CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Mothers are considered to be phenomenal beings as they take part in the creative activity and mothering is an activity of infinite variety. Stories of mothers and mothering are the most repeated tales in the history of human beings and they endlessly appear in the socio-cultural history of the universe. Mothering is a recurrent activity and a never ending process. Concepts of mothering and motherhood practices have undergone many permutations. Mothering is no more a personal affair but a political activity. From being considered a natural instinct, mothering has come to be a systematic happening. The last two decades of the twentieth century can be viewed as an era of motherhood studies. The studies on mothering and motherhood theories have obtained new heights with the functioning of an exclusive association for the research on mothering and motherhood studies (The Association for Research on Mothering) and an exclusive research journal for studies on mothering.

Mothering is the most paradoxical issue at the centre of all societies. Without mother/mothering – from its biological function to its regulating activity – no one can exist in the world. Despite the permanent focus it has obtained through the ages, mothers/mothering can not be unduly glorified as an ever sacrificing, never changing, and ever ready activity or be reduced to the level of a mere breeding activity. The glorification or the reductive attitude turns mothering into an institution perpetuated by the patriarchal clan by keeping reproductive power under the control of male power. The most natural and powerful activity of women has become the most disempowering social role for many women. Mothering oscillates between power and powerlessness. Thus as discussed in the introductory chapter the unique biological capacity of a woman has become an automatic power engine to enslave women.
As the mothering activity differs from individual to individual and culture to culture, it creates the possibility for a multidimensional approach. The study of mothering and motherhood ideologies highlights the voice for/of the once silenced. Among motherhood theories and literature produced by various racial/ethnic groups like Mexican American, Asian American, Indian and Native American, the African American literature and theories are acknowledged for their richness.

African American women are capable of framing strategies for wading through their adverse situations. They are active strategists and they are thoroughly brilliant in assessing the possibility and devising the means to realise and achieve their goals in life. Most of them are not passive acceptors of their adverse situation but active revoltors when they encounter with determination with adverse situations and multiple exploitations. They devise strategies of resistance to transmit power. They employ these strategies in their creative works and theoretical manifestos. For African American writers, biology plays a minor role in mothering, as they consider mothering/motherhood as a socially, culturally, historically, and individually constructed activity. In their works mothers/mothering are never romanticised as self-sacrificing and ever forgiving life givers. By giving new role models they create prototypes which can easily subvert western notion that mothering itself is reproduced.

African American women break the construction of motherhood on the binary opposition between public/private domains. Mothering in western culture has been defined in terms of binary opposition between male/female, mind/body, nature/culture, reason/emotion, public/private, labour/love dichotomies. Nevertheless the African American culture defined mothering based on the polarity of experiences.

The present study on the African American definition of mothers/mothering/motherhood the novels of eminent African American Women
writers – Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker – unfolds that these chosen writers present a kaleidoscopic perspective on motherhood.

The chosen writers present the three types of mothers – biological, other and community mothers. They never confine these mothers to performing only one role. The determining borders of these categories of mothering are more fluid and flexible than fixed and static.

Gloria Naylor gives more importance to community mothers and the motherline. Toni Morrison focuses on the significance of othermothers and community mothers. Alice Walker concentrates more on the need for foremothers, ancestors and spiritual communication with ancestors.

The African American women writers offer a different view of mothers/mothering by stimulating new consciousness regarding mothering/motherhood. All these successful mothers follow a set of strategies – educating, nurturing, warning, instructing, and healing – in order to bring up their children successfully. Some of them are abusive, destructive and even manipulative. African American mothers are expected to understand the need to nurture their children with a view to make them understand the strategy to resist racism and sexism. Mothers are expected to nurture self-love and self-esteem which will definitely guard their children from racist and sexist exploitation and will also make them efficient enough to survive within the racist and sexist world by the means of resistance.

Among the mothers, Ceil, Mrs. Browne, Cora Lee, Fannie, Willa, Keishe, Sadie’s mother, Mariam, Pauline, Reba, MacTeer, Geraldine, Margaret Street, Hannah, Helene, Rochelle, Sethe, True Belle, Baby Suggs, Rose Dear, Mavis, Pallas, Dee Dee, Wild, Mem, Margaret Copeland, Celie’s mother, Celie, Shug Avery, Olivia, Zede, Tashi, Harriet, Eva Peace, Pilate, Lily Paul’s mother, Catherine, Settle, Mrs. Hill, and
Meridian are biological mothers. Among these mothers only six are successful. This is because the African American ideology of motherhood expects more qualities to attain the status of successful biological mothers. They are expected to fulfil certain tasks like:

- Looking after the physical survival of the children
- Making the children socially acceptable
- Accepting the ancient cultural properties and values
- Preparing the children to face the racially biased world, and
- Recording the slave history in America.

Among these mothers, Ceil in *The Women of Brewster Place* fails to protect and ensure the survival of her child Serene. Reba of *Song of Solomon* too could not nurture Hagar to cope with her one-sided love affair with Milkman which results in the loss of her life. Sethe's horrific maternal love chases away her boys. Mavis, like Ceil, could not protect her children Merle and Pearl. Pauline's unconcerned and indifferent maternal love affects Pecola at multiple levels and finally it becomes a threat to the life of Pecola. True Bell could not train her daughter Rose Dear to survive and lack of training leads Rose Dear to commit suicide. Willa could not protect her son and make him survive the patriarchal domination of the Nedeed men. Ceil, Willa, Pauline, Reba, Sethe, True Belle, and Mavis fail to ensure even the physical survival of their children. Catherine in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* could not prevent her daughters Dura and Tashi from the painful practice of genital mutilation. Sadie's mother in *Bailey's Café* could not allow Sadie to be socially acceptable as she makes Sadie indulge in prostitution. Hannah does not inculcate any value in Sula and she fails to be a good role model to her daughter.
Cora Lee gives birth to children without knowing what mothering is. Geraldine does not train her son to be ready to imbibe the cultural values. Eva Peace, the most prominent/controversial mother figure in *Sula*, does not nurture her daughter Hannah and fails to make her realise the importance and significance of motherline. True Belle could not train her daughter Rose Dear how to meet the financial crisis [economic sustenance] and the importance of the presence of mothers in the life of the daughters [cultural sustenance]. Pauline has not educated her daughter Pecola the strategies to safeguard herself from the inter-racial and intra-racial sexist oppression. Celie’s mother never tries to protect her daughter from the physical abuse of her step-father. Lily Paul’s mother could not prevent childbirth as she does not know anything about the contraceptive methods. This kind of unawareness also results in bad mothering. Mothering is low in the priority of Meridian as she leaves her biological son in order to pursue higher education. Tashi fails to give Bentu Morgan good health condition as she has been affected by circumcision. The reasons for the failure of above mentioned biological mothers are:

- Economical instability and unemployment problem of Black men (Ceil)
- Impacts of sharecropping (Elvira, Margaret Copeland)
- Inadequate knowledge of mothering (Cora Lee)
- Cultural and intra-racial patriarchal oppression (Tashi, Willa)
- Acceptance of Black mammy images (Pauline, True Belle)
- Assimilation of white American culture (Pauline, Geraldine)
- Failure to understand the need for motherline (Hannah)
- Socio-political evils of slavery (Sethe, Baby Suggs, True Belle)
- Absence of cohesive family structure and irresponsibility of black men (Ceil, Rose Dear, Mattie, Margaret Copeland)
• Disloyalty to daughters (Dee Dee)
• Psychological imbalance (Wild, Celie’s mother)
• Evil impacts of circumcision (Tashi), and
• Inadequate knowledge and absence of freedom to choose or reject childbearing (Lily Paul’s mother, Meridian)

Among the biological mothers Mrs. Browne, Fannie, MacTeer, Helene, Mem, and Harriet are successful biological mothers as they always aim at protecting the children by adopting certain strategies. Among them Mrs. Browne of *The Women of Brewster Place* is the most successful biological mother as she trains and allows her daughter to think independently and accept a new life style while at the same time retaining the African cultural values. She is also a strong disciplinarian. In spite of her inability to assist Mattie during her adverse situation, Fannie, the mother of Mattie safe guards Mattie from the physical violence of her father. MacTeer, within her African American nuclear family, could educate her children regarding their survival skills. Helene, the single mother, could nurture Nel with the survival skills. Helene does not fit in motherline blindly by accepting the life style of her mother Rochelle who happens to be a Prostitute. Helene’s commitment to mothering enables her to make her daughter Nel to be socially acceptable. On the other hand, Rochelle unlike Sadie’s mother never allows Helene indulge in prostitution. Mem, is a good role model to most of the young African American mothers, who with the help of her educational status, supports her family financially, protects her children from her husband and trains them to be the members of racially biased society. She nurtures her daughter Ruth amidst the hostile phase of her husband’s brutal behaviour and economic instability at home. The success of her mothering lies in Ruth’s successful life. Harriet is the only militant mother in the novels chosen for analysis. Amidst her revolutionary and unsafe life she could manage
her daughter Anne Nzingha. Her success lies in Anne’s determination to preserve her African roots and mother goddess cult. Anne Nzingha inherits such determination only through her parents, especially from her mother.

In the chosen novels, Abigail Day, Jessie, True Bells, Pilate, Ondine, Alice, Violet, Nettie, Eva Turner, and Mama Day serve as othermothers. Among them Jessie, Ondine and Alice fail in their role as othermothers. Jessie, who has been forced into prostitution, could succeed neither as a biological mother to Lorene nor as othermother to Mem. Ondine is the othermother who fails miserably to educate her niece and to persuade her to accept African cultural values. Her assimilation of the white cultural values of her master makes her fail in her role. Unlike Josie, Ondine understands the responsibility of being the othermother to Jadine but her realisation comes too late to correct Jadine. Like Ondine, Alice too plays the role of the othermother to Dorcas but she fails to protect Dorcas from death. The reasons for the failure of these othermothers are:

- Assimilation of White American culture
- Structure of the family (African Americans prefer African extended family set up to Euro American model of nuclear family), and
- Financial Crisis

It is interesting to note that Abigail Day, Nettie, and Eva Turner are successful othermothers. Abigail Day succeeds in educating Ophelia Day to fit into the motherline of Willow Springs. Eva Turner is a significant case because she is able to transform herself from biological mother to othermother and then to community mother. There is an evolution in her motherhood practice. Nettie nurses her sister Celie’s children Adam and Olivia and makes them socially acceptable by turning them into good scholars. The
positive output of Nettie’s mothering is seen in the status of Olivia and Adam as presented in The Temple of My Familiar and Possessing the Secret of Joy.

Eve, Mama Day, Mattie, The’rese’, Consolata, Lily Paul, Eva Turner, Eva Peace, Baby Suggs, Meridian and Tashi are the community mothers. The role of these community mothers fall under two categories. They are:

- A set of mothers who appear as community mothers and perform their prescribed tasks (Mama Day, Eve, Theresa’ and Consolata and Lily Paul), and
- Another set of mothers – Evolutionary mothers – who begin their mother roles as biological mothers and later they transform into community mothers (Mattie, Eva Peace, Baby Suggs, Meridian, Tashi)

Eve, The’rese’, Consolata, and Mama Day are community mothers who have crossed their child bearing age but still shower maternal affection and accept all deserved individuals as their children irrespective of distinction based on gender, race and age. Eve of Bailey’s Café offers home to all single women and she constructs her own community. The’rese’’s role in Tar Baby is a typical example that highlights the expected role of community mothers in young African American women’s life.

Despite the fact that Jadine has not accepted the advice of The’rese’, she symbolises the role of a good community mother when she accepts the African values and African driven conception of self and community. Consolata and Lily Paul play parallel roles in creating a community of victimised women. They bring together all those who have been disconnected from their motherline. They create a separate society and motherline to safeguard the women from all kinds of social evils. Mama Day’s role in her family, community and in her island is remarkable. She safeguards not only her grandniece but also the entire island.
The second set of mothers includes Celie, Baby Suggs, Eva Peace, Meridian, Mattie, and Tashi. These mothers fail in their role as biological mothers owing to various reasons like slavery (Baby Suggs), socio-political evils such as war (Eva Peace), conflict in choosing between maternity and self fulfilment (Meridian), and patriarchal oppression in the name of religion (Tashi) and acceptance of sensitive mothering style.

Eva Peace who has been sensitive in meeting the needs of her biological children turns to be a successful community mother as she protests three children who are not her own and who belong to different races. Baby Suggs could not mother anyone of her own children but succeeds in bringing together the community people, heals their psychological ailment caused by slavery and teaches them the life skills essential to lead a normal life. Tashi is quite different from all community mothers as she kills M'Lissa, the active performer of circumcision. By killing M'Lissa, Tashi liberates the whole community from circumcision. She thus emerges as a community mother.

Among these mothers, Eva Turner, Celie, and Mattie gradually transform from one kind of motherhood to another gradually. Mattie, Eva Turner and Celie perform all kinds of mother roles. Among them, Mattie and Eva Turner complement each other by shifting from one role to another. Eva Turner who has been functioning as othermother emerges as a community mother by accepting Mattie within her household. Mattie, on the other hand, who has been a biological mother to Basil – after the arrival at Eva’s home – turns out to be the othermother to Celie. Subsequently, she could accept all the victimised women including Celie at Brewster Place and succeed as a community mother. Unlike these two characters Celie begins her life as othermothers to her own brothers and sister and becomes a biological mother as a result of her having been
raped by her stepfather. Towards the end of the novel, Ceile constructs her own community. The reason that may be cited as factors for the success of the community mothers are:

- Acceptance of African cultural values
- Inspiration from their African Roots
- Capability to perform more than one role
- Universal acceptance (of all children as their own irrespective of race, class and gender), and
- Strong belief in motherline and female bonding.

Bell Hooks’ ideology of shared parenting is also found in the three novelists. Gloria Naylor in her *The Women of Brewster Place* highlights Samuel Michael as a responsible father who is very much bothered about the life of his daughter Mattie. His responsible nature makes Mattie feel ashamed of her premarital relationship with Butch Fuller. Naylor repeats the same tale in her *The Men of Brewster Place* where Basil shows his responsibility in nurturing his sons. Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon* presents the idea of shared parenting in nurturing the children with cultural values. It is well showcased in the role played by Pilate. As she loses her mother even before birth, she is nurtured by her father. Among the chosen writers Alice Walker takes more care in presenting the concept of shared parenting. Alice Walker delineates the role of paternal responsibility in bringing up children. Mr. Hill is the case in point. He nurtures Meridian to be socially conscious. Moreover, he connects Meridian with her paternal grandmother. The same theme is repeated in *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* through the character Robinson.

Any mother is bound to be sensitive to the needs of the child. She must be available to meet the demands of the child. This kind of attitude leads her to coddle the
child. Sensitive mothering ideology at times interferes in regulating the children. For African Americans mothering is an ideology that is determined by the needs of the culture. Thus, they do not appreciate sensitive mothering to empower the children. Among the novels chosen for the study, there are only six characters who are highly sensitive in meeting the need of children. But their sensitive nature leads their children only towards destruction. Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye* is hyper-sensitive to her son’s need but fails to instruct her son about funkiness. Like Geraldine, Ruth in *Song of Solomon* is more interested in pampering her son Milkman thus not allowing him to grow on his own. Even though Pilate succeeds in connecting Milkman to his ancestors, she fails to nurture Hagar. Reba also could not cultivate strong sense of will power in Hagar. She dies towards the end of the novel due to the lack of will power. Mattie tops the list of sensitive mothers in the chosen novels as she pampers Basil and makes him not to be socially acceptable. He goes to the extend of man slaughtering. Thus African American ideology of mothering never encourages sensitive mothering as it leads towards destruction.

Through their mothering potentiality the mother characters emerge as guardians of their past as well as the future generation. With their unique mothering ability, black mothers acquire high status within the Black community whereas in American society, their mothering was subordinated to patriarchy which degraded women into mere sexual beings. As a contrast, African American mothers use their mothering abilities to develop new models for social transformation. They treat mothering as a cultural and collective effort rather than the work of a single person. Through their mothering abilities, African American mothers make their daughters understand their place and role in the society. So the African American daughters seek identity from their mothers and get connected with their mothers because of the cultural centrality and significance
of mothering. This phenomenon of getting connected with their mothers and fitting into the motherline enables the daughters to empower themselves. They intend to mother the mind of the children. (Collins: 1991)

The primary aim of these three writers is to subvert the racist discourses that naturalise race inferiority and project blackness as other and mere ‘object’. Their primary aim is to identify and challenge racist practices. It is only at home the children learn about their heritage and community. So mothers, who are expected to function at home, teach their children the survival skills within the system that oppresses them but not at the cost of losing their cultural values. Thus it urges the younger African American women to reject the western models including the New Woman ideology. At the same time, the African American mothers never hesitate to accept the new lifestyle pattern. They accept modern lifestyle by remodelling them based on the mythical, ancient and cultural values. They never suffer from the dilemma of choosing between profession and maternity. Instead, they accept any kind of profession as they are the bread winners in most of their families. Most of the families in the chosen novels are woman-headed families. They keep their ancestral memory as a part of their cultural strength. They use storytelling, songs and soliloquies to imprint cultural ingredient as well as strength and courage in the mind of the children. They instil in the children the knowledge about their past and ancestors in order to enable them to reject and stand against the controlling image put forward by the dominant culture.

Besides the mothers and mothering discussed above, there is also the case of two mothers nurturing a single child. In Gloria Naylor’s Mama Day, Abigail Day and Mama Day together bring up Ophelia Day. Abigail Day teaches Ophelia Day the significance of being and becoming a mother. Mama Day enables her to fit into the motherline created by their ancestral mother Sapphira Wade. In Toni Morrison’s Song
of Solomon Pilate and Reba together bring up Hagar. Unlike Ophelia Day, Hagar could not imbibe the cultural values in spite of the presence of the Demeter-like mother figure Pilate. Hagar needs, as she herself says, more mothers in her life to identify the best role model. Hagar’s voice can be taken as the voice of all African American young women. In Alice Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* Celie and Shug Avery together bring up Fanny. Fanny never suffers due to the unconcerned nature of her biological mother Olivia, who is more interested in the academic world than in maternal tasks. Owing to the presence of the strong grandmother figures – Celie and Shug Avery – Fanny’s childhood days have been the most pleasurable period in her life.

There is also yet another category of mothering where the mother – daughter roles are more slippery and reversible. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* Sethe’s daughter Denver nurses Sethe with maternal care. There is a reversal mother-daughter role in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* where Celie nurses her own mother who has been affected psychologically because of the death of her husband. Above and beyond, Celie nurses and protects her brothers and sister, Nettie, as a mother. In turn Nettie protects and nurtures Celie’s children as othermother. Thus these two examples illustrate how the determining border of mothering is more flexible in African American families.

Contrary to the protecting, nurturing, training and healing maternal love, there is also portrayal of horrific maternal love. There are five mothers who apparently indulge in killing. They are:

- Sethe
- Eva Peace
- Tashi
- Willa Neeed, and
- Margaret Copeland
While it might be argued that the mother-act of killing the offspring is legally wrong, such killing act might be justified as acts of just kindness since the aim behind such acts is not to commit murders, but to save the killed from lifelong suffering racially and socially. Such killing may be seen as attempts at liberating the potential victims from a demeaning prospect in life.

Sethe’s act of infanticide can not be considered murder as she liberates Beloved from the treachery of slavery. Eva Peace’s act of killing Plum is only to liberate him from slow death caused by drug addiction. In these two cases mothers perform the unacceptable role of destroyer of life rather than of creators. Tashi, a victim of circumcision is also an unusual and unique fictional mother. In order to liberate the entire community of girl children/women from the cruel practice of circumcision, Tashi kills M’Lissa, the tsunga of the African Patriarchal community. This act can be taken as a pure maternal act as she loves all the children of the community as her own.

In Alice Walker’s *The Third Life Margaret Copeland* Margaret commits suicide along with her bastard son Star. Killing Star can not be taken as an act of murder as it essentially saves him from unwanted suffering in the future.

Mothering becomes problematic when mothers commit suicide. Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* which is known for its glorification of mothering and motherhood, unfolds also the story of a mother who commits suicide. Miranda Day’s mother commits suicide so as to escape from her husband’s disloyalty. Fortunately the cultural values, motherline and conjuring power guard Mama Day and enable her to mother her siblings as well as the community. Toni Morrison presents Rose Dear as a mother who commits suicide as she is unable to bear the financial crisis that prevails in the family. Alice Walker also presents the story of a mother who commits suicide in her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. In this novel, Margaret commits suicide along with her
bastard son Star in order to escape from the Grange Copeland’s irresponsible nature, her sense of guilt and of the burden of financial crisis caused by share cropping system. Her death results in, her son Brownfield’s growing up in a socially unacceptable fashion; and Brownfield who is irresponsible, murders his wife Mem. Thus, the death by suicide of the mothers leads to a chain of undesirable consequences.

In the chosen novels ancestors play crucial roles. In *Mama Day*, Gloria Naylor creates Sapphira Wade, a conjure woman who creates the human race. In *Song of Solomon* the protagonist’s quest revolves around his ancestral roots. Even though the text concludes with the identification of patriarchal ancestors, the novelist does not fail to create strong maternal ancestors like Singing Bird. Alice Walker in her *Meridian* focuses on the importance of maternal as well as the paternal ancestors. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker relates the life of protagonist with her various incarnations during her earlier births. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Alice Walker does not fail to narrate the role of Corrine’s ancestors’ roles in creating Cherokee alphabets. The novelist brings in the ancestors to highlight the richness of African heritage and to ascertain the significance of motherline.

African American Women suffer as ‘other’ due to the Controlling images like Black Mammy, Black Matriarch, the welfare mother and Jezebel. The chosen African American writers through their maternal narrative challenge, redefine and subvert controlling image. These derogatory stereotypes never allow the non African American creative writers to present a positive image of the Black women. So the African American women writers subvert the already established stereotypes and negative notions about black women. These stereotypes serve as an interlocking system of race, gender and class oppression. The Black Mammy figure is described as the faithful and obedient servant. She is expected to be a loving, nurturing, and caring woman who
must take care of her white master’s family better than her own. She is a person who is well loved by her masters’ children but at the same time she can not replace their mothers. This image defines the black women as passive takers of subordinate roles. It is one of the crucial stereotypes created by the white and it prescribes behavioural norms to black women as mothers. Through this mammy image, the white world aims at encouraging Black women to transmit the same kind of subordinate role to their girl children. Through this act, they aim at making black children to internalise the mammy image for them to become mammies in future. Through this strategy, the white world aims at training the Black women and children to serve them for generations together.

African American women writers redefine the mammy figures through their work. They portray Black mammy image in a way to instruct the Black women not to accept the prescribed image of Black mammy and to threaten the white world by giving a new colour to the mammy image as most cunning and as prone to poison her master. This brand of mammy image is portrayed by Gloria Naylor. She presents Sapphira Wade who must, according to the white parameters, be an obedient servant in Bascombe Wade’s family. But she poisons her master Bascombe Wade to set the island free for her own people. In Toni Morrison’s works the Black mammy figures instruct Black women not to accept the prescribed role by white world. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline remains obedient and acquires power and in her master’s family at the cost of sacrificing her own children and family. The same kind of image is recreated in *Tar Baby* where Ondine, a black mammy, succeeds in neither becoming a biological mother nor in fulfilling her role of othermother. Moreover, she could not become a successful black mammy as Michael, the son of her master, flees home. In *Jazz* Toni Morrison once again retells the same tale through True Belle, a black mammy who fulfils her ‘duty’ at the cost of her family and daughter. Through such representations,
she wants Black women not to accept the Black mammy image. Alice Walker presents the white world's need for Black Mammy through Sofia. As Sofia refuses to accept the role of Black Mammy she is imprisoned. Not submissive and soft Sofia is a shrewd and strong woman who challenges white expectations of the black. Thus all the chosen writers aim at redefining the role of black mammy in their works.

As a contrast to 'good' black Mammy image, the Black matriarchs symbolise 'bad' black mothers. According to the white world, black matriarchs fail to fulfil the prescribed 'womanly' duties. They are responsible for children's failure to be educated. They are usually presented as aggressive and unfeminine women. The Euro-American patriarchy views Black matriarch as failed Black mammies and they affix a negative stigma on them as they violate the imposed role of being submissive and hardworking servants.

It is interesting to note that African American women writers especially the chosen women novelists, subvert the image of Black matriarchs. In all her novels Gloria Naylor highlights the role of matriarchs in reconstructing the black community and society. Her fictional matriarchs Mattie, Mama Day, Eve, Eva Turner, and Mrs. Tilson are the matriarchs who are soft-natured in approaching and handling the need of children. They are shown as more than the protectors, nurturers and healers. Mattie is a soft-natured woman who reconstructs the whole women community in Brewster Place. She is the healer of Ceil. Miranda's roles in nurturing Ophelia Day and her well accepted status in Willow Springs are remarkable. Mrs. Tilson is a courageous but not an aggressive woman and she challenges the dominance of patriarchs in Linden Hills. Eve, who is shown as a more uncaring woman, is the real protector of all victimised single women. All these writers succeed in presenting these matriarchs as stronger and more responsible black mothers who are interested in reconstructing the shattered
family structure of the Black community. They are also invested with the responsibility of uncovering the motherline for the young ones.

The impact of the absence and presence of matriarchs in the family and community has been dealt within the novels of Toni Morrison. The Bluest Eye showcases the negative impact of absence of matriarchs whereas Sula highlights the importance of matriarchs through Eva Peace. The roles of Baby Suggs, True Belle and Consolata are highly remarkable for their contribution to the reconstruction and restructuring of the family and the community. Alice Walker highlights the evolution of Black matriarchs through Celie in The Color Purple. She also comments on the role of African patriarchal set up in her Possessing the secret of Joy.

The third controlling image is the wet mother concept which portrays Black women as breeding animals and the children born as further labour force to be owned. They are also presented as mothers who never work but enjoy all the benefits of the state including unemployment compensation. White people label the welfare mothers as ‘bad’ like the matriarchs. In all the chosen novels no single mother sits around and collects welfare. Contrarily they earn livelihood through their hard work. Mattie in The Women of Brewster Place and Eva Peace in Sula are known for their hard work.

The fourth controlling image as presented by the white world is Jezebel image which presents Black women as whores and sexually aggressive women. To subvert this image, Toni Morrison has created Rochelle in Sula who is a prostitute by profession but she never encourages her daughter Helene to be in that profession. Alice Walker through Josie in The Third Life of Grange Copeland showcases the ill-fate of teen age mothers and of those who involve in prostitution.
Thus Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker subvert the controlling images. Through their remodelled version of these controlling images they present more prototypes of black mothers. They are:

- Hard working mothers who can reconstruct family and community
- Multitask mothering (fulfilling more than the biological role)
- Conjurers
- Community mothering who transcend their biological roles, and
- Mutual mothering through female bonding.

These prototypes are derived from the Hellenistic and the Christian mythological mothers. All the chosen writers use the Persephone/Demeter myth in their novels while describing mothers and mothering. In Gloria Naylor’s works, Eve possesses the qualities of Persephone, Madonna and Mawu. Naylor brings in the image of Kamadenu, the cow Goddess image, through Mattie. *Mama Day* uses Isis who is the protector of fertility. Her fictional community mother Eve represents Persephone – the creator and protector and Mawu the mud mother. Mattie represents Kamadenu, the nurturer.

Toni Morrison recreates the mythological Madonna, the creator and protector through Eva Peace who goes to the extent of getting her leg amputated for the sake of the physical survival of her children. Pilate and Sethe represent the Persephone image. Sethe represents the Kamadenu archetype as well as the Persephone image. Alice Walker narrates the importance of the female procreative energy through the use of the “yoni” symbol through the fictional community mother Lily Paul. Lily Paul also represents the Persephone archetype. Alice Walker recreates the god Legba through Shug Avery. Alice Walker is also interested in reviving the mother goddess cult. So she
vividly narrates the importance of Isis and Medusa goddess cult in African nations through Anne Nzingha.

Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker pay equal importance to the destroyer image. Apart from presenting mothers as creators these writers experiment with the possibility of projecting them as destroyers. The reason for projecting the mothers as destroyers is to highlight the courage of Black women who could do anything for the betterment of the children. According to them mothers could take any kind of incarnation to destroy evil in the society. Gloria Naylor’s fictional mother Willa who is expected to be a creator in the patriarchal society turns to be the destroyer of the same patriarchal clan of Nedeed. She represents the Durga/Kali image. Toni Morrison’s Eva Peace and Sethe also represent the Kali image as they kill their own children for the benefit of the children. Alice Walker’s Tashi, who murders M’Lissa in order to relieve the entire community of girl children from the painful cultural practice of circumcision, represents the Kali image.

Thus Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker give importance to mothers and mothering. Nevertheless they never absolutely glorify the role of mothers and mothering in their fictional works. Rather they accept mother as a systematic performer who moulds the children and the society. They accept mothers as social activists and mothering as a social activism in order to effect social transformation in the African American society. They recreate archetypal mother figures in order to present mothers and mothering as agents of social transformation and empowerment.