CHAPTER-3
MATERNITY AND MATERNAL BODY – POLITICS AND ROMANTICISM

Themes like adolescent changes and pregnancy, labour and child-birth, lactation and nurturing, caring and child-rearing, are recurrent themes related to the biological aspects of motherhood, in the poems written by women. This phase of maternity and the changes that accompany it, whether biological, psychological or socio-cultural, have been depicted from a variety of perspectives by women writers. Eunice De’Souza in her poem, “Catholic Mother” (see appendix for full poem; pg-i) depicts in a nutshell the issues that politicise motherhood. De’Souza, through the use of brief and cryptic sentences, depicts the predicament of a woman as mother.

The poem though entitled, “Catholic Mother” has a male persona as the speaker. The opening lines that introduce the persona;

Francis X D’Souza
father of the year. (l.1-2)

is perhaps symbolic of all men and to add to this he is also a priest which especially means that he should be a man of high morality and must possess greater knowledge of the ‘good and bad’ as compared to ordinary men. To heighten the irony this priest has the distinction of being the ‘father of the year’. Therefore he is highly qualified on the grounds of morality and prudence. After having introduced the persona, De Souza goes on to say;

By the grace of God he says
we’ve had seven children
(in seven years). (l.5-6)

In a typical and characteristic patriarchal tone the speaker proclaims the achievements of his life, ‘seven children’, without giving any credit to his poor wife who bore him those seven children! Perhaps, about this fact he is either totally oblivious or is indifferent to it. But what actually stuns the reader is a small parenthetical elaboration that these children have arrived in ‘(seven years of marriage)’ (l.6). De’Sousa’s poetic talent is at its best when she in order to satirise this fact, in reality underplays it. The father then states;
We’re One Big Happy Family
God Always Provides. (l. 8-9)

As if the satire wasn’t severe enough De Souza, adds a witty and humorous aspect to it, that they are a “big and happy family..........and God ... Provide’s”(l. 8-9). What is implied here is perhaps, the old dictum that children are God sent, therefore one shouldn’t interfere with His holy will, and also that it is God’s duty to provide for the children!

India will Suffer for
her Wicked Ways
(these Hindu buggers got no ethics).
Pillar of the Church
says the parish priest (l. 9-12)

and also because if one interferes with the divine will, it will be a loss of ethics, perhaps. Therefore one must stick to the concept that children are God’s gift. So deep rooted are the notions of male superiority, male will and mostly these notions were intertwined with religious and cultural diktats, that nobody generally questioned the wisdom of such concepts. Another masterstroke of crisp and subtle satire is, when the mother superior adds;

Lovely Catholic Family
says Mother Superior (l.13-14)

It is the “Mother Superior,” the head of the catholic parish who pays a compliment to the family. The patriarchal designs are so deep-rooted and profusely spread in the social fabric that even women serve, unknowingly and unintentionally perhaps, as agents of patriarchy. The Catholic priestess perhaps saw nothing wrong in the whole family, rather she appreciates the family. The closing lines of the poem are climactic, as they shatter the hopes and promise made to the reader by the title of the poem;

the pillar’s wife
says nothing. (l. 15-16)

the reader on seeing the title of the poem expects that, either the mother will say something or else something about her will be told. Added to this is her agony of bringing up seven children, De Sousa here, says;
Here he is top left
the one smiling. (l. 3-4)

that is a group picture with his family perhaps, only the father seems to be smiling, neither his children nor his wife. The extent of the misery of the Father’s wife as well as the insensitivity and hypocrisy of the father vis a vis the institutions concerned are marvellously conveyed by these few words. And so is the institutionalised approval of it which is rather disgusting. The injustice he imposes thus on his wife and thereby on the children as well, are pitted against his hollow diatribe against “Hindu buggers” who have “got no ethics”. By thus juxtaposing phrases and direct speech, De’Souza avoids lengthy description and brings out the irony of the Father’s words simultaneously. The last two lines of the poem which are actually one short five-word sentence, say the most:

the pillar’s wife
says nothing. (l. 15-16)

This contradiction between the title and poem, perhaps is intentional, and hints at the woman’s situation. The poem though entitled “Catholic Mother,” has a female presence but absolutely not a word is uttered by the catholic mother in the poem. Instead it is the father who is accompanied by his silent and always pregnant wife and seven sullen children, who does all the talking which may be considered as the objective correlative between this particular situation where the woman though present says nothing, symbolizing the female voice that has been silenced for centuries by patriarchal forces. Eunice de Souza’s memories of Catholic Goan life in Poona deal with its repression, prejudices, ignorance, social injustice and women’s place in marriage and family. De'Souza is unmarried and childless. Her poetry is feminist in its awareness of women’s oppression within the patriarchal system represented by the Catholic Church and the husband. It is an established fact that in the past women used to have multiple pregnancies. Around ten to fifteen pregnancies was the average number of pregnancies a woman would undergo and usually most women would die during child birth. Here the poet seems to express her solidarity with other women. Eunice De’Souza’s poem illustrates eloquently how oppressed and suppressed women are in some cultures and some strata’s of the society. Their plight can only be imagined. The persona in this poem portrays these
women who have absolutely no control over their bodies and motherhood is in a way, forced upon them. Their trauma and dilemma is unfathomably portrayed in this poem. It is a subtle satire. The irony lies in the juxtaposition of the father’s speech and the real situation. As always, wit and irony control and enhance anger and sadness. Adrienne Rich wrote: “Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications” (1977: 39). This poem speaks about the results of patriarchal practice. The poem’s words should stick in our mind. The Catholic Church, here represented by the parish priest and the Mother Superior, continues to deny women the control once their bodies and counteracts with its prescriptions to inhibit family planning.

Radical group feminists like Kate Millet, broadens the terms ‘politics’ to include all “power structured relationships in which one group of persons is controlled by another” (Sexual Politics, 23). Here in “Catholic Mother” we see how politics breeds the subordinate political status of the mother, which reflects the institution of motherhood.

Although the maternal body has been the focus of much maternal politics and romanticism, Anne Sexton’s poem “In Celebration of My Uterus,” (see appendix for full poem; pg-i) celebrates the female body and romanticizes this unique and marvellous gift that women possess, ‘the uterus’. Perhaps, like most other women, even Sexton did not realise how precious a gift the ‘uterus’ is, that her body possess and what this uterus meant to her, until she was threatened by a medical condition to have her uterus surgically removed. Though most of Sexton’s poems are confessional, this one is particularly biographical and confessional. As Diana Hume George in an Overview of Sexton's Canon, observes, “When Sexton died in 1974, her reputation as an important member of a misnamed and misapprehended movement in modern American poetry was secured. She had become almost entirely identified with the controversial "confessional school," and she was generally regarded as amongst its most accomplished practitioners. In company with such poets as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and W. D. Snodgrass, she had risen to fame well beyond the boundaries of New England. She received the Pulitzer Prize and numerous other awards, including nomination for the National Book Award, and fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the
Ford Foundation, and the Guggenheim Foundation. She taught at Radcliffe and Harvard, lectured at Bread Loaf, held the Crashaw Chair at Colgate University, and was a full professor at Boston University by 1972.” She was much in demand on the poetry reading circuit, where her “flamboyant, dramatic performances were celebrated and criticized.” It is with this reputation that she has been lauded as a femininist poet. The news of an impending hysterectomy-removal of the uterus, upset her, but due to some reason the hysterectomy was cancelled and she begins this poem on a cheerful note, when she says;

They wanted to cut you out
but they will not.
They said you were immeasurably empty
but you are not.
They said you were sick unto dying
but they were wrong.
You are singing like a school girl.
You are not torn. (l. 2-8)

She addresses her uterus here when she refers to it as sick, dying and empty, but she then says that it is as healthy and cheerful as a school girl.

The poem evokes images of the uterus as being powerful and beautiful on its own, it mimics the format that Whitman’s poem “Song of Myself,” uses to celebrate the male form. “In Celebration of My Uterus” depicts woman as being constructed positively, in spite of being reverberated in a patriarchal culture. For she addresses her uterus as ‘sweet weight’, an oxymoron, perhaps to suggest a mixture the feelings, primarily happiness at the ability to mother; but at the same time the burden of the patriarchal - social and cultural restrictions that are saddled along with it.

Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
and of the soul of the woman I am
and of the central creature and its delight
I sing for you. I dare to live. (l.10-13)

This poem is a mixture of the cultural, biological and to a little extent medical analysis of the Uterus. A mixed use of the term 'uterus' and 'womb' exposes the additional connotations of the latter in culture. The first part of the poem personifies the womb, it is an address to the womb, and denotes it as a living being “and of the central creature and its delight” (l.…..12).
Each cell has a life.
There is enough here to please a nation.
It is enough that the populace own these goods.
Any person, any commonwealth would say of it,
‘It is good this year that we may plant again
and think forward to a harvest.

The poem integrates women's spirituality with sexuality and creativity with
procreativity, praising the womb as a factor uniting women around the world.
Sexton was one of the first poets who entered the tabooed area of praising the female
body and its processes.

Each cell has a life.
There is enough here to please a nation.

It implies activity and indicates that an egg cell does not necessarily need a
sperm to form an embryo and then 'a foetus' but is 'life' in itself. The common
perception of the passivity of the female egg in the process of fertilisation is plainly
contradicted here, without eliminating the metaphors of the 'harvest' and 'planting'.
The quantitative aspect of the sperm can be deciphered that it is not exactly the,
‘amount’ perhaps that is important in the reproductive process - but the mythical
level. Literary critic Natalie Angier has commented over this line saying that ‘it is
not the quantity of the sperms a man can produce instead it is the monthly ritual of
the women’s ovulation, its celebration and then the acceptance of menstruation as
the inevitable continuation of the cycle, if the egg is not fertilized.’(Angier; pg 97)

A blight had been forecast and has been cast out.”
Many women are singing together of this:
one is in a shoe factory cursing the machine,
one is at the aquarium tending a seal,
one is dull at the wheel of her Ford,
one is at the toll gate collecting,
one is tying the cord of a calf in Arizona,
one is straddling a cello in Russia,
one is shifting pots on the stove in Egypt,
one is painting her bedroom walls moon color,
one is dying but remembering a breakfast,
one is stretching on her mat in Thailand,
one is wiping the ass of her child,
one is staring out the window of a train
in the middle of Wyoming and one is
anywhere and some are everywhere and all
seem to be singing, although some can not
sing a note.
It is here that Sexton sings the note of female sonority and celebrates the uterus as a unifying female factor. Interestingly Sexton draws a wide range of women as mothers almost covering the entire global female demography. She declares the female sonority amongst women of all economic classes, all ages, and all cross-sections of the society. And in so doing she is, at the same time aware of some women who may not be able to sing a note- why? Perhaps they are imprisoned in cultural restrictions or else aren’t aware of the need for female sisterhood and its strength - innocent or ignorant. But one thing is certain that Sexton has full faith in the power of the ‘womb’.

As has been discussed in the first chapter ‘Introduction’ ( refer to pg. 5-6 ) it is because of the presence of this womb and the ability of women to procreate that the patriarchal forces have subjugated and suppressed women, because they knew that women have the ability to become very powerful in the domestic sphere and can also extend this influence into the public sphere Sexton is perhaps drawing attention to this aspect of womanhood. Therefore like any other means of reproduction, womanhood also became a means of ownership, “the ownership of the womb.” Sexton further mentions and reiterates that the ‘womb’ is sweet weight;

Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
let me carry a ten-foot scarf,
let me drum for the nineteen-year-olds,
let me carry bowls for the offering
(if that is my part).
Let me study the cardiovascular tissue,
let me examine the angular distance of meteors,
let me suck on the stems of flowers
(if that is my part).
Let me make certain tribal figures’.......                   (l. 31-39)

In the concluding part of the poem, the phrase “if that is my part” suggests playing a role in an act scripted by providence and thus predestines the woman's fate through the uterus. Instead of rebelling against this preordained fate, she celebrates being “the woman I am”, and sees it as a factor uniting her with other women, a sign of female sonority. It is precisely in keeping with the views of the Radical Feminist, as discussed in the previous chapter. It also emphasises the unity of the self and the body, not their alienation and fragmentation, with respect to mutual independence of
existence. The field of discussion here proves our initial point that women have to steer the argument in their favour through all the possible perspectives available to them. The feminine aspect of motherhood does limit and incapacitate a woman’s ability to lead life in the same way as a man.

The feminists of the 1980’s promoted women writers to accept the female body, and to glorify it rather than criticize it. Sexton in her poem, evokes images of the ‘Uterus’ as an entity that is beautiful and powerful on its own. It was different from the usual practice of praising the male form. This poem contributes to the representation of women as being constructed positively, in spite of the satirical and ironical overtones, like ‘sweet weight,’ or “(if that is my part)” which smacks of patriarchal culture. The poem integrates women’s spirituality with sexuality and creativity with procreativity, praising the womb as a factor of unity for women around the world. She celebrates womanhood, not only from the biological perspective but adds to it a spiritual level and the resulting whole is a departing point for her acclamation of identity. The use of epithets like –‘soul’, eventual creature’, ‘spirit’ – for the uterus hints that the speaker is not oblivious of the nature and function of the uterus and she exposes further the reproductive function by mentioning the fertility of the ‘soil’ of the field;

Each cell has a life.

There is enough here to please a nation. (l.7-8)

And also says;

In celebration of the woman I am and of the soul of the woman I am
And of the central creature and its delight. (l. 12-13)

Sexton says that it is the presence of the ‘uterus’ that united all the woman of the world. More over the role of the uterus, as described by her, is also supported by Sevenhuijen and Vries, article ‘Women’s Movement and Motherhood’ which cites some of the reasons for the newly acquired popularity of motherhood. motherhood because they say, “feminist vision of the preparation of species is better than a vision of its end” (17) and the experience of motherhood thus came to be looked upon as a more elemental human condition which rendered life as meaningful.
Shulamith Firestone, also a Radical Feminist’s theorist concurs with the theme of this poem, she traces the cause of women’s physical oppression to reproduction. According to this school of thought, as already discussed in the previous chapter, motherhood begins with pregnancy and child birth, enslaves the mother, because of the physical realities of reproduction and pins women down, rendering them socially, politically and economically insecure. In this poem the Radical Feminist Approach is implied, as over here the subordinate role of women is also depicted because unfortunately the female biology is also instrumental in adding to the sad and pathetic state of women, which has been then totally exploited by the other political institutions like marriage, religion, patriarchy and cultural practices. The institution of motherhood has been aptly depicted in “Catholic Mother”, the hypocrisy of Francis X. D’ Souza is exposed by the ironic juxtaposition of phrases like “Grace of God” and “Pillar of the Church” against the sufferings of the Father’s wife due to seven consecutive pregnancies in a short span of seven years for seven children.

Continuing to explore the aspects related to the physical body, the first stage that comes in the life of a female that prepares her for motherhood is adolescence and puberty. Although the female body is physically different from the male body right from birth, a girl might realise this difference only when she reaches adolescence. At this stage the female body undergoes marked changes, and the girl becomes or is made conscious of the fact that her body is preparing itself to enable her to become a mother. Motherhood in its multifarious hues finds expression in the mother persona of a wide range of poems that enrich literature. This also marks her stage of adulthood, as Kamala Das in her poem, “An Introduction” (see appendix for full text; pg-xx) mentions;

..................I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair........ (l. 23-25)

In this poem the mother persona initiates her daughter, who is now grown up to the society as a part of her daughter’s societal initiation and in so doing she narrates her own experience as a girl! What she satirizes here is that once a girl attains puberty she is expected to behave like a grown up and mature person; even though mentally she may not have attained the maturity associated with these bodily changes.
Though another poem that is based on a similar theme but dealt with differently is Eunice De’Sousa’s, “Sweet Sixteen” (see appendix for full poem; pg- xxiii)

Eunice De’Souza, in her ironical and satirical poem, “Sweet Sixteen,” which is based on an identical theme as Das’s, “An Introduction,” but is diametrically opposite in its approach, because here it is the daughter persona who is the narrator and is shown, discussing adult societal initiation into society, with her friend as she says;

Well, you can’t say
they didn’t try.
Mamas never mentioned menses. (1.1-3)

in the opening lines of the poem that, here the mother did try to initiate her daughter into adult society, but without the mother mentioning word like, ‘menses,’ as they are a taboo.

Therefore the observations that the natural and universal functions of the female body are not supposed to be openly discussed in public or even in the private, between a mother and her daughter, or friends, or teachers, as the society considers such talk by women as indecent and vulgar, by social institutions has been highlighted and satirized both by Das and De’Souza. Therefore on account of such social inhibitions, girls aren’t initiated properly into the society because of which they suffer due to either ignorance or a biased initiation as in Das’s, “An Introduction.” Thus the flawed training given by mother’s to their children, in turn creates women who have gender problems.

But on a personal level or as an experience the poem by Lucille Clifton, “In Praise of Menstruation,” (see appendix for full poem; pg-iii) is a celebration of the female body and its difference. Lucille Clifton is a highly reputed and prolific poet. She is a distinguished Professor of Humanities at St.Mary’s College of Maryland and a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. Lucille Clifton is known for her depiction of the female experience through the ages. Here in this poem Lucille celebrates a woman’s fertility, she compares the menstrual flow to a river,

if there is a river
more beautiful than this
bright as the blood
red edge of the moon if
there is a river
more faithful than this
returning each month
to the same delta

The centralising metaphor here is that just as a river that flows through the barren land imparts it fertility, similarly it is the menstrual flow that is the first symbol of fertility for the woman. She compares the menstrual flow to the,

Red edge of the moon
she further goes on to elaborate that the menstrual river is;
is a river
braver than this
coming and coming in a surge
of passion, of pain if there is

Here she fuses images of nature and female sexuality when she proudly proclaims that the female body is a fertile and powerful creation that can only be matches by the powerful life giving river. She moves on with the same metaphor of the river and goes on to say;

a river
more ancient than this
daughter of eve
mother of cain and of abel if there is in

Clifton looks at the female experience through the ages. She claims that it is only through this life giving river, ‘menstruation’ that the oldest, ablest and the best of civilisation were born and still continue to be born. By fusing images of nature, female sexuality, and matriarchal mythology, the poem transcends the familiar taboos. She credits women and their reproductive ability for all civilisation and existence, thus far.

She goes on to challenge;
the universe such a river if
there is some where water
more powerful than this wild water

that the red river of menstrual flow is the most powerful in the universe. Should a stronger force exist, it would only be another version of "this wild water."

pray that it flows also
through animals
beautiful and faithful and ancient
and female and brave                        (l-20-23)

She wishes and prays that this powerful river through which propagation and
progeny is maintained in this universe be there as one could only "pray that it flows
also through animals beautiful and faithful and ancient and female and brave."(l-20-
23) In one conditional sentence, which five times repeats the phrase "if there is a
river," the poem represents the cyclical and periodic aspects of menstruation.

Another thing that strikes us about this poem is the lack of capitals,
punctuations, long and plenty of sentences, which are usually seen in other poems,
perhaps it is Clifton’s style to use spaces that are so pared down that they seem like
substance in the poetry.

Sylvia Plath’s poem, “Metaphors,”(see appendix for full poem; pg-iv) discusses the personas attitude towards pregnancy and maternity. "Metaphors" is a
very short poem from 1959. Plath announces that she is a riddle in nine syllables,
and then uses a multitude of seemingly unrelated metaphors to describe herself.
However, it is clear upon close reading that she is describing a state of pregnancy.

In her poem Plath describes the period of gestation accompanied by the
physical and mental changes that the persona undergoes. So vivid is the imagery
employed that one can actually , picture the persona, a pregnant mother, in a full
length mirror. In the opening lines the speaker sees and relates to a series of object’s
that reflect the pregnant women;

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
an elephant, a ponderous house,
a melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!        (l. 1-4)

the helplessness of the situation and the personas state of mind is evident from the
fact that she draws all negative similes like, elephantine, clichéd house, melon-
shaped gravidity, makes her legs seem, by comparison like slender tendrils, the red
fruit the melon is the foetus. The persona refers to the bulge of the pregnant woman
and the corresponding gain in her weight as elephantine, because it refers to the
hugeness of the physical structure that the woman attains during her pregnancy. The
clichéd metaphor of the pregnant body being likened to a house where the foetus
resides during the period of gestation symbolises the woman’s helplessness when
she uses the word, ‘ponderous’ – which implies to the awkward and unwieldy condition of the a full term pregnant female. As if all this isn’t just enough she goes on to further compare the pregnant woman to melon- that is rotunded, when fully ripe, the inside redness of the fruit is likened to the growing foetus, and the imagery is rather ridiculous to imagine when the poet describes the big round melon being supported on two tendrils. The beauty of this metaphor is that a pregnant mother also looks round, and her upper body is huge and fat as compared to her legs and feet that remain comparatively slender. Therefore the image seems like the caricature of a pregnant woman in her awkward body. It is natural for any woman to suffer loss of self-esteem and embarrassment at such a drastic change in her physical appearance especially when shape is such an important aspect of female beauty. She further describes the woman as;

This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising.  
Money’s new-minted in this fat purse. (l. 5-6)

She pictures a loaf that rises due to the fermentation of yeast from its original shape into a flaccid, soft and disproportionate loaf. She then compares herself to a fat purse and the money in it is newly minted symbolizing the foetus. Although she does use slightly positive symbols for the foetus she definitely doesn’t compliment the mother’s body which she compares to a fat purse.

I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf. (l. 7)

Here the persona is very clear about her predicament when she says that she is ‘a means’ or ‘a stage’. The imagery of ‘a cow in a calf’ perhaps depicts two things simultaneously, one it shows the enormous size of the foetus, that a slender or innocent calf like mother carries and second could be that the foetus is as sacred as the cow and she is just a conduit between the cow and the universe as she suggests, “I’m a means, a stage....”.

The process and the expectant phase in a women’s life is shown as disempowering the persona, as she tends to lose her identity in becoming a means for reproduction. She further uses metaphors like, she has eaten green apples’ that have caused abdominal swelling demanding release,’ here the green apples may be a reference to the symbolic biblical parable; where in the garden of Eden, God forbids
Adam and Eve from having the forbidden apple, perhaps it is that sin which she has
committed due to which she is suffering from abdominal swelling.

I've eaten a bag of green apples;
Boarded the train there's no getting off. (l. 8-9)

The helplessness of this situation is crystallized in the last line of the poem –
"Boarded the train there's no getting off (l.9)." Is a suggestion that she lacks control
over herself, and is rather at the mercy of others. She implies that her feeling about
the child means nothing; she must carry the pregnancy to term. She has no choice in
the matter. Quite obviously, the stereotypical image of the glowing, exuberant
pregnant woman is not found in "Metaphors." The famed Plath scholar Stephen
Gould Axelrod agrees, and writes that "Beneath the humour of Plath's imagery, we
discover very little real pleasure...indeed, in the last two lines even the humour
vanishes, displaced by anxious awareness of remorseless fate." The nine lines
correspond to the nine months of pregnancy, and each line possesses nine syllables.
In this poem, the narrator is describing her pregnancy in metaphorical language,
exploring an ambivalence about it.

She first announces herself as a "riddle in nine syllables" (the poem is also nine lines
long). She then describes herself as an elephant, similar to a huge house. She is also
like a watermelon, walking along on two small legs, though she praises both the “red
fruit” of her belly and the “fine timbers” of her legs. She then compares herself to a
loaf of bread, its yeast rising big and full, and a coin purse stuffed with newly-
minted money.

She views herself as simply a “means,” a carrier for a child. She is merely a
“stage,” a hardworking “cow in calf.” She believes she looks as though she has eaten
a large bag of green apples. Ultimately, since there is nothing she can do about her
pregnancy, she sees herself as having boarded a train which she cannot leave.

"Metaphors" is a very short poem from 1959. Plath was pregnant with her
first child, Frieda, at the time of the poem's composition. Though most critics concur
that Plath's healthiest relationships in life were with her two children, the poem
suggests a deep ambivalence about motherhood. The basic conflict in the poem is
that of duty versus individuality. The narrator feels that by subsuming herself to the
duty of motherhood, her own individuality is being stifled. Though the poem uses
consistent first person, the ironic effect is that the speaker's individuality is only expressed in terms of the child she carries. She is aware of herself, but only in terms of what she cannot be.

While some of the poem's images are rather humorous - she describes a pregnant woman as "a melon strolling on two tendrils," for instance - the overall depiction of pregnancy is not very heartening. The woman, whom readers should assume is Plath herself, is discouraged by her physical appearance. She feels large and unwieldy, comparing herself to an elephant, a "cow in calf," and a "ponderous house." She expresses no joy with her increasing size. Instead, she is too well-aware of how she has lost control of her body. She lacks individuality, and is instead only a "means" and a "stage" for another. Everything happening to her is for someone else, not for herself.

The bleakness of this situation is crystallized in the last line of the poem – "Boarded the train there's no getting off." Here, she suggests that she lacks any agency, and is instead at the mercy of another. She implies that her feelings about the child mean nothing; she must carry the pregnancy to term. She has no choice in the matter. Quite obviously, the stereotypical image of the glowing, exuberant pregnant woman is not found in "Metaphors." The famed Plath scholar Stephen Gould Axelrod agrees, writing that "Beneath the humour of Plath’s imagery, we discover very little real pleasure...indeed, in the last two lines even the humour vanishes, displaced by anxious awareness of remorseless fate."

Upon closer analysis, Plath's choice of imagery reinforces her belief that the speaker in the poem is simply a carrier. Let us see for instance, an elephant is valuable not for itself, but for its ivory and its ability to carry load. The timber of a house, perhaps the reference here is to a wooden house, is valuable only for what it contains - a family - and not in itself. A purse is insignificant; only the money which it holds matters. Her allusion and evocation of green apples suggests both a sour, uncomfortable treat, perhaps here she wants to suggest that the apples weren’t fully ripe, as in that, the speaker wasn’t all that mentally prepared for the pregnancy and metaphorically she had the unripe desire for motherhood. But it could perhaps also offers an implicit allusion to Eve, who ate an apple from the tree of knowledge and
thus cursed all women with the legacy of painful childbirth, as has been already discussed.

Woman though has been bestowed with the ability to mother, a very precious and unique gift, but the institution of motherhood has made it, her weakness and uses this against her. Eunice De’Souza’s poem illustrates eloquently how oppressed and suppressed women are in some cultures and some strata’s of the society. Their plight can only be imagined, the persona in this poem portrays these women who have absolutely no control over their bodies and motherhood is in a way, forced upon them. Their trauma and dilemma is unfathomably portrayed in De’Souza’s poem ‘Catholic Mother,’ based on a similar theme. It is a subtle satire.

Biologically the next stage to follow on a woman’s journey to motherhood is labour and child – birth. This is a bitter sweet experience for woman and also a life changing one. Kristina Rungano in her poem, through the use of a variety of personae traces the aspects of a women’s experience, in her poem “Labour”(see appendix for full poem; pg-v) that describes the persona who undergoes labour. Kristina Rungano in the opening lines depicts the persona as;

For nine months I had borne him in my womb.  
Nine months of disillusionment and pain.                                            (l....1-2)

But in the very next lines, the prospective mother persona seems to be in a jubilant mood when she declares;

Relieved only occasionally by the gentle kicking within me;  
The gentle movement of the life I created within me  
Nine months I waited for this day;  
Nine months and the grotesque lump growing on me.                                     (l....3-6)

Here she rejoices in the thought that, “I created within me” ....(l...4), this experience of motherhood that is unique and exclusive only to her, even though she complains of the long period of nine months that she will have to wait for;

And Kit making numerous sacrifices – of patience and love –  
Nine dreary months of waiting for this day.                                                   (l....7-8)

Ultimately after a long period of waiting she seems to be in labour, the nine months that seemed so heavy for her and now the time for the harvest;
And now I was beginning to feel sharp pains in me –
And mama saying they are labour pains –
The pains which will be the spring of new life...  

The strong bond of love and expectation that binds a mother to her child, helps her endure the

severe pains at the time of child-birth.
And now I was beginning to feel sharp pains in me –
And mama saying they are labour pains –
The pains which will be the spring of new life...  

Even though the persona is perhaps experiencing labour for the first time she seems to be obsessed by the sex of the baby, for she says;

Would it be a boy, I thought with intensified wonder,
– How proud his father would be,
– Or would it be a girl –
Someone I could teach to be just like me

At this stage too when there is this intense experience of labour, high hopes and expectations, the persona perhaps, overcome by cultural factors is already fantasising the arrival of and the prospective upbringing of the child. For she feels a boy will make the father proud and a girl should be a replica of her own self!

Written in the 1980s, this narrative poem is different in its content for two reasons: it portrays a woman’s ambivalent attitude towards the changes in her body and her different moods during pregnancy, and the innovative aspect that deals with the issue is the inclusion of the man, the child’s father whose love helped her through all these inconveniences, when she reminiscences through those happy moments that allow her to cope up with the difficult labour. The presence of the second but silent persona in the poem is depicted;

I looked up into Kit’s eyes
– The eyes that had seen me through
– The eyes that had known my sadness and joy for nine months
And I saw in them all love and care
– The pain which he felt for me
And like the sun on a cold morning
Relieved me of all fright, all desolation.
I looked with warm contemplation
To the moment when his warm embrace would say
‘Our own baby – the very essence of our love
And tiny little hands would cling to my breasts in hunger
Tiny mouth drawing warm milk from me
An innocent little face looking into my face.
With trust
Learning me, just as Kit did.
I felt him, Kit
Captured by a foresight of summer days to come
The days when we – no longer just two –
Would walk in the dusk

The character described here is the persona, ‘Kit’... the husband of the mother persona. The dexterity with which Kristina has dealt with this delicate issue of labour with the help of the dual husband - wife persona has helped lighten the tension of the incident portrayed and at the same time conveyed the message of the 1980’s feminists for maternal revivalism. For her the persona adds;

And thus I was borne to the labour ward
Whilst Kit waited
– Waited again
– Waited in warm anticipation
– Waited for the awakening of my new beginning

Thus the poet here seems to emphasise more upon the father’s wait and anticipation that seems to be just as much if not more traumatic as compared to the mother persona’s experience. Kristina Ranguno’s poem, “Labour” seems to be a beautiful depiction of how the maternal pain and suffering can be lessened if her male counterpart supports her and shares her experience. These changes could attempt to unite both the women and the men in their responsibility towards parenthood. This poem is a beautiful endeavour and points to these changes in a personal and intimate form. The next poem presents the experience of childbirth from a male point of view.

It is for this reason that a male perspective on childbirth as given by, Lenrie Peter’s, a Gambia born surgeon, poet, novelist and singer’s, whose poem, “She Came in Silken Drapes,” (See appendix for full poem; pg.vi) will provide an interesting balance and neutrality to the perspective. Lenrie Peters was educated at the universities of Cambridge in London, where he also practised apart from England, Sierra Leone and since 1969 in his native land Gambia. Peters begins his poem as;

She came in silken drapes
and naked breasts,
Veiled Artemis;........... (l. 1-3)

The first lines introduce the very seductive Greek Goddess Artemis, who is a symbol of fertility, productivity, child-birth, growth of the fields and of animals.

Brandishing the sword
and that forbidden thing (l. 5-6)

in these lines Artemis is shown brandishing a sword at Saturn, who is introduced in the second stanza. According to a legend he is known to devour his sons as soon as they are born;

She handed me the word
Sealed in cotton wool
Tied in an endless riddle
Love and loveless hate (l. 8-11)

In these lines the, the new-born child is addressed as “word”. As explained by Papke, this is a Biblical allusion. The gospel John I, 14 maintains: “The word became flesh and dwelt among us!” The Christian tradition is based on a male god and his son: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything that was made”(189). In Jewish, Christian, Islamic traditions, God the Father created ancient Goddesses as Mothers, such as Artemis, Isis, and Demeter, who represented procreation. The poet changes Christian tradition and returns to the mythical Goddess whom he invests with the power of the word.

Gentle winged butterfly
with the voiceless cry by day –
Huntress of crippled manhood
Unequal tyrant by night (l.15-18)

The gentle, “winged butterfly” also refers to the new-born child. The figure of the woman represents, however, also the threat of castration and violence: “Huntress of crippled manhood / unequal tyrant at night...”(l...17-18) .The use of psychoanalytic analogies intensifies the impression of conflicts and disillusionment in male/female relationship. Love here is not the deep and passionate feeling any longer, rather it has lost its radiances and beauty and is therefore ‘lustreless’. As
Peter’s who is a physician and has assisted in many child-births, knows that it can be a very, “bloody” process, as he mentions;

Love, lustreless word  
A thousand times misused  
As often bathed in blood.  

(1.29-31)

This poem uses the childbirth metaphor to develop simultaneously the birth of a child and a poem. It is through the birth of the poem that men experience a feeling similar to child-birth. Here the comparison is between the birth of a child and a poem; both of them are outcomes of a highly ambivalent and violent love affair between a man and a woman; a poet and his muse, respectively. The poem develops its tension through the swift change of symbols and images from the Bible and from Greek and Roman mythology, perhaps just the way the birth of a child transforms the lives of its parents. As, most of these images have its base in psychoanalytic thought about male and female sexuality.

Let me wash you  
Like the frenzied gold-sifter  
Let me lead you  
through the dense crowd  
over the phallic mound  
To the crystal spring  

(1.32-37)

In the poem there are complex symbols and images in the first four stanzas. It is only the last stanza that is simple. Here the persona is directly addressing the woman or the muse, because he is unable to carry on any further. The speaker persona of the poem compares himself to “the frenzied gold-sifter”, who offers “to wash” his object of desire and to “lead her to the crystal spring”. Just as the newborn child is all soiled and must be washed. This poem too is polished after its first delivery, once the words are written on the page, in order to invest it with lustre and shine. After a traumatic and painful birthing process, whether it is with the baby or a frantic struggle with words,

and that forbidden thing  
Less clumsy in a dream  

(1.6-7)

That has been desired from the beginning can be admired and celebrated as the ;

Where I have found  
the purest living thing.  

(1....36-37)
Just as the poem must be free from all superfluous and unwanted words, the “frenzied gold-sifter” leaves only pure gold behind and only the purest and simplest form of nature is born. The poem not only creates the fusion of the biological and literary childbirth, that connects the body and mind, the experience of motherhood and to the aesthetics of literary creation, the poet remains confused and puzzled about the admiration of the mysteries of life and nature. This poem highlights the complexities of nature that is in its most complex and intricate form at the time of a new birth, a new creation and in so doing he feels that he has experienced the ‘birthing-process’. In her essay “Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse” (1987),

Susan Stanford Friedman explores the cultural resonance of the childbirth metaphor and gender difference in the metaphor’s meaning reflected in the process of reading and writing:

The context of the childbirth metaphor is the institution of motherhood in the culture at large. Consequently, the meaning of the childbirth metaphor is overdetermined by psychological and ideological resonance evoked by, but independent of, the text. [...] While the metaphor draws together mind and body, word and womb, it also evokes the sexual division of labour upon which western patriarchy is founded. [...] For biological and historical reasons, childbirth is an event whose meaning is constituted differently by women and men. This difference informs why they use it and what they use it for. Men’s use of the metaphor begins in distance from and attraction to the Other. [...]. Gershon Legman applies this theory specifically to the male birth metaphor, which he calls a ‘male motherhood of authorship,’ an archetypal fantasy of great power and persistence determined by largely unconscious fear and envy of woman’s sexual and reproductive powers. [...] The childbirth metaphors of women and men differ not only in their psychological charge but also in their function within the larger work. While men’s metaphors often reflect the ethos of their times, women’s metaphors tend to be deeply personal statements about how they try to resolve their conflict with cultural prescriptions. (Friedman 1987, 51–66)

Peters’ poem concurs with Friedan’s theory about the difference between men’s metaphors and women’s metaphors regarding the birthing process. The process of child- birth as experienced by a woman can never be experienced by a
male writer, Irène Assiba d’Almeida’s poem “Sister, You Cannot Think a Baby Out” is precisely an apt description of the child-birth process which cannot be even understood by men.

“Sister, You Cannot Think a Baby Out,”(see appendix for full poem; pg-vii) reflects the persona’s typical maternal dilemma, which is similar to the one in Plath’s poem, “Metaphors,” in which she says that pregnancy for her is as though she has, “Boarded the train there's no getting off” (l-9), a process which she has to go through over which she has no personal control. Irene’s poem begins like;

Day after day
Week after week
Month after month
Life within me
I, amazed to feel it grow
Unable to comprehend
the mystery

(l....1-7)

the persona’s sense of helplessness seems to intensify as she say;

I, afraid of pain
Not like anything I know
Is knowledge power?
Is ignorance bliss?

(l...8-11)

So puzzled is the persona at her predicament that she cannot even decide whether it would be better to have the ‘knowledge’ of what she is in for or whether ‘ignorance’ will be bliss for her, because how much ever you may know about pregnancy and child-birth, when the actual experience has to be undertaken one is never prepared.

The first kick, energetic,
Pleasant, moving pain.
Will the rest be the same?

(l.12-14)

The experience is so full of pleasure and pain; hope and fear, that the persona cannot resist but to turn ultimately to;

An old Lamaze book
On a dusty shelf
Breathe in, breathe out,
Breathe life

(l.15-18)
Eventually one energetic kick and here we have the persona turn to the ‘Lamaze book’, the humour here is subtle, when all that the Lamaze book suggests is regular breathing to ease pregnancy and labour, it is perhaps from this Lamaze technique which is so fallacious and misleading that this poem got its title, “Sister, You Cannot Think a Baby Out” to suggest that bringing a new child into this world is just not all that easy. For she says;

Sisters laughing at you
At Lamaze too
At all the books you read!
When pain tightly grips
And Queen Nature reigns powerful,
Who remembers?
Sister, you cannot think a baby out (l.19-25)

With this we come to the second part of the poem, this poem is divided into two parts the first being the one concerning pregnancy and the preparation for birth. The repetition of the title marks the division between the first part and the second part. The second part depicts the actual child-birth;

Giant octopus
Tentacles in disarray
My body knows not
How to channel the pain. (l.26-29)

The persona seems to be absolutely taken in by the intense labour, and at this moment she is at a loss to comprehend how to take the pains.

A lull at last
Soothing balm on a raw wound
Then, suddenly, a dam gives way (l.30-32)

But these pains are described as though they come in waves, and once the intensity of the pain lessens the persona is relived, but this was not for long because in the very next lines she say;

The water breaks.
Surprised at the mighty flow
I lie, soaked in pain and fear. (l.33-35)

The experience is so vividly portrayed, the language so aptly used that the reader can actually experience the persona’s agony;
An iron hand grips my womb
And viciously lets go
grips, lets go,
Again and again
Faster and faster
Sweating pearls all over my brown skin
Eyes wide open in disbelief
Never knew I could be
such a good contortionist!
Exhausted

Here the sentence, “lets go grips, lets go,...” (l....37-38), co-ordinates with the Lamaze’s suggestion, “Breathe in, breathe out, Breathe life” (l. 17-18), in the first stanza. Additionally, the poem works with the repetition of unconventional sentence structures which express ignorance, surprise and ironic comment. Ultimately the moment of joy and achievement arrives;

Like a volcano
Erupting a living force!
A last pang, excruciating
And, before I know
A thunderlike scream goes
As comes into this world
The baby

The persona has become a mother, in the real sense of the world. The institution of motherhood into which she had stepped unawares of what was to come and even the available information in the Lamaze books was ridiculously lacking and wanting in the real depiction of labour and child –birth. But her experience of motherhood makes her repeat her initial belief, when she says;

With the joyous scream of life.
Yes, I know
You cannot think a baby out!

Considering this child-birth experience and comparing it to Lenre Peter’s poem preceding this poem one feels that the actual title of this poem should have been “Brother, for you it is impossible to think a baby out,” it would self-consciously reflect the real situation where any comparison to the actual experience of child- birth is futile and only the mother who undergoes the process knows it. It is amazing to see how the difficult and traumatic experience of child- birth undergoes
complete transformation of presentation, when it is presented as an experience as in
the poem just discussed and when it is presented as an institution.

In Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze’s, poem “Birthing” (refer to appendix for full poem; pg:ix) we see the same process of child birth depicted but over here the persona narrates her experience differently. The poem is short and it goes;

ah carry she cross water
ah carry she cross lan
ah carry she
wid all dignity
ah born she on a day
like balm
a day of potency
wen spirits warm
an cluster roun
an smelt of milk
like she

(1. 1-14)

The ears, eyes, touch and scent, are all appealed to over here, to rouse our imagination. Here the persona gives birth to a ‘daughter’, and that too with all ‘dignity’ and amazingly it isn’t just dignity but also, ‘potency’. Here there is a biblical reference to ‘balm’ which is echoed with the ‘smell of milk’. In this poem the Christian and the African myth has been combined to praise, ‘birthing.’

In the background an image is conjured up that creates an atmosphere of heavenly serenity and also a sense of background African incantation. Therefore into this atmosphere of Christianity and African culture the little baby is received. Somehow when the birthing process is seen from the perspective of religious institutions or cultural institutions, it sounds divine, celestial and an out of this world experience. Breeze, was born in rural Jamica, in her poems she deals with the biological, social, cultural and historical aspects of mothering and, especially, the experience of mothering in the Caribbean diasporas in London. The striking difference in the way the theme of child-birth is projected as a personal experience and as an institution, comes full circle with Jeni Couzyn’s poem “Spell for Birth” (see appendix for full poem; pg-x).

Jeni Couzyn, who is a South Africa born Canadian poet. She was educated at the University of Natal and in 1966 she immigrated to Britain and where she worked as a freelance writer. Later she became a Canadian citizen in 1975, in 1976 she was
appointed writer-in-residence at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. In her poem, “Spell for Birth” she converts the trinity of Christianity into;

\[
\text{God the mother} \\
\text{God the daughter} \\
\text{God the holy spirit.}
\]

(l.1-3)

Here, instead of the holy trinity, ‘God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,’ she has changed it to ‘God the mother, daughter and holy spirit,’ for creating the , “Spell of Birthing.”

The poet has converted the Christian holy trinity into a female one. This conversion is a strong feminist appropriation of the Christian symbol into a universal ‘birthing experience’. The poem further adds;

\[
\text{Triune of love} \\
\text{Triune of grace}
\]

(l.4-5)

that the trinity is the ultimate and supreme trinity that is required for the, ‘spell of birthing,’

which brings together love and grace. The poem stresses the conversion of trinity, twice, this time it is;

\[
\text{Stream take you} \\
\text{Current aid you} \\
\text{Earth receive you}
\]

(l.6-8)

Perhaps for the second triune – “stream”, “current”, “earth” – there are two meanings that emerge from this. The first could be understood as, the process of birthing: the stream here, refers to the amniotic fluid that the foetus is in, the current refers to the forced propulsion of the foetus facilitated by the stream of the amniotic fluid from her mother’s womb, she takes her first breath on earth.

The second way to decipher this is perhaps that, it could portray an imploration of the elements the three vital factors for human life - water, air and earth. The verbal charm, will be used as a spell to ward off danger – the imminent trauma and tribulations in labour, and on a broader perspective – the problems of human life. As the, ‘stream, current and earth,’ perhaps is a representation of God and Human bond, just like the poet would now like us to consider this as a mother-
daughter bond, and to represent this the holy trinity is once again feminised and the “triune” now becomes:

Triune of grace  
Triune of power.  

(l.12-13)

In this poem here, the title could mean three things, it either means ‘Spell’ as in ‘a period of experience’ or it could mean ‘Spell’ as in ‘a charm, to ward off danger’ or else it could also mean, ‘to have magic power.’ In this ‘spell for birth’, there is the third triune which is the most powerful one and is still incomplete, because the ‘trinity of love and grace’ and the ‘trinity of grace and power’ are still separate. Perhaps the poet wants an incantation for the ‘spell of birth’ that will create the third triune of ‘love, grace and power,’ that is so desperately required by the feminine world, to make this world a heaven on earth – a place of eternal trinity, feels Jeni Couzyn. As we move ahead on our journey of motherhood, we come to child-nurturing, care and rearing, from child-birth.

As has already been discussed earlier in chapter one, motherhood is conferred with the responsibility of child-rearing. It has also been discussed that the task of child-rearing was deliberately entrusted upon women due to patriarchal pressure that wanted all power to rest in the hands of men and wanted to subjugate women by depriving them of economic, social, political and other securities. In her poem, “Morning Song,” (see appendix for full poem; pg. x) the poet Sylvia Plath, describes how a mother persona, who has just been blessed with a baby, feels about the changes that she has to undergo physically, emotionally and socially.

The mother persona in this poem, described her new born baby and her perception with him in the opening lines of the poem when she say;

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.  
(l. 1)

In fact, as has been expressed by the mother persona “maternal feelings” do not automatically occur. The persona is sincere and honest to confess her state of mind in the initial few days of the birth of her child. She feels a sense of alienation and separation from the baby. Though this is a temporary phase and as the poem progress we see that in the last three stanzas, the emotional estrangement is replaced by concern for the child as she impulsively and instinctually, listens to the sound of
her child even as it sleeps. The surreal images and comparisons are expressed vividly and emphasize the sense of strangeness and entrapment of the mother.

The persona compares her child to a “fat gold watch”, which is surreal. Perhaps what she wants to convey is that love is engaging and involving, while the winding up a watch is a mundane and mechanical act. The simile heightens and broadens the distance between the act of love and the arrival of the baby, as a result of it. The obvious gap being that between the baby and the emotions that engendered it? By raising this question which is considered a “natural” phenomenon, that leads to the birth of a child.

Plath, wants to perhaps draw the attention of the reader to something that is an accepted fact but, if it is not a planned decision it could perhaps be startling and lead to such a reaction. A similar situation has been discussed earlier in Eunice De’Sousa’s poem, “Catholic Mother”. This is the typical disorienting effect of Plath’s surrealist style. The watch is granted life and utility only through another otherwise it is cold and lifeless. Like a child, it is given life: a beginning, a passage of time and aging. The absence of the happy feelings generally associated with childbirth, is also linked to the absence of any mention of the child's father, and also absent is any reference to the holding and cuddling of the newborn baby. The child was simply given birth, like the winding of the watch that marks the starting point, and now like the watch the child’s life span begins ticking slowly, steadily and monotonously along.

The persona further adds;

    The midwife slapped your foot soles, and your bald cry
    Took its place among the elements.                   (l. 2-3)

    Perhaps the most striking word here is "bald," because it is an unconventional style to describe a sound. It may also be a reference to the baby, presumably with little or no hair, a case of transferred epithet. Here, the cry of the child is considered to be the child itself, which implies that the speaker is unable to distinguish between the baby and the noise it makes. Therefore her role as a mother is defined not by her baby, but by her baby's cries. The cries of the baby are a major link between the mother and the child. She feels little attachment for the life she has
brought into the world. This is evident, because, there is no mention of either the baby’s name or its gender. If indeed the word ‘bald’ is used to describe the noise, rather than the child, it should be noted that the cry sounds naked or hollow. The baby's voice is described thus to show that it is neither musical and melodious, nor grating, but "bald": it lacks a personal appeal, perhaps the mother child bond is lacking, which if it had been there it could have made the cry whole. It is also interesting that the child's cry takes its place "among the elements," making it simply another part of the natural world, comparable to fire and wind.

Somehow the persona is still not in a position to connect to the baby as a human, could be because the child does not display any human qualities, therefore she says that it took its place amongst the ‘elements’. The visible distance between the mother and the child is still maintained.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls. (l. 4-6)

The baby over here is referred to as a ‘statue’ because just like a statue in the museum the baby too, is a new addition to the family, even though it is ‘new’ and ‘exciting’ one can just look at the statue. The eerie and surreal feeling is because of the timelessness of the statue, which is typical of a museum.

In this stanza the infant is shown as the new attraction in a "drafty museum" where "voices echo." The child has been put into an enormous and never-ending realm; it could be a symbolic reference to earth itself. Just like the “new statue” the baby is also granted no apparent attention, it is simply a new addition to an old collection. There is in this stanza, no apparent distinction between the speaker herself -- as mother -- and the other onlookers. She is just another visitor, looking on "blankly as walls."The poem still reinforces the nonhuman quality of the baby as perceived by its parents. The child is addressed as a “new statue.” The mother is still aloof and is pictured as gazing at it “in a drafty museum.” In other words, all they can do is stare at the child as if it were a statue- new, strange, unique and precious, but no communication occurs. Plath’s surreal images maintain the distance between the baby and the mother. Therefore the mother persona feels that;
I’m no more your mother
Than the cloud that distils
a mirror to reflect its own slow.
Effacement ate the winds hand. (l....7-10)

The statement betrays the mood of the mother persona; she has a negative attitude towards her duties as a mother. By referring to herself as a cloud she tries to imbue a touch of ephemerality, just like the cloud is transient and disappears in the same way the speaker’s role in the child’s life is temporary. The mother persona also, mentions here that on becoming a mother, she loses her identity which merges with the maternal self. In a scene that pictures the common parental tasks of attending to a young infant, the speaker says:

One cry, and I stumble from bed,
Cow heavy and floral.
In my Victorian night gown. (l.13-14)

Though the tone here is casual but it is rather confusing. The speaker then goes on to speak of the child’s “mouth-breath” which lands on “pink roses” in lines 10 and 11. The innocent images of the sleeping baby creates the requisite imagery of motherhood, that may be expected of the poem and it is in sharp contrast to the distance that the speaker has tried to create in the earlier part of the stanza. Where the speaker denies her own motherhood, and says that she and her child are both merely elements of nature.

Plath in this poem, draws an exquisite contrast between perception and reality, between the way motherhood has been glamorised and the way a new mother struggles to come to terms with her new found status and responsibility. Here the speaker does not flatter herself. She reveals a sense of disgust with her physical self, the typical gain of weight during pregnancy, and an apparent change in the speaker’s life style which is well satirized in the title of the poem ‘Morning Song,’ which is used here as a parody for an aubade, supposedly a love song, sung by the lover’s in the morning, to celebrate a whole night of love-making. While here the speaker is up early in the morning to the cries of her baby for whom she has mixed feelings of indifference and love!
Plath’s description of the night gown as ‘Victorian’ is not an accident, but, it reveals the Victorian era of staunch patriarchal values, which leaves no room for women to foster individuality or creativity because for women there is no hope for change from their role as wives and caretakers of children. The crux of the poem is to show how change in life style necessitated by the labour of maternal love, leads to unavoidable and irrevocable modifications in the life of a woman. The overall concept of motherhood as depicted by Plath’s poem ‘Metaphors’ and ‘Morning Song’ is one depicted by loss: the loss of physical beauty, of quality time and one’s individual identity. The concept of mothering runs counter to the wildly, recognized perspective that it is a fulfilling and rewarding stage in a woman’s life. The opening lines of the poem, "Love set you going like a fat gold watch." Oddly, compares the child to a pocket watch. The watch is fat and gold, implying, that it is exclusive and of the premium class, but is of course inanimate. The subsequent implication that an act of love -- leading to childbirth -- is comparable to the winding of a watch perhaps reveals the speaker’s attitude to the whole issue. The major theme in “Morning Song” is the initial sense of alienation for the baby and then the process by which it is overcome. This poem though it begins on a note of institutionalised motherhood, moves on to depict maternal instincts and attitude, and also the transition as it occurs.

Plath does not take up the issue on the basis of sentimentality. What she wants to emphasise here is the basic fact, that giving birth to a child is not the same as rearing a child. A woman does not attain motherhood merely by bringing the child into the world. She has to learn maternal behaviour. The transformation of the woman into a mother is as new as the taking birth of a child. Even the mother persona’s listening to the child’s sounds and getting fascinated is not under her control. The persona responds to her instinct: “only cry and I stumble from bed (l.13).” The child cries and to her it is a “morning song” and a maternal bond seems to establish even though it is only with the help of the cries of the infant. Though secondary, but also an important issue that the poem deals with is; can a woman have it all? The oft asked and pondered over question because here too the poet is faced with the same dilemma - how to be both mother and famous poet? This poem perhaps answers the implied question. The joyous ending proclaims the arrival of
both a new signer on the scene and a mother also proud of her child’s vocal signals and message.

Plath’s ambivalence about maternal attitude was only natural. She was a young writer and had high expectations from her poetic career, motherhood at that stage could, and did, place limitations on her. As she could not at all find time for her poetic work, she could not write good poetry, and her career suffered after the birth of her kids Frieda and Nicholas. As a mother she had little or practically no time to go in for writing. While her husband Ted Hughes, also a poet, could devote his time towards a prolific professional literary career. This predicament and her helplessness to resolve it, led to growing resentment. It was because of this that Plath reiterates and also supported the concept of motherhood, as that of a sacrificial act, which eventually exhausts and frustrates the mother. This poem is a vivid and pertinent piece of deep internal conflict that a new mother faces. Talking of maternal dilemma and child-rearing issues takes us right back to the Radical Feminist theory, that as already discussed is based on the woman’s ability to become a mother. The Radical Feminists agree that child-rearing is not essentially a sex-specific issue, but it is the institution of motherhood that expects ‘good mother’ to devote their time and energy, as it is their duty to mother. Another poem based on a similar theme, is Lorna Goodison’s, "Songs for My Son", though the mother-son poems, written by women writer’s are scarce, and difficult to find.

Lorna Goodison's poetry covers a wide range of themes reflecting her concern with major and intersecting issues that confront postcolonial Africaribbean women such as writers: gender, culture, spirituality, class, language, history and, most of all, the issues concerning the reclamation of an Africaribbean motherhood and matrilineage. As motherhood is a central and major aspect of and to the experiences of most Africaribbean women, it is Goodison's keen desire to attain and construct an Africaribbean matrilineage that makes her consider such themes and positively consider the issue of Africaribbean motherhood and mothering.

Her position as a poet helps her to attempt and develop a rhetoric of recovery for the Africaribbean motherhood and mothering which issues forth from her response to her experience of being mothered and being a mother herself. Lorna Goodison was born at Kingston in Jamaica in 1947 her family has a black and white
ancestral background. She has been writer-in-residence at the University of the West Indies and at Radcliffe College, USA. She now lives and teaches in Toronto. In her poem, “Songs for my Son” (see appendix for full poem; pg-xi) the speaker a mother persona begins by saying that;

    My son cries
    the cats answer
    I hover over his sleeping
    suspended on his milk-stained breath
    I live in fear of his hurt, his death.                        (l.1-5)

Here the person is the child’s mother who fears that her child might be taken away from her by death and therefore she leans over him to check whether he is alive or dead. To understand the persona’s fear for her son’s death a little background and context will be helpful. The African women too faced feminist issues and lamentated the loss of their individual desires for personal and career growth because they also choose the Victorian concepts of motherhood, as the only and appropriate choice for women.

But there were issues raised, which-seemed to suggest that Afrisporic mothers have no way out as they lacked agency, this though wasn’t really the case. Instead Afrisporic mothers have an agency which is embedded in the "Afrocentric tradition . . . [of] motherhood of varying types, whether blood mother, other mother, or community othermother" (Collins, 1994: 207). But the problem that arises here is how to utilize that agency, in the socialization of sons by mothers without falling into the traps of bad mothering set by sexist and racist misogynists. Rich (1976) advises that if mothers want their sons to grow up unmutilated by sexist attitudes, they must sensitize their sons on all aspects of misogyny while developing strategies of negotiation against their exclusion from social discourse (207) still dominated by patriarchy. The method of socialization of sons by Afrisporic mothers is encapsulated in the question:

"what do I want for my son?" (211).
Rich’s statement below suggests a possible solution: Women who have begun to challenge the values of patriarchy . . . want [their sons] to remain, in the deepest sense, sons of the mother, yet also to grow into themselves, to discover new ways of being men even as we are discovering new ways of being women. We
would wish that there were more fathers not one, but many-to whom they could also be sons, fathers with the sensitivity and commitment to help them into manhood in which they would not perceive women as the sole sources of nourishment and solace. (211)

A way of fostering this concept of the new man in a man-child is for the mother to craft the tools that would enable the man-child to possess the "courage of women" (215), so that he can avoid retreating into the "old male defences, including that of a fatalistic self-hatred" (215).

Carole Klein interprets this method of man-child education as the ability to help the man-child recognize, develop, and synthesize his feminine and masculine personalities (245).

Goodison negotiates her response to the question through her poetry. "Song for My Son" begins with a confession of anguish of a mother who fears for the loss of her son to death: therefore it is here that Goodison, fears for the safety of her son and she does not want to lose him to death. Even though the moving of his chest assures her that he is alive. Goodison's wants her son to be safe and this is reflective of maternal fear, because if the man-child dies, then all her effort and labour of love and motherhood, would have been in vain a waste, “and her desires to leave her mark in the world would have come to nought”. Therefore at this stage of the mother and son relationship, we see Goodison displaying what Olsen has defined as the first stage of four overlapping stages through which a mother gradually shapes her son's future to coincide with her deepest aspirations for him. This first stage is "where her fantasies and attitudes, joys, fears, and hates will be communicated primarily nonverbally, though accompanied by words"(16).

The attitude of the new mother is one of emotional ambivalence, for the new born boy, she depicts ambivalence not only in her reaction to the news of the sex of the child, but even in the manner that physically demonstrates and expresses that response through laughter and tears. The laughter is loud and wild, and uncontrollable tears.

Her tears are either a sign of too much joy or of much sorrow. The laughter and tears perhaps originate from both fright and hope. She hopes, as Klein puts it, that her son "can more easily than his mother, possess the world she brings him into,
because he is a sexual 'other'' (12), but fears what the system in Canada may do to him because he is a racial "other."

and if God bargains
I strike a deal with him
for his life I owe you something, anything
but please let no harm come to him. (l.12-15)

She tries to protect her son in every possible way, she prays and bargains for his safety and survival with God. She wants to shield her son from any harm that might come his way.

The cat cries
my son answers
his sleep is short
his stomach hurts. (l.16-19)

The mother persona suffers from insomnia, which is aggravated by the fright that her son may die, and if he did, it would deprive her of the opportunity to leave a mark of herself on the world through him.

The son's "... stomach hurts (l.19)
from the mothers'breast milk. The situation is heightened because "my son cries / the cats answer" (l...16-17). Her fear is perhaps due to some maternal and folk superstition that is caused by the sense of insecurity that can be traced to her cultural narratives about the evil powers of cats. This fear almost semi-paralyses the mother persona and she falls into a trance. In that state, she is reminded of her time of labour when the spirits of foremothers and other mothers, all come to help her go through the arduous task:

They gather from beyond
through the trees they come
gather on the banks of the family river
one by one they raise the keening song (l.20-23)
great grandmother Rebecca of the healing hands Tata Edward, Bucks, and Brownman

my father's lost mother Maria
and now my father
come to sing the birhtsong
and Hannah horsewoman to ride me through (l.26-29)
This practices of birthing differs spiritually and communally world over, here the practice adopted refers and can be traced back to Africa. After the son is born, and after the persona is told of the sex of the child, she is immediately told by them that real mothering has just begun.

What Goodison so precisely captures in this poem is well depicted by the female shaman, Sobonfu E. Some's. It is believed in African cultures, as written by Some, “that every child is a spirit that takes on human flesh” (1999: 56-70). Hence, Goodison's midwife;

a knife keen with garlic
to sever you from me
and we’ll never smell its primal top-notes
you or I
without memories of our joining

But this statement may not necessarily imply that the very close relationship between the mother and son has been weakened. Goodison identifies a three-way connection between the persona and her man-child that hold this relationship together. These include firstly the connection between the womb and the severed umbilical cord, secondly between the breast of the mother and the child that now provides milk to the infant son, and thirdly the fact that the ‘child is flesh of her flesh.’ Also, this three-way bonding is drawn from Goodison's Afrocentric cultural praxis in which the birth of a child makes stronger and concretizes the cyclical link of the ancestors (past), the mother(present) and the child (future). The three-way connection will ensure the strengthening and continuity of the mother-son bonding. In this triad, the son’s father is not mentioned. Interestingly, the father figure is only represented in Goodison's father's spirit, who joins her other relatives during her labour.

The presence of the paternal spirit what is usually considered in both Africa and among Africaribbean communities to be an all female affair speaks volumes of untold connections. The presence of the grandfather’s spirit at the time of the birth of his grandson by his daughter who possesses the qualities of the son he probably wanted, but instead had a daughter, blends well into the patriarchal environment in which households are mostly female-headed. This explains to an extent the desire that Goodison nurses, that is to have a father figure for her son. Failing that, she
would rather have her own father as that figure, not just to seal the grandfather-grandson bond to ensure the passing on of the family tradition of maleness, but also to satisfy Goodison's desire "for a second chance to form a love bond with her father, through delight in a boy who shares their genes and is part of their family history, and can have important aspects of redemption. The loneliness and pain of her own childhood-which Goodison articulates in "For My Mother(May I Inherit Half of Her Strength)"(see appendix for full poem; pg-xli) may recede beside the happy continuity of generations that she has made possible" (Klein 20). The son is named symbolically as well;

I’ll name you Miles I say
for the music, and for coming
a long way
you suck, my womb pulls 

(l. 51-54)

But this statement may not necessarily imply that the very close relationship between the mother and son has been weaned. The name too imparts a musical quality to the poem. She feels that by nurturing her son, she has overcome the separation. She refers to a biological fact, when she mentions the hormonal functions of the maternal body, that a suckling child controls the production of milk and the contraction of the womb. Mother and child still live in symbiosis and depend on each other. The experience of motherhood endears a child to the mother and creates a symbiotic relation between the mother and her child that proves to be a biological necessity for both. A poem based on a nearly similar theme is Eunice De Sousa’s, poem “For Rita’s Daughter Just Born”(see appendix for full poem; pg- xiii)

In this poem the mother persona has just given birth to a baby girl and she expresses her maternal experience that is unique in its own way, and nothing can come as a close parallel to this experience portrayed by Eunice De Souza’s poem, “For Rita’s Daughter, Just Born,” which narrates the experience and the emotional state of mind of the mother person, who has been blessed with a baby daughter and she goes;

Luminous new leaf
May the sun rise gently
On your unfurling in the court yard always linger….

(l.1-3)
Here the infant daughter is addressed as a luminous leaf; the mother person continues to display her sense of rapturous joy when she sees the child and at the same time prays to God that her daughter’s life be always filled with gentle ‘sunshine and rain.’

The persona implores the almighty to protect the child from natural calamities, cultural and social problems when she says,

Stone of these steps.
stay cool
She perhaps refers to the cultural aspect, as she further says;
gods in the niches.
old brass on the wall.
ever the shrill cry of kites.

(1.6-7) (1.8-10)

it may be understood as allegories of protection in Christian and traditional Indian culture. In Eunice De Souza’s poem, the imagery reflects a mother’s concern for the influence of nature and culture, on human life and not only that but also accompanied by its promises and dangers. Eunice de Souza’s poems on mothers and children express the poet’s solidarity with women and her maternal thinking for children’s well-being and healthy development. She is a compassionate, though an ironic critic of women’s oppression that reflects in the small objects of her poems that hide the underlying emotions of anger, tenderness, pity, sadness and joy with firm understatements, as are made in this poem. In Sylvia Plath’s, “Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman,” the two facets of motherhood, institutional as well as experience, form the intertwined theme of a young mother and her daughter.

Though the persona does not believe in magic, the maternal speaker in the poem “Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman” (see appendix for the full poem; pg- xii) speaks to her maturing daughter and about the wonders of the female body by revising all its features and aspects, that already exists about the female body. Here, the speaker tries to convince her daughter by ultimately conveying to her the power of the body, and for this she draws a parallel between the body and the earth imagery. However, the daughter is not convinced and is distanced from this fact through a contrasting image: the string bean. But the speaker uses this distance to show the mixed images of entanglement and separation of mother and
daughter in order to expound wisdom to a daughter approaching her own womanhood. The opening lines begin with:

My daughter, at eleven
(almost twelve), is like a garden.
Oh, darling! Born in that sweet birthday suit
and having owned it and known it for so long,

and immediately introduces the garden motif (lines 1-2). She further compares the girl to garden images like “lemons as large as your desk-side globe” (lines 16), “the market stalls of mushrooms / and garlic buds all engorged” (lines 19-20), and “the apples . . . beginning to swell” (lines 23) are all linked by the imagery of enlargement, of round, full fruits, which are a semblance of breasts developing in a young woman, when “summer” or puberty “has seized” her (line 14).

The summer has seized you,
as when, last month in Amalfi, I saw
lemons are large as you desk-side globe—

The image of a lemon the size of a small-globe seems absurd, but when one cuts the lemons in half, their size and shape resemble developing breasts. The symbol of the garden in general, perhaps fits into the image of the well-known biblical garden, the Garden of Eden. It is with the Eden, that their comes the image of adult bodies in a state of childlike innocence. Perhaps that is why the swelling fruit is used to symbolise the breasts; not to act as provocative imagery but rather to extend the state of innocence of Eden to the daughter.

But even though Adam and Eve were eventually cast out of the Garden of Eden, there is still a hopeful reference to the air of summer and growth within the poem. There is no reference to desolation or the depression of winter. Rather, the poem’s tone represents a celebration of the young girl, growing towards fullness and ripeness.

In Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America, Alicia Ostriker says that many woman poets use the image of earth as a way to revise poetry about women. “Women who identify their own bodies with earth,” Ostriker says, “tend not merely to celebrate the concept of fecundity but to link earth’s powers with a critical and subversive intelligence, or with the creative
imagination itself” (111). This to say that, female poets use earth as a metaphor for two reasons, one for a fertile female body and two for a creative woman.

Sexton’s speaker supports this notion, especially emphasizing the creative imagination. Nancy Gerber in Portrait of the Mother-Artist: Class and Creativity in Contemporary American Fiction suggests, “mother-artists demonstrate an ability to create using ordinary, domestic materials” (7).

Though Sexton does use domestic imagery, there is one image that stands outside of this idea:

That is when the speaker says:
What I want to say, Linda,
is that women are born twice.
If I could have watched you grow
as a magical mother might,
if I could have seen through my magical transparent belly,
there would have been such ripening within:
your embryo,
the seed taking on its own,
life clapping the bedpost,
bones from the pond,
thumbs and two mysterious eyes,
the awfully human head,
the heart jumping like a puppy,
the important lungs,
the becoming—
while it becomes!
as it does now,
a world of its own,
a delicate place.
I say hello
to such shakes and knockings and high jinks,
such music, such sprouts (l.57-78)

It is the amazing image of a ‘transparent and pregnant belly.’ She uniquely reimagines what is already extraordinary by conceptualizing a developing embryo not as an abstract—or rather, unobservable—idea, but as an observable process. The alternating images of fecundity and “creative imagination” show Sexton beginning to revise the woman-as-earth metaphor.

However satisfying this image of woman-as-earth may feel on the surface, Ostriker is careful to point out that woman-as-earth is a common motif, even in male-dominated literary traditions. That tradition tends to show “how the power of
men’s fantasies depends consistently on a vision of nature and woman, as alive, fecund, and essentially mindless” (Ostriker 110).

It is clear here that Sexton’s treatment of woman-as-earth is not just aware, but full of creative imagination, and therefore not “mindless.” Ostriker then warns that the same manner in which women have been subjected to male dominance, men have also controlled nature, despite its procreative power. It is an image that carries powerful implications. But Sexton seems to anticipate these implications of subversion and responds accordingly.

The poem is addressed to the daughter. The mother persona here perhaps is talking to the daughter in the photographs, while the daughter is not physically present there. For she says;

Its not a strange place,
this odd home
Where your face site in my hand
so full of distance,                                          (l...10-14)

She talks to the daughter’s photograph when she says, this one under a blueberry sky. (l.7) In this poem the poet tries to impart her love, her blessing, her wishes and most of all her own personal sense of fulfilment as she sees her daughter blossom into a charming young girl. Sexton, creates an image of the mother living through a second birth, when she sees her daughter grow. So mixed with feelings and emotions is a mother child bond that it enriches the lives of both the mother and the child. Maya Angelou’s poem “Mother, A Cradle to Hold Me ”(see appendix for full poem; pg-xvii) is also written on similar lines.

Maya Angelou depicts the feelings a child has towards the mother, the persona here is a child. The opening lines of the poem spells the context that is to follow.

The lines go:

During those early, dearest days
I did not dream that you had
A large life which indended me,
For I had a life which was only you.              (l.1-4)
Here the child admits that initially its only world is the mother. It is a slow and gradual weaning away that the mother has to initiate as the child grows up, that makes the child independent;

> Time passed steadily and drew us apart.
> I was unwilling, I feared if I led you go
> You would leave me eternally.
> You smiled at my fears, saying
> I could not stay in your cap forever.
> That one day you would have to stand.                     (l.5-10)

this reality, that eventually the child will have to ‘stand’ on its own one day;

> And where would I be? You smiled again I did not.       (l.24-25)

makes the child nervous and scared of the unknown. Too scared to let go of maternal security the child tries to cling on to the mother. But by and by, after repeated episodes of separation the child says;

> Each time you re entered my world.
> You brought assurance.
> Slowly I gained confidence.                            (l.34-36)

The presence of a mother with her child always reassures and reaffirms a very filial and instinctive bond between the two. It is not only the child that longs for maternal care and security, but the mother also finds peace and bliss when she is with her child;

> When you put your finger on my hand
> And your hand on my arm, I was blessed with
> a sense of health, of strength and very good fortune.     (l.51-54)

The child’s ecstatic moments came from just a little touch of the mother. But as the child grows and attains more knowledge and information, during the teenage period when the new world seems to tempt the child, the mother takes to the background ;

> Condescendingly of course,
> From my high perch
> Of teenage wisdom.
> I spoke sharply to you, often,
> Because you were slow to understand.                    (l.62-66)
Over the years children grow attain knowledge join profession, earn salaries wealth and luxuries. But at the end of it all. The persona says;

Mother, I have learned enough now to know
I have learned we nothing....................
That my refreshers ignorance and mockery
Did not bring you to
Discard one like a broken doll
Which had cost its famous

This unfortunate course through which any mother child relation passes through has fortunately culminated here, with a deep realization 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 no other person can take her place. This is the ultimate sense of gratitude that any child can have for the mother. It is this mother-child experience as depicted by Angelou, that celebrates the labor of motherhood and ‘empowers a mother; Angelou in her autobiography, ‘I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings’ says, “[S]he was there with me. She had my back, supported me. This is the role of the mother….”. Therefore as the mother- child bond initially begin with the bond between their bodies, first the womb and umbilicus and then the breast, but slowly this develops into a strong emotional connect between the two. As this study moves on to explore issues regarding motherhood and mothering, the next chapter deals with the psychological aspect of motherhood.