CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The novels of Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker – the African American women writers – have been taken up for study in order to find out how mothers and the mothering activity have been represented in them. In order to examine the conceptualised representations of mothers and mothering in the chosen fictional works of these authors, it is necessary to begin with a brief introduction to the concept of mothering, a working definition of mothers and mothering, the politics of mothering and major theories on motherhood. Hence, the introductory chapter of this thesis is divided into three sections. The first section briefly discusses how the study of mothers and mothering is a discipline by itself, and how the concept of mothering has been viewed and treated by various schools of feminism. The second section is a brief introduction to the socio-cultural life of black women in America and it also highlights the basic differences between Anglo-American and the African American ideologies of mothering. It examines the theories with a view to adopting them as a framework for the study of the novels of chosen authors. The third section of the chapter consists of a brief review of relevant literature, hypothesis, the major methodology, and a description of the chapter division adopted.

The term 'mother' can be defined as a woman who gives birth to child or children and protects her offspring with care. In a broader, non-biological sense, a person who shows her/his caring attitude towards another can also be considered a mother. Sara Ruddick (1989), the American motherhood academician, defines the
term mother as “a person who takes on responsibility for children’s lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life” (40).

In order to define the terms “mothering” and “motherhood”, the act of mothering must be analysed and assessed. In the act of mothering, a woman’s biological capacity to conceive, gestate, deliver and lactate can not be considered the sole criterion because mothering meets more than the biological needs.

Mothering is a primary medium through which everyone first forms one’s own identity and identifies one’s position and status in the society. Hence, mothering emerges to be a significant phenomenon as it engages with demanding activities of child rearing and nurturance.

To begin with, mothering is a common activity that takes place within a family. Family is a smaller unit of a community, which is indeed a subdivision of a particular society. Thus, the family which is a smaller division of the society shares specific socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political ideologies. As a result, the act of mothering that is situated within a particular socio-cultural group can not be considered a universal and fixed entity.

Though mothering is a personal feeling, it can not be taken as a simple and singular dimension. Mothering indeed possesses a multifaceted and complex dimension. Moreover, mothering can not be considered the unitary experience of a woman. That is, the act of mothering can not be considered a consistent and stable activity even within the case of a particular woman’s experience. Thus mothering differs and keeps on varying within an individual woman’s experience depending upon the psychological, physiological, economic, cultural and sociological factors. In other words, it can be said that the practice of mothering differs culturally and individually.
Mothering is considered a socially significant phenomenon for two reasons. First, the mother, apart from delivering the child, is expected to care for, rear and protect the child physically. Secondly, the mother needs to meet the child’s emotional and moral claims. These two tasks definitely serve to provide meaning, purpose and identity to both the mother and the child. Thus, mothering evolves to be a meaning-giving, purposeful and identity-forming phenomenon.

These two simultaneous processes determine the efficiency of an individual in the activity of mothering. On the one hand, the mother’s understanding of herself as an individual, her belief about the institution of family, her childhood experience and the nature of the individual child taken up for the rearing process shape the mothering activity. On the other hand, it is shaped by the mother’s ability to fulfil the prescribed task effectively as the task of mothering involves thoughtfulness, deliberation and judgement. The task of protection, nurturance and training the children involves the mother’s self-knowledge, adequate resources, knowledge of the situation and, above all, her intelligence. To be precise, the mother has to meet the immediate needs as well as the long term needs of the child in a balanced way.

Evelyn Nakona Glenn (1994) proposes a working definition of mothering thus:

... [mothering is] a historically and culturally variable relationship “in which one individual nurtures and cares for another”. Mothering occurs within specific social contexts that vary in terms of material and cultural resources and constraints. How mothering is conceived, organized, and carried out is not simply determined by these conditions, however. Mothering is constructed through men’s and women’s actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus,
agency is central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological, construct. (Glenn 3)

As it is woman whose biological potentiality enables her to deliver children, she is always identified with her potential energy to be and become a mother and her ability to care, rear and nurture. Her procreative energy enables her to be a dynamic participant in evolving relationship as she is the primary agent with whom everyone identifies initially.

As the mother handles this complex, multidimensional and dynamic activity of mothering efficiently, she is considered a source of power. Since the complete act of mothering indicates devoting oneself to taking care of others, woman and mother, womanhood and motherhood have come to be treated synonymously. The protecting and nurturing activities are always linked to femininity. Apart from bearing and rearing the children, women are assigned the role of undertaking the complete responsibility of children. The woman’s ability to love others, protect, nurture and train the dependents with tenderness is considered to be yet another qualification to shoulder this responsibility. This idealisation has started emerging as a stereotype.

This unique power of women to mother has created a specific space that has made other people look at mothering and motherhood as a site to highlight the difference between women and men. In due course, the care shown by women emerged as a metaphor and also as a standard for all forms of caring. As a result, caring is made a part of being a woman. Thus, gender identity and differentiation are reinforced by the act of mothering. Under the guise of “good mothering” a woman is forced to be an embodiment of self-sacrifice, self-denial, and self-effacement. The notion of motherhood as a relationship-evolving medium is shifted
to be a political institution that has made women’s reproductive energy remain under patriarchy.

Fredrick Engel (1884) in his book in *Of the Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* views motherhood as a “world-historical defeat of the female sex” (1972:20). In feminist theory, each thinker’s view on motherhood is being revised and redefined by the other feminists who come after them. Jean Bethke Elshtain (1982) is one such political thinker and liberal feminist who attacked liberal feminists’ views on mothering that includes the views of Wollstonecraft, Friedan and Mill. She attacks their opinion viewing motherhood as “role” as reductive of the scope of mothering. According to her:

Mothering is not a “role” on par with being a file clerk, a scientist, or a member of the Air Force. Mothering is a complicated, rich, ambivalent, vexing, joyous activity which is biological, natural, social, symbolic, and emotional. It carries profoundly resonant emotional and sexual imperatives. A tendency to down-play the differences that pertain between, say, mothering and holding a job, not only drains our private relations of much of their significance, but also over-simplifies what can and should be done to alter things for women, who are frequently urged to change roles in order to solve their problems. (qtd. in Tong 36)

Socialist feminism considers motherhood as a tool that is used by capitalism to exploit women. According to this school, capitalism used motherhood as an unpaid labour. Alison Jagger, a Marxist feminist, defines mothering as a social activity in which one individual cares for another. For her, motherhood is an alienating experience for any woman because the ‘product’ of reproductive labour
is decided by someone else but not by a woman. For example, in certain societies where children's labour power is used as adult power, a woman is pressured to deliver more children. And in certain societies where children are considered an economic burden, a woman is not encouraged to have many children even if she wishes.

Simone de Beauvoir (1942), an Existential feminist, believes that one can transform society by changing the concept of motherhood and the idea of maternal instincts. She believes that through the child bearing activity women are subjugated to the home, to their husbands, to men and to housekeeping. She asserts that in order to change this condition, the myths related to motherhood must be destroyed. She adds: “...motherhood is the most dangerous snare for all those women who want to be free and independent, for those who want to earn their living, for those who want to think for themselves and for those women who want to have a life of their own” (341). At the same time she states that there are certain women who can transcend the barriers. Attaining the transcendent level as well as to be mothers simultaneously is possible only in certain case like “lawyers, physicians, government, ministers, etc.” (ibid) as these professions always allow women to spare enough time for their children.

The Radical school of feminism identified motherhood and family life as crucial aspects of women’s subordination. During the late 1960s and the early 1970s most members of the Women’s Liberation Movement rejected the idea of monogamous marriage, motherhood and family life as a bad-life-choice for any woman. Their rejection was made easier owing to the advancement in medical science which made maternity a choice rather than an inescapable destiny. They altogether assert personal freedom and self-development by distancing
responsibilities of the family. Some of the radical feminists envisage a utopian future when with the help of science ‘birth’ must be removed from the domain of woman’s body altogether. In reality, these attitudes became harder to maintain and these ideologies were found difficult to live out in practice. They have been forced to find out a new political analysis of marriage and motherhood. So, the radical movement has stopped denigrating the maternal role and has begun to idealise motherhood as essential stage in feminine self-fulfilment. At the same time, they view heterosexual nuclear family as a bad idea for the empowerment of women. Hence, they aim at families which are entirely controlled by women and turned to be pure matriarchal families. In this sort of matriarchal family fertility is controlled purely by women through artificial self-insemination.

There is a sharp difference between radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists regarding their opinion on motherhood. Radical-cultural feminists never encourage women to give up the power of reproduction as they consider reproductive power to be the ultimate female power; where as radical-libertarian feminists consider the reproductive power and the idea of the biological mothering as a patriarchal construction to subordinate women. Radical-Libertarian feminists object to the idea of biological mothering since it demands too much on women’s body and energy. Radical-Libertarians feminists have two reasons for their hatred towards biological mothering. The first is a weaker and a more general version offered by Ann Oakley and the second is a stronger and more specific version offered by Shulamith Firestone.

Ann Oakley attacks the myth behind biological mothering which states that all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children and all children need their mothers. According to Oakley, this myth behind biological mothering is itself
a patriarchal construct which makes women committed only to their children. Regarding the statement that all women need to be mothers Ann Oakley states that it is only the socialisation of girl children that makes the society to instruct women to bear children. In Oakley’s view, women owe nothing except the ovaries and wombs to be branded as an apt person to bear children. The second assertion that mothers need their children is based on the belief that woman’s maternal instinct must be satisfied; otherwise, she will be frustrated. But Oakley denied the very idea of “maternal instinct”. From an investigational observation she has found out that mothers learn mothering only through other people and not by instinct or intuition. She states that most women who abuse and neglect their children were themselves abused and/or neglected as children. So she concludes that mothers are not born but are made.

The third assertion that children need their mothers contains according to Oakley three assumptions that unnecessarily associate women with children. They are:

i) children are best met by their biological mothers

ii) young children need the devoted care of their biological mothers, and

iii) children need one nurturant caretaker especially in the form of biological mothers

Ann Oakley proves these assumptions false. She states that the social mothers are as great as biological mothers. She adds that there is no need of the presence of biological parent, and all that is needed is a trust-worthy and dependable person who is capable of providing a consistent and disciplined care to the child. Regarding this “one nurturant” concept Ann Oakley states that children are
benefited more through collective socialisation or "multiple mothering". She argues that anyone who is capable of mothering can be replaced for biological mothering. She concludes that biological mothering is a cultural construct and a strategy adopted by patriarchy to suppress women.

Shulamith Firestone in her *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970) gives almost a similar assessment on biological motherhood but she is harsher in tone. She suggests that the material base for women’s oppression lies not in economy but in biology. According to her, female reproductive capacity is the reason for the gender division of labour on which patriarchy constructs its ideology on sexism.

She states that there is no need for adults to be biological parents in order to lead a child centred life. She also adds that child-bearing and child-rearing processes are painful to women. She adds that technology can liberate human species from the burden of reproductive responsibility. Thus women can no longer be the victim of the pain of child bearing and there is no need for them to be an embodiment of self-sacrifice.

Adrienne Rich, a Radical-cultural feminist, criticises Firestone’s arguments against biological motherhood. In *Of Woman Born* (1986) she identifies biological mothering as a "potential relationship" between a mother and a child. She views motherhood as an institution and experience. Rich agrees with Firestone that institutionalised biological motherhood under patriarchy is a definite form of oppression to any woman and it must be annihilated in order to liberate women. She states that the institutionalised biological motherhood is an over-whelming success of patriarchy. In the institutionalised biological mothering set-up, patriarchy convinces most women to accept mothering as the one and only job.
This restricting role of women denies women’s access to public life. Rich views motherhood as an institution that never encourages women to fulfil their own needs. According to her:

Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal “instinct” rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realisation, relation to others rather than the creation of self. Motherhood is “sacred” so long as its offspring are “legitimate” – that is, as long as the child bears the name of the father who legally controls the mother. (Rich 42)

“Good mothers” in the institution of mothering are never expected even to have friends and plans apart from their family affair. All these expectations surely make any woman ‘motherly’ in patriarchal term but this “motherly” status will tax any mother’s patience and make her feel anger and frustration.

As a contrast to this institutionalised biological motherhood, Rich proposes an alternative “experience” where a woman can take control of child-bearing as well as child-rearing through which she would experience biological motherhood in her own terms. Rich does not accept Firestone’s argument on liberating women through reproductive technology. According to Rich, a woman in a patriarchal society must go along with her body but not against it. She must not give up the potentiality of her body. Thus for Rich child-bearing and child-rearing are not a hindrance but a challenge put forth to them to rear and nurture children with feminist values.

Radical-libertarian feminists and Radical-cultural feminists debate on the issue of surrogate or contracted motherhood. Surrogate or contracted mothering is an arrangement where a third party is hired and paid for giving birth to a child
who is going to be reared by somebody. The woman whose gestational services have been contracted is called the birth mother of the child. The birth mother’s service is utilised in two ways. In some cases women will be full biological mothers where women’s genetic and gestational services will be utilised, whereas in some other cases, women’s gestational service alone will be utilised and she will not be eligible to be termed the genetic mother.

Radical-cultural feminists oppose this kind of contracted motherhood as it encourages class consciousness among women. It affects women’s relationship to each other by creating a division between economically privileged women and the economically disadvantaged women. The economically under-privileged women are purely to meet the reproductive needs. And this will definitely result in the introduction of capitalism among women. In this contractual context, the woman’s position as mother is being questioned with regard to parental connection, genetic contribution and rearing responsibility. As a surrogate mother is genetically unrelated to the embryo, she has no parental rights. Even if she is the genetic as well as the gestational mother of the embryo, she can not hold any right on the child as she does not have any professed intention to rear the child. Her commitment as a gestational parent can not be compared to the kind of contemplated commitment of biological parents. Radical-libertarian feminists reject the radical-cultural feminists’ views on surrogate mothering. Radical-Libertarian feminists do not complicate their views on surrogate mothering whereas they state that if contracted motherhood is handled properly it can bring women closer to each other. To them surrogate mothering is a phenomenon that increases women’s reproductive freedom.
Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow are two well-known psychoanalytical feminists who have analysed pre-oedipal stage of psycho sexual development in order to find out the reason and solution for gender inequality. According to both of them the basic reason for the dominance of patriarchy springs from the fact that women do all or most of the mothering. According to Dinnerstein, the infant possesses a symbiotic relationship with his/her mother as he/she is incapable of distinguishing between herself/ himself and the mother. The infant’s first encounter with the maternal body makes the child associate with the maternal body and with the material or physical universe. The mother is the source of pleasure as well as pain for the child as she represents the unreliable and unpredictable universe. As a result the infant starts feeling ambivalent towards mother figures. She recommends dual parenting system as remedy to abolish sexual inequality. It also enables to stop the role-play system within the family as woman playing the nurturant role and man playing the world-builder role. It enables the parents to feel free to choose any combination of nurturing and enterprising activities without confrontation between and reinforcement from each other. Finally, dual parenting will enable the children to understand each parent’s responsibility and equal role in world-building and child-rearing.

Nancy Chodorow in The Reproduction of Mothering (1979) examines why women want to mother even when they are not bound to do so. She rejects Freud’s idea that for women babies are substitutes for penises. She tries to find out the answer to the question by analysing the pre-oedipal stage of human psychosexual development. Her object-relational theory states that the infant boy’s relationship with his mother is not the same as the infant girl’s with her mother. The infant boy senses the difference between his body and his mother’s and understands the
mother's otherness. In order to escape from his father's wrath, the boy separates himself from his mother and learns about power and prestige from his father. It makes him define himself in opposition to the female sex that his mother represents.

She terms the mother-daughter relationship as "narcissistic over-identification". Chodorow states the reason for heterosexual attitude of any woman directly relates to their pre-oedipal stage experiences. Chodorow states that the psychosexual development of boys and girls has got several social implications. The boy separates himself from his mother and prepares himself to work in the public sphere whereas the girl's relatedness with her mother makes her identify herself with the private sphere. In order to remove this inequality that prevails between the boys and the girls owing to the parenting model, Chodorow, like Dinnerstein, suggests dual parenting style.

This dual parenting or co-parenting system will definitely enable boys and girls to grow up with equal rights and to make them take pride in their autonomy. This system will make the boys and girls realise men and women need to balance their own self-interests. Above all, the co-parented children will not allow home to be viewed as woman's domain and public world as man's domain. This will make the children have a balanced view on public and private home.

The second wave of feminism kept child care as the central issue for the women's movement. With the emergence of Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, the dual career family with shared responsibilities had been emerged. During this wave debates on single motherhood, lesbian motherhood and childless mothers went on. After the 1970s there have been a number of views on mothering. During this period, feminist theorists like Mitchell (1974), Dinnerstein (1976) and
Chodorow (1978) and research scholars like Boulton (1983) and Sharpe (1984) described and analysed the construction and experience of motherhood and mothering positively. The last two decades of the twentieth century can be considered the decades of motherhood academicians.

Sara Ruddick's (1989) maternal theory is a practice-oriented theory. She states that mothering is maternal practice that demands more. According to Sara Ruddick, there are three demands that constitute the maternal practice – preservation, growth and social acceptability. She adds that “to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training”. She considers preservation as the pre-eminent demand, as it is both epistemological and practical. She states that to preserve the life of the children is to respond to the children’s need with care rather than abuse, indifference or flight. The second demand immediately follows the first one and focuses on the nurturing of life emotionally and intellectually. Unlike preservation or protection, this demand of ‘nurturance’ appears to be historically and culturally specific. The third demand, that is training, is made not by children’s needs but by the social groups to which the mother belongs. As the children need to be “socially acceptable”, the mother can opt for any training strategies to make them ‘socially acceptable’.

In order to fulfil these demands the mothers need to think out strategies. Sara Ruddick calls for planning out strategies through maternal thinking. She states that a mother has to plan strategies for mothering as a separate discipline:

Like a scientist writing up her experiment, a critic working over a text, or a historian assessing documents, a mother caring for children engages in a discipline. She asks certain questions – those relevant to her aims – rather than others; she accepts certain criteria
for the truth, adequacy, and relevance of proposed answers; and she cares about the findings she makes and can act on. The discipline of maternal thought, like any other disciplines establishes criteria for determining failure and success, set priorities, and identifies virtues that the discipline requires. Like any other work, mothering is a prey to characteristic temptations that it must identify. To describe the capacities, judgements, metaphysical attitudes, and values of maternal thought presumes not maternal achievement but a conception of achievement. (24)

Sara Ruddick states that a mother must adopt certain strategies to fulfil the need of the children. She states that: “Her training strategies may be persuasive, manipulative, educative, abusive, seductive or respectful and are typically a mix of most of these”. (21)

Many Western theories debated whether to accept motherhood or not in the lives of women. As a counter-action to the Western notion, third world women argue that motherhood should not be analysed and defined in isolation from its socio-cultural context. They aim at giving alternate culture-specific ideologies on mothering and motherhood. This has given birth to many categories in motherhood theories such as Native American, African American, Hispanic, and Asian American. Among these, African women’s experience of mothering is indeed important among these racial ethnic groups as they are recreating African experience within America. In order to understand the black ideology of mothering, a brief introduction to the condition of black women in America is important.
Black people were brought to America from West African societies and they brought with them the ideas and beliefs of their people. In order to understand the conditions of black women in white society, it is indispensable to view their status in their motherland. African mythology believes that the world was conceived and delivered by woman. In West African society, the black women’s role as a mother was considered to be important. They were viewed as goddesses due to their fertility and reproductive capacity. Unlike women in other societies, black women were respected for their ability to give birth and for continuing the race of the ancestors without any interruption.

Apart from being a wife and mother, the African women performed many roles in their West African society. They played a crucial and remarkable role as traders in maintaining the economy of the country. In brief, it can be stated that West African women were independent and wealthy. La Frances Rodgers-Rose (1986) points out that when African women came to America they brought with them the same attitudes, beliefs and expected role behaviours typical of African women.

On the other hand, during slavery, the black people in America were considered to be sub-humans. The white people tried to define them as less than human beings. They adopted an attitude that indicated to the public that the black people, both men and women were not human beings with feelings and pride.

During slavery, slave women were defined in terms of their breeding capacity. But the concept of motherhood behind child bearing was minimized. Until the middle of the eighteenth century most of the black slaves were males. Initially, the whites preferred male slaves to perform heavy jobs. Black men were encouraged to go for interracial marriages to have more slaves as black men slaves
had no hold over their wives and daughters. The black women had to bear the heaviest burden such as sexual exploitation by the white male and were forced to accept the plight of their daughters in the sexual exploitation by the white masters. Watkins (1970) rightly points out the condition of black women thus:

Hard labor, poor food and little shelter, the inhumane breeding of more slaves, the rigors of keeping her master's house and children, and the passive acceptance of any white man's advances – all were parts of the black woman's life. (13)

In New England, the black women had to undergo the experiences of two different worlds – that of the black and the white. The black women had more contacts with the white world than black men. During slavery they were forced to play many roles under the white masters like cook, maid, baby-siter and on several occasions the masters' concubine. In due course, accepting such jobs became a necessity to earn their livelihood. Black women getting a job under whites become easier than black men. Even though a black woman's experience is a part of black community experience, her peculiar and exploitative bond with the white world especially the white male affected her relationship with her own community and its members. This had a greater impact on her marital life.

In white America, the black women had to undergo many hardships. The African-American women were marginalised in the social structure and they were viewed as insignificant in the field of literature. Even the world of black literature was occupied with male heroes and protagonists and their experiences. The complexity of the female experience remained unrecognized.

In an alien America, the black women found themselves in such a helpless condition that even defining their womanhood remained a complex phenomenon.
Commenting on the struggle faced by the black women in the hierarchical pattern of America, Wade-Gayles (1984) points out that:

There are three major circles of reality in American society, which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people, most of them men, exercise influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people, regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small, dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation and vulnerability. These are the distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America. (3-4).

Till the eighteenth century, the black woman was not recognized in the new world. After that the black woman was being viewed as a “fallen” woman, the whore, the slut, the prostitute” in the American society. (Hooks 1981: 52) She was viewed by white people:

... as sexually permissive, as available and eager for the sexual assaults of any man, black or white. The designation of all black women as sexually depraved, immoral, and loose had its roots in the slave system. White women and men justified the sexual exploitation of enslaved black women by arguing that they were the initiators of sexual relationships with men. From such thinking emerged the stereotype of black women as sexual savages, and in sexist terms a sexual savage, a non-human, an animal can not be raped. (ibid)
However, there was no evidence for the stereotypical images of black women as "sexually loose" (Hooks 52) in the nineteenth century slave narratives and diaries.

A majority of the slaves wanted to accept the morality of the dominant culture. During the years of black reconstruction (1867-77), black women struggled to change the negative images of black womanhood that prevailed among the white society. Even this effort at self-improvement by the black women had become an object of amusement.

The white journalists ridiculed the efforts of the black women in the newspapers and magazines. Instead of encouraging the changes that had taken place in the black society they delighted in entertaining white readers with negative stereotypes of black people. Ray Ford Logan (1980) took a survey of the role of newspapers and magazines from 1877 to 1918. Based on the enquiry, he pointed out that most of the articles aimed at maintaining the races separate by accentuating the difference.

Even when a black woman became a lawyer, doctor or teacher, she was likely to be labelled a whore and prostitute by the whites. After slavery, the white men and women began adopting complex strategies to spread myths about black women. One such myth was regarding the greater sexual potency of the black woman. The white society perpetuated this myth to maintain a social control as they were afraid of miscegenation. In order to control the inter-racial marriage between white women and black men, the whites used lynching, castration and other brutal punishments. In the case of the black women and white men, the myth revealed that the black women were incapable of fidelity. This propaganda of negative images about the black woman prevented white man from marrying a black woman. White men were prosecuted when they treated black women as
human beings. Even during the later part of the twentieth century – when the barriers of interracial marriages were broken down – the rate of black women, marrying white men remained lesser than the white men marrying the black women.

Magazines, newspapers and popular culture too played a crucial role in establishing the negative stereotype of the black woman. They tried to present the black woman as a radically different one, an over weight creature with thicker lips. But in real life, she was a healthy, attractive and good-looking woman. When the white media wanted to present a positive image, they portrayed her as a long-suffering, religious and maternal figure. The roles of the black women as self-sacrificing and self-denying characters were appreciated and seen as appropriate by the whites.

It is interesting to note that there are few prominent images of black women like that of black Amazon and Aunt Jemima in white America. The black Amazon image represented black woman as an active and powerful woman contradictory to the image of Aunt Jemima who was projected as a passive, long-suffering and submissive black woman. The typical antebellum imagination of black “mammy” or “nanny” images portrayed black woman as a passive nurturer and a mother figure who was expected to be inferior but also capable of loving both the white and the black children. The sapphire image depicted the black woman as “evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn and hateful” (Hooks 1981: 85). Black women tried to remain submissive and they never came forward to show their reaction against the harsh treatment of black women in the society. Thus, all the myths, realities and stereotypes presented by the white society about black woman characterized her as negative and anti-woman.
Barbara Christian (1980), an exponent of African American criticism, writing about the struggle of black women, points out:

As poor, woman and black, the Afro-American woman had to generate her own definition in order to survive, for she found that she was forced to deny essential aspects of herself to fit the definition of others. If defined as black, her woman nature was often denied; if denied as woman her blackness was often ignored; if defined as working class her gender and race were muted. (161)

Even after manumission, the slave women's status did not improve and their liberation led them to economic slavery in the form of sharecropping. Even the Emancipation Proclamation Act did not completely free the blacks from the clutches of slavery. Black men were forced to take care of their families but were not in a position to get jobs where they could work with pride and dignity. So, the black women were ultimately forced to take care of the family by doing the familiar work of helping the white women in the kitchen and taking care of their babies.

According to Du Bois (1961), such domestic workers were subjected to all kinds of exploitation such as using a separate side door to enter and leave, receiving low wages and sexual exploitation by their employers. Black women's responsibility to take care of the family literally disturbed as well as strengthened the relationship between the black men and women. Black men became aware of their inferior position in the economic sphere, whereas it strengthened the family structure when the black men's inability to help the family was replaced by the black women for the survival of the family. Black women bore the brunt of the
familial and economic needs but in reality they had “a lower income than the black male or white female”. (Staples 1973: 19)

According to Staples (1973) welfare schemes of the government of United States too played a vital role in stereotyping black women and black families headed by women. The reason for black women heading the family was the unemployment rate among the black men which was twice higher than the number of unemployed white men. The unemployed black men often led the family depending on the welfare schemes of the government that provided financial assistance. Some welfare departments had made it a condition that in the financial aided family, the male might be absent from the home and the female might either be divorced or abandoned along with her children. So, many unemployed black men were forced to leave home so that their wives and children could receive financial assistance. Thus, the majority of the black families receiving public assistance were headed by women. This has made the society to think that all black women heading the family are the exploiters of government welfare schemes. But, in reality the amount that they received was “hardly sufficient to guarantee even bare survival”. (20)

Hooks (1981) states that the white society established hierarchy based on race and sex. White men were placed high followed by white women and black men. The black women were placed last. Even though several changes had taken place after slavery, the devaluation of black womanhood, the sexual exploitation of black women and the sub-human status of black women remained the same even after hundred years.

Even though a black woman helped in the survival of the family she could not help in maintaining her pride and dignity as a human being and her dignity in
the economic arena as she was paid less, and given an opportunity where there was
the least possibility for improvement. This situation made the black matriarch
community remain weak and subordinate. In this context, it is apt to cite what
Staples (1973) has recorded about the status of black women:

The concept of the privileged, domineering Black woman only
serves to mask the real economic and social deprivation of the Black
female underclass. The economic order, in conjunction with racism
and sexism, has placed the black woman in triple jeopardy, forced to
face the machinations of capitalism racism and sexism by herself.

(Staples 23)

Further, J. Yee (1992) states that the antebellum period stereotyped
women’s sexuality and branded them either as good or evil. They used ‘race’ and
‘class’ to categorise women and measure the middle class white women as pure
and good with fragile symbols. But the black and poor white women shared the
idea of bad womanhood. This made the twentieth century people view the black as
“sexually promiscuous”. Yee says that the sexual exploitation of slave women was
meant to reproduce more slaves. According to Orlando Patterson the rape and
sexual exploitation of the Black women are symbolic whips and chains that
contributed to Black women’s social death and dishonour during slavery. The fear
of sexual exploitation by the white master and powerlessness to rebel against the
masters made them always susceptible to harassment and rape. The presence of the
racially mixed children in the plantation points the black women to the society as
seducers rather than acknowledging the white men’s morally inferior behaviours.

Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin (1976) point out that the
difference between being black women and black men is not the same as being
white women and white men. The black woman has never appeared as a fugitive slave abolitionist, the leader, an entrepreneur and as political activist. The black women were silenced and even black American history remained partial in this regard.

Diann Holland Painter (1988) states that most of the female heads in black families were widowed, separated, divorced and ‘single women’ and women whose husbands were away from the family. Though they remained single the level of remarriage remained less among the black women than among the white women. In this regard Painter asserts: “Moreover, divorce rates are rising faster among non white than white males, though this is not true for non white females...Once divorced or widowed, black women are less likely to remarry than whites” (qtd. in Zinn 155)

K. Sue Jewell (1993) believed that the privileged class used images and ideology to maintain its social power and economic wealth, and as the African American women were socio-economically depressed they could not represent any ideal images about themselves.

Even though black women participated in the women's empowerment programme, the Black feminists attacked the white for not forfeiting their gender privilege. They believed that the white feminists were acting out of a collective memory of being rated, ranked and classified by a white world. Though the sufferings of women are similar the sufferings of black women differ from that of women in other nations. So, in their works, the black feminist writers confronted this by presenting white women as pampered, spoiled and weak. Caraway (1991) justifies this argument by quoting Washington who states:
Harper tried to bridge these two movements by attending the white feminists' conventions.

Euro-American Feminist theorists have drawn attention to the connection between feminism and racism as America is known for its racism. Several minority writers have found that racism that dominates white America was yet another reason for the oppression of black women. These theorists analyse:

... [the] factors within the minority community such as the fear of dividing the minority community; lack of knowledge of feminism; the relationship of black and Latin women to the church; and, among black women, the focus on male liberation in the black social movement of the 60s and the idea of the black matriarchy. (Caraway 46)

During the abolitionist movement both the black and the white women challenged their subordinate status as females and campaigned for equality. White feminist abolitionists also were interested in black women sisterhood. In reality, only few white women overtly addressed the problem of racism. The reason for rejecting the black women's problem is that the Southern as well as the Northern whites were afraid of ending of slavery that would promote racial equality and racial amalgamation. As the black women believed that the white woman's movement would not ameliorate this status, the black women started thinking about a movement from their perspective. Yee states that: "[T]o shift the focus away from white middle class – to bring women of color in from a marginal position to center of discussion – opens the possibility of a fuller examination of women's rights" (137)
Despite all the tension that prevailed between black women and men, black men supported black women’s suffrage movement as they thought that racial solidarity might be achieved through self-improvement. Leaders like Fredrick Douglas believed that black women’s liberation should remain separate from the struggle for racial equality. No black woman attended the Seneca Falls Convention. Moreover, the issues addressed by the delegates in the Convention had little relevance to black women’s aspiration. The Black women fought for female equality either as independent spokespersons or participants in the black convention movements. Yee rightly points out that among the prominent spokespersons of black suffrage movement: “Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Sojourner Truth carried on the tradition of public speaking that Maria Stewart had established twenty years before”.

Shadd and Truth were two of the most outspoken black female proponents of black women’s rights and abolition. Of all the speeches, Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I a woman” is the popular speech delivered by the black feminists. Black feminists’ interest rests not on ascertaining the difference between biological males and females but lies in rejecting the hierarchal definition of woman. They wanted to assert gender as a common dominator and wanted to project the female subject as always being constructed by gender. The black feminists wanted to recover and recreate the bond among all women irrespective of their race which the white women omitted. In reviewing the works of feminist theorists, one can find the relative lack of attention given to racism and minority women. Even Simone de Beavouir, while comparing slavery and women’s oppression, has ignored the experience of the enslaved black women. The comparison between enslaved women and liberated women will lead to further analysis of oppression as well as
the differences between their situations! All the black feminists are against another idea introduced by white feminist – the concept of sisterhood.

The concept of sisterhood has been existed throughout the ages. But the diaries and correspondences of American women suggest that from the late eighteenth century and through the nineteenth century, they invented a newly self-conscious and idealized concept of female friendship. When this idea was formulated they began asserting their ideas of sisterhood in their conversation, reading and writing.

Sisterhood has its origin in a specific culture but its benefits are intended to be cross-cultural and international. In reality it is relevant only within the white American family even if it is intended a cross-border relationship among women irrespective of race, colour, culture and class. They consider that race was the first border to cross before traversing the next stage towards empowerment.

Sisterhood is the term used in women’s activism to highlight the political solidarity among women. It is a model for feminist intercommunity relations. It led to debates on shared oppression, common victimization, solidarity and collective activism. The idea promoted through sisterhood is interracial, transglobal and cross-cultural relations and kinship. It also suggests that a woman has unconditional love and loyalty to other women. For them sisterhood leads towards equality. White feminists viewed sisterhood as a viable model as it emerged out of family heritage. As the white nuclear family model identifies woman as a powerless victim, the white feminists move away from being a mother. Their fear of becoming mothers originates in the specific condition that motherhood necessitates oppression.
African American feminists never felt comfortable with “sisterhood” as it implies the gender specific issues. They view any gender specific concept as a burden which leads them to ultimate oppression.

In spite of great visions, many feminists, especially African American feminists, have criticized the term ‘sisterhood’. African American feminists view this term as a bio-specific term as the inventors – Euro American white women belong to middle class – practice inequality among different races and classes. Even though they invented the term ‘Womanist’, as a counter reaction, they did not generate any alternative term for ‘sisterhood’. The limitation of the term is that it never tried to recapitulate non-white experiences. At the same time, African American feminist theorists accepted the concept of motherhood as it culturally rooted from their African belief system. Traditionally motherhood is seen as a small unit of this sisterhood where the relationship evolves naturally.

The African American pattern for motherhood originated from the African model which has the tradition of multiple mothering. For Africans, even the kinship of a ‘sister’ implies co-mothering. They consider motherhood as the greatest level for a woman.

Before colonialism, the concept of mothering was highly esteemed in African society as it played an important role in tribal socialisation. Tribal communities in Africa like Yaruba of Nigeria and Ashanti of Ghana viewed motherhood as a key factor for social relationship. The Ashanti tribal mother views motherhood as a moral relationship. She never expects disobedience and disrespect from her children. She views the mother as a benefactor and a protector. Above all, African society looked upon a mother’s role with high esteem as the “protector,
benefactor”, and “bearer and guardian of the tribal legacy” (Collins 1991: 129 – 130).

Her status in America is not the same as in Africa. The new world affected her ability as a mother. She was unable to show any attention and initial respect to her child. At the same time she did not eliminate any of the fundamental impulses and instinctive maternal feelings. Staples aptly says: “[n]one of the brutalities suffered, the humiliation encountered, the destruction of her cultural mores altered in any basic way the mother-child relationship” (130).

Unlike Africa, there is no one to commemorate the role of mothers in America. There is no positive mother-child relationship during slavery since it was bound by oppression. Primarily, the black woman slave had to fulfil her role as worker and then only she happened to fulfil her motherly duty. So neither the slave mother nor children were in the privileged position as their African counterparts.

The black man was the most powerless person in the socio-economic and socio-political condition of America. During slavery he was not allowed to form a family. So he never came forward to protect either his property or his women. As a result of this black women were forced to face family problems and society became matriarchal. The black woman as nanny or mammy nursed not only the white children but also nursed the fatherless and motherless black children. The concept of community mother started from here.

In the life of the slaves, mothers played a crucial role rather than the fathers as most of them were unaware of their fathers. At present, in U.S.A, the black community receives prominent importance. Sociologists like Robert Bell have found that the beliefs and trust of black women play a vital role in motherhood. They gave more importance to the role of mothers than to the role of wives. Since
she has to handle other responsibilities often she finds only less time to perform her role as careful and provident mother. The black mother in America unlike her African counterpart exercises her authority only at home rather than in any other environment. She raises her children with greater ease than white mothers.

Even this concept of a mother in Black community varies according to class status. The lower-class Black mothers try to prepare their children to face the harsh treatment of the outside world, whereas the middle class mother tries to feed the values and habits to achieve the goals of education and material success.

If the mother is young, the grandmother takes care of the baby and the mother. Grandmothers play a crucial role in the black community in bringing up children, naming the newborn children, in preserving the family history, folklore, proverbs and traditional lore. Above all, they remain as a link with the past. Generally, the black grandmother prefers to be with daughters rather than sons.

Since the mothers and grandmothers are strict with the children in matters of educations, household duties, sexual morality and basic disciplines, the black girl children are “socialised to become independent, disciplined and puritanical than the Black boys” (Staples 158). Young black girls have an intimate relationship with their mothers. They learn all the household duties like cooking, cleaning and childcare. Often they were given charge of their young siblings. The sharing of household duties constructs a positive relationship between a black mother and her daughter. Her complete feminine role was shaped by her mother’s attitude towards men. Staples says that:

This collective care of the children can free many women from the burden of motherhood. Then the institution of motherhood can be something that we all can take pride in, not as a condition forced on
women by the nature of their biology, but as a voluntary choice based on the value children have to the society and to their mothers.

(159)

The matriarchal image of the black woman is not an equivalent image with matriarchs of other societies because the matriarchal society must be economically secure. Indeed, the black matriarch is not economically secure. Regarding the image of the black matriarch Jean Bond and Pauline Perry in their article “Is the Black Male Castrated?” rightly point out that: “...the so-called Black matriarch is a kind of folk character largely fashioned by whites out of half truths and lies about the involuntary condition of black women” (qtd. in Hooks 1981: 72).

Hooks (1981) also adds that the black matriarchy theory is more positive than the image of black woman as “mammy, bitch or slut” and this myth helped in projecting the black woman as a “masculinised, domineering, amozonic creature.” The black matriarchal image in U.S.A was a threat to black men because it made the black men to be branded as “weak, effeminate and castrated” (Hooks 75).

There are two prominent images of the black mother-the image of Eve who was branded as a source of downfall and destruction of mankind and of Madonna who gave birth to the saviour and brought redemption and salvation to mankind. Both these images of black mothers are available in Black American literature. Even though many of the American writers presented black mothers as evil Eve who should be destroyed, Black women writers like Maya Angelou started bringing in the images of Black woman as Madonna. Maya Angelou in her *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* remembers black women as Madonna as they:

...not only [for] keep[ing] the black family alive, but (also) the white family... black women have nursed a nation of strangers. For
hundreds of years, they literally nursed babies at their breasts who they knew, when they grew up, would rape their daughters and kill their sons (qtd. in 125).

The question that haunts the literary artists and researchers is whether the black woman is the destructive Eve offering the poisonous apple or Madonna bringing hope and salvation. Ultimately in world history the Black mother made a greater impact by emerging as a strong figure of courage, strength and endurance. Dance (1980) says about the black mothers thus:

She is unquestionably a Madonna, both in the contest of being a saviour and in terms of giving birth and sustenance to positive growth and advancement among her people. It is she who has given birth to a new race; it is she who has played a major role in bringing a race from slavery and submission to manhood and assertiveness. It is largely because of her that we can look back on the past with pride and look forward in the future with courage. (131)

As there are a number of opinions on black motherhood, black feminist thinkers came out with exclusive theories of their own. Among them Bell Hook’s “Revolutionary Parenting” (1984), and Patricia Hill Collins’ theories on motherhood (1991, 1993, 1994) are considered to be relevant by the researcher to analyse the chosen novels for this thesis. Moreover Sara Ruddick’s theory is also adopted for the analysis in order to fit black motherhood in the universal paradigm.

According to Bell Hooks (1984), early stages of contemporary Anglo-American women’s liberation movement viewed motherhood as an oppressive factor. This notion of motherhood as an oppressive factor reflects the “race and class biases of participants” (133). Hooks argues that only college-educated,
middle-class white women viewed “motherhood and child-rearing as the locus of women’s oppression” (ibid). As a representative of the black women she contemplates the idea that black women would never identify motherhood as an oppressive factor. Rather they would view racism, lack of jobs and lack of education as obstacles. She substantiates her argument by tracing out evidences from the history which says that black women kept working from the period of slavery to the present and they too got an opportunity to work that affirms their identity as women and as human beings. Even though a group of feminists avoided motherhood during the early phases of Women’s Liberation Movement, a group of feminists opted for female parenting. Hooks (1984) proclaims that the female parenting is “significant and valuable work” (136).

Bell Hooks (1984) regards that the re-emerged interest in black motherhood as having positive and negative implications to the feminist movement. On the positive side, there will be perpetual need for research on female parenting. On the other hand, the romanticisation and idealisation of motherhood will lead women to be looked upon in a sexist term as “life affirming nurturers” (135). She also advocates that female parenting “must be recognised as such by everyone in the society including feminist activists” (136).

Nevertheless, she argues that parenting may not be viewed as an exclusively woman oriented activity. Men can also take part in parenting. Moreover men’s participation in parenting will give children a better role model. She recommends Sara Ruddick’s hypothesis of “effective parenting” (139).

In order to avoid the isolation of the family from the community Bell Hooks (1984) advocates “small, community-based, public child-care centers” (144). She considers this kind of shared responsibility as “revolutionary” (144).
Child care, according to Hooks must be shared with other child rearers and elderly people in the community. She acknowledges that this kind of community mothering is common to black people. When this kind of shared child rearing is operated in the community the children can rely on the elderly people for their emotional and, intellectual support and sustenance and they do not depend on their parents alone. To foster children within the best possible social framework and to relieve women from doing sole and primary parenting, shared and community-based parenting is recommended by Bell Hooks (1984) in her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*.

Patricia Hill Collins, even though accepts that survival, power and identity shape motherhood for all women, states that the black mothering experience remains muted in feminist theories. She adds:

Feminist theorising about motherhood reflects a lack of attention to the connection between ideas and the contexts in which they emerge. While such contextualisation aims to generate universal “theories” of human behavior, in actuality, it routinely distorts, and omits huge categories of human experience. (1994: 61)

Collins (1991) appraises black motherhood as “both dynamic and dialectical” (118). She assesses “controlling images of mammy, the matriarch and the welfare mothering practices” as oppressing factors for black women (ibid). African American women need to resist the controlling images of black women as “mammies” “matriarchs” and “prostitutes”. In order to fight against these negative controlling images, African American women had to draw on long-standing Afrocentric feminist worldview emphasizing the importance of self-definition, self-reliance and the necessity of demanding respect from others.
Unlike these controlling images, motherhood is a site where Black women can express and learn the power of self-definition and self-esteem. Moreover, motherhood will enable them to understand the necessity of self-reliance and independence. She affirms that motherhood in Black culture provides a platform for self-actualisation and it serves as a catalyst for social activism.

According to Collins (1993) white perspectives on motherhood are problematic for Black women. She states that the African American model of mothering is different from the Eurocentric ideology of mothering in three important ways:

First, the assumption that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has almost total responsibility for child-rearing is less applicable to Black families. While the ideal of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied Black families sufficient resources to support private, nuclear family households. Second, strict sex-role segregation, with separate male and female spheres of influence within the family, has been less commonly found in African American families than in White middle-class ones. Finally, the assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a “good” mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time “occupation”, is similarly uncharacteristic of African-American families. (1993: 43-44)

She states that there are two Eurocentric images of Black motherhood which are interdependent and capable of defining Black women’s roles in white and African
American families. The mammy image presents black woman as a faithful and devoted domestic servant. She is aimed at mothering the white children "conscientiously" (1993: 44) and loving them as if they were her own. Through the mammy image she is represented as "ideal Black mother" who accepts any kind of meagre amount for her duty and her inferior status in white family and society.

Mammy image is transformed into "too-strong matriarch"(44) who has to raise "her weak sons" and "unnaturally superior daughters" (44).This is a complex image as it tends to misrepresent her either as aggressive and unfeminine while she protects or as invisible while she remains silent.

She adds that without constructing an Afrocentric ideology of motherhood, Black women are open to exploitation by the dominant group. The low self-esteem of black women rooted in these images will be passed on from mother to daughter which will in turn provide a powerful mechanism to control African American communities.

Collins (1991) states that in opposition to the Eurocentric ideology of family life, African societies do not have a rigid sex role segregation. In African societies, motherhood is placed at the centre of their religion, philosophies and social institutions. In West African societies, mothering was not a privatised nurturing occupation of biological mothers. For them, emotional care for children and providing economic support for their physical survival were interwoven as interdependent, complementary dimensions of motherhood. Collins states the reason as follows:

First, since they are not dependent on males for economic support and provide much of their own and their children's economic support, women are structurally central to families. Second, the
image of the mother is one that culturally elaborated and valued across diverse West African Societies. Finally, while the biological mother-child bond is valued, child care was a collective responsibility, a situation fostering cooperative, age-stratified, woman centered “mothering” network. (45)

In addition to this, she distinguishes various categories in mothers and mothering practices in African American tradition. She considers the border of defining the categories as fluid and changing. She adds that the biological or blood mothers are expected to take care of their own children. Apart from biological mothers she includes another vital category of othermothers which is a community specific category.

This West African family model has been offered as an alternative pattern to the African Americans to conceptualise Black family life. African American communities have recognised that vesting the complete responsibility of mothering a child on biological mothers is unwise and makes the task almost impossible. Stanlie M. James (1999) examines African American and West African concepts of othermothering and its importance to the survival of Black community. He opines that the traditionally rooted othermothering and Community othermothering may serve as an important tool for the development of Black feminists to offer new models for social transformation in the twenty-first century. He defines othermothers as

...those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of child care for short-to-long-term periods, in informal or formal arrangements. They can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or supportive fictive kin. They not only serve to relieve some of the stress that can develop in the intimate daily
relationships of mothers and daughters but they can also provide multiple role models for children. (45)

This traditionally rooted concept of othermothering can be treated throughout the history of African American tradition. In indigenous African context, mothering is highly regarded. It symbolises creativity and continuity of the race. The enslaved West Africans were not allowed to have traditional family patterns and values in the new world. They were not allowed to establish families either on the westernised or on the African model. As a result of this recognition, the concept of “othermothers” has been central to the institution of Black motherhood. Othermothers are those women who assist blood mothers by sharing the responsibility. In African American communities the boundaries distinguishing biological mothers are not rigid but fluid and changing. The othermothers support not only the children but also the blood mothers. Their contributions to African American communities are larger as they perform community-based child-care. They take care of:

- Children orphaned by the sale or death of their parents under slavery
- Children conceived through rape
- Children of young mothers
- Children born into extreme poverty, and
- Children who have been rejected by their biological mothers

This experience of Black women as othermothers has provided the foundation for Black women’s social activism. Their responsibility of nurturing children in their own extended family network has stimulated Black women to feel accountable to all Black children. This responsibility gives birth to another category of mothering which is called community othermothers. All these different African American
categories of mothers are viewed as a symbol of power. This power is generated not only from their roles as mothers in their own families but also from their crucial role in the development of Black community as a whole. Black women’s specific role in nurturing their community development serves as a foundation for community based power which will support the vulnerable members of the community to be self-reliant and independent. This kind of mothering practice provides a better role model to black daughters unlike Eurocentric psychoanalytic models. The role model that a black mother gives to her daughter is quite different from the role model that a middle-class white mother provides to her daughter. Collins (1993) states that the presence of hardworking mothers, othermothers and community mothers offer a wide range of role models that are capable of challenging the cult of dominant white womanhood. At the same time, black mothers face a critical situation to make the black daughters not to fit into the stereotypical images of mammy and matriarch. She states this complexity as follows:

...Black girls have long had to learn how to do domestic work while rejecting definitions of themselves as Mammies. At the same time they’ve had to take on strong roles in Black extended families without internalising images of themselves as matriarchs....Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures. (1993:53-54)

Black mothers ensure their daughters’ physical survival during dangerous situations and also help them to go further more than what they as mothers were allowed to go. They socialise their daughters to be independent, strong and self-
confident. Black mothers always emphasise protection either by shielding their daughters from the dangers caused by race, class, and gender or by teaching them how to protect themselves in such situations. Hence the true meaning of Black mothers depends not only on their bringing up their own biological children but also in uplifting the entire black race through the empowerment of black children.

For Collins (1994) motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class and gender. According to her, racial domination and economic exploitation shape the mothering context for all women. According to Collins, racial ethnic women’s struggle centres on three main themes. The first theme is the struggle for control over their own bodies in order to preserve choice over whether to become mothers as they are forced to have unplanned children due to the “widespread institutionalised rape of Black women by white men” (1994:53) during the period of slavery and in the segregated south. The skin colour and hair texture of children born out of unplanned pregnancy showcase the powerlessness of African American women.

The second dimension of racial ethnic women’s struggle for maternal empowerment lies in the decision and process of keeping the children with them. In African American communities during slavery, children’s lives were controlled by their white slave masters. Black children could have been sold or whipped or even killed with the mother nowhere to say a word. The act of physical separation or psychological separation of mothers and children “designed to disempower individuals, forms the basis of a systematic effort to disempower racial ethnic communities.” (1994:54). In such circumstances, keeping their children with them would definitely empower black mothers.
The third dimension of racial ethnic women's struggle for maternal empowerment concerns the efforts taken by the dominant group to control the children's minds. All these three dimensions can be overcome with the help of their strong, dynamic, indigenous culture which is being the source of energy. African American mothers can draw these cultural mores from the Afrocentric tradition where they have varied types of mothers. Racial ethnic mothers need to foster a meaningful self-identity in children within a society that denigrates people of colour.

The present study intends to focus on 'woman as mother' and this will be examined against the various concepts of motherhood ranging from the traditional to the radical. The function and concept of motherhood will be examined vis-a-vis the concepts of woman and womanhood. It is proposed that different dimensions of motherhood that range from assigned role play through socio-historically constructed entity, racio-cultural preserver and recreator to an independent being who rises above the restricting social and contextual demands be examined in the thesis. The thesis, thus, intends to study the novels of Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker as expressions of motherhood. Such an expression ranges through a number of perspectives-mother as a social construct, as a matriarchally groomed entity, a force receding from responsibility, a liberating agent, a benevolent crisis-manager, a teacher, a protector, a preserver of tradition and re-creator of root-culture, a figure of cultural wisdom, a self-effacing familial figure, a history-conscious saviour and so on.

The last quarter of the twentieth century is considered an era of women writers in the history of African American Literature. There are a large number of women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, Ann Petry, David

Almost all the black writers concentrated on the theme of motherhood. Among them Toni Morrison, the Nobel Laureate, is a remarkable writer as she uses her novels to map African American history, especially the history of slavery. Alice Walker, the founder of womanist theory, is known for her interest in racial politics, female bonding and woman-identified women. Gloria Naylor, the winner of best first book award, is always remembered for her inevitable attempt to recreate African culture, heritage and its values in her works. The criteria mentioned above have served in the selection of the novelists taken up for the present research venture.

Valerie Lee (1996) states that “midwives, root workers and traditional women healers dominate and transform the narratives of a significant number of black women writers including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor…” (9). Trudier Harris (2001) comments on “maternal toughness” in the first few pages of *Beloved* and highlights Sethe’s “maternal strength” that is “willing to sacrifice morality…to grade herself…to separate her mental self from the physical abuse on her body” (69). Trudier Harris (2001) views the role of Baby Suggs in *Beloved* as “noteworthy” (59) and finds a similarity in the mothering role of Baby Suggs and Mattie Michael in *The Women of Brewster Place*. Harris describes Baby Suggs as “the supportive mother” (60) since she affirms “a space of survival, a spiritual place where black women can go to tune out the destructive forces of the world” (60).
Gurleen Grewal (1998) analyses “the matrix of the womb and the longing for maternal nurturing as an important subtext” in *Sula*. He also appreciates Pilate’s capacity to draw Milkman Dead “into the matrix of African American culture” by functioning “as the life-ensuring mother figure to him” (68). He considers Rose Dear and Wild in *Jazz* as “figures through whom Toni Morrison represents the terror and bewilderment of black maternal experience during slavery and its aftermath”. (132)

Barbara Christian (1990) views *The Women of Brewster Place* as a novel in which “women mother one another” (357). She also highlights Naylor’s emphasis on “female values [that are] derived from mothering-nurturing, communality, [that has] concern with human feeling”(363). She also states that Morrison’s *Sula* and Walker’s *The Color Purple* are novels that “critique motherhood”(363). Marianne Hirsch (1990) views Toni Morrison’s *Sula* as a novel that deals with “the complicated interaction of maternal and daughterly voices” and he appreciates the novel’s “mediated status of maternal discourse”(417). According to him *Beloved* and *Sula* are novels that “heighten and intensify the experience of motherhood – of connection and separation” (428). Molly Hite(1990) views *The Color Purple* as a novel in which “the female roles of mother, daughter, wife and lover are slippery to the point of being interchangeable”(440).

Bell Hooks (1990) states that Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* “eschews” the identity of mother as defined in patriarchal society. Black women view mothering as “a task [that] any willing female can perform, irrespective of whether or not she has given birth” (468). Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos (1992) highlights the impact of slavery on Sethe and says that it “denies Sethe, her mothering and destroys the natural cycles of maternal bonding”(51). He analyses *Beloved* as a
novel that showcases “an interface between life and death from within a mother”.

Vincent A. O’Keefe (1996), while commenting on the narrative pattern of *Beloved*, states that “**Beloved** centres on and circles around Sethe Sugg’s maternal act of infanticide” (636). Karin Luisa Badt (1995) comments on “diaspora mothers” who are “everywhere” in Toni Morrison’s novels. He states that Morrison’s novels, especially *Sula, Beloved, Tar Baby* and *Jazz* “are drawn to and repulsed by the haunting presence of the mother”(11) and he also states that the characters’ returning to their mothers “should be seen in its political and cultural contexts”(12). Michele Pessoni (1995) analyses “the Great Mother archetype” in *Sula*. Commenting on Sula’s rejection of Eva, he states that “patriarchal fear of the feminine as Terrible Mother blinds Sula to the importance of maternal nourishment”. (42)

Adrienne Rich (1989) observes that Pauline Breedlove of *The Bluest Eye* has damaged herself with “internalised racism” and that she can “neither love nor try to protect her own child, while doting on her employer’s blonde children”(xxv). Wilfred D. Samuel and Clenora Hudson-Weems(1990) state that *Beloved* is “the social and emotional relationship between mother and infant”(102). They view Michael in *Tar Baby* as a “victim of his mother warped revenge”(89).

Eleanor W. Traylor (1988) states that *Tar Baby* “is a story about nourishment and of a woman whose nourishing power [is] cut off from its source” (McKay 148). Carolyn Denard (1988) argues that Eva is “not a doting mother…but she provided(sic) what was needed for them [children] to survive”( McKay 176) Sandi Russell views Pilate as “the most powerful…female ancestor” ( McKay 44).

Holloway and Demetrakopoulos (1987) view Nel’s matrilineal line suffers from
"an Eve/Mary bedrock of feminine duality, the Whore/Madonna polarity". And they describe Eva as "the founding matriarch and queen of the line"(54). They view Hager as a person who does not know to assert self because she "has been so pampered" and "terribly 'over mothered'"(98). Holloway and Demetrakopoulous (1987) state that "mothers and daughters have a special relationship in Morrison"(153). Dorothy H. Lee (1980) states that "the woman in Yellow [in Tar Baby] is reminiscent of the navelless Pilate in Song of Solomon, who also suggested a primal mother goddess". While commenting on Gloria Naylor's Mama Day, Valerie Lee(1996) states that "Mama Day's strength is grounded in an ancient African mother"(134). Kashinath Ranveer (1995) states that Lessie's mother in Alice Walker's The Temple of My Familiar represents "the plight of every black mother who has lost her spouse".(189)

The review of relevant literature has been used as a means to define and justify the topic and also to indicate that there is ample scope for researching into the complexities of mothers and mothering in the novels of Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

The First chapter of this thesis has given an overview of mothering and motherhood theories and it has discussed the theoretical frame work adopted for analysing the novels of the novelists chosen for research study. This chapter has also given the rationale behind the choice of the novelists and the topic and stated the research hypothesis.

The second chapter examines the novels of Gloria Naylor with the major focus trained on motherhood as a site of power in which the mother exercises her will to mould the young ones. It is intended to show how in Naylor's novels motherhood is weaned off from the patriarchal power system. The novels hinge on
the conviction that African American motherhood has to be resituated in African culture, which is and ought to be the root of the black in America. They question the status and condition of black culture when the blacks are displaced from their African motherhood by the vortex of white American culture. The chapter discusses how the novels of Naylor reveal a concern for the continuation of black matriarchal structure and power in America in the context of the impact of assimilation on African American motherhood. The chapter also examines how the novels of Naylor insist on the re-creation of the unique and rich African cultural practices in the new homeland of the Africans. Naylor puts forth the idea that any black woman is capable of emerging as a community mother who can lessen the responsibility of the biological mother by protecting and nurturing children who would otherwise be left to despairing loneliness when their mothers had to be away on work. The novels emphasis the need for community mothers whose main task is to rear children in the African ethos and cultural practices which would otherwise be lost by being engulfed by white culture. To Naylor, the task of the community mother is to sustain the life of the root – African cultural values and practices – so that the black in America do not lose their basic identity. Thus, the community mother is responsible for transmitting the cultural heritage from one generation to another thereby sustaining the cohesion of the black community in America. Naylor’s novels project the mother as a healer who heals the children by using her knowledge of ethnical practices. Healing – both physical and psychological – plays a vital role in the maternal practices of African American mother in a racist society.

The third chapter studies the works of Toni Morrison, who, unlike Gloria Naylor, prefers to situate motherhood in the historical context. She highlights the impact of historical happenings on motherhood. She considers motherhood a
liberating act which no one else in the world has the possibility of exercising and experiencing. The chapter also examines how the novels emphasis the need for one to connect oneself with one’s own cultural heritage and posit that this alone will constitute good mothering. Besides focusing on historical continuity, Morrison’s novels give importance to biological mothering. The chapter studies how the idea of Motherhood in Morrison’s novels has evolved from the task specific activities of the mother. The tasks relate to the protecting of the children and fostering in them a sense of independence, to nurturance and training and to the inculcation in them of ancient cultural values and historic specificity with regard to pre-slavery, slavery, and post-slavery conditions of existence of the black. The novels fuse the history of the black family with the history of the race and a significant aspect of mothering is to put the seeds of this relation between the black individual, black family and black history in the mind of the young. Thus, the mother is a significant node in preserving the past, in transmitting it to the present, and in preparing the young for the future. The significance of oral transmission in the complex process of mothering is unmistakable. Though she gives importance to the well-being of children, she pays equal or more attention to the well-being of mothers. Morrison also reveals certain convictions which she shares with Gloria Naylor. She believes in the need for community mothers as they could heal, nurture and protect the homeless children and prepare them to survive physically and culturally. She treats the act of mothering both as a public and a private responsibility. She also makes it clear that the experience of motherhood keeps shifting in meaning according to time, space and situation. She rejects the nuclear family system and pleads for the restoration of the ancestral African practice of othermothering in the African American families.
The fourth chapter takes up for study the works of Alice Walker who is herself a theorist of motherhood. While like Gloria Naylor and Morrison, she emphasizes the maternal practices of African Americans, she goes beyond them and traces the maternal practices of African Amerindians and of African Communities. It seems as if she wants to situate motherhood on a larger map of ideas and practices. According to her, mothers have to be strong. She emphasizes that motherhood as a concept and a set of maternal practices should transcend the limitations of biological motherhood. Unlike the other two, Walker posits that mothers should operate on two levels. The mother has to educate the daughters in sexuality, an area that remains a major source of exploitation and subordination and she has to function on the spiritual level. The latter accounts for her attempt to trace the practice of mother worship in different cultures. Walker focuses her attention on the procreative energy of feminine power and hence she does not prefer woman to be submissive and to play the role of a subordinate.

The fifth chapter recapitulates the historical and the theoretical dimensions discussed in the introductory chapter. It summarizes the concepts/features of motherhood commonly shared by all the three writers as evidenced in their novels. It also highlights the significant differences among the three. It also attempts to indicate how the differences make the works of the three complementary to one another.