CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION : PROBLEMATICS OF MOTHERHOOD

I'm not questioning maternal love... I'm questioning maternal instinct

- Elisabeth Badinter

1.1.0. The women's movement has touched the lives of many women, radically transforming the nature of their everyday experiences. Inspired by these changes, feminist theorists and creative writers are developing critiques of established institutions and old social orders, challenging long-standing assumptions about social structures and women's position in them. Especially during the second half of the twentieth century, women have been striving to contest these systems of power developed by patriarchy. They seek to explain why women continue to be marginalised and reveal how fixed assumptions about an essential female nature have historically shaped all aspects of women's lives, influencing their psychological, physical and social well-being.

1.1.1. As a result of the emerging feminist awareness, women's familial roles were the first to be questioned - a revision/re-vision of feminine stereotypes being the logical outcome of such an awareness. The patriarchally-dictated, long-existing stereotypes of woman as a passive, docile and
voiceless being gave way to a redefinition of women by themselves. No longer willing to slip into slots allotted to them by a male-dominated society, women wake up amidst problems and travails, seeking to define themselves in terms of what they really are, rather than what society wants them to be - a mere wife, mother or home-maker.

1.1.2. The institution of motherhood has undergone enormous changes in the wake of the feminist movement. With various psychological and societal complexities involved and with centuries of myth foisted on motherhood, the dismantling of this patriarchal institution rendered the task a complicated and problematic one. Even if changes could be effected at the psychological and cultural levels, women's biological potential, their reproductive capacity, among all the differences between men and women, was the most unlikely to undergo a change. Chained both by biology and society to the mother-role, women realize that this role, thrust upon them, erased the actual experience of mothering. Societal expectations of the 'ideal' mother marred the actual personal experience of giving birth to and nurturing the child.

1.1.3. This strange discrepancy between the reality of their lives and the mother-role to which they were trying to conform led feminists such as Adrienne Rich to question the
institution of motherhood. In her book *Of Woman Born*, Rich distinguishes between motherhood as "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" and motherhood as "the institution which aims at ensuring that that potential - and all women - shall remain under male control" (1976:13). Rich's distinction can be expressed as the difference between the experience of mothering and the institution of motherhood, or as the difference between women deciding who, when, how and where to mother and men making these decisions for women.

1.1.4. Within the constraints posed by the institution of motherhood, equality appeared elusive. As the institution of motherhood was being naturalised and universalised by a patriarchal society, denying the optional character of motherhood, motherhood began to be promoted as the only option, as a compulsory social institution. Women began to experience an ambivalent situation when they realized that their reproductive capacities both shackled them within patriarchy and also placed them beyond it. Having children provided growth and opened new perspectives, but the social construction of motherhood could be restrictive.

1.1.5. The institution has both constrained and degraded women's potentialities. It has used mothers as a means to an end. As it was necessary for the economy that children
be produced, patriarchal thought has ordered women to restrict themselves to motherhood. Hartmann’s definition of ‘patriarchy’ includes such a systematic manipulation of women’s reproduction. According to Hartmann, patriarchy is “a hierarchical set of social relations among men, which has a material base in men’s control of women’s labor power and restriction of women’s sexuality, either towards reproductive purposes or towards satisfying the needs of men” (cited in Gordon 1990:9). Nancy Chodorow, in her book, The Reproduction of Mothering, argues that mothering was reproduced, both at the level of social organization and at the level of individual development by a complex system that depended upon the family for its continuity. She points to the family as the institution within which the economic and social requirements of the whole society are met by means of the creation of appropriate personality structures for the roles to be played within it.

1.1.6. Such an institutionalization of family structures and the role of women in them prompted Simone de Beauvoir to state in her book, The Second Sex, that one is not born, but rather, one becomes a woman — thus formulating the distinction between sex and gender, and suggesting that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. This distinction further discredits the notion that anatomy is destiny, ‘sex’ being the invariant, anatomically distinct.
aspect of the female body and 'gender' the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires. Also, the sex/gender dichotomy brings out the difference between being a female and being a woman, and one therefore may be born a female, but becomes a woman.

1.1.7. Similarly, one is not born, but becomes a mother. Motherhood is more than the biological process of reproduction. As an institution, it consists of customs, traditions, conventions, beliefs, attitudes, mores, laws, rules, precepts, and a host of other rational and non-rational norms which deal with the care and rearing of children. This dissertation is concerned with both the ways by which society institutionalizes one of its important functions, namely, the bearing and rearing of children, and the forces - cultural, ethical, economic, political and technological - that shape its operation. It is an exploration of the problematisation of motherhood in a social context, embedded in a political institution, in feminist terms - through the study of select literary texts.

1.2.0. The changing attitudes towards motherhood have been inscribed in literary texts of various countries/cultures, for now no literary text is ignorant / innocent of ideology. This dissertation focuses on the transition in the concept of motherhood as enshrined in
twentieth century literary texts by women writers of different countries and cultures ---- Afro-American, American, British, Canadian and Indian To examine these issues, the texts selected for study are

Afro-American Alice Walker's Meridian (1977)
Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987)

American Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland (1915)
Marge Piercy's Woman On The Edge of Time (1976)

British Margaret Drabble's The Millstone (1965)
Doris Lessing's The Summer Before the Dark (1973)

Canadian Margaret Laurence's The Diviners (1974)
Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1986)

Indian Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954)
Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)

Although a host of other feminist writers have written on this sensitive yet challenging issue, this dissertation restricts itself to one text each by the above authors, taking them as representatives of their milieu.
1.2.1. The dissertation takes for its base the three phases in the evolution of women's literature - feminine, feminist and female - as formulated by Elaine Showalter. The feminine phase being one where women wrote in an effort to equal the literature by men, the feminist phase, a conscious revolt against patriarchal norms, and the female phase rejecting both imitation and revolt in favour of an autonomous literature (Showalter 1989 405). Alice Walker's delineation of the three phases in her women characters - the suspended women, the assimilated women, and the emergent women - has a striking correspondence to Showalter's divisions. Extending both Showalter and Walker's divisions to the concept of motherhood, and using these divisions ideologically as well as historically, one can discern these phases in the concept of motherhood also feminine motherhood sponsored by the patriarchal cultures / religions, feminist motherhood sponsored by feminist theorists in general, and female motherhood sponsored by a section of recent Franco-American theorists. Added to these is the advent of technological motherhood sponsored by Hi-tech reproductive strategies adopted in recent feminist utopian / dystopian texts. With these changing attitudes and approaches to it, the institution of motherhood is so polarized and problematized that it becomes an area of study - a discipline by itself - which is termed here as
Problematics of Motherhood. This chapter provides a global perspective of motherhood - a historical, cultural and literary backdrop - tracing the existence of motherhood patterns as enshrined in Eastern and Western religions, myths and literatures down the centuries and across various milieus, indicating how these factors play on the female psyche, naturalising and ingraining both the terrible and benevolent aspects of motherhood.

1.3.0. The role of religion in structuring the institution of motherhood cannot be overlooked. Over the centuries, cultural practices have been justified on religious grounds. Even customs which prove detrimental to the society or the individual have been justified on account of having religious / mythological precedents. Where motherhood is concerned, religion provides models of the ideal mother, taking it for granted that women follow them in all respects. The figure of the Virgin Mary stands at the helm as a model of Christian virtues, both pagan and Christian images of the mother dominate Afro-American beliefs, and in India, the concept of the ideal Hindu woman is based on mother-goddesses and mythic models from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and other Puranas.

1.3.1. The worship of the mother has become an integral part of the Hindu psyche that the Hindu often merges the
goddess with the human mother, imposing the virtues of the goddess on the human mother, and thus idolising her. India has a long history of mother worship in the form of Aditi, the mother of gods, Prithvi, the mother-earth, Sita, the daughter of Mother-Earth, Durga, Saraswathi, Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Cauvery, Gayatri, Devi, Ambika. Mythologically, there are various shades to the mother-image - Kunti, who abandoned her illegitimate child, Gandhari, who cared for a thousand Kauravas, Kaikeyi, who exiled her stepson for her son's benefit, Yashoda, one of the earliest surrogate mothers. The Hindu woman in Indian literature is usually based on mythic models from the Ramayana and Puranas, Sita, the silent sufferer - the archetype of Indian womanhood, the Earth-Mother, forbearance personified, the playmate and beloved Radha, the devotee Meera. Of these, the image of the woman as Mother Earth, symbolising forbearance and endurance, is the most persistent (Alladi 1989:1).

1.3.2. Like their Indian counterparts, the Black mothers have to contend with prevailing stereotypes of Black Motherhood in African religion and myth. The African Yoruba proverb says 'Mother is gold', idealising the mother-figure in African myth. The women are depicted as guardians of traditions, and the strong Earth-Mother stands for forbearance, stability and security. It is generally assumed that the black mother, more than the white mother,
has a natural aptitude for motherhood, and this assumption has resulted in the Mammy stereotype

1.3.3. While polytheistic literature provides evidence of the inclusion of women as well as men in almost every aspect of temple life and popular cult as initiants, celebrants and priests, parts of the Bible represent men in a special and closer relation to God than women. Many Biblical passages express ambivalence towards women, and fear of their sexuality and normal bodily functions. In comparison to men, women are shown as less capable of moral judgement and more tied to the material than the moral or spiritual aspects of existence. This ambivalence towards women is reflected in their roles as mothers too. The virtue of women as wives is defined in terms of their roles as economic producers rather than mothers. Even when a woman physically gives birth to Jesus, and thereby enables his redemptive mission, she is shown as of relatively slight account in that mission in early cult. It was only centuries later that the central role of the Virgin birth was attested in both the Western and Eastern churches. Gradually this recognition of Virgin Mary attained divine magnitude, and Mother Mary became the model of feminine Christian virtues.

1.4.0. For centuries, the sugary cult of motherhood has been idealised by writers and thinkers. Rousseau, for
example, portrays Sophie, the 'ideal' woman in *Emile* (discussed in Badinter 1981 208-12) While *Emile* is strong and domineering, Sophie is weak, timid and submissive. Such a woman would soon be fully prepared for her role as a mother, living through and for her child. According to Rousseau, the future mother will not be willful, proud, energetic or self-centered. In no event should she become angry or show the slightest impatience. Rousseau also confines the mother to the home as all her concerns are to be family-centered. The analogies Rousseau makes between mother and nun, home and convent, reveal much about his feminine ideal. Outside that model, according to him, no salvation exists for women.

1.4.1. Ideas about the 'correct' maternal role have changed over the years. Not until the nineteenth century, for example, did a child's development and well-being come to be viewed as the major, if not the sole responsibility of her or his mother, who was then urged to devote herself full-time to her maternal duty. In contrast, during the eighteenth century, child-rearing was neither a discrete nor an exclusively female task. There was little emphasis on motherhood *per se*, and both parents were advised to raise their children together.
1.4.2. In the twentieth century, under the sway of behaviourism, the mother became the focus of 'experts' on childcare. A corollary of the focus on mothers was the disappearance of fathers. It was assumed that children spent most of their time with their mothers, not their fathers, even though by law and custom, final authority was patriarchal. The advice offered during the first decades of the twentieth century was of two types. Prior to about 1915, women were urged to be moral and loving, perhaps even indulgent toward their children, although the experts continued to insist that training and study were necessary to do the job well. But by the early 1920s, with the advent of psychoanalysis, women were warned against 'smother love' and were told to stress discipline and regularity. Either way, psychoanalysis has greatly contributed to making the mother the central character in the family. After having discovered the existence of the unconscious, and shown that it takes form throughout childhood, psychoanalysts formed the habit of questioning the mother, even challenging her, over the child's slightest psychological problem.

1.4.3. Dr Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* is a clear case of the changing attitudes towards motherhood in the twentieth century. Although the book championed full-time motherhood when it was first released in the 1940s, the 1976 edition rejects Spock's earlier claim that working mothers
harm children. It argues instead that women should feel free to work and that men make good parents too. In this connection, Gerson quips that Spock has been as much influenced by women as he has influenced them (1985: 183).

1.5.0. Literature reflects these changing attitudes towards motherhood. As in life, so in literature, there is no gradual evolution in the perspective towards motherhood - the pattern is erratic. Exalted to heights in one era, suppressed in the next, dominating in another, silent or ignored in the succeeding age - the 'real' mother still remains elusive. Nevertheless, the succeeding literary resume attempts to bring out the myriad shades of the mother figure as reflected in the works of writers in different ages and milieus.

1.5.1. Much of Western literature looks back to the Demeter-Persephone myth as an archetype of the mother-daughter relationship. According to this myth, Persephone (Kore) is abducted and raped (in one version by Poseidon, lord of the underworld, in another by Hades or Pluto, King of death). Demeter seeks revenge for the loss of her daughter by forbidding the grain - of which she is queen - to grow. When her daughter is restored to her - for nine months of the year only - she restores fruitfulness and life to the land for those months. In this myth, the separation
of Demeter and Persephone is an unwilling one, it is neither a question of the daughter's rebellion against the mother, nor the mother's rejection of the daughter. The myth indicates that each daughter, even in the millenia before Christ, must have longed for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death. And every mother must have longed for the power of Demeter, the efficacy of her anger, the reconciliation with her lost self.

1.5.2. One comes across such strong mothers in the Germanic folk epic Das Nibelungenlied and in the figure of Clytemnestra in the Greek epic tradition. In the former epic, although Kriemhild's relationship to her mother Uta is a close one, Kriemhild does not refrain from rejecting her mother's advice and choosing her own course of action, she rejects the maternal role to which she was expected to confine herself. Similarly, in the Greek epic, Clytemnestra becomes the antithesis of the nurturing mother figure, turning her back on the maternal role as she seeks vengeance on her husband Agamemnon.

1.5.3. In Medieval literature, mothers are conspicuous by their absence. From Chaucer and his contemporaries, nothing is known of the work and activities of medieval women, nor is there any clue concerning the relationship between a
fourteenth-century mother and her children. In Shakespeare, Demeter is separated from Persephone. As Myra Glazer Schotz points out, nothing is known of the mothers of Jessica, Desdemona, Ophelia, Regan, Goneril or Cordelia (Davidson and Broner 1980:45). In Shakespeare's works, the mother's role is diminished while the father becomes important. In Pericles, it is the father-figure who searches out the daughter and brings about the union with the mother. In The Tempest, mother and daughter are forever isolated. The Winter's Tale remains the most maternal of all of Shakespeare's plays; in no other play do we experience with such intensity that every mother contains her daughter within herself and every daughter her mother.

1.5.4. The Victorian era emphasizes the redemptive or salvatory potential of the mother. Works extolling woman's special role as the moral regenerator of mankind - Sarah Lewis' Woman's Mission (1839), Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House (1854-62), and John Ruskin's Of Queens' Gardens (1865) - articulate the differences between feminine and masculine nature, creating a myth of womanhood/motherhood, which postulates woman's moral efficacy in the world, at the same time limiting her sphere of action. Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House particularly has become the most famous stereotype, one that Virginia Woolf in 'Professions for Women' vehemently attacked. Though motherhood in the
Victorian age has been idealised and glorified by male novelists, female novelists, even those who were not themselves mothers, had a more realistic, if not an outright pessimistic outlook on the business of motherhood. It is hard to find in the works of George Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell a single strong mother who influences her daughter's life for good, a fact that is surely a refutation of the simplistic and sentimental view of motherhood found in many male essayists and novelists. The novels of Jane Austen, Fanny Burney and the Brontes reveal a tradition of the absent mother mainly because the heroine had to act independently for the plot to unfold. Hence mothers in nineteenth century fiction are dead, absent, weak or in need of help themselves.

1.5.5 Of the British novelists taken up for study, Margaret Drabble sees motherhood in positive terms while Doris Lessing depicts the tensions and conflicts arising out of this role. Often referred to as a 'cautious feminist', Drabble in her fiction depicts woman in the role of a good mother / wife, who at the same time remains true to herself as a person. In her life or fiction, she does not advocate a feminist overthrow of the patriarchal order which has earned her the title of a liberal feminist. Her novels, *A Summer Bird Cage, The Garrick Year, The Millstone, Jerusalem the Golden, The Waterfall, The Needle's Eye, The Realms of*
Gold, The Ice Age and The Middle Ground exemplify this fact. Her themes include children, pregnancy, maternity and family. "One's relationships with one's siblings and parents is something that you're going to write about again and again, in different forms" (cited in Creighton 1985:20), admits Drabble, and, no doubt, the central generating tension in many of her novels resides in mother-daughter relationships. Drabble's repeated delineations of the mother-child bond in her novels and feature articles have earned her the titles 'women's novelist' and 'novelist of maternity', not always positively meant. For most of Doris Lessing's women, motherhood proves to be a suffocating experience. Molly, in The Golden Notebook, after divorcing Richard, brings up her son Tommy as a single parent, sacrificing her ambitions and desires, but finds him revolting. For Anne however, motherhood is a soothing and satisfying experience. In her moments of turmoil, tension and disintegration, Anne finds comfort and stability in the thoughts of Janet. The novel further reflects on the stigma of the unwed mother - Anne, who had been living with Max Wulf without marriage, marries him when she conceives so that their child is not illegitimate, but divorces him after the birth of their daughter. In the Children of Violence series, the gruelling experience of childbirth, the disfigurement of her body, and the uncontrollable flow of
milk from her body leave Martha disquieted. In *Shikasta*, Lessing’s stance is more positive as she stresses the vital role of parental affection in bringing up children.

1.6.0. The American poet Emily Dickinson’s poetry reveals a mocking and even contemptuous tone of the daughter towards her mother. The qualities that her mother embodies are the Christian virtues of meekness, patience and submission, and these attributes, Dickinson feels, deserve only contempt. She extends her rejection of her mother and the maternal world to any convention which she, as a woman, is expected to submit to: courtship, marriage, children.

1.6.1. In the novels of Ellen Glasgow, the mother exists only as a shadow cast over her daughter’s promise. In Edith Wharton’s novels, the strained relationship between mothers and daughters is one of the persistent themes. Willa Cather, Colette and Virginia Woolf, as Jane Lilienfeld indicates (Davidson and Broner 1980 160-75), were born into families of strong women. Unlike nineteenth century mothers, the mothers of these early twentieth century writers were neither obsessive nor felt a need to dominate their daughter’s lives. Not surprisingly, all three writers wrote about strong women, and also maintained close relationships with women.
1.6.2 The two American novelists selected for study here are Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Marge Piercy, the former belonging to the early part of the twentieth century and the latter to the second half of the century. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman marks an early part of the tradition in which such writers as Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Margaret Drabble, Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, and countless others now stand" observes Sheryl L Meyerling (1989:9) True to this statement, Gilman was one of the early precursors of the feminist movement. In the period before the First World War, when most feminists were preoccupied with the struggle to gain the vote, Charlotte Perkins Gilman addressed instead the social and economic roots of women's oppression. What Gilman depicts in her utopia Herland, she had already explained in Women and Economics (1898), The Home: Its Work and Influence (1903) and Human Work (1904). She claims that the relegation of women to roles associated with their sexual or reproductive activity is disadvantageous to our progress as individuals and as a race. Though not a misanthropic feminist, Gilman was against androcentric culture which treated women as merely extraneous, child-bearing females. The working girl, the working wife and mother, became the ideal which she preached. Gilman was willing to accept matrimony and motherhood provided women were released from their
conventionally defined and limited roles Gilman's views were much more vehemently voiced years later by the radical feminist Marge Piercy who believed that the patriarchal system cannot be reformed, only overturned. Piercy asserted that male power was at the root of the social construction of gender. She attacks men's control over women's role as child bearers and childrearers in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Her novel *Vida* evokes the turmoils of the years which Piercy experienced as one of the organizers of the 'Students for A Democratic Society'. Her *Braided Lives* is called a 'narrative of survival' rather than a bildungsroman because the heroine does not succeed, but merely survives. In *Small Changes*, she imagines an alternative world in which the power politics of sexual relationships are replaced by a concern for each person as an individual and a respect for mutual needs. Piercy's formulation of the feminist problem acquires validity through her recognition of the need for revolutionary change in society and through her careful attention to the details of the intricate relationship between sexuality and cultural role playing.

1.7.0. Moving over to the Indian scene, it is observed that the old order does not easily yield to the new, and the Indian mother finds herself caught inextricably between tradition and modernity. Restricted both biologically and culturally, the Indian woman's predicament is such that she
finds herself at crossroads - she is unable to shake off her conventional roles of being a wife and mother, nor is she able to completely assert her identity as a woman, in terms of what she really is

1.7.1. In early Indian literature, one comes across mother-figures equated to goddesses. Virtuous, caring, self-effacing and self-sacrificing, these women seem to conform to the ideal of womanhood / motherhood. But in reality, one wonders - are these mothers real women? Are they not erasing a part of their personality, cutting fragments off themselves that refuse to conform to this ideal? Isn't the picture we see of the perfect mother actually a stunted, distorted one where the real woman never emerges? Yet it is into this 'safe' hole that millions of women creep into in order to avoid complexities and strains in relationships.

1.7.2. Contemporary Indian writing continues to portray the struggle between what is expected of a woman and what is innate in her. Anita Desai's women question and sometimes rebel against their maternal role, but are not able to reject it outright. Nanda Kaul in Fire On The Mountain, Bim in Clear Light of Day and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? at some point in their lives deny motherhood and attempt finding escape routes, but eventually understand
that this is one role which is most difficult to relinquish. In Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow, Storm in Chandigarh* and *A Situation in New Delhi*, the female protagonists are self-assertive women, who relinquish their marital role when marriage threatens to become a burden, but willingly see motherhood as the key to happiness and fulfilment. Tara Parameswaran's *Once Bitten Twice Married* portrays an overprotective mother whose daughter succumbs to her overbearing attitude. In Raji Narasimhan's *Forever Free*, the heroine fights against her mother's interference but returns later to her widowed mother.

1.7.3. Among the Indian novelists taken up for study here - Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande - the former portrays mothers who are completely defined by their maternal role while the latter depicts women against a traditional backdrop, struggling to shrug off the roles foisted on them. In *A Handful of Rice*, we come across a Markandaya heroine, Nalini, identified solely through her mother-role, whose need to love, to possess and to wield power are all carried out through her maternal identity alone. In Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*, Mira's mother who personifies the 'Ma' image, looks upon her sons as power symbols. In *Possession*, Anasuya acts as a mother-surrrogate, to whom both Caroline and Valmiki turn for advice and guidance. Only Lalitha of *Two Virgins* is not totally
enmeshed in the feminine motherhood that the other Markandaya heroines who, blissfully unaware, are caught Deshpande’s heroines however refuse to fit into these stereotyped moulds. Her novels explode the myth of the mother being a paragon of all virtues. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* the oppressive effect of motherhood is increasingly felt by the women protagonists.

1.8.0. In English-Canadian fiction, notably in the novels of women writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Beatrice Culleton, Margaret Clarke (Helen M Buss) and Gabrielle Roy, the struggle between mothers and daughters emerges dynamically through various stages of its development. These writers recognize the pervasive influence of the mother and tend to represent it through the daughter’s gradually emerging discovery of her own female identity. In their works, there is an emphasis on the past that, for women, is bound with the mother. The psychological journey that appears so much in Canadian fiction reveals the ambivalence that characterizes the daughter’s feelings about the mother. The dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and the theme of motherhood are brought out in Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire Dwellers, A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners*, Margaret Atwood’s *Lady Oracle, The Handmaid’s*
Tale, Surfacing and The Edible Woman, Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree, Margaret Clarke's The Cutting Season and Gabrielle Roy's The Windflower

1.9.0. In Afro-American literature, the image of the black woman as mammy persisted beyond the Civil War into the literature of the 1890s. The black woman's tendency to see maternal duties as natural and sacred must have reinforced the Southern planters' notion that black women were perfectly suited to be mammies. Even as the planters praised the black woman as the 'contented mammy', they insisted that she neglect her own children. Quite paradoxically, the white planters relegated the duties of motherhood to a being whom they considered 'subhuman', thus creating a line of demarcation between the spiritual and physical aspects of motherhood.

1.9.1. In contemporary Afro-American women's fiction, the black mother is no longer seen as a breeder, concubine, sapphire, mammy or mule, nor is she exalted to the status of the saviour or madonna. As Mari Evans points out, the black women "braved the ideological strictures of the sixties and freed themselves from the roles assigned to them in the writings of their male counterparts, where, depicted as queens and princesses, or as Earth mothers and idealized Big Mommas of super human wisdom and strength, they were
unrecognizable as individuals" (cited in Alladi 1986 101)
The change in outlook is visible when writers like Margaret Walker and Louise Meriwether are compared to Toni Morrison or Alice Walker. Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* is an exaltation of motherhood, depicted through Vyry, a mother at seventeen, whose life is a repetition of her mother’s. Louise Meriwether’s *Daddy was a Number Runner* portrays Henrietta, another example of a self-sacrificing mother. Alice Walker’s short stories portray mothers who undergo degradation and self-annihilation, tolerate violence, in order to save their children. In her stories, ‘Roselily’, ‘The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff’ and ‘Strong Horse Tea’, from *In Love and Trouble* and in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, we come across such self-sacrificing mothers. In Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline Breedlove is unlike the stereotyped image of the black matriarch who holds the family together. Dissatisfied with the role of motherhood, Pauline carries it with resignation. In *Sula*, Eva Peace is initially portrayed as a sacrificial mother but soon the stereotype is broken and the rest of the portrait as a mother is less positive. Of the other mothers in the novel, Hannah is not interested in caring for her children. Helena is a stern parent who smothers all natural instincts of her child, Nel is the over-protective mother who chokes her children with too much love, and Sula herself is interested
neither in matrimony nor in motherhood. Ondine of *Tar Baby* and Ruth of *Song of Solomon* take to motherhood more easily.

1.10.0. With the change in gender stereotypes, what is the image of the mother today? Is she still the silent, self-sacrificing and unassuming person she once was or has she transgressed these lines to become an educated entity who holds her own opinions and has set her own goals? Does the onus of bringing up a well adjusted child, with the 'correct' set of morals and values lie only on her, or is it a societal responsibility? The ensuing chapters attempt to explore these questions, tracing the d-evolution of motherhood from an unquestioning conformity to patriarchal norms, through a scepticism regarding their validity, to a remoulding or total rejection of motherhood and its imposed ideals.

1.10.1. The second chapter, *Feminine Motherhood* examines how women's capacities for mothering and the ability to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced by being built into the feminine psychic structure. This chapter focuses on the manner in which patriarchal institutions with religious sanction mould women into feminine mothers as a consequence of which motherhood becomes synonymous with femininity. By confining mothers to the domestic circle and by extending their role
from the biological to the psycho-social, the institution converts mothers into reproductive and child-rearing machines. Asserting that self-realization and self understanding are irrelevant for the mother, feminine motherhood demands of women a renunciation of personal aims in favour of familial ones. Moreover, society breeds guilt into the very fabric of a woman's character, holding her responsible for anything that goes wrong in the family. Anger is regarded the antithesis of the maternal, and the mother is expected to suppress it. The subtle differences in conformity to the institution—meek acceptance, burdensome acceptance or a wavering between acceptance and questioning—is also indicated.

1.10.2. The transition from the 'feminine' to the 'feminist' phase of motherhood—which begins with the realization by women that the patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the natural human condition—forms the crux of the third chapter, 'Feminist Motherhood.' Feminist mothers oppose those aspects of motherhood that make childbearing and childrearing stressful rather than fulfilling experiences. Pointing out the hiatus between the institution and experience of motherhood or the contradictions between ideology and reality, this chapter poses and explores the alternatives to feminine motherhood. The seeds of this 'new' motherhood are sown with the
stirring of a revolt of the protagonists against their mothers which is not so much a personal attack on the mothers as it is against the institution they represent. The maternal instinct and the mystique of motherhood no longer hold good as the emerging feminist mother questions or rejects the roles foisted on her.

1.10.3. Chapter IV: Technological Motherhood discusses the ideological treatment of technological motherhood promoted by Hi-tech reproductive strategies and its relation to feminine / feminist motherhood in three utopias / dystopias namely Gilman’s Herland, Piercy’s Woman On The Edge of Time and Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale. The chapter explores the major question: Does women’s liberation require a biological revolution? Should women relinquish their reproductive roles and take recourse to techniques of reproduction, or should they retain their reproductive powers in order to gain the actual experience of mothering, at the same time ensuring that it is not tainted by the politics of the patriarchal institution of motherhood? The far-reaching effects of technological reproduction - on child-rearing, family structures, heterosexual relations, racism, classism and sexism - are also explored.

1.10.4. Chapter V: The Aesthetics of Motherhood shifts the focus from the thematic to aesthetic aspects of motherhood, indicating how a self-conscious feminist
narrative point of view, structure, genre, imagery and myth contribute to working out the problematics of motherhood. The texts studied are classified into those written from the daughter's point of view, and those written from a mother's perspective. Texts written from a 'daughterly' perspective can be said to ally with patriarchal discourse in the process of 'othering' the mother. It is only when the maternal voice makes itself heard that the space for maternal narrative is opened, and the mother becomes the subject of her own story. The double-voiced narrative, as a result of the protagonist speaking simultaneously as daughter and mother, is also discussed. Further, the chapter delineates the manner by which the utopian mode and the employment of fantasy/allegory serve the purport of radical feminism by making the impossible seem plausible. Finally, the metaphors, symbols and images that reiterate and reinforce the feminine, feminist or technological phases of motherhood are culled out and discussed.

1.10.5. The concluding chapter picks up the threads of argument once again, moving from the specific predicament of the fictional mothers to wider, universal issues. Balancing the claims of feminine, feminist, biological and technological motherhood, it is concluded that the institution of motherhood is not totally abolished but only amended giving way to a more tolerant acceptance of the pluralistic attitudes towards motherhood.