CHAPTER III

EVOLUTION FROM BIOLOGICAL MOTHERS TO COMMUNITY MOTHERS

This chapter examines the role of black motherhood and mother-practices as found in Toni Morrison’s novels and it also attempts to identify and explicate the theory of motherhood that may lie beneath the surface narrative. This chapter intends to examine Toni Morrison’s attitude against framing any homogeneous definition of mothering and motherhood. It also purports to study how by planting her characters in the context of events in the history of the Blacks, Morrison creates a concrete space for motherhood practices. Toni Morrison considers motherhood as a site of power as it serves to highlight and promote African American cultural values and to record and transmit their history orally through mother to children. Maternal identity, thus, becomes a position of authority for black women.

Toni Morrison considers motherhood as a liberating force. Hence, Morrison affirms that mothering is not a conflict-ridden state but rather a matter of choice that invests one with responsibility. In Anglo-American culture, women had to choose either work or motherhood. But Morrison views motherhood as something based on the properties of African practice which considers motherhood as a communal rather than a private and individual affair.

Morrison is against the idea of a single experience or universal experience of motherhood and firmly believes motherhood to be a cultural entity that keeps on varying with time, space and culture. Moreover, she believes that an established and
closed definition of motherhood will definitely erase diverse and multiple experiences of motherhood. Morrison positions motherhood at the centre of African American culture and postulates that motherhood has specific tasks to be fulfilled such as protection, nurturance and training of children through which cultural heritage and tradition could be preserved. Morrison considers protection as one of the primary tasks of the mother.

Toni Morrison also handles the bond between mother and child – the most fundamental of personal relationships to narrate the depths of human experience and emotions in general and she uses the same bond to interpret maternal acts historically and culturally. She does not give importance to socially constructed limitations of motherhood but tries to present it as a universal phenomenon. Thereby, she has completely erased the boundaries drawn by society, culture and history and has created a new definition and theory of motherhood applicable to individuals irrespective of class, race and gender.

In this context it would be apt to cite the remarks of Lisa C. Rosen (2003):

Through out her novels, Morrison dissects, examines, and re-examines the archetypal image of motherhood, ruthlessly challenging traditional definitions of mothering. She examines the intergenerational impact on the human psyche of motherhood as both a presence and an absence. Writing out of a tradition in which mothers are the keepers of history – the oral tradition – Morrison inextricably links the mother’s role with the role of history. To lose, or dishonour, or ignore one is to lose the other. And these are the primal relationships of humanity. We are nothing outside of history; likewise, without mothers, we would not exist. (224)
The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved, Jazz, and Paradise are the novels taken up for study in this chapter. Her Love has been left out of the purview of the thesis as it shows loss of mothers and motherhood and more of motherless children.

Based on the treatment of mothers and mothering in the novels of Toni Morrison, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of the chapter deals with the impact of assimilation of white culture on black motherhood. This has been presented in her The Bluest Eye and Tar Baby. The second section of the chapter deals with Toni Morrison's vision of mother as creator/destroyer which is presented Sula and Beloved. The third section of the chapter deals with Song of Solomon which glorifies the role of othermothering, the role of shared parenting in black communities and the role of root workers and ancestors. The final section of this chapter deals with Jazz and Paradise in which Toni Morrison presents maternal love formed through female bonding.

In The Bluest Eye and Tar Baby Toni Morrison showcases the condition of mothers and mothering influenced by white culture and how Pauline and Jadine fail to fit into the paradigm of Black Motherhood.

The Bluest Eye opens with the description of an ideal Euro-American family. By presenting this kind of an introduction, Morrison symbolically presents the harm that is awaiting Black mothers and Black children. It portrays a hardened maternal love. Morrison presents three mother characters in this novel – Pauline Breedlove, Mrs. MacTeer and Geraldine. Pauline Breedlove survives on the fringes of the society and is employed as a domestic maid in a white house. She never finds any difficulty in her
professional and domestic chores as she considers this as an extension of her household duties.

In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison does not create an extended black family with ancestors but creates a nuclear family which paves the way for the absence of ancestors and othermothers. The absence of ancestors and othermothers results in the loss of life of Pecola. Besides the loss of life, even child abuse happens in the case of Frieda, which might not have happened in an extended family consisting of grandmothers and othermothers.

Pauline, a failed biological mother, in *The Bluest Eye* loses her passion for cultural heritage and ancient properties and she internalizes the white views of the model family and ideal female beauty. This in turn disturbs her ability to fulfil the tasks of a black mother. Pauline’s artistic competency like housekeeping, arranging cane and containers beautifully and systematically with utmost aesthetic reverence has been lost. Mori (1990) reasons out that Pauline has lost all her qualities once she migrated to the North along with her husband. She loses interest in her artistic talents after she enters the wealthy white family of the Fishers as domestic servant. She willingly utilizes her ability to make her master’s house beautiful whereas she abandons her responsibility and role in managing her own house and her children. To Trudier Harris and Gloria Wade-Gayles, Pauline is a true “black mammy” (qtd. in Samuel and Hudson-Weems 1990: 27) who remains subservient as it gives her more economical power. As Gloria Wade-Gayles states Pauline is not yielding to powerlessness but she is acquiring more power and strength. Ironically she is acquiring power at the loss of her self-esteem. Mori (1990) points out the consequence of her irresponsibility:
Pauline overlooks the risk and danger of surrendering her talents to the white family and fails to realize that her seemingly benevolent employers have displaced her from her own home and severed her from her own people, seriously undermining her own cultural and personal identity (46).

This happens due to Pauline’s separation from her own people, her cultural heritage and motherline. Since she oscillates between two identities, which is termed as “double identity”, Pauline and her family are not accepted by anyone and they are bereft of any respectable status within their own community.

Her hardened maternal love emanates from her lonely childhood. As an adolescent girl, Pauline had imbibed white norms of beauty and this in turn is reflected in her unloving attitude towards Pecola and Sammy. Drawing attention to this situation, Wade- Gayles comments that Pauline “rejects her own daughter because she has erased from her psyche the line separating reality from illusion, mammyhood from motherhood” (qtd. in Samuel and Hudson-Weems 1990: 81). Karen Carmean (1993) observes that Pauline begins following the role defined by non-blacks, and by denying herself the possibilities of growing amidst her own culture and tradition. She is the representative of many who, "in adopting white values and standards of behaviour, deny their essential value, substituting false – even destructive – standards”. (21). Denise Heinze (1993) also discusses this in a very similar way by stating that all her passion and emotions echo more of a white individual’s experience than a black’s. She clarifies that Pauline acquires the power of domestic servant by losing her self-esteem and dilutes her power and this in turn diminishes her power as mother.
Unfavourable situations and circumstances also victimize Pauline. As Usha Puri (1989) remarks:

Both mother and daughter are victims of media which instructs them that only by imitating white ideal of beauty they can be acceptable and loved. Their helplessness to achieve this ideal results in blurring of fantasy and reality. The fantasy world is no comfort for Polly and Pecola. (134)

In stead of playing the role of a protector she destroys the life of her children by imitating white norms of beauty. She is responsible for her son Sammy running away from home. Morrison describes it in the novel thus:

Them she bent toward respectability, and in so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly’s mother’s. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life (BE 100).

Morrison presents Pauline as a mother who damages the ideal structure of familial relationships. She portrays how the label ‘mother’ will remain only a tag if a black mother abandons her cultural/racial root and neglect her maternal tasks. Even though Pauline explains her emotions by saying “I loved them and all” (BE 96), she fails to become a nurturing protector of her children.

Pauline Breedlove is aggressive and violent unlike her daughter Pecola who is submissive and introvert. Pauline always fights with her husband by throwing pots and pans at him. She behaves in this way only when her love is not recognized by others.
Working in the Fishers’ family as a maid lacking self esteem, she believes that a white man’s household is a site of power. She almost dotes over Fishers family and their children as demi-gods. Pauline enjoys luxury in her employers’ household. The more the comfort she receives from the employer the more she neglects her home and family. She diverts her motherly love towards white children and her impersonal love towards her own children. This makes them view her not as their mother but as ‘Mrs. Breedlove’

Pauline Breedlove is depicted as an independent woman who never depends on male support. She fights against the ills of poverty and despite her tremendous efforts, she is unable to build a satisfying family life. Pauline as a woman, wife, mother and breadwinner struggles to maintain a successful life but fails as she lacks the support of the community.

Pauline rejects her daughter based on her conception of beauty from the white perspective. She confronts two value systems – African American and the white American value system. She does not succeed in selecting the correct one. Pauline too fails to train her children to preserve their culture and to fight against the racist and sexist world. Pauline never knows about her responsibility towards her children who are to be trained in their culture and tradition by her. Lisa C.Rosen’s (2003) remark sums up the issue:

Pecola’s mother has no community in whose ways she can train her daughters. In her inability to protect her daughter from her drunken husband, Mrs. Breedlove fails in her maternal duty; not only does Pecola get pregnant when her father rapes her, but she miscarries, her tenuous
hold on sanity is broken, and she is rendered for ever incapable of attaining the status of decent, acceptable citizen. (219)

As Pauline lacks self-esteem and self-love she fails to nurture positive qualities in her son and daughter. Even though she worships the white masters and submits her complete service to them, they recognize her only as an "ideal servant" (BE 99). They think that she cannot be replaced by any other domestic maid. D. Samuel and Clenora Hudson –Weems (1990) arguing about Pauline’s lack of sense of self-esteem comment thus:

...Pecola, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove fall victim for their failure to transcend the imposing definition of “the Other's” look. Reduced to a state of ‘objectness’ (thingness), each remains frozen in a world of being-for-the-other and consequently lives a life of shame, alienation, self-hatred and inevitable destruction (10-11).

Thus, it is evident that Pauline lacks a sense of self-love, self-esteem and love for her own culture. The Bluest Eye exemplifies the need for mothers to maintain a strong authentic sense of self to nurture the same in the children.

The time of action of the novel is the 1930s and 1940s - the period of heavy migration. Pauline’s response to migration is an evidence of the problem of cultural transplantation of women from the South to the North and its impact upon their marital lives. As Usha Puri (1989) observes, the novelist raises a pertinent question as to when a black woman is able to attain the zenith of happiness and she subtly answers that it is possible only when she accepts her social and racial identity. Throughout this novel, Toni Morrison stresses the importance of the connection between a black individual’s
conducted and her community's value system because she strongly believes that the community determines the parent-child and male-female relationship. Toni Morrison is of the conviction that the socio-cultural environment plays an important role in determining parent-child relationship.

While discussing the impact of economic issues on motherhood, Morrison highlights the difference between the two poor families – the MacTeers' and the Breadloves'. In spite of their poverty, Claudia's parents retain the emotional strength of a black family and show love and care towards their daughters. Even though MacTeer articulates her love for her children in a harsh manner, she never hates them. Unlike Pauline, MacTeer is always aware of her responsibilities towards her children Claudia and Frieda. Her faith in cultural acceptability and moral responsibility is significant. Highly conscious of her place in the society, she is aware of the need of the politics of interfacing with the dominant white culture. She always goes to any extreme to help them. Her love for the children is the best example for care and protective responsibility of an ideal black mother.

Her nurturing ability is reflected in the self-protective nature of her children. Besides self-protection MacTeer has brought them up with self-love and self-esteem. This is obviously seen in the incident in which the children react towards Henry who sexually misbehaves with Frieda. This kind of capability is enhanced by her being community bound. She has taught her children to fear prostitutes, despise laziness and to keep themselves away from those who relinquish the culturally accepted margins. But throughout the novel, Morrison never gives space for emotional demonstration of love between the mother (MacTeer) and daughters.
Apart from these two families, Morrison brings in the family of Geraldine, which is close to the ideal family as depicted in a primer. Geraldine, a middle class woman, is described as one who forms her own norms. As far as her son is concerned, she:

...did not allow her baby, Junior to cry. As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them – comfort and satiety. He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod. Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled. (BE 67)

Moreover, she trains her son to be aware of the color prejudices in the society. She clearly "had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud." (BE 67) She is the one who always wants to come out of funkiness. Morrison touches upon the irony of the sophisticated middle class women who adopt the White American values and wipe away the eruption of funk and try to repress natural spontaneity in love making. It is evident in the following lines: "In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of wide range of human emotions" (BE 64).

The result of this is clearly reflected in the crude behaviour of her son Junior who treats Pecola badly in front of others by humiliating her. Though Geraldine protects her son physically, she fails to nurture him with self-love which will automatically lead him to love his fellow human beings. She has never trained her son to have admiration for his culture, whereas she has inculcated in him a sense of aversion towards her own black people.
Apart from studying motherhood in this novel from a mother's point of view, one can also examine the impact of motherhood from the children’s point of view. Pecola and Cholly are two examples for the negative impact of improper motherhood. It is quite evident that Pecola’s becoming a victim is caused by her mother’s rejection of the Black tradition and culture. Young Pecola’s life revolves around her search for self-esteem. Her fall is the result of her parents’ frustration. Pecola, in the process of fighting back to achieve her self-esteem, begins to search for an acceptable face with blue eyes which is the epitome of her desirability. She always feels that she has been rejected by others and she confirms this when her mother throws her out of Fisher’s spotless kitchen. She fails completely in her life as she is not properly mothered, protected, nurtured and trained by her mother.

Cholly Breedlove is also a victim of failed motherhood. Rejected and uncared for in his childhood, he becomes incapable of loving his wife and children in a healthy way. Cholly does not have any idea of how to raise children as he is not raised by any parent. So he could not comprehend parent-children relationship. This is the result of his failed and unhappy childhood. In one of the interviews with Jane Beckerman (1994) Toni Morrison says that, “he (Cholly) might love her (Pecola) in the worst of all possible ways because he can’t do this and can’t do that. He can’t do it normally, healthy and so on.” (Taylor-Guthrie 60)

Throughout the novel Morrison stresses that parental influence as a determining factor in children’s interpersonal relationship. Cholly experiences a sense of failed parenthood at the age of four itself. He has been abandoned in a junk heap by his mother and rejected for a crap game by his father and “there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites and they alone interested him”
(BE 126). His Aunty Jimmy plays the role of othermother after whose death he becomes "[d]angerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to feel tender and violent, to whistle and weep" (BE 125). Both Pauline and Cholly are the representatives of failed parenthood who go far away from Bell Hooks’ ideology of shared parenting.

Even between these characters, Morrison highlights the difference of circumstances and the possibility of othermothers. The Northern experience is always different from Southern black culture. Aunty Jimmy who has come from the North stands for their cultural practices which make her rescue Cholly and treat him as her son, whereas, Pecola, who lives in the South since her birth has never relished the kind of motherly warmth and compassion from others. Even MacTeers could not replace her mother.

Thus, Morrison in her novel The Bluest Eye advocates the need for the sense of family history and community history. The complete story turns out to be a painful documentation of her childhood lessons. It balances the experiences of childhood and adulthood, by fixing Pecola Breedlove’s life at the centre. The entire novel can be taken as a documentation of mother-child relationship influenced by racial hatred, social discrimination and social violence.

Toni Morrison continues the same theme in Tar Baby. This novel showcases the negative impact of Western influences on Black Motherhood. Tar Baby can be compared with The Bluest Eye as it highlights the nature of the mothering/motherhood influenced by white culture. It is also the first novel for Morrison to deal with White mother-son relationship. If The Bluest Eye emphasises the experience of a young girl who is not protected by her own mother, Tar Baby emphasises the condition of a young
girl/woman who is not properly nurtured either by her biological or by adopted parents. Erickson (1993) considers the whole novel as an exemplification of “failed nurturance” (294).

In this novel, unlike in The Bluest Eye, Morrison delineates the nature, benefits and responsibilities of othermother. The novel highlights the power of African community mothers. There are three mother figures – Ondine, Margaret, and The’rese` – in this novel.

Ondine, the othermother in Tar Baby, resembles as well as differs from Pauline Breedlove. Eleanor Traylor (1988) points out the similarity thus: “Like Pauline Breedlove of Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, Ondine and Sydney work hard, are reliable, aim to please and do” (140). At the same time, she is different from Pauline. As described earlier, Pauline fails to fulfil the primary maternal function of protection. Unlike Pauline, Ondine accepts responsibility for Jadine – the twelve year old orphaned daughter of Sydney’s dead sister. She is responsible for her physical survival and for sending her to school. Ondine herself was a motherless child and is a childless mother. Morrison shows the struggle between cultural rootedness and the desire for self-development through Jadine and Ondine. Jadine’s aversion for black cultural rootedness and her quest for self-actualization in terms of assimilated white culture stem from improper mothering. Ondine mothers Jadine in the accepted norms of assimilation and she never teaches Jadine her African rootedness. Having been with her white master’s family for over thirty years, she has immersed herself in the ways of the Street family. Ondine has assumed the “rituals-ablations, eating habits, little ways of being and doing” (140) of the Street family. She herself has become unaware of importance of preserving/recreating African culture.
Being an unmothered child and a childless mother Ondine finally accepts her failure to be and to become a successful mother. As a mammy figure she can not impress Michael, the son of Margaret Street. Ironically Jadine treats Ondine as a mammy by taking her “turn” to pay back. Ondine explains to Jadine the need to respect motherhood: “You don’t need your own natural mother to be a daughter. All you need is to feel a certain way, a careful way about people older that you are” (281). Ironically, unlike the African mothers, Ondine is not accepted as a mother figure by Jadine. Ondine states the significance of a black daughter: “A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her…I don’t want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours” (281). This effort to make Jadine realise the importance of connecting oneself with the motherline is almost a self-realisation about the absence of her own motherline. She accepts her failure. Morrison describes her helpless status thus:

Her niece, her baby, her crown had put her in the same category as that thing she ran off with. And now she was going on talking, explaining, saying, but Ondine never heard anymore….Ondine sat patting the table with her right hand, her chin resting on the fist of her left. (TB 282)

Finally she accepts her failed role as othermother either to Jadine or to Michael. She says, “I’m responsible for not telling nobody” (283). She aptly states the importance of nurturing and training the children to be within the cultural boundaries: “Maybe it don’t pay to love nothing, I loved that little boy like he was mine, so he wouldn’t grow up and kill somebody. And instead of thanks, I get meanness. Disrespect” (ibid).

Unlike Pauline, Ondine understands the need to be respected by children. Morrison hence conveys the need for a mother figure to protect and foster a daughter’s femininity and blackness.
At the same time, Ondine can not fulfil her othermother function as Pilate does in *Song of Solomon*. Weems’ (1990) perception of this is worth considering:

At the crucial age of twelve, a point of transition from childhood to adolescence, she is deprived of parents to nurture and guide her. There is no Pilate in her life. Unlike Pilate, who passes the legacy of her cultural heritage to her nephew, Milkman, Ondine does not perform this function for Jadine. (83)

Due to Ondine’s failure in nurturing, Jadine has not understood the need to become mother. Even though Jadine’s “blood rush[ed]es to Jadine’s skin…when her motherlessness was mentioned” (*TB* 281), she is not ready to accept Ondine’s advice of accepting some woman as her mother. Nor does she agree to become a mother. Ondine fails to teach the importance of the mother’s role in the daughter’s life. Thus, Jadine remains in a state of permanent motherlessness.

Besides Ondine, Jadine herself is responsible for her failure as she is used more to the Western culture than her African roots. It is well highlighted through the way she responds to the communities of women. The appearance of communities of women of the past and present to educate Jadine regarding her African roots is important in the novel. The community women include: “Rosa and The’rese` and Son’s dead mother and Sally Sarah Sadie Brown and Ondine and Soldier’s wife Ellen and Francine from the mental institution and her own dead mother and even the woman in Yellow” (*TB* 258). Among the members, the presence of Son’s dead mother and Ondine suggests the importance of the survival of motherline. These community women represent the magnitude of cultural properties and cultural inclinations.
In spite of the portrayal of Ondine and Margaret as almost failed mothers, Morrison gives an important and specific African American mothering through The'rese'. The appearance of the community mothers signifies the role of matriarchs in the African American tradition. As Jadine is not properly mothered she assimilates white culture and she rejects her black heritage. Moreover, she is not interested in becoming either a biological mother or a mother of any kind. In order to instruct Jadine on her capacity to become a mother and her need to come out of her sterility, these community women appear and threaten her. Even if the capacity of a woman as a biological mother fails, the role of bonding among women will never fail in the African American community. These community women come forward to connect Jadine with her African root by highlighting the importance of the acceptance of motherhood. But Jadine is not ready to accept it as she has immersed herself in the culture of Paris. They:

were there crowding each other and watching her. Pushing each other – nudging for space, they poured out of the dark like ants out of a hive....They looked as though they had just been waiting for that question and they each pulled out a breast and showed it to her.... They stood around in the room, jostling each other gently, gently – there wasn’t much room – revealing one breast and then two and Jadine was shocked. (TB 258)

Unable to understand the presence of these night women, Jadine connects this image for the negative influence on her relationship with Son.

Through the community women Morrison presents, as Lee says, the wondrous and realistic picture of African American Motherhood. The’rese’s extraordinary tallness, her tar complexion and canary yellow costumes resemble the African goddess
Ilis. (Refer Appendix III). The woman in Yellow is a parallel to Pilate. As a thematic motif, these mother figures appear often in many of Morrison’s novels. According to Eleanor W. Traylor (1998):

> These women, by allusion, figure the warrior women, the market women, the calabash-carrying women, the queen women, the life-bearing, culture-bearing women of their own ancient origins. In their songs, their tales, their reference, these women acknowledge women of other cultures whose paradigms they either approve or reject. (McKay 149)

Almost all their activities are more suggestive. They make their presence to heal Jadine. Their protruding breasts symbolise the idea of the mother as nurturer. On the symbolic level, the breasts of the mothers indicate the source of nourishment both biological and racial. Hence they are not just organs but the essence of womanhood and motherhood. Thus, the whole scene suggests the principle of nurturance and meaningfulness of black motherhood to Jadine.

Jadine is been given two chances – by Ondine and by community of women – to be saved from the negative impact of Western culture. But she is unable to understand them as positive forces. According to Karla Holloway (1987) Jadine is called by goddess earth, who embodies the cosmic life principle. Even after the calling she could not understand the importance either of the culture specific values or knowledge of mothers and mothering. Jadine unconsciously avoids all the culture-bearers including Son and The’rese and goes back to adopt Parisian culture. Towards the end of the novel she has been abandoned by all her well-wishers.

Like Jadine and Ondine, Margaret is not a properly nurtured child. She lacks authentic mothering that results in the loss of her complete female self. She feels
emptiness within herself. According to Erickson, Margaret is a symbol of failed nurturance. She is an embodiment of patriarchal motherhood. According to Demetrakopoulos (1987) “in Margaret we have the first full-fledged portrait of a child abuser in all of literature” (138). Having been married soon after her high school to Valerian who is almost twenty years older than her, Margaret becomes a teenage mother. The “rosy cheeked” (TB 19) Margaret adores her beauty and the same has become a source of pain to her as it made her a victim.

This condition is the result of mothering in the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Those who mother in the system of patriarchal institution can understand the loneliness, isolation, emptiness, and boredom at a point as this institution expects more from mothers without contributing anything in return. So, the resulting emptiness makes Margaret abuse her son Michael and he falls as a victim to his mother’s warped revenge. By abusing her son, Margaret tries to fill up the emptiness and thinks of giving some meaning to it. Margaret has been lost in the large space of the mansion psychologically and the loneliness haunts her, waking her from her ignorance. The image of Ondine haunts her as Ondine symbolizes the thread of losing her son’s love. Margaret is afraid of Ondine’s affectionate nature and it signifies her maternal insecurity.

Though it is Gideon who tells the legends to Son, it is The’rese’, the conjure woman, who makes him realise the spiritual kinsmen. Barbara Hill Rigney (1988) comments thus on The’rese’:

The’rese’ herself is the swamp haunt, and - like Pilate and the ageless Circe in Song of Solomon, like Eva Peace and Ajax’s "conjure woman"
mother in *Sula*, like the healer M' Dear who presides over birth and death in *The Bluest Eye*, and like the wise Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, she is also the ancestor figure. (66-67)

She serves as a guiding principle to Son who records facts to escape from slavery. She is the keeper of racial memory, the teller of tales, the practitioner of Voodoo and above all she is the embodiment of the female principle. The rese` never plays the role of mammy or keeper of other’s houses. The rese` is the nurturer and community seer in this novel. She is against the substitution of mother’s milk as she revolts against man-made milk. By the act of revolting against the substitution of mother’s milk, The rese` asserts the importance of the nurturing power of women.

Thus Morrison highlights both the negative impact of assimilation and migration and the importance of African cultural phenomenon of community mothers in *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby*.

*Sula* and *Beloved* present a totally different aspect of motherhood. Toni Morrison showcases in these novels the horrific maternal love that makes mothers kill their own children as a means of love and resistance.

*Sula* is a novel of maternal power, maternal affection and motherline. There are two families – the family of Peace and the family of Wright – epitomizing the themes of maternal power, maternal affection and the survival of the motherline. These two families are matrifocal and matriarchal. Peace’s family is basically a patriarchal one, which gets restructured as matriarchal as the plot develops. Contrary to this, Wright’s family is matrifocal and it re-emerges as a matriarchal family although it defines itself through “patriarchal and church-generated stereotypes” (Demetrakopoulos 1987: 53).
Apart from Helene, Hannah, Rochelle and Helene’s mother there is one more mother character in this novel. She is the mother of Ajax, a voodoo practitioner. With all these mother characters and their mothering capacities Sula becomes a perfect novel for motherhood study.

In the Peace’s family, Eva and her daughter are two mothers who are often debated within the African American motherhood ideology for their success/failure as mothers. Eva “a god figure” (Byerman: 1982) stands as a creator and a destroyer. After her husband Boy Boy deserts her with three children, Eva Peace reconstructs her home and ensures its survival through her mere self-sacrificing deed. She willingly amputates her leg in order to get the insurance money monthly to run the family. This makes Eva “a good mother”. As Barbara Christian (1980) observes, Eva is “an example of the mama who is both the sacrificer and sacrificing as woman, who learns to accommodate life’s meanness but only with a vengeance” (28).

Eva is the founding matriarch and the queen of her motherline and she fulfils the survival of motherline through Nel, her grand daughter Sula’s friend. Throughout her life she stands as a symbol of protection and nurturance. Demetrakopoulos (1987) views her as a strong, fierce, rational and thoroughly a protective mother. She is also a community mother who, apart from her own children, protects and nurtures three children from different ethnic background – white, black, and Chicano. This act of protecting the abandoned children makes her a true matriarch that challenges the controlling image of a black woman. It showcases Eva’s efficiency in creating a microcosm of ideal community. Heinze views Eva as a Madonna figure for her capacity to shower endless love without any distraction. Demetrakopoulos (1987) compares Eva with mythical Hestia and Demeter thus:
She is a deeply sane and cautiously protective Hestia, an overseeing Demeter. These are the two goddesses that I see as most operative, most strongly emerging in Eva...Eva’s house becomes a fortress for the woman of her line. Her immobility is like that of Hestian queen bee; she scarcely ever descends to the lower floors, but sits on a throne-like wagon device to receive her faceless, nameless and interchangeable suitors. They surround and worship her, but are like the castrated priest of Isis, weak and wispy forces of the masculine. (55)

As the goddess Hestia (Refer Appendix III), Eva remains kind and merciful to all orphan and missing children which in turn enables her to accept Nel as her grand daughter towards the end of the novel.

When Eva finds her daughter Hannah on fire, Eva jumps to protect Hannah. This is an evidence for her natural maternal affection. Eva’s attempt to protect her daughter Hannah turns Eva a “Great Mother” (Weems 38). Her act emphasises the sacrificial role of woman-as-mother. Her ideal love becomes an unconventional mother love.

Contrary to this image of creator, protector and nurturer Eva Peace, “transmutes into Kali, the mother destroyer who forces an end of life cycle” (Weems 57) by her act of killing her only son Plum. (Refer Appendix III). Plum, who returns from the War, has already been drowned by drugs. As she finds Plum incurable, she burns him. His animal like existence makes Eva commit murder – mercy killing – which may be viewed as incomprehensible act of love.

In an interview with Robert Stepto (1976) Morrison justifies Eva’s deed as an act of mercy killing. Her decision to kill her son is to end the life of one already psychologically dead. It was painful to Eva that “her son was living a life that was not
worth his time. “She meant it was too painful to her; you know the way you kill a dog when he breaks his leg because he can’t stand the pain” (Traylor – Guthrie1994: 9). Killing Plum shows the unusual love and mother –son relationship. Trudier Harris (1991) views Eva’s act of killing her son as:

...a slap in the face of all traditional matriarchs, for there is no God-centred morality informing her actions...In deciding that her son Plum would be better off dead, Eva recognises no authority, no morality except herself.... Eva becomes the vengeful goddess in destroying a creature who has failed to worship in an appropriate manner at her altar.

(74)

In spite of pungent criticism against her, Eva can be viewed as a good mother as she adopts her own strategies and identifies virtues that suit her discipline of motherhood. Demetrakopoulos (1987) says that Eva’s life:

...has been economically, socially and historically determined in the most narrow way; but in spite of it all, her character is one of fierce protectiveness, gracious regality, magnanimity, deep intelligence, and great courage. And her sharp tongue is salt with wisdom. Eva becomes the Demeter/Sophia, the last phase of feminine wisdom which never stops mothering; informing younger persons of the deepest truth; for Eva mothers Nel into old age. (61-62)

For this powerful mother, there is no surviving progeny. All her children, including her grand daughter Sula, have died. Unusually Eva makes her motherline to continue not in her progeny. As her granddaughter dies, Eva accepts Nel as her own grand daughter as she does not find any difference between them. Eva heals the mind of Nel that has been wounded by Sula and Jude. Eva brings maturity into the mind of Nel.
Even though Eva succeeds in her protective nature and nurturing capacity she fails to train her children. As a mother Eva needs to train her daughter Hannah. Eva fails to train Hannah, which makes her emerge as an unsuccessful biological mother. Contrary to Eva and Helene, Hannah is critical about the idea of unconditional maternal love. Unlike her mother Eva, Hannah fails to give disciplined love to Sula as she herself had not received it from her mother. In spite of possessing the qualities of Demeter, Eve, Madonna, Isis and Kali, Eva fails to opt training strategies in order to mould Hannah. Her hardened maternal love drives her to murder her son Plum, whereas her sensitive love makes her to dote over Hannah without nurturing her to be a good mother.

Hannah’s love for Sula is an objective one. She believes that a child is an autonomous being and a different person. She believes that the mother may dislike her children owing to the differences in life style, beliefs and values. Her notion of children as “different people” paves way to her losing the love of her daughter Sula, who emerges as an emotionless person to watch her own mother burning. Toni Morrison brings out Hannah’s opinion about children in a dialogue between Hannah and her friends:

"They a pain"

"Yeh wish I’d listened to mamma. She told me not to have ’em too soon"

"Any time at all is too soon for me"

"On, I don’t know My Rudy mind his daddy. He just wild with me. Be glad when he grewed and gone."

Hannah smiled and said, "Shut your mouth. You love the ground he pee on"

Morrison describes Hannah as a person of unquestionable kindness and generous nature, and her beauty is coupled with her funky elegance of manners. Morrison presents her as an extrovert who longs for love, respect and recognition from others. Hannah is also presented as a flirt who finds her personal fulfilment in her relationship with men. Throughout the novel she leads a life of a non-conformist.

Contrary to Eva Peace’s family, there is Nel Wright’s family which is purely matrifocal and matrilineal. Demetrakopoulos (1987) says that: “Nel’s matrilineal line suffers from an Eve/Mary bedrock of feminine duality, the whore/Madonna polarity” (53).

Heinze observes that Toni Morrison has created the Wright family as a contrast to Eva’s household. Rochelle, a Creole whore, is the mother of Helene and grandmother of Nel. Rochelle, a French speaking whore, is being observed as the one who conducts her life according to an inner code. “She is both the Madonna and the whore in her representation of life and her indulgence in earthly pleasures” (Henize 30). Indirectly, her death makes Nel understand the racial prejudice in the society. Rochelle’s bright and gaudy clothes, her unrestricted laughter, financial independence, apparent lack of concern for material possessions and unconditional love are unusual to Nel.

Helene Wright, the mother of Nel, is the daughter of a prostitute. As her mother Rochelle did not want Helene to grow up in a brothel house she was brought up differently and got married to Wiley Wright in Medallion. On account of this, she makes her life quite independent and devotes her service to the most conservative
church in the town. She is fully interested in rearing her daughter Nel Wright. In her new life she starts presenting her identity as a good respected mother and a good housewife. In Medallion, Helene works hard to erase the childhood memories as the daughter of a New Orlean prostitute. As she could not control her past she wants to mould the present and even future under her control. As a result of this she exercises full control over her daughter Nel.

Helene always shows her uneasiness in acquainting herself with Rochelle. Like Pauline and Geraldine, Helene too accepts the white middle class norms to conduct her life. She tries to present herself as an epitome of ideal womanhood. All her dignified, graceful, beautiful and religious behaviour is the result of her assimilation of white values. All these qualities make Helene prevent Nel from all her desires and wishes by her excessive and dominant affection for and control over Nel. Unlike Pauline, Helene accepts passively the subhuman treatment of the black by the white society when the white conductor humiliates her. At the same time Helene never allows Nel to undergo this kind of oppression from the white society.

Helene’s influence on her daughter Nel is noteworthy. Through her Madonna image, she makes her daughter Nel live out the life of a “good woman” and to follow the Mary tradition. Helene helps Nel to emerge as “Eve figure” (Henize 54).

There is a vast difference between Peace and Helene families of women as mothers. Peace family has a strong matriarchal figure Eva, but could not pass on her matriarchal tradition to her progeny as she lacks all maternal strategies to transmit her good maternal qualities even to her own daughter. Contrary to Eva, Helene Wright who has got her matrilineal heritage and who has unsentimentally given up her mother Rochelle passes on the matrilineal heritage to the next generation. In Eva’s household
nobody survives except Eva whereas in Helene Wright’s family Nel is the only survivor and she symbolises hope even in the mind of Eva. Though Helene Wright accepts the Western norms of family structure, she is all the time being challenged by her matrilineal heritage. Helene Wright and Eva Peace can be considered parallel as well as polarities as they perform the same maternal duty successfully and fail in threading their motherline respectively.

There is one another mother – the mother of Ajax. She is a contrast to Helene Wright and Eva Peace. She is a brilliant, strong and liberated woman who practises voodoo. She is more spiritual than any other Christian woman. Ajax likes Sula because she is as strong as his mother.

In *Sula*, Morrison brings out mother characters who are different from each others and their mothering skills also differ from each other. Morrison subverts the established notions of good, submissive, self-effacing and ever-willing mother image through the portrayal of Eva. Demetrakopoulos (1987) commenting on the differences among mother characters in Toni Morrison’s novels – *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* – states thus:

> Mothers and daughters have a special relationship in Morrison that resonates to my memories. She gives us so many portraits that we are bound to find ourselves. The contrast between Sula and Hannah, Nel and Helene, Pecola and Mrs. Breedlove, Claudia and Mrs. MacTeer are striking, but similar. In all these relationships, the mothers’ major function is to give their daughters something to survive with. (153)

*Beloved* (1988) which is the story of slavery intertwined, shows a mysterious mother – daughter relationship. Like *Sula*, this novel revolves around the horrors of a terrible mother who kills her own son. *Sula* explains Eva’s anger as “an anger handed
down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children’s lives, no voices in their upbringing” (Hirsch 1990: 428). Beloved speaks out that anger that remained unspeakable. Marianne Hirsch (1990) states that “the mother-daughter conversations that do occur in Beloved are beyond the grave; if Sethe is to explain her incomprehensible act, she has to do so to a ghost” (428). Beloved’s setting is post-emancipation Ohio and the plot has the central figures Sethe, a former slave woman and her reincarnated dead child Beloved. The slavery as well as the post-slavery period had its worst effect often on crucial cultural institutions of Black motherhood.

Karla C. Holloway (1987) views Beloved as “a history of absence”, as slavery never allows mothers to be nurturers and protectors who seek the well being of children and who aim at a promising “cultural and generational continuity” (169). Thus Beloved can be considered a story of mothers who suffer from the loss of children. Sethe explains to Paul D, how difficult it is to mother her children at Sweet Home without a community of elder women to offer her guidance and support. Sethe acknowledges the role of foremothers in training the daughters in the African American society.

In fact, this novel that portrays the devastating effects of the maternal instincts based on a real life event that happened in the life of Margaret Garner in 1850. Karen Carmean (1993) comments on Morrison’s choice of real life story thus:

…..she (Morrison) actually started writing the story, she meant it to be “about the feeling of self” women express best “through nurturing”. For Morrison, the central question in the case of Margaret Garner’s story was how and why that Nurturing instinct could lead to infanticide. (83-84)

Beloved can also be viewed as the personification of the loss of the motherline in the African American society. A major part of the story covers the relationship
between the mother and the daughter. The novel reflects the harsh reality of being a black mother faced with adverse circumstances.

Sethe is different from other fictional mother characters of Toni Morrison. She kills her own daughter Beloved to save her from the prospect of cruel humiliations. Sethe adopts the act of mercy killing and her aim is to protect her own daughter and her community from the clutches of dehumanizing slavery. Eva’s act of killing her own son emerged from an individual’s pain whereas Sethe’s deed of killing her daughter is the result of collective memory.

Sethe, a formerly enslaved black woman, resists slavery by committing infanticide. This is motherlove shown in a different manner. She is yet another illustration of how the motherline has been cut off by slavery. Sethe’s attitude towards Beloved stems from her own motherless childhood. She too has lost her mother at a tender age. Moreover, Sethe does not have othermothers as women have in West African Societies. She is deprived of the warmth and security of the mother even when she was a new-born babe. Lisa C. Rosen (2003) remarks that “throughout the novel Sethe’s mothering is intertwined with her memories of her own mother, who was separated from her by the crudities of slavery, and with the mothering and memories of her mother-in-law Baby Suggs”. (221)

Sethe’s remembrance of her mother often signifies the ancient motherline that Sethe always longs for. Sethe is often protected by her mother’s guidance. Sethe’s mother is symbolized by a circle and cross branded on her rib. Mori (1999) argues:

Although the circle at first indicates the enslavement and physical burden inflicted upon her body, she reverses the negative representation and uses it as a crucial identification by which daughter will remember her. Although she is executed, Sethe’s mother possesses the potential
fortitude to protect her daughter, repelling the confinement inscribed on her body. (136)

Sethe often requests her mother "Mark me too" which signifies her desire to be connected with her community mother, for mothers represent historical and cultural continuity.

In order to love their daughters, mothers need to be loved as daughters by which alone they can affirm their selfhood. Commenting on the socio-historical depiction of slave motherhood in *Beloved* Schapiro (1991) states that mother is vital in nurturing the child and the system of slavery played a crucial role in either separating mother from the child or in enervating and depleting the mother so that the mother could lose self. By denying the self and subjectivity of the mother the dominant culture makes the mother reproduce the same kind of mothering with out 'self' in the next generation. Moreover no one can expect the child to see either the self or self in the mother when the society denies them the human status. This leads them to remain in the selfless condition for ever. Moreover this is cyclical process. From Sethe's mother the selfless condition is passed on to Sethe and it will be passed on to Beloved and Denver in future. So the white people's treatment of black people at the subhuman level is an intentional act.

According to Morrison, the institution of slavery challenged Black mothering and it denied Sethe and her mothering and it destroyed the naturally expected maternal bonding. In Rigney's (1991) words, the "African Great Mother is muted through slavery" (70). As Demetrakopoulos (1992) states, Morrison examines motherhood in its most denied form where the enslaved mother "reduced to a broodmare". As the "mother cat" eats her babies "as the ultimate act of protection" Sethe kills her daughter
“to die in the cradle [rather] than to live out one’s full life span soul-dead, a zombie/puppet daily treading”. (51-60)

According to Rigney (1991) Sethe’s strong maternal love of Sethe resembles Demeter’s. Her strong maternal love makes Sethe the African Great mother, the ultimate power, who is capable of creating and destroying. Thus she is “Kali as well as Demeter” (69).

Mothering and motherhood were denied during slavery and enslaved black women were viewed only as breeding stock. This is highlighted when the white master steals Sethe’s milk by destroying the bond between mother and child. This highlights, as Christian says, the chaotic space of mother-love and mother pain. This act of stealing milk from Sethe equates Sethe with cow, an animal and it insults the presence of human self in Sethe. But according to Hudson – Weems (1990) the symbolic act of equating Sethe with the cow has got mythical and mystical values of ancient Egypt. Sethe is envisioned as a Hathor, the mother of Sun God who has a human face but the ears and horns of cow. It is also the equivalent of Kamadenu (Refer Appendix III) in Hinduism, the cow Goddess with female face and cow’s body which is meant for nurturance and prosperity. Cow is generally seen as life-giver. Samuel – Hudson and Weems (1990) state the reason thus:

Because of its fecundity, the cow, like the earth, is often mother goddess, nurturer, and provider of food (milk), a life giving source (in Hinduism for example). Thus, by topsy-turvying the traditional negative stereotypes of chattel slavery, Morrison successfully elevates Sethe to the level of goddess through her selection of name alone. (137)
Demetrakopoulos (1992) views Sethe as part of pattern of the Demeter/Persephone dyad which, is the central divine image for Western culture of the pattern that all women must follow and comprehend in all its phases in order to individuate. We all begin as Kore, the daughter, before maturing into the Demeter phase of nurturer. All women, as they leave the first bloom of youth, experience the two sides of Demeter: They age into knowing within both the kindness of Sophia, umbrella mother to species, and the deadly killing anger of Kali. (51)

Thus Sethe highlights the horrors of slavery on Black motherhood and by equating Sethe with Demeter, Kamadenu, Hothar and with the Great African Mother, Morrison projects the ultimate nurturing and procreative power of women.

Apart from Sethe – Denver relationship, Sethe’s mother-in-law Baby Suggs is also a powerful character like Eva of Sula, The’rese’ of Tar Baby and Pilate of Song of Solomon. She is a granny who serves as othermother as well as a community mother. Baby Suggs who has lived “sixty years a slave and ten-year free” (104) is a preacher and a healer for the entire community. She signifies the role of community mother during the post-slavery period. Her interest in creating her own Black community and in healing all inmates of the community showcases the need of the hour. She often says “love your heart” (B 89) and it implies that every black individual has a strong and proud self. Baby Suggs calls her community to move beyond the already existing models of identity that slavery has literally trained into their bodies. Baby Suggs preaches dances and sings with the community. Baby Suggs is a mother of eight children who have “gone away from her. Four taken four chased” (B 4). As she shows
the power of mother's love, she serves to be a great consolation to Sethe and inspires her with her "quiet instructive voice" (B 86)

Baby Suggs, a strong and supportive mother affirms a space of survival and “a spiritual place” to all black women where they get united to drive away any “destructive forces of the world” (Harris 2001: 60). Toni Morrison has made Baby Suggs to be responsible for each one of their well-being in the community, by preaching about God and praying to Him. In this process Baby Suggs could attain maturity in becoming a community as well as a spiritual mother. Tudier Harris puts this fact effectively thus:

From naming herself Baby to founding a religion, Baby Suggs puts into reality what Eva peace only hints at. In the process, she becomes mother/priest, a potential savoir, to a generation of suffering and undirected newly freed black community. (61)

She heals everyone in the community to pass over evil memory of slavery and to understand the purpose of freed life. Even though she missed nursing her own eight biological children because of slavery, she manages to nurture all the black children of her community. Tudier Harris (2001) says that she has the power to transform those around her:

By inspiring the black characters around her to see themselves as new creatures in body and mind, she serves the mother/god role in shaping/nurturing new life. In a transformed usage of power, Baby Suggs assumes the role of encouraging in her black neighbors a strength similar to the kind she has had to rely upon throughout her. (61)
Grewal (1998) views the character of Baby Suggs as the reflection of Jacob’s grandmother who appears in *Incidents of a Slave Girl* who has nine children out of which only one was left alive. Harris (2001) compares Baby Suggs with mothers in the tradition of Ralph Ellison’s Mary Rambo and Gloria Naylor’s Mattie Michael. He says “she (Baby Suggs) becomes the comforter to other ailing souls whether they are children or adult” (59-60).

The comfort Sethe receives from Baby Suggs is remarkable. Lisa C.Rosen (2003) states rightly thus: “Sethe’s mothering is intertwined with her memories of her own mother, who was separated from her by the cruelties of slavery and with the mothering and memories of her mother-in-law”. (221)

There is a reversal of mother – daughter function in the case of Sethe- Denver as it happens in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* where Celie nurses her mother. Denver nurtures Sethe’s soul to deliver Sethe from the clutches of Beloved. Sethe has ensured her physical survival but not nurtured Denver’s soul to attain womanhood. Denver is always aware of the present unlike Sethe who is held up in the past. Demetrakopoulos (1992) views Denver as a Demeter figure as she is the rescuer of her mother.

Thus Morrison has engaged the state of absence of mother, and separation and forceful removal of daughter to constitute the core of *Beloved*. Sethe’s absence of mothering as well as absent mother does not become the hindrance for the survival of motherline. Baby Suggs’s legacy has been continued by Denver through Sethe. Thus Morrison presents an optimistic though painful ending with the survival of motherline.

Having concentrated on the nature and function of mothers and mothering in the
nuclear family and in matriarchal and matrilineal societies in her novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby* and *Sula*, *Beloved* respectively. Toni Morrison shifts her views to the role of strong mothers in a patriarchal family. Morrison questions the state of mothering and motherhood in African American nuclear family life contrary to African extended family life. Whereas she experiments with matrifocal, matrilineal and matriarchal families with strong mothers, she is unable to correlate the mythical, philosophical ideology of mothering with earthy expectation of motherhood. These families are only partially successful as Eva could make her motherline survive through community mothering ability. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison presents two types of mother. One is Ruth and the other is Pilate.

Though Ruth is the biological mother, she does not have it in her to become either an othermother or a community mother. The reason for such inability lies in her upbringing. She is a woman of manners and culture. As she has lost her mother at the young age she has been nurtured by the warmth of her father. She could not understand the real value and responsibility of African American mothering. She has never enjoyed the nurturance – either of biological mother or of community mother – in her life. Hudson and Weems (1990) state the impact of the absence of mothers in Ruth’s life thus:

She [Ruth] has not had the luxury of blossoming with her mother’s milk; her growth is thus artificial, like Pecola’s, who is forced to drink white milk from a cup. Although, she receives love from her father, Ruth appears psychologically damaged and incomplete. (Weems 55)

As Ruth enters into marriage, she has not attained psychological maturity. She does not know how to distinguish the love of father from other kinds of love. She confuses her father’s love and mistakes it for possession. This leads her to be sensitive in mothering
Milkman Dead. It never allows her to have a meaningful personal identity. She always confuses her relationship with any man – father, husband and son – in her life.

Ruth nurses her son in a way that disables Milkman. He is not able to attain his personal identity. She treats Milkman as a doll and feeds him for a longer period of life, which makes Milkman “stretch[ed] his careful boyhood out for thirty-one year” (SS 98). She views her mother as an “insubstantial” (SS 75) character and “too shadowy for love” (ibid). In spite of her selfless love, like Eva, Ruth too cannot get the love of her son. This is due to her inability to view her son as “a separate real person” (SS 75). Hannah of Sula views her daughter as a separate person too early in her life whereas Ruth could not view her son as a separate person even after his thirties. This inability is the reason for her nursing him with breast milk for a longer time. Alladi Uma (1989) states that the act of feeding Milkman for a long period as a deed to derive power thus: “the physical pleasure she derives in nursing him is comparable to the sense of power she has over him, a power resulting from his dependence on her” (55-56). Thus the act of Ruth reflects implicitly her desire for the presence of mother figures to nurse and nurture.

Since Ruth lacks a sense of self, she has very little to give to her son. She can be considered a character of extremes that oscillates between strong love for her son and her inability to attain selfhood. Yet, against all odds, Ruth never becomes insane like Pecola or dies like Sula or Hagar. This is due to the role played by Pilate in her life.

Pilate is the protector of the weak, at the same times she is a terror to the evil doers. She plays the role of healer in the life of Ruth. As Ruth is involved in a loveless relationship with Macon Dead, Pilate helps Ruth to conceive Milkman through her root work. She practices voodoo and helps Ruth beget Milkman. As Mickelson (1979)
observes: “Pilate is protean: protector, sorceress, healer, mediator, mother, soothsayer and many other things. She can be regally tall to shrink to humble proportions” (137). She without and doubt is the daughter of nature for many reasons. She does not have a naval and is motherless even at her birth. She is nurtured by the forest.

Contrary to Ruth, Pilate is rooted in African American culture. Unlike other women, Pilate can not be confined within the circle of gendered life. Unlike Ruth, Pilate is never passive and domestic. She is shown as a free spirit who wanders through the forest. Her ability to reunite Macon Dead and Ruth for the impregnation of Ruth through her voodoo arts and her dressing sense assert her agendered personality.

Pilate’s smooth stomach signifies that she has not been born from human woman and it projects Pilate as Earth, the mother of all. She is associated with nourishment and nature. Her relationship with her ancestor is a mark of the reciprocal affection between the living and the dead in African culture. She draws the strength from the ancestors and she passes on the same strength to Milkman and Ruth as Earth mother figure. She offers nourishment to others in this novel. Though she is motherless she is not an unmothered daughter. She is a product of shared parenthood as she is well nurtured by her devoted father with African cultural properties. She is also nurtured by nature herself and it is highlighted when she is found among trees and loved by her farm animals.

Being a self-resurrected and self-delivered woman without a navel, she appears a mysterious woman to men with whom she has intimate physical relationship. Her protective nature saves Reba from all kinds of violence. When once Reba was harassed by a man, she frightens him and projects herself as a strong Amazon:
Pilate plucked the knife out of the man’s shirt and took her arm away. He lurched a little, looked down at the blood on his clothes and up at Pilate, and licking his lips backed all the way to the side of the house under Pilate’s gaze. Her lips didn’t start moving again until he was out of sight and running down the road. (SS 95)

Like Eva Peace’s family, Pilate’s household also has a number of women. Pilate and her daughter Reba are deeply engrossed in their roles as mothers. Unlike Hannah, Reba has a strong instinct to secure and protect their offspring.

Both Pilate and Reba had to protect Hagar. Only with Hagar, Pilate is sensitive. Unlike Sula, Hagar is an over-protected and pampered child. Pilate understands Hagar’s need of “family, people, a life very different from what she and Reba could offer” (151). As both Pilate and Reba protect her, she has been viewed as the daughter of two women. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos (1987) sees Hagar as “trapped in a Persephone/Kore role that has reduced her to a Baby Bear or Goldilocks slot within her family” (98). If Hagar is made a baby bear by Pilate, Ruth and Milkman derive the benefit of her nurturance and initiation. Pilate becomes a surrogate mother to Milkman.

As Eva passes on the heritage of her motherline to Nel after the death of Sula, Pilate passes on her cultural heritage to her surrogate son Milkman and succeeds in her mother role. Apart from Ruth, Reba, Pilate, and Singing Bird, the mother of Pilate, plays a vital role in conceptualizing the theme of motherhood in Song of Solomon. Unlike in The Bluest Eye and Sula, in Song of Solomon Morrison stresses the need for transgenerational maternal love at spiritual level. Singing Bird, who belongs to the earlier generation, inspires Pilate often and she is symbolized in the form of two birds circling around. Circe, the midwife who has been with Singing Bird is portrayed as a
healer and deliverer. Circe’s role in Milkman’s life is as important as the role of Pilate, as Circe guides him to his grandmother Singing Bird.

Toni Morrison expands her theme of women healing each other through maternal affection and female bonding in her novels *Jazz* and *Paradise*. *Jazz* is “the memory of the lost mothers” (Deborah McDowell 3). The whole novel is bound with everyone’s memory of their lost mothers. The protagonists of the novel Joe Trace, Violet and Dorcas lose their mothers, the causes for loss being insanity, suicide and murder respectively.

Joe Trace’s early life is filled with his search for his mother Wild. Wild, who suffers from insanity, could not recognise her son. He makes three solitary journeys to find his mother. Joe Trace longs to trace his mother back and he wants to be acknowledged and recognised by Wild. As he could not receive the expected maternal love from his mother, his longing for maternal warmth turns to anger. Being a “powerless, invisible, wasteful draft”(J 179) Wild does not understand what goes on in and around her. Even though Wild is the wildest being she is not violent at any point. She has neither nursed nor nurtured Joe. The narrator says thus of the mother-son relationship:

> She was indeed his mother? And even though the confirmation would shame him, it would make him the happiest boy in Virginia....And how he was willing to take that chance of being humiliated and grateful at the same time, because the confirmation would mean both....She wouldn’t even have to say the word “mother”. Nothing like that. All she had to do was give him a sign. (J 36-37)

Through Wild, Morrison presents the wildness of the world during 1920s when African people were oppressed by all possible means like lynching, unemployment, rape and
slave labour. As they could not be liberated from injustice, they come to experience a sort of wildness in them. Thus Wild becomes an archetypal Wild woman. Being the child of nature she lives in a cave which is outside the male domain of law, order and reason. The dwelling place is a symbolic representation of the womb.

One could view the traces of Wild in Violet also. They also physically resemble each other by being dark and skinny. They both have a kind of affection for golden Gray and are silent towards Joe. Their silence disturbs Joe. Dorcas possesses the qualities of Wild as well. Mbalia (1993) comments thus: “just as Joe sees Wild in Violet, so he sees his mother in Dorcas” (123).

On the other hand, Joe Trace’s wife Violet Trace also suffers from the loss of motherly love as she lost to receive adequate maternal love during her childhood. Morrison initiates the opinion that any woman must be a daughter by fulfilling the daughterly duties in order to emerge as good mother (as instructed by Ondine to Jadine). Violet is not properly mothered by Rose Dear and she has not received the maternal warmth during her early childhood as Rose Dear has committed suicide. As she has not received any maternal love and as she has not played the role of daughter well, she could never become a mother. She could not psychologically prepare herself to be a mother. Her effort to reject motherhood is triggered by her desire to find her lost mother. While searching for details about her mother, Violet finds out the painful childhood days of Rose Dear.

Ironically Rose Dear also has failed to relish the maternal love of her mother as True Belle has diverted her love and affection to Golden Gray, the mulatto son of her white mistress. This resembles Pauline of The Bluest Eye who was abandoned Pecola to nurture her master’s children. After having an understanding of the painful childhood
days of Rose Dear, Violet stops blaming her mother for committing suicide. Her longing for maternal love indirectly affects her to be harsh with Dorcas.

Of three losses in the novel, Dorcas’ loss of mother is heavy as it links directly to the socio-political issue. Her parents are victims of the East St. Louis Riots. As there is no one to tell her about her family heritage, Dorcas suffers from lack of self-identity. As she has not received maternal love, she confuses it with all kind of love. This is obvious when she falls in love with Joe who is much older. In this novel Morrison realistically presents the impact of racism on the familial unit as viewed by Denise Heinze (1993):

By totally excising even the semblance of the family in this novel, Morrison exposes to extent to which external conditions have conspired against not just the nuclear/patriarchal structure as an option for the black family but any recognisable familial configuration at all. (98)

Thus Dorcas represents the condition of the loss of family that causes remarkable damage in maternal bonds which result in fragmented society.

Morrison highlights the impact of inter-racial violence on maternal bonds through Vera Louis Gray and True Belle. Until the Civil war there was a dominant ideology about women who were expected to be pious, pure, submissive and docile. The white women of elite planter class were expected to get married through proper alliance and beget children only to those who could inherit the property. White women were considered a community for reproduction within the economic, political and cultural system of slavery. As Vera Louis Gray fails to follow this order, she has been excommunicated by Colonel Wordsworth Gray. Within the slave system the mullato children of the white master/mistress and slave women were accepted as slaves. As a white mistress she inherits twenty-seven year old True Belle as slave to take care of
Golden Gray. This affects the family of True Belle. It deprives Rose Dear of maternal affection which in turn leads to the suffering of Violet, the third generation of True Belle family.

Thus Morrison shows how the maternal loss of one person leads to the suffering of the forthcoming generations as a chain reaction. As a novelist and a maternal theoretician Morrison suggests a remedy through her fictional world in the character of Alice Manfred. Alice Manfred, the aunt of Dorcas, plays a crucial role in this novel as a healer of all those who are psychologically wounded by maternal loss. Alice serves as othermother. Alice, an idealistic woman and widow, rebuilds her own life and as a perfect African American othermother accepts her orphan niece Dorcas without any hesitation.

Alice heals Violet’s split souls. Violet has two “violets” within her body that is textually presented as “Violet” and “that Violet”. Alice stitches the split souls of Violet and this act of healing is metaphorically presented as the act of sewing. Alice has stitched the fragmented self of Violet through a kind of maternal warmth and this act vividly portrays how a woman can mother another woman of almost the same age with a sort of maternal affection. The narrator reveals the healing process thus:

Violet had the same thought: Mama. Mama? .... The silence went on and on until Alice Manfred said, "Give me that coat I can't look at that lining another minute".... It's different from what I thought", She said "Different".... Alice ironed and Violet watched.... she buttoned her coat and left the drugstore and noticed, at the same moment as that Violet did, that it was spring. (J 110-114)
Unlike the healing that takes place in the case of Ceil of *The Women of Brewster Place* where she cries while being healed, Violet laughs throughout the process. The narrator states thus:

In no time laughter was rocking them both. Violet was reminded of True Belle, who entered the single room of their cabin and laughed to beat the band....But what they felt was better. Not beaten, not lost. Better. They laughed too, even Rose Dear shook her head and smiled, and suddenly the world was right side up. Violet learned then when she had forgotten until this moment: that laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears. (J 113)

This maternal healing between Alice and Violet is a reciprocal act. Violet in turn instructs Alice about the need for abolishing the class difference among black women saying that there is no significant and noteworthy class difference among African women.

There is a mutual maternal care between Alice and Violet. Mbaliya says about the maternal thus: “Actually, in nurturing each other – Alice sews Violet’s raggedy clothes; Violet listens and responds to Alice – each becomes a mama for the other” (634). Violet, Alice and Dorcas are in need of mothers. It is evident from the act when each of them says the word “mama”. Among the three, Felice is fortunate enough to be accepted by Violet as a daughter and Felice is also ready to accept Violet as mother. Thus all the women benefit from each other’s companionship.

In this novel, True Belle too plays the role of othermother to Violet. As an African grandmother she takes care of Violet even though she failed to nurture her own
daughter. Rodrigues (1993) also notes perceptively the mother role of True Belle. It is True Belle who rescues the family from despair and introduces Violet to the world of laughter and survival. Like Eva Peace, True Belle also an advising, benevolent, protective and wise Black ancestor. She is a saviour of Violet and she is responsible for Violet’s arrival at Palestine where she meets Joe. Moreover True Belle gives Violet the inner strength and confidence. Through True Belle, Morrison highlights the role of African American grandmothers, which is othermothering in reconstructing the family. Even though she fails as a biological mother in nurturing Rose Dear, she succeeds in performing the othermother role to Violet.

Violet’s experience in her earlier life as a motherless and hungry child makes her not to accept children in her life. But after forty years, she starts mourning for not having children. She expresses her longing to become a mother by staring at children, day-dreaming of her miscarried child who happens to be a girl child with the image of Dorcas; and by holding a doll in her arm while sleeping that symbolically represents her longing for children and her longing to be a mother. After the healing process, Violet tries to fill up the vacuum in her mind with Felice. Violet of course mends the rupture that has prevailed between Felice and her mother.

Paradise highlights the failure not only of individual but also of the community owing to its loss of care and nurturance by mothers. It is a portrayal of a particular community that has lost its value owing to its denial of ancient properties. This novel presents abortions, miscarriages, sickly children, dead babies, maternal neglect, motherlessness, mother-loss and mother-daughter estrangement. Morrison argues in her novels that preservation of culture and ancient properties is one of the strategies to be adopted to resist oppression and a tool to be employed for the
achievement of empowerment. In *Paradise* Morrison presents situations and circumstances where both culture and ancient properties were not accepted by the members of the community. In order to highlight this Morrison narrates the story that happens at the patriarchal community Ruby and the Convent, the matriarchal community of victimised women. Lisa C. Rosen (2003) observes that in *Paradise* the motley group of women at the Convent represent a “matriarchal rejection of the patriarchal ‘Paradise’ of Ruby, Oklahoma”

The town is named after the Ruby who died as no white doctor offered medical treatment to her when she badly needed such treatment. The act of naming the town ‘Ruby’ symbolises the loss of feminine and maternal power. Ironically the Convent has never been a convent but had been an embezzler’s mansion. After the embezzler was imprisoned, the land was leased to a catholic church. The catholic nuns in the church, who were devoted to Indians and the coloured people, established a school for the Native American Girls. After a year, most of the sisters left the Convent but not Mother Mary Agnes and her unofficially adopted daughter Consolata. Later, the Convent becomes a place for victimised women and it has become a threat to the male centred Ruby.

Contrary to African matriarchal culture, Ruby slowly lost its culture and went against it by marginalising women and femininity. None of the town women experiences fulfilment and they do not feel connected to each other through their maternal function. For each woman in the town, motherhood is associated with loss, pain and suffering. Arnette and Soanne, the inhabitants of Ruby, go to Convent for abortion. Consolata decides not to abort them. Arnette is asked to wait for her time to deliver of the baby which ended up as a premature delivery. Thus Consolata considers Magna Mary a mother. As a mother Magna Mary nurtures Consolata and trains her to
adopt patience and accept the generosity of God. All the training she receives from Magna Mary helps her in fulfilling the role of a healer. She remains a spiritual mother characterised by wisdom and profound love due to her healing power. She resembles Miranda Day of *Mama Day*. Like Eva of *Sula* and Baby Suggs of *Beloved*, she contributes to need of the society. Consolata assumes the charge of the convent after the Mother Superior passes away.

Mavis, Seneca and Pallas are in Convent and the reason for their arrival at Convent is the maternal failure. All these three women are mothers and they too play crucial roles in their daughter's lives either positively or negatively.

Mavis arrives at Convent due to the death of her newborn twins Merle and Pearl. The media as well as her husband view Mavis's "negligence" (P 22) as the root cause for the death of the twins as she has left the "newborns in the car and went into buy...Weenies" (P 23). Owing to the heat inside the car and lack of aeration, the babies die. Their death haunts Mavis. As she wants to escape from a sense of guilt and her husband's, Mavis gets out of family. Before she lands up at Convent, she visits her mother Birdie who instructs her about the importance of protecting Mavis's other children. Birdie teaches her the importance of mothers in the life of children thus: "You still have children, children need a mother. I know what you've been through honey, but you do have other children" (P 31).

Unlike in *Beloved*, the dead twins in *Paradise*, haunt Mavis in the form of her other living children. She often says: "I'm saying they are going to kill me" (P 31). After listening to her, Birdie tries to persuade her not to think in an "unusual" manner (P 32). After a week Mavis leaves her mother's place without knowing her destination. On her way her car breaks down and she is in need of help. Morrison presents Mavis's state of mind thus:
Like the girls running from, running toward. If they could roam around, jump in cars, hitchhike to burials, search strange neighbourhoods for food, make their own way alone or with each other for protection, certainly she could wait in darkness for morning to come. She had done it all her adult life, was able to sleep best in daylight. Besides and after all, she was not a teenager; she was a twenty-seven-year old mother. (P 36)

Her quest for protection is readily available at Convent and she accepts Consolata as mother figure.

The novel also presents the story of Seneca, the daughter of Jean abandoned at the age of five. After Jean leaves her daughter, Seneca has been brought up at foster homes where she is well-approved as she never hesitates to accept life as it comes to her at foster homes. Seneca has been well looked after by her adopted mothers in both the foster homes. Her story leads to another story of maternal loss. This aspect of maternal loss happens in life of Mrs. Turtle, the mother of Seneca’s boy friend Eddie. Eddie has been imprisoned and Mrs. Turtle refuses to help Seneca financially to get him out of prison. Later Seneca hears the “flat-out helpless mother cry” (P 134) of Mrs. Turtle. As Seneca, could not get Eddie out of prison, on her own she takes refugee at Convent. The third inmate of Convent, Pallas arrives at Convent as a consequence of her mother’s illicit love affair with Palla’s boyfriend Carlos. Pallas, a sixteen year old girl, leaves with her boy friend Carlos to visit her mother. Unexpectedly her mother Dee Dee and Carlos develop a relationship which leads to Palla’s estrangement from Dee Dee. As a result Palla arrives at Convent.
Thus, the lives of the inmates of the Convent show a common core – the wounds of maternal failure and absence of maternal nurturance. Convent offers them a haven where they are healed by Consolata who is a woman of great of spiritual inner power. She performs the role of Baby Suggs of *Beloved*. Consolata teaches the women to heal themselves by painting images of themselves, their pasts and their fears about the haunting past to exorcise the pains of the wound. She says: “I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for” (P 262). She emerges as community mother by taking care of other abandoned women. As a spiritual mother she heals the inmates of the convent. Finally they are cleansed spiritually by getting drenched in “scented rainfall” (P 282) which arouses them from sleep by its aroma. “It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces”. Amidst of this healing process Pallas delivers a delicate son.

As a mark of celebration of rebirth all these women of Convent – Consolata, Mavis, Seneca, Grace and Pallas – dance furiously. Consolata as a priestess guides these women into the healing ritual. The new life is symbolized by the birth of son of Pallas as the birth of George in Naylor’s *Bailey’s Café*.

Thus, through the portrayal of the lives of wounded women and the strength of community of women, Morrison presents a story of maternal loss and its impact on women’s life. Unlike her earlier novels *Paradise* highlights atrocities and violence on the survival of motherline.

Motherhood thus is a cultural practice necessary for preserving one’s history. It is also important for the survival and wellbeing of children of the whole race. Toni Morrison tries to present mothering as an essential relationship not simply between
mother and child but between mother and the community of children. By presenting the archetypal roles of mothers as protector, nurturer and trainer of children, she demolishes the definition of mother and motherhood as a mere biological phenomenon. Mothering has an intergenerational historical impact on children. Mothers, apart from their function as protector, nurturers and trainer, also function as the historians by orally passing on the history of the race through generations. They are the keepers of history and culture in the novels of Toni Morrison.