juxtaposed to the exploitation of the African continent. The narrator expresses the tantalising beauty of, the African continent as though it were a lovely woman, that entices the western coloniser.

She further adds;

If I could drive the malaria from my bones,
accept what I cannot accept,
then
lift
up
my
gun and...
shoot.
Here on either side of
the great precipice,
time has not begun to get
restless:
the winds are so still
I asked a toucan for a drink, and
he heard me!
Ah,
the land is truly beautiful.
The cattle are healthy,
their udders are full.
And they might even
smile – at milking.
Especially now that their
milk and their
meat go to
far away places to feed
mouths that are less
hungry than our own. (1.27-53)

The narrator points out the mindless exploitation and caprice of the exploiter. The
greed of the materialistic world seems to ignore the finer human sensitivity, to
materialistic and financial gain. The mention of the cow is metaphorically
representative of the mother, who is the character under discussion here. The
narrator goes on to expand the metaphor into all things like farm produce, etc.

She proceeds;
As happens to the potatoes
we till
so slowly
so painfully:
using
ancient implements,
hoeing and
brushing.
Baby,
it couldn’t have been
you that I
feared.
The noises
the praises
the blame:
and affection running as
thin as flax in the hands of a crippled dame,
and
my love
pawed by
rising expectations and
rocketing inflations,
just
couldn’t
fare
better than a fat mouse
before a lean cat.                          (l.54-80)

The excellent intertwining of the dual themes that seems to run parallel in the poem.
The plight of the mother and her child is intertwined with the machiavillian greed
for money from the farm produce. Though there is always some scope of change and
a sense of opportunity, false perhaps, when the narrator says;

They say
they mean
us all to
walk
swim and
fly?
What do we do, but
crawl into
corners and die
who were born without
legs
fins or
wings?
No, there are choices I
couldn’t face
even for
you,
My Little Queen.                      (1.81-98)

And ultimately the mother persona seems to give up all possible choices to
meet her chosen destiny , that is ‘motherhood,’ and the little girl, will be her
“Queen,” the poem ends on a note of subservience and surrender, both to fate and
the powerful social oppressive circumstances created by the society.

This poem conjures up images and situations that clearly depict human
dilemmas. The vital question that forms a circular argument in the poem is, whether
life is something that develops inexorably towards a pre-determined end, or whether
it is a process that can be controlled and taken into one’s own hand. The poem can be understood by splitting it into four parts. The first part deals with the relation between a man and a woman and a mother and her infant daughter. While it may be very easy and convenient for the father to leave a little child and go away, the mother is compelled by duty and helplessness to take care of the child as has already been discussed in the first chapter ‘Introduction,’ of this study. If we consider motherhood primarily as a combination of two parts child-bearing and child-rearing, then the latter takes long and tedious years of sacrifice as well has been shown in the preceding poem, to this one “Gynaec I.” It is a pity that women get drawn into and saddled with child-rearing. Aidoo has very artistically entwined the dual theme of oppression of the women and the colonisation of Africa, in this poem. The suppression of the weaker sex on the one hand is juxtaposed to the exploitation of the African continent. The narrator expresses vividly, the sensuous and luscious, African continent as though it were a lovely woman, that entices the western coloniser, “Ah,/the land is truly beautiful./The cattle are healthy,/ their udders are full./And they might even / smile – at milking (l...43-48). The first part deals with the man who has refused to accept the situation and therefore departs. The second part begins like a nostalgic return to a pastoral past, “Ah, this land is truly beautiful.” But again politics and sarcastic comments intrude, “Cows might even smile – at milking.” Africans and even their animals seem to agree happily to their exploitation and starvation. Another point worth the mention here is the continuous undercurrent of sacrifice that is associated with motherhood. This juxtaposition of the exploitation of a mother and the African continent, corroborated the Eco-feminist theory(already discussed in Chapter:Two). This theory also voices its revolt against the exploitation of ‘mothers’ and ‘mother earth’. The antithesis of the first part leads to the second layer of meaning that emerges, from the relationship of Africa with the Western world. The first part began in a male voice that seemed to object to something that came before the initial “But”. Who is speaking? Who addresses the woman as Princess? Who is made – not born: God, the royal father, a lover, the father of her child? Thus leaving a lot of questions unanswered, although one thing becomes clear that the man refuses to shoulder his responsibility and leaves the woman alone.
To explain and answer these questions we will have to study the next poem, as it precedes this one and seems to answer most of the questions.

This poem is entitled “Gynae I” and it deals with post-partum complications. Perhaps most of the questions that have been posed in “For Kynna II” answer these questions.

Here are some excerpts:

Getting scraped
Lying in
‘vestigating only.
Post-partum complications:
Tying it up
Throwing one out
Removing it all.
Dying for it
Dying with it
Dying from it.

All agony
no
ecstasy.

For,
he
comes and stands with
a sheepish grin that
tries to hide the
scowl and
fails.

There
she lies
the lamb.
Rounded limbs;
dimpled cheeks;
dewy lips
parted
in farewell to a
barely
understood
life.
And they said
they didn’t know

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This poem is a sequel to the earlier one, as it depicts the post-partum experience of the persona. The wide gamut of emotional experiences that the persona goes through has been portrayed in the poem. With an address of the daughter, the poem now turns to the personal. The exclamation, “Baby, it couldn’t have been you that I feared,” expresses the mother’s endearment and perhaps also her anguish for her child’s future. This third section shows the turmoil of a confused mind. “The noises, the praises, the blame” and the most hectic of all activities, “running”, “rising”, “rocketing”, are set against “the still winds” and “a time that has not begun to get restless” in the preceding part. They refer to the hectic activities and the atmosphere in the labour-room in “Gynae I” and to the love “pawed by // rising expectations and rocketing inflations” in “For Kinna II”. The next step takes up the expectations and inflations concerning possibilities of life ranging between the extremes of omnipotence and desperation. The poem culminates in the courageous contradiction of a pre-determined life and in the assertion of hope for a future built on choices. The mother lovingly greets and accepts her daughter as “My Little Queen” ( “Kinna II”, l.98). The child is born a queen and will now govern her mother’s life......

Kamala Das in her poem “My Grandmother’s House,”(see appendix for full poem;pg:-lii) talks of the innocent love of childhood as compared to the sexual desires and frustration of the adult life. The poem has a fairy tale beginning:

There is a house now far away where once
I received love…….. (l.1-2)

The nostalgia and the fond remembrance with which the persona who is the granddaughter, seems to mention the house, and the whole poem like a celebration of love and home, but just then it turns into an elegy, when the persona remorsefully says;
That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence…

it talks of loss, decay and mourning for the perished world. It sounds like a nightmare that is confronted with destruction and decay. The grand-daughter persona is driven to despair. The persona then drifts back into a state of nostalgia when she says:

you cannot believe darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved…

But soon this sense of peace and solace gives way to her present day state, where she says:

I who have lost
My way and beg now at stranger’s doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

In contrast to her present condition and state of mind the speaker celebrates her childhood which according to her was cocooned in love and protection. Kamala Das was not brought up by her mother, because at a very young age she was sent to her grandmother’s house. This has been regretted by Das, as she has missed the fondness and care of her mother, but her grandmother was a blessing to her and a mother-figure. Das feels that if there has ever lived someone in this world who has truly loved her it was her grandmother, as she expresses in this poem through the granddaughter persona.

This poem corroborates the views of the Liberal Feminists, that if woman perform their motherly obligations with care, it can build an empowering and ennobling relation between them and their children and this can be their reward for motherhood. In this poem, this concept is illustrated as the grandmother who is the mother-figure here, provides the solace and strength to the speaker. This relationship enriches her. The Eco-feminist perspective on motherhood too takes up the idea that motherly warmth, nurturing and co-operation, will ultimately help liberate women from the shackles of patriarchy. Womanhood bears close affinity with nature as is viewed by the world, and the similarity between the way the patriarchal powers exploit, abuse, rape and hate women with the rampant exploitation of the earth mother, are the crux of the eco-feminist concept of feminism. This has been
discussed elaborately in the chapter on feminist perspective on motherhood. Rich says, “Out of the earth womb, vegetation and nourishment emerged, as the human child out the woman’s body (Of Woman; 107-108). A poem that closely resembles this one is ‘Point Shirley’ (see appendix for full poem; pg-lii) by Sylvia Plath in which she acknowledges the positive aspects of the experience of motherhood.

The speaker in ‘Point Shirley’ is deeply and immensely attached to her grandmother and just like Das’ persona in ‘My Grandmother’s House’; Plath too depicts a sense of overwhelming loss. In ‘Point Shirley’ the speaker expresses deep love towards her grandmother, as she says:

I would get from these dry-papped stones:
The milk your love instilled in them
and the efforts of the grandmother to maintain her home as
a labour of love, and that labour lost .

this shows the speakers deep love and affection for her grandmother, and therefore the maternal love and effort did not go entirely in vain. Plath projects the theme in a beleaguered and elegiac tone. Here the grandmother is the symbol and icon of motherhood. Through the depiction of labour the poet implies both denial of the duties inherent in motherhood as well as a celebration of motherhood.

As Plath’s own attitude towards motherhood was a negative one she considered it both a futile and self-deplete task, as compared to that of her grandmother for whom motherhood was a pious and dedicated duty, which is gradually undone by times erosive effects;

like broom straws worn to the nub.

not only did the persona in Plath’s poems depict an attitude of futility and rejections towards the tasks of the institution of motherhood, but Plath’s poem ‘Metaphors’ also depicts a persona who rejects and detests the very idea of physical change that a female body undergoes during pregnancy, which is similar to Kamala Das’ “An Introduction,” or Eunice De Souza’s “Sweet Sixteen,” where the persona herself blames her childhood parenting for having prepared her inadequately to face a male dominated world. But she does not want her daughter to face a similar predicament and therefore she decides to prepare her like a responsible mother.
But before they enter
I will have said
Your bones are lovely

And before them strange hands there was always this hands that formed (l.50-54)

Or as in Anne Sexton’s poem, ‘Little Girl My String Bean,’

Oh Darling, let your body in
let it tie you in
in comfort.
What I want to say, Linda
Is that women are born twice.. (l.55-59)

The persona here though regretted the fact that she herself wasn’t well prepared to step into womanhood. But nonetheless the mother persona assures her daughter that womanhood is nothing to fear and that it should be a welcome change in a woman’s body. She does not criticize the male behaviour, body or attitude rather she welcomes motherhood as ‘a rebirth,’ and a ‘new life’.

She further goes on to nostalgically speak of her own pregnancy and expresses the desire that if she were able to see her daughter in the embryonic form she would have enjoyed her pregnancy even more. Sexton in this poem truly celebrates the experience of pregnancy, motherhood and later mentors the daughter into womanhood.

Therefore unlike Kamala Das or Eunice De Souza’s persona this poem initiates a young daughter into the world of womanhood, by showing her that life can be nothing less than a celebration and joy. Sexton clubs the feeling of her separation from her adult daughter along with the cherished maternal dream to see her daughter grow into a ‘happy women,’ contrary to all the kind of speculation associated with the snapping of the mother daughter bond. Sexton envisages her presence in her daughter’s life as, “I am here that somebody else, an old tree in the background.”(L.91.92) Though any relationship involves deep psychology and emotions, the mother-child relation moves the rough and entire gamut of emotions, but then the society receives an individual who is properly initiated for it, and therefore helps create harmony and good relationships.
Another poem that depicts the delight of motherhood is Dharker’s poem “Living Space,” (see appendix for full poem; pg- liv) where she projects the maternal instinct for protection and survival of the children against all odds. The poem compares and contrasts the sharp line technique of the first stanza to the second stanza of the poem that reflects the precarious condition of “these eggs in a wire basket” the poem opens on the note;

There are just not enough
Straight lines. That
is the Problem.
Nothing is flat
or parallel............ (l.1-5)

Perhaps suggestive of the fact that in this world fate and logic do not support each other. One can’t really trust the fairness of divine justice.

..............Beams
Balance, crookedly on supports
Thrust off the vertical.
Nails clutch at open seams.
The whole structure leans dangerously
Towards the miraculous........... (l.5-10)

But the forces of survival and procreation somehow miraculously hold the leaning structure in its place. Therefore what is beautiful, mysterious and amazing here is;

Into this rough frame,
Someone has squeezed a living space a living space
and even dared to place
these eggs in a wire basket............ (l.12- 15)

that the maternal instinct of procreation and protection finds a niche against all odds to save and protect the child. The fragile and delicates egg shells, that hold the material and potential to issue forth ‘new life’, are the objective co –relative to the human life itself which though so delicate and precarious still finds expression in the world. The narrative of this poem concludes on the note:

while fragile curves of white
being out over the dark edge
of a slanted universe,
gathering the light
into themselves,
as if they were
the bright, then walls of faith. (l.16-22)
that though the universe is ‘slanted’, also referring to the tilt in the axis of the earth, to help provide better light to the egg, which is metaphorically referred as the ‘wall of faith’. The ‘egg’ here is also a metaphor for ‘motherhood’ that provides protection to the child through all odds. Eunice de Souza, writes about this poem, “the strongest poem in the book, however, is ‘living Space’ which catches exactly the ramshackle quality of life in this country, and the spirit of survival that so often and so mysteriously accompanies it’ (1997,49)

The speaker in this poem remains a foreigner who just observes the various conditions of human life. The poet is preoccupied with the details as seen by her. The persona does not hide her emotions behind irony or sarcasm; rather here the emotions of sympathy and pity are admirably portrayed with sensitivity and intuition. Audre Lorde once described mothering as the “ability to make something out of anything “(1984, 174). The instinct of motherhood is one of survival and protection.

Dharker enumerates in her various poems a variety of mother persona who depict a vast gamut of feelings and emotions depend upon the different situations and even circumstances that Dharker describes the gamut of feelings and emotions that one undergoes depend upon the different situations and even circumstances that Dharker describes.

Eunice De Souza in her poem “For a Child, Not-Clever,”(see appendix for full poem:pg-iv) shows the empathy and comprehension that are necessary to deal with all aspects of a child’s emotional and social world and their conflicts, especially if the child is physically challenged. For such a child, maternal love and reassurance, serves as a strong shield as against the social humiliation that the child has to face, and the mother too seems to fight against all social odds to make her child feel loved and wanted in this hostile world.

The child persona in this poem tries to find appreciation and acceptance from his mother. As the poem opens on the following note:

Once you thought it good
You came fifty –sixth in class
out of fifty-six children.
But Mummy, your said,
fifty-six is bigger, than one. (l.1-5)
the ‘Child, not Clever’, turns the hierarchical thinking of competition at school and is ridiculed. Children are made to face a lot of competition and comparison by their friends and it is only the mother who can protect her child from the judgmental and evaluative eye of the ‘others’. The child in this poem seeks love, acceptance and compassion from the mother. It reminds one of the Wordsworthian lap of ‘mother nature’ that has formed the crux and basis of romantic poetry for decades. Here Eunice shows that a child’s emotional, social and internal conflicts can only be delicately dealt with by the mother with empathy and compassion, especially those of handicapped children. In this poem, Eunice not only projects the importance of a mother for the child but also at the same time she presses upon the requirement for the inspiration and gratification that a mother draws from a satisfactory mother-child relationship. The benefits are mutual. Maya Angelou’s poem “Mother, A Cradle to Hold Me,” (see appendix for full poem; pg-xvii), is also written on similar lines.

During those early, dearest days
I did not dream that you had
A large life which indended me,
which was only you.
For I had a life

Here the child admits that for her the mother figure is nothing but her total life. This unfortunate course through which any mother child relation passes has fortunately culminated here, with a deep realized that;

I thank you that you still find
Something in me
To cherish, to admire and to love
I thank you, Mothers
I love you.

What a mother can mean and be for a child, cannot be replaced by anyone. This is the ultimate sense of gratitude that any child can have for the mother and this is the absolute delight in life that one have as a mother and reflects the experience of motherhood. But Jean Binta Breeze’s poem, “Testament” (see appendix for full poem; pg-lv) is a beautiful depiction of how black Caribbean mother raises her children in the diaspora of Britain, it exposes the ramifications that the social and cultural differences between the two races can have on mothering. Although the poem is written in Creole it can easily be decoded. Structurally the poem is divided
into three parts, that correspond to the daughter, mother and grandmother, the three generations. In the first section the mother sets a frame and explains why she had to time her testimony then;

    sing girl
    sing,
    dere’s more to you
    dan skin

(l.1-4)

here the mother encourages the girl to overcome her racial prejudice and utilise the positive aspects of her race. The mother goes on to narrate that she is now growing old and has worn off due to the hard work of raising the girl with care.

    my fingers witlow
    from years of cleaning corners
    where brush an dustpan
    couldn’ reach
    same han
    use to plait yuh hair
    wid pride

(l.5-11)

She mentions little details her childhood when she would, plait her hair, to which she further adds;

    oil it thickness
    wid hope an dreams
    tie it up wid ribbons
    of some rainbow future

(l.12-15)

even the little daily activities of child-care seemed to be laden with wishes and dreams for the little girl’s future, when she says that “the ribbons of some rainbow future” (l. 14). She depicts typical maternal love.

    every thought is a prayer
    dat de pot won’t bwoil over
    while ah pull myself upstairs
    to scrub de bath
    dat de cooker
    won’t start play up
    an de smell a gas
    come leaking troo
    dat someting teacha sey
    would register
    an yuh all could see a way
    to stretch yuh brain
    an move yuh han
    pas idleness
    to de honour a yuh work

(l.32-46)
the mother persona reminiscence the childhood of the girl and all the care and effort that she as a mother used to take to ensure that the child is not discriminated against in school and that she can fit in and be a part of the white society.

ah can feel it
now yuh gettin older
steppin pas my likkle learning
dat yuh tink ah stupid
ah see how yuh fadda
embarrass yuh frens
wid im smell a oil
from de London trains
so yuh now stop bringing dem home

(1.47-55)

now the mother feels that her daughter has grown and therefore she considers her mother stupid, the girl also doesn’t invite her friend’s home because she feels that the smell of the oil of London trains embarrasses her friends. Both she and her husband have invested in a better future for their children. But now at a time when the children are in their teens, the differences in race and class interfere and disturb the relation between parents and children.

This poem addresses a mothers experience in the world of institutions like race and the identity of both the mother and the child. The poem and especially the refrain, “Sing girl sing dere’s more to you dan skin”(l.1) describes race as a matter of cultural and social perception, not of biology and skin. Black children discover difficulties in interracial friendship during puberty.

The sense of discrimination and the feeling of being discriminated against is a painful experience in these years. The mother senses that the children have begun to feel ashamed of their family background and of their parents;

an if ah see someting good
in a skip
ah know it embarrass yuh
wen ah tek it out
but in dis place
dem trow weh nuff good tings
an waste is something
drill out me
from young
we had to save weself
from a shoestring
to a likkle lef over
an yuh know
how ah keep all yuh tongue sweet
wen ah tun mi han
to mek something special
out a nutten

But the mother who has perhaps lived all her life under such discrimination, does stand up against this racial discrimination now and she strongly protests against the social injustice and inequality against the black minorities. She feels that she has endowed her children with all the qualities to be included in the society as an equal, entitled to all the rights and duties. And could be somewhere in the process she elevated her children to such a high standard that they have even risen above their parents;

ah nat trying to mek yuh feel sorry
believe me
ah just want yuh to understand
dat we come as far as we can
an we try to arm yuh
wid allde tings
dat in fi we small way
we could see dat yuh might need
ah nat telling yuh look roun
jus

the mother seems to be all in control here, and instructs her daughter to feel like an equal in the land where she has grown, but in so doing the mother realises that she has lost her security somewhere under her daughter’s silent critique. The mother ruminates, in the following lines;

ah see yuh eye turn weh
anytime yuh see mi han
an at my age
ah really kean worry
who ah belch in front a
an if ah see someting good
in a skip
ah know it embarrass yuh

the mother expresses anguish at her daughter’s indifference. This is the irony of maternal / parental fate that, the mother strove hard to accomplish her dream to make her children rise above their status and standard and attain the coveted social
grace of the white, but eventually the dream when it is realised leaves the parents out of it, and very painfully and pitifully the mother is made to suffer the same indifference from her own children now, who consider her as a social inferior.

Social and cultural gaps are depicted in tiny details and are shown to have, deep impact and effect on the life of a black family. The mother acknowledges that her daughter wants to adjust to the white socio-cultural norms in order to be acceptable to the white society. The persona moves between the past and the present in time, the poem suggests that identity creation is a reaction in response to the perceptions and prejudices of others.

But could be in an attempt to recover her identity and satisfy her ego, in the time to come, the mother depicts her vision of an identity, that is made by the pride she takes in herself, for having been able to make her children attain the desired social status and equality. But she is not ready to batter it with her own racial pride.

She goes on to talk about her experience of mothering, and her heroism, in having been able to do so under the burden of poverty in a materialist society. She restores her pride and her dignity, and tries to overcome her feeling of acute dejection and rejection by her own children, by enumerating her work and her achievements;

```
we had to save weself
from a shoestring
to a likkle lef over
an yuh know
how ah keep all yuh tongue sweet
wen ah tun mi han
to mek something special
out a nutten                      (l.107-114)
```

The poet has depicted a remarkable mother persona, the persona is shown to be struggling with the various socio-cultural challenges but at the same time she wants to draw her children back into her own culture, and if not that, at least to take pride in their cultural heritage. The mother tries to remedy her mistake and as a correction she narrates to her daughter the heroic tales of her own heritage.

The third section extends the role of mothering to that of the rich heritage of the grandmother;
The above mentioned lines depicts the extension of mothering to the ancestral mothers, the mythical Maroon Nana, who was an eighteenth-century African Jamaican fugitive slave woman and became the symbol of Jamaica’s resistance to slavery and colonisation. In the end, the mother extends the Maroon Nana example to compares her journey and her life to Nana’s fight. They have both been “fighting pon er piece a lan”. Now she claims the right of citizenship for the whole family.

The depiction of the changing awareness of mothering that is impacted by racism and class, plus made worse by economic constraints, becomes the central focus of discussion in such situations. It considers the experience of mothering as an amalgamation of joy and pain on many levels – biological, social and historical. It explores in the most effective way how problems of racial and cultural separatism are steeped in dual issues. One they end up creating a pseudo-identity for the children, who then neither belong neither to their parent culture nor the culture of the foreign land to which they have immigrated. This also builds barriers within the family.

Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze, has created this mother persona to tell us how differences of race, class and economic status interfere into experience of motherhood, and also in the mother-daughter relationship. The mother has to pay with being made to feel inferior before her daughter’s identity. She accepts this
uncomplainingly because of her love for her children. The poem shows how the mother questions her understanding of race and culture through her experience of mothering in the diasporas. White mothers of black children have been writing in a similar way about the difficulties of mothering in a multi-racial world.

Lorna Goodison also talks of the social and cultural aspects that a mother has to deal with because of the difference, between race and colour. In her poem, “I Am Becoming My Mother,”(see appendix for full poem; pg- lx)

she shows how the daughter persona, celebrates and rejoices in the fact that she is like her mother;

Yellow / brown woman
fingers smelling always of onions
My mother raises rare blooms
and waters them with tea
her birth waters sang like rivers
my mother is now me

This poem celebrates the intimate relation between mother and daughter. The speaker identifies herself with the colour and smell of her mother’s skin. She rejoices in the fact that her mother is a woman of colour and therefore the persona too has inherited her mother’s colour.

My mother had a linen dress
the colour of the sky
and stored lace and damask tablecloths
to pull shame out of her eye.

The persona’s praise of the life giving power of the mother, exalts the status of the mother to that of being a creator. Her creativity is further glorified, in the fact that the mother’s trail of creativity goes on, the mother had a taste for beauty and an inclination to collect all these treasures and create a heritage that the children will take pride in possessing. In the last line the persona takes pride in the fact that her mother shows respect for convention. When the mentions,

She “had a linen dress the colour of the sky”(l.7), she “stored lace and tablecloths to pull shame out of her eye”(l. 10-11).
Them she affirms that;

    I am becoming my mother
    brown / yellow woman
    fingers smelling always of onions (l.12-14)

perhaps the reference to her fingers always smelling of onions, refers to the mother’s preoccupation with house hold drudgery. Though the women has all the qualities and abilities as a mother but still she has to keep proving her worth to her family at all times so that, she may be considered as useful to the family. Moreover the persona knows that mothering is a continuous process and that there is no break or vacation from mothering. Although the poem is an open ended dialogue between the mother and daughter, the only thing that can be asserted here is that, the daughter is willing to accept her mother’s fate and her own role as a mother, without any regret or intension to avoid it.

The persona mentions both the qualities and the small vices. The poem invokes the intimacy between mother and daughter and becomes an illustration of the experience of mothering that leads to a smooth transition , from the personas role as a daughter to that of a mother. It also highlights the sisterhood of women, here as the community of proud black women.

This poetry can be applicable to even people from different cultures. But what it more closely resembles, is the preferred European form for love poetry, where the fourteen lines consist of a sextet and an octet.

Since the poem is written in a soft sing-song manner, movement starts and ends at the same point, the poem gives the impression that the mother and daughter are associated in a playful interaction and that there is complete transformation and identification between the mother and daughter.

This poem portrays a relationship between mother and daughter, that is so loving and blissful, that it seems like a complete experience of motherhood. In comparison to some of the mother-daughter related poems discussed in the previous chapter and also the thoughts of many feminists on this subject , discussed in the second chapter, where so many difficult mother-daughter-relations seem to prevail in psychoanalysis and literature.