CHAPTER II
COMMUNITY MOTHERS AND MOTHERLINE

This chapter intends to study the perspective from which motherhood and mothering have been presented in the novels of Gloria Naylor and it attempts to draw the theoretical scaffoldings underlying such a perspective present in the novels. This chapter also analyses the maternal practices and the role of black motherhood and it theorizes the maternal theory underlying the novels of Gloria Naylor. It also examines her conviction that there is need for a redefinition of African American motherhood. Gloria Naylor’s cultural and feminist standpoint propels her to situate her texts within various social and political movements of the twentieth century America. In turn, it expands the scope of the definition of motherhood as she wants it to be viewed in the contemporary African American society. Her conscious use of symbolic, religious, dialectical and musical acts in her novels challenges the fixed notions of race and creates a culture-specific motherhood against racist oppression. As a black woman who respects the role of women in her life and in others’ lives Naylor creates a female centered universe in each of her novel. She situates mothers and community mothers at the centre of this universe. Moreover she projects them as life sustaining phenomenon. Her formal pattern of repetition of characters, issues and themes contributes more in moulding these mother figures as goddesses.

The Women of Brewster Place (1982), Linden Hills (1985), Mama Day (1988), Bailey’s Café(1992), and The Men of Brewster Place(1998) are the novels taken up for study in this chapter. The novel 1996, published in 2005, has been left out of the purview of the thesis as it focuses predominantly on mind surveillance.

Naylor’s novels portray motherhood as an innate political power that women possess which they use to fight racial oppression in the society, to preserve the cultural
heritage and to promote their cultural values. This entails mothers and motherhood not being situated in the domain of patriarchal power and family structure. The novels present mothers as autonomous beings who create a community by erasing the negative impact of slavery, migration and assimilation. Naylor firmly believes in the construction of the black community in a land of alien culture. So she creates exclusive black communities and places mother characters at the centre of them. She emphasizes the economic independence of mothers to support the family. She also believes in expanding the concept and practice of motherhood by augmenting and extending mother-functions by adding othermothers to biological mothers and community mothers who would take care of the abandoned black women and children destined to live in the white society and indoctrinate in them the cultural values of their ancestral West African societies.

Naylor aims at the empowerment of the younger generation by making the mothers perform significant tasks such as preservation, nurturance and healing. All these tasks enable the black mothers to protect their own children as well as the children of the community physically, psychologically and economically. The mother is also seen as educator who would teach and train the children, especially girl children to safeguard themselves from sexist, racist and classist subjugation and exploitation. The mothering task extends to the domain of rehabilitation by healing (psychologically and physically, but more so in the former domain) those children who had not been mothered properly and responsibly and hence had been vulnerable to racist/sexual attacks.

In Gloria Naylor’s works, the community othermother is not shown as functioning in a subjugated and secondary position. In all her novels, she makes community mothers work for the community with missionary care for the well-being of
the individual and the community. She considers the power of community/othermothers as both transformative and transmissive. Such power is used to protect the children and vulnerable members of the community and to keep posterity centred on traditional cultural values. She considers this as an empowering act and experience. From this perspective biological mothers would appear less significant and less powerful.

Gloria Naylor’s uniqueness lies in her attempt to create in her novels a specific landscape and community that resembles African motherland. She firmly believes that the black women’s status in African American community lies in their role as mothers. She identifies the community othermother as a powerful figure who contributes to the community’s well being. She firmly believes in the transformative power which in other words has been called motherline. Noami Lowinsky (1992) defines the motherline thus:

> When a woman today comes to understand her life story as a story from the Motherline, she gains female authority in a number of ways. First, her motherline grounds her in her feminine nature as she struggles with the many options now open to women. Second, she reclaims carnal knowledge of her own body, its blood mysteries and their power. Third, as she makes the journey back to her female roots, she will encounter ancestors who struggled with similar difficulties in different historical times. This provides her with a life-cycle perspective that softens her immediate situation… Fourth, she uncovers her connection to the archetypal mother and to the wisdom of the ancient worldview, which holds that body and soul are one and all life is interconnected. And, finally, she reclaims her female perspective, from which to consider how men are similar and how they are different. (13)
This motherline as advocated by Naomi Lowinsky could be found in Naylor’s *Mama Day*. She advocates this motherline even among non-biological mother–child relationships in *Linden Hills*.

Naylor’s narrative presentation of mothers and mothering through almost all the novels enables her to form an overall perspective based on which her implicit theory of motherhood can be deduced. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, she has presented failed biological mothers like Mattie Michael, Ceil and Cora Lee. She also presents Mattie Michael and Eva as mothers who try to emerge as community othermothers. In *Mama Day* she has succeeded in presenting the title character as a perfect community mother who protects her people and the island and emerges as a ghetto goddess. In her next novel, *Bailey’s Café*, she presents another community mother who embraces women from different racial-political backgrounds. In her second novel *Linden Hills*, she presents the threats that loom over such motherhood in the patriarchal system. Even though her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* presents Mattie Michael as a failed mother, her fifth novel *The Men of Brewster Place* succeeds in presenting the same character as a successful biological mother through her son Basil’s memory.

*The Women of Brewster Place*, the American Book Award winning novel for the year 1982, is a novel of seven stories based on the lives of seven women who end up their lives in Brewster Place. This novel is the first of her novel series and she finishes the quarter with *Bailey’s Café* that highlights the accomplishment of the human spirit over adversity. Each story in *The Women of Brewster Place* concentrates on the life of a woman. Even though each of these seven stories is independent and complete in itself, the stories are interconnected with each other and they get united at the end of the novel both thematically and narratively. In this novel, she creates a perfect black ghetto namely Brewster Place.
The inspiration for *The Women of Brewster Place* came from several sources, but the main source is Naylor's own mother and grand mother as Naylor herself says:

The women [of *Brewster Place*] are women I never knew personally. But I have known that spirit, I have definitely known that life. That is how those characters were born... I wanted to immortalize the spirit I saw in my grand mother, great aunt and my mom (Draper 1992: 1482).

It is interesting to note that Fraser(1993) reads *The Women of Brewster Place* as a counterargument to the New Right discourse of "Black welfare motherhood" and single-parent families, exemplified by the Moynihan report. "By presenting the living diversity of Black female experience, struggling to survive in the ghetto, Naylor undermines conservative stereotypes of black poverty"(Gate 1993: xi). Celeste Fraser reads this novel as an attempt by Gloria Naylor "to disarm" the fables constructed by Murray and Moynihan regarding black people and black families.

Naylor has created Brewster Place which is a dead end street occupied earlier by Irish and Mediterranean people. Later it was occupied by the Blacks. The author describes the street as "the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Reality Company"(1). This place is occupied by poor and powerless black people, who are mostly denied respect and discarded by other people. They never interfere in events that go on in the outside world and hence it forms a unique social environment. Even though their sufferings are different, the women of the place adopt unique strategies for helping fellow women for their own and the survival of the society. These women are "hard-edged, soft-centred, brutally demanding and easily pleased" (5).
Among the seven prominent women characters in this novel there are two unwed mothers – Mattie Michael and Cora Lee. Apart from them there is Luceilia Louise Turner(Ceil), a biological mother. Eva plays the role of the community mother. Kiswana Browne’s mother plays the role of a perfect biological mother who deals with the idealistic and politically motivated daughter.

Her novels focus on what women can do for each other in a positive way that goes beyond the practice of sisterhood bonding. In an interview with Donna Perry (1991), by approving the real power in women’s love and support for one another Naylor says:

I do, beyond a doubt. Historically, women have only had each other. It is only very recently that they have been given any exposure outside the home or even the ability to work outside the home and to live and make a living. Maybe because my mother had six sisters and two brothers, I saw this support of women for one another all my life. And my grandmother was like the matriarch there. I saw what women would do for each other. In my own life, when there’s problem of any nature, I turn to a woman. Your female friends are the ones you have the longest history with, for the most part, because they understand; they understand. The bonding of females will always come up in my work. (Montgomery 2004: 79).

Through the text, mother–child relationship, especially mother-daughter relationship, is being highlighted.

A study of any female character in this novel directly leads on to a study of the life of Mattie Michael. Mattie Michael who is the central mother figure in The Women
of Brewster Place starts her childhood in Rock Vale, Tennessee in a patriarchal family with a tough father and a submissive mother. Brought up ignorant of sex and sexual abuses, Mattie Michael easily falls a victim to the smooth talking Butch Fuller, a self-contained womanizer who never believes in marriage. She is seduced by Butch Fuller on one spring afternoon in the field of Basil herbs and he abandons Mattie to manage her father Samuel Michael on her own. A large part of Mattie’s story covers her life from the time of her leaving Tennessee to her arrival at Brewster Place. She is almost caught in all circumstances that are beyond her control like poverty, lack of man power, racial injustice and hard work.

When her mother tells her husband about Mattie's pregnancy, he never speaks a word either to his wife or to Mattie. He gets highly disappointed when he comes to know that the father of the child is not Fred to whom Samuel Michael has intended to give his daughter in marriage: “He wanted to kill the man who had sneaked into his home and distorted the faith and trust he had in his child” (WBP 23).

The wrath of her father and her own conscience make her resolve not to disturb her parents, to move away from home and settle down with her friend Etta Johnson. As Etta Johnson also leaves her, she finds loneliness eating into her existence. Not a girl anymore and not an experienced mother as yet, she stands at the threshold between girlhood and motherhood. She finds it difficult to manage her work and Basil, her son. She longs to be assisted by her mother in rearing Basil. Yet her mother refuses to stay with her as she has to take care of her husband. On the other hand, her mother wants Mattie to send Basil to her. Mattie does not heed to her as she does not want to get separated from her son.

With the help of Eva Turner who is introduced to Mattie as a nameless woman, Mattie and her son Basil get the warmth, comfort and security that they need. Eva
Turner, who has been the othermother to Ceil her grand daughter, now replaces Mattie’s biological mother. Barbara Christian (1990) comments on the role of Eva Turner thus: “it is a stranger Miss. Eva, who mothers Mattie and her son, giving them a secure and happy home. Miss. Eva may, as she says, partial to men but in the novel it is Mattie she treats like kin”. (357)

With the arrival of Mattie and her son Basil, Eva’s family resembles the African American extended family. Eva who is already serving as othermother to her granddaughter Ceil goes further to achieve the functional status of the African American community mother. Eva offers not only her place, but also the confidence and moral support that Mattie so badly needs. Eva’s transformation is a gradual process as she has been a biological mother, then the African othermother and then the Community Mother.

Mattie can be categorized under sensitive mothers. As a sensitive mother, Mattie makes herself available all the time to Basil’s needs and never allows him to worry about anything. This is obviously seen from the incident when Basil is arrested on the charge of manslaughter. In order to get him on bail, Mattie goes to the extent of selling off her house that has been gifted by Eva. Mattie never scolds or warns him. Instead she pampers him thus: “Baby, there ain’t nothing to worry about” (WBP 48). Even though Mattie understands the harshness of the community and the world, she does not facilitate Basil to have the courage to fight back racism. She does not want to leave him anywhere not even in her mother’s place.

Eva often warns Mattie not to dote over her son so much. She often wonders whether the love that Mattie has for her son is at the expense of the love that she should have for a mature male companion will do her any good. She views the wellbeing of Mattie from a mother centred angle rather from the child centred perspective. Basil
turns out to be an irresponsible person without caring either for his well being or his mother’s due to the over-protective and sensitive love. In rearing Basil, Mattie exhibits a toxic love that leads to her losing her son for ever and her losing the home that Eva has offered to her. Larry R. Andrews (1993) comments on this issue thus: “one of the problems several women face is that in their isolation they come to focus all their needs on their children and define themselves exclusively as mothers, thus enacting a male-defined, exploitative role” (287). This tendency has both negative and positive consequences.

King and Mitchell (1995) argue that African American literature presents two extreme pictures of black mother parenting the son. They explain it further thus: “mothers who whip their sons brutally “for their own good” and mothers who love their sons to destruction through self-sacrifice and overindulgence” (12). Mattie, according to King and Mitchell, belongs to the second category. On account of her overindulgence, Basil finds it difficult to attain manhood. Moreover, he loses his self-esteem, dignity and true self-consciousness. In this connection, it is apt to quote Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucy (1989) who examine the case of sensitive mothering. They view one of the features of sensitive mothering in regulating the children thus:

Essentially there should be no overt regulation; regulation should go underground; no power battles, no insensitive sanctions as these would interfere with the child's illusion that she is the source of her wishes, that she has "free will". (23-24)

Mattie, as a biological mother, fulfils the duty of a protector. When Basil was a baby, he was bitten by a rat. Mattie Michael immediately began to cry with him and
"she sat up all night with the light on" (29). Whitt (1999) notices a similarity between this and a similar incident in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.

Mattie is a Southerner who migrates to the North. Her disconnection from her African root in mothering is also responsible for her over-protection and excessive love for her son. Moreover, this does not allow her to listen to Eva Turner, who advises her not to pamper her son and warns her to be assertive. Naylor has presented the consequence of Mattie’s rejection of Eva’s advice. There may be another reason suggested by psychoanalytic theory. The boy child and the girl child have different experience in the socialization process of sex-role. The boy children learn maleness by rejecting femaleness and by separating themselves from their mother. Girl children establish their feminine identity by embracing or adopting the femaleness and of their mothers. Here in this novel also, Basil rejects his mother and wants to embrace his maleness sought in the outside world.

Even if she fails as a biological mother, she succeeds as a surrogate mother in bringing up Ceil and as a community mother to all the women in Brewster Place. Now, the question is whether her failure as biological mother should be used against her. Her failure as a biological mother does not interfere with her nurturing, protecting and healing capacities. After losing everything, Mattie Michael arrives at Brewster Place where the community of women suffers from various kinds of exploitations. In spite of having all kinds of problems like losing her father’s love, the love of Butch Fuller and the failure of her son’s life, she remains calm and generous. Her tolerance, empathetic nature, and her fellow feeling project her as an “earth mother”.

Mattie’s story of success starts only after she reaches Brewster Place where she exercises her free will to protect other female members of the place. Mattie’s ability to
function in an extended family circle is evidently seen through her relationship with Ceil Turner. Mattie is considered to be Ceil’s second mother as they had spent their early days in Eva Turner’s Place.

Ceil (Luceilia Lousie Turner) is the granddaughter of Eva Turner and Eva is her othermother. Her story deals with the impact of economic issues on motherhood. While highlighting the theme of conflict between men and women, Naylor focuses on the black man’s limited job opportunities and on poverty which lie at the root of such conflicts. Eugene, the husband of Ceil, thinks that a job is one of the means to assert his manhood. Their marriage turns to be loveless by racism and economical depression. Eugene blames Ceil for his inability to get a job. Ceil understands his frustration and tries to make the necessary adjustments to run the family peacefully. As he is unable to fight against the social and political realities, he becomes a problem maker to Ceil and their daughter Serena. Ignoring all the meaningless hatred of Eugene, Ceil always serves as a consolation to him. Apart from the affection she has for Eugene, the fear of Eugene leaving her and her daughter makes her adopt all available means to retain her husband. She even goes to the extent of aborting the second baby she is conceived with. Even after Ceil’s tremendous self-sacrifice, Eugene decides to leave her.

Unfortunately Ceil is denied by her husband and her daughter Serena. Serena always serves as a moral support to Ceil. Even when Eugene fights with her, she consoles her mind by looking “down on the peaceful face of her daughter and softly caressed her small cheek” (WBP 93).

Mattie has great concern for Ceil not only because she is the granddaughter of Eva Turner but also because she has reared Ceil during her early days. After their arrival at Brewster place, Mattie functions as a mentor and a nurturer of the women of Brewster Place including Ceil. Jill Matus (1990) points out:
After the catastrophic death of Ceil's daughter, she [Mattie] is mentor and nurturer. Mattie's moving ritual of bathing and cleansing Ceil draws on commonsensical folkloric wisdom and links her to the tradition of black women who have nursed their sisters through grief and suffering. As the community's best voice and sharpest eye, she is well-qualified to express the unconscious urgings of the community and dream the collective dream. (52)

Mattie’s failure as biological mother never prevents her mothering ability and maternal thinking. This becomes evident by her ability to give what may be called a new birth to Ceil. After the death of Serena, Ceil passes into a death-in-life state. Mattie bathes Ceil carefully and tenderly as a mother. She rocks her and the rocking symbolizes the rocking backward in time and implies the act of getting back into womb. Naylor has explained this process lyrically in the novel as follows:

Ceil moaned Mattie rocked. Propelled by the sound, Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time.... She rocked her into her childhood and let her see murdered dreams. And she rocked her back, .... And Mattie rocked and pulled-and the splinder gave way, but its roots were deep, gigantic, ragged, and they tore up flesh with bits of fat and muscle tissue clinging to them. They left huge hole, which was already starting to pus over but Mattie was satisfied. It would heal. (WBP 103-4)

After this symbolic, mystical and spiritual rebirth that Ceil undergoes, she cries over what she has failed to do after the death of her daughter. Moreover, Naylor is specific in presenting this rebirth to happen only outside white patriarchal set up. Mattie makes Ceil undergo catharsis. This catharsis is possible only after self-realization. Naylor
states that effect of (re)birth thus: “And Ceil lay down and cried. But Mattie knew the tears would end. And she would sleep. And morning would come”. (WBP 105)

Judith Wilt (1990) appreciates the importance of Mattie’s role in the life of Ceil by stating that Mattie has brought back Ceil to her normal sense by healing the psychological wound caused by the loss of her child. Judith Wilt views Mattie as Ceil’s guardian and comments on her deed thus:

Mattie heals Lucielia by becoming her mother, returning the maddened, infanticidal mother to the life-affirming womb and bearing her again, cleaning the sick and helpless woman... Lucielia drifts toward sleep and a clearer awakening, secured by the mythic maternity of her resilient guardian. (144)

Mattie is responsible for saving Ceil from a premature, grief-stricken demise. Michael Awkward (1993) points out that the purification process is a complementary one. He says that as Mattie cleanses the outside, Ceil gets cleansed inside. The tear is a symbol of that purification. Thus Mattie succeeds as a surrogate mother by healing her surrogate daughter Ceil. Without the presence of Mattie, Ceil might have become like Pecola of *The Bluest Eye* or Sula of *Sula*, or Hagar of *Song of Solomon*.

The complete act of healing happens in the case of Ceil and she comes back from her pains of the loss of her two children. Mattie is considered by the novelist herself as someone more than black earth mother:

No! No! No! Like a black Brahman cow, desperate to protect her young, she surged into the room, pushing the neighbor woman and others out of her way....The black mammoth gripped so firmly that the slightest
increase of pressure would have cracked the girl’s spine. But she rocked
(WBP 103).

Naylor brings in the analogy of Brahman Cow and black mammoth not for aesthetic and analogical purpose but to highlight the efficiency and potentiality of Mattie. In Hindu Mythology the Brahman Cow is Kamadhenu, (Refer Appendix III) the cow goddess who is responsible for life giving and prosperity. The use of mammoth suggests more than one layer of meaning. The mammoth is an extinct genus known for its long and wooly hair which is also one of the physical characteristic features of a Black woman. Both the mammoth and the black people are known for their great physical strength. The reasons for its extinction are mainly based on human hunting and climatic change. In the beginning human beings were afraid of its huge size and they could not attack it single handedly. So they attacked it in groups and led them to extinction. It is similar in the case of Black people also. The way in which human beings attacked the mammoth resembles more the slave catching method. It is interesting to note that the social structure of the mammoth resembles the African American priority. The mammoths live in herds headed by a matriarch while the bull mammoths lived solitarily or formed a loose group after sexual maturity. So it can be said that Mattie is the black mammoth, a matriarch who manages the herd of other mammoths in Brewster Place.

The rocking episode is a significant event. It introduces “the maternal history and female centered survival”(Fraser 99). By her rocking, Mattie takes Ceil over her grief of mothers caused by “massive, institutionalized violence” (100). Moreover, Fraser adds that the strength of motherhood rests not on any essential or mythological character of black women, but on the necessity to overcome violence.
Cora Lee in this novel is an irresponsible black mother. She loves her children when they are helpless infants but starts neglecting them when they grow up. She does not understand the cultural definition of her sex role as a mother in her community. She accepts men in her life only to beget babies. Part of the problem lies with her parents especially with her mother who rarely tells her about the nature of babies. She never recognizes the fact that babies are not mere dolls but complex human beings. Moreover, she fails to understand that as mother she has to protect and nurture the children. Her fascination and obsession with toys leads her to beget more babies. She sees her children only as “plastics”. Her admiration for toy that is approved for young girls by western culture has its impact on her. This is the result of the assimilation of western culture by the black and its impact on the cultural view of African American motherhood. Her parents never tell young Cora Lee that the mother is responsible not only for begetting and rearing babies but also responsible for nurturing, guiding and teaching them until they become adults.

Apart from Mattie, Ceil and Cora Lee, there is another mother who should be taken into account. She is Mrs. Browne, the mother of Kiswana Browne. While commenting on Kiswana Browne, Naylor says that she has drawn inspiration from her mother to create such a biological mother who resembles more of her own mother. She says:

I'm sure there must be. I'm positive that if I ever had the inclination or the time to take them apart I would find things that would surprise me. Maybe she's there in a mother that worried excessively – Kiswana Browne's mother [in Brewster Place], for example. This kind of mother who would come visit you and check out your apartment. (Montgomery 2004:79)
Kiswana Browne's story signifies the generational differences between mother and daughter. It is set in the early 1970s when there was an increasing popularity in reclaiming African roots. Kiswana Browne is also highly influenced by the movement and she arrives at Brewster Place and her relationship with Cora Lee is remarkable.

Kiswana Browne's episode is significant because it highlights the class difference that is present among the members of Black community of Brewster Place and the Black people who live in Linden Hills, a neighbouring settlement of Brewster Place.

Kiswana, a college dropout, is highly influenced by Marxist theory. Her mother Mrs. Browne never agrees with Kiswana's stay at Brewster Place as she is a class-conscious woman. At the same time she fulfills all the required functions that an African American mother would perform. Kiswana Browne is a free thinker who never likes any kind of dependence on other people. Without any disrespect to her mother she decides the moral standards of her own life. Kiswana Browne has rejected her mother's choice in naming her Melanie because she wants to have an African name rather than accepting her own grandmother's name.

Though the mother and daughter come together only for an hour or so, the episode shows different African American experiences. Using Patricia Hill Collins' (1991) social learning theory it can be said that Mrs. Browne is a strong disciplinarian. This is true as far as Kiswana Browne does not want her mother to know her premarital relationship with Abuse. Moreover, Mrs. Browne is highly concerned about her daughter's protection. She does not want her daughter to be deprived of money at any time. She is not pleased when she knows that Kiswana has asked for money from her brother. Hence, while she leaves she keeps money for Kiswana on the cot.
Gloria Wade-Gayles (1993) offers an explanation for this apparent contradiction suggesting that Black Mothers:

- do not socialize their daughters to be passive or irrational. Quite the contrary, they socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self confident. Black mothers are suffocatingly protective and domineering precisely because they are determined to mould their daughters into whole and self-actualizing persons in a society that devalues Black Women. (54-55)

Mrs. Browne possesses all the qualities of a Black Mother. Her remarkable act of protecting her daughter physically, guiding her away from the sexual exploitation of men makes her a perfect African American mother. She wants to nurture the traditional qualities of African womanhood in Kiswana by protecting her economically. She is the opposite of Fannie, the mother of Mattie, who wants to live with her husband rather than protect her own daughter. Fannie, as a Southerner, must have shown greater love towards Mattie. The reason for not showing affection to her daughter may lie in the difference in economic status and her unwillingness to move away from her southern roots. At the same time, Fannie can not be totally considered a failed mother as she “prevents him (Samuel Michael) from beating the pregnant girl (Mattie) to a pulp”. (Christian 1990: 357)

Turnage (2001) emphasizes the relationship between African American young women and their mothers by saying that the black mothers have:

- instilled in them the knowledge that they are competent and lovable. Based on their trust in their mothers, these young women believed, when confronted with difficult situations, that they could rely on their mother’s
assistance. Thus, as they grow into black womanhood, they grow with the knowledge that they can accomplish their goals and that they are worthy of love and respect. (184)

Kiswana views Linden Hill's morality "as hypocritical and narrow minded" (Christian 1990: 113). Unlike other women characters, Kiswana attempts to help the community but her mother is not for this. Adrienne Rich (1986), in her Of Woman Born rightly comments on the status of women activists and their mothers thus: "The woman activist or artist born of a family-centered mother may in any case feel that her mother cannot understand or sympathize with the imperatives of her life; or that her mother has preferred and valued a more conventional daughter or a son" (Rich 229).

As Rich says, Kiswana Browne's mother never desires her to be an activist. But she wants her to accept the cultural values of Linden Hills and settle down to a family life. The rupture between Mrs. Browne and Kiswana Browne is due to the generation gap and the healing of the rupture, as Larry R Andrews (1993) points out "emerges not from suffering but from the daughter's discovery of her mother's sexuality. Kiswana Browne is "healed" in her conflict with her mother by coming to identify herself with her mother as a woman" (288). Here Kiswana Browne understands her not as a mother but as a woman.

Kiswana Browne never encourages her mother to identify Kiswana Browne with Linden Hills. Contrarily she always feels proud of her tradition and often remembers that her tradition encourages the need for a strong mother figure and mothering.

The clash between these two women emerges in the choice of name. Kiswana changed her name from Melanie to indicate her rejection of the Euro-centric culture.
and her affirmation of her allegiance to her African heritage. Mrs. Browne stands for
the traditional values of African culture whereas Kiswana represents the attitude of the
middle class black society in which the youngsters reject the values of the parents and
accepts the values of black nationalists. Mrs. Browne who can not reconcile herself to
this change says:

It broke my heart when you changed your name. I gave you my
grandmother’s name, a woman who bore nine children and educated
them all, who held off six white men with a shotgun when they tried to
drag one of her sons to jail for ‘not knowing his place’. Yet you needed
to reach into an African dictionary to find a name to make you proud.
(WBP 86)

In this way, Mrs. Browne argues that Kiswana’s given name Melanie has a history and
heritage. After knowing this, Kiswana accepts her rejected family history. Naylor
through Kiswana instructs the black women to inherit the family values and the black
revolutionary ideals. Through this, Naylor seems to say that whatever kind of social
activism the black daughters are involved in, they must fit themselves into the
motherline of African Americans. Kiswana realizes this. She

...suddenly realized that her mother had trod through the same universe
that she herself was now traveling. Kiswana was breaking no new trails
and would eventually end up just two feet away on that couch. She
stared at the woman she had been and was to become. (WBP 87)

Even though the healing does not happen as it happens in the case of Ceil, the
healing is witnessed through Kiswana Browne – Mrs. Browne reconciliation. What

Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other – beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive and proverbial: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other. (220)

It is, thus, this mothering of Mrs. Browne that enables Kiswana to emerge as an activist with the political betterment of her people in view. She handles political issues deftly which is evident in her demanding of the documents of Brewster Place from the masters. Moreover she has strong passion for her African American culture. It is true what has been stated by Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis (1981) about Black mother – daughter relationship in the case of Kiswana Browne. According to them the black mother’s foremost task is:

...teaching of survival skills to females for their survival skills in and for the survival of the Black Community. Intra-group survival skills were given importance and credence than survival skills for dealing with the White society at large. There is a tremendous amount of teaching transmitted by Black mothers to their daughters that enables them to survive... (106)

Irrespective of the nature of mother-daughter relationship between Mrs. Browne and Kiswana Browne, it is teaching that plays a crucial role. Kiswana is against Linden Hill for its hypocritical life style but is not against African culture. As she has inherited the strength of the black community, she is enabled to challenge and survive at Brewster
place and to live for her fellow black women. More over this mother–daughter relationship has to do with more things as Christian (1990) points out:

Kiswana's meeting with her mother is an amplification of a major chord sounded throughout this novel, for Brewster Place women mother one another. Perhaps these women are sometimes labeled “matriarchs” because together they are able to endure so much. (357)

Thus in this novel Gloria Naylor has presented successful surrogate mothers, successful biological mothers and matriarchs of the Black community who remain as a source of energy throughout the novel.

The Women of Brewster Place is thematically related to her fifth novel The Men of Brewster Place. It is set in the same place as the first novel and all the characters of The Women of Brewster Place revisit this novel either dead or alive. Ben, who is dead in The Women of Brewster Place, comes alive and plays a vital role in this novel. Ben learns three lessons of which the first one is silence as a means of survival. The second lesson is about Uncle Tom in White society. The third lesson is of the isolation and fate of black fathers and black daughters in the white society. After the death of his grandfather, his grandmother takes care of him. Once again, Naylor hints at othermothering.

Ben and his wife Elvira are sharecroppers with Mr. Clyde. Their innocent daughter is sexually exploited by the White master. Even though Naylor presents the story of men, she does not fail to highlight the importance of the mother's role. Ben fails to protect his daughter, even after understanding her painful circumstances in Mr. Clyde's place. His wife Elvira never tries to understand her daughter's position in a White family. Instead, she wants to shirk her responsibility by saying: "She aint doing
the best she can, and I'm sick of carrying the load for a half-grown woman and a no-count man. Both of you lazy as sin" (MBP 21-22).

Elvira’s daughter, a “sweet girl” is crippled from birth because the midwife broke her foot at the time of birth. It can not be rectified throughout her life. Though Elvira considers her daughter a burden she sends her daughter to Mr. Clyde’s house to earn money. Even when her daughter tells her about the behaviour of Mr. Clyde, Elvira is not ready to believe her. Instead she blames both the father and the daughter. She often calls her “the load” which implies that she is a burden on her. Unfortunately, she too falls as a victim to western culture. She feels proud that her daughter works in the white master’s place. She “runs and brags to the neighbors’ that our daughter is now working in a rich house in Memphis”. (27)

Elvira resembles Pauline Breedlove in Morrison’s The Bluest Eye who feels proud to be a housemaid for the white master. Like Pauline, she too takes pride working in a white family. Like Pauline, Elvira too does not show any maternal interest in her daughter. As Pauline’s irresponsibility as a mother caused the loss of the life of Pecola, Elvira becomes responsible for the loss of the life Ben’s daughter. Like Margaret of Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby Elvira is the abusive mother.

Basil’s story is given in first person narration. Basil is introduced as an irresponsible person in The Women of Brewster Place. In The Men of Brewster Place Basil is presented as a person who longs to compensate the love that he has for his mother by finding out some woman and lead a happy life. The mother role that Mattie played is now played by Basil to his sons. His fathering ability resembles the maternal love that he has received from his mother. His loveless marriage with his wife and his imprisonment lead him to lose the love of his children. When he comes back he could get the same kind of love from his sons Jason and Eddie. Keishe, Basil’s wife as a
mother wants to bring up her son. But Basil is determined to get the love of his sons as a gesture of honouring the maternal love he had received from his mother. In this way Mattie’s love for her son Basil never fails. Mattie can not be considered totally a failed biological mother based on the analysis of *The Women of Brewster Place* alone.

Gloria Naylor’s second novel *Linden Hills* is also titled after the name of a residential place as her first novel. This place is introduced in the first novel itself as the native place of Kiswana Browne, where Theresa owned an apartment and where Cora Lee’s sister had a big house. Mel Watkins (1993) states that Naylor in *Linden Hills* uses a "...confined geographical setting to construct a fable about the interconnected lives of a group of black characters. It is, however, a much more ambitious work ... [that] tackles a controversial subject with boldness and originality" (7).

Even in the first novel, the readers are given a glimpse of the hypocritical lifestyle of the inhabitants of Linden Hills. Naylor has shown the class difference among the black people by portraying the economically poor community in Brewster Place and the upper middle class society in Linden Hills. Barbara Christian (1990) points out that Naylor’s geographical set-up contains “race and class distinctions” (352). Naylor’s creation of Brewster Place shows her ability to form a close-knit community amidst the white culture. In contrast she shows in *Linden Hills*, the people’s inability to form a community in an exclusive black environment owing to their assimilation with white culture.

Unlike *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills* presents the black bourgeois class. In this novel, Naylor presents only fewer possibilities of female community. Andrews (1993) observes the peculiarities of a variety of women characters in Linden Hills who find it difficult to communicate with one another for mutual support:
Among the minor characters are two older women (one with a matriarchal aura), several respectable wives and mothers of middle age, and several well-educated young women of the third, rising generation. Grandma Tilson is the stern guardian of traditional values comparable to Mattie Michael, but she is no longer alive.... Yet, she is significant not just as a woman or for women, as Mattie is. Her warning against self-betrayal and loss of identity (selling "that silver mirror God propped up in your soul), so often ignored by the middle-class residents, is meant for women and men, and Lester and Willie are its most receptive audience. The other older woman, Roberta Johnson, Laurel Dumont's grandmother, gives good advice about finding one's center, too, but she is ultimately ineffectual in preventing Laurel's suicide. (291)

Linden Hills, like The Women of Brewster Place, begins with the description of the history of Linden Hills as it has been constructed by Nedeed Men. The community living in Linden Hill does not resemble African community. In Linden Hills women are not given importance. They are considered only as reproductive machines. In this novel, mothering gets importance in its failure. No child in Linden Hills is properly mothered. Willa Prescott, the wife of the last of the Nedeeds begets a son, the sixth generation of the Nedeeds. She is confined with her son in the basement of her house for not begetting a dark-skinned heir like the Nedeed line.

In this novel, Naylor has created four biological mothers and one community mother. Willa Prescott, Luwana Packerville, Evelyn Creton and Priscilla McGuine are biological mothers and Mrs. Tilson is the community mother. Roberta is the othermother.
Christopher N. Okonkwo (2001) states that Willa’s death has not always been viewed merely as a suicide and self-destruction. Okonkwo further states that, “Willa’s “self-sacrifice” not only envisions cleansing of the (original) sin wrought on the world (of Linden Hills) by a male, Luther Nedeed, but also, in a larger racial/political sense, it (re) establishes the presence of and (re) locates strong Black womanhood at the center of Black liberation struggle and discourse” (118). Willa's death is a metaphorical representation of the Black woman's critical and unrecognized position in the nationalist struggle.

Christopher N. Okonkwo distinguishes the difference in the suicide committed by Laurel and Willa. Laurel’s suicide is an evidence of failure in her battle against the powers of androcentrism. Even though she is well trained by her grandmother Roberta she does not accept her grandmother's prescription of cultural ways in dealing with one's suffering. She does not look for any alternative means to come up against the ills of the society. She shrinks within the boundaries of materiality, maleness and marriage because she has disconnected herself from her motherline. He views Linden Hills as a novel that deals with the need for sociopolitical and spiritual salvation in a black community that suffers from interracial sexism. He states that Willa’s discovery of her foremothers is, in a way, a birth. Moreover, he adds that:

Willa's portentous motherhood alludes to the availability of that (woman's) "God" an everyday she – Black, maternal, bereaved, earthly and commissioned emphatically to address the needs of Now. The birth completes the call-and-response continuity of a woman's collective. In a broader socio cultural and political sense, it shows how women respond to each other's adversity, work through each other, and often entrust their salvation to a woman's community. (125)
In Naylor's creation of this patriarchal community the sons are expected to be like their fathers and to be separated from their mothers. The condition of women and mothers in *Linden Hills* reflects the opinion of Adrienne Rich who states that in the patriarchal community: “... (a) mothers, women have been idealized and also exploited ... Black women have had a very different understanding rooted in their respective community history and values: the shared concern of many members of a group for all its young” (xxiv).

Willa's maternal failure is a repeated tale/curse on the Nedeed women. Naylor states Willa’s loss of her self identity in the family thus:

> Willa Nedeed was a good mother and a good wife. For six years, she could claim that identity without any reservations. But now Willa Nedeed sat on a cot in a basement, no longer anyone’s mother or anyone’s wife. So how did they happen? She stared at the concrete steps leading up to the kitchen door. It happened because she walked down into this basement. That was simple enough; that was clear. (*LH* 279)

As Willa Prescott Nedeed's life and motherhood are controlled by Nedeed, she is unable to find her identity. The imprisonment of Willa leads her to trace out "herstory" (Christian 1990: 360). She starts finding out the stories of her foremothers which revolves around the loss of their motherhood.

Lawana Packerville, the wife of Nedeed the first, was a slave who was purchased by Nedeed himself for her dark colour. The liberation that is brought by Nedeed for Lawana is not liberation but a trap to keep her oppressed throughout her life. After she begets a dark coloured son, she is replaced by a housemaid. More than her husband's rejection, her son's rejection makes her anxious. In order to console
herself, she resorts to writing letters to herself. In her letter she says: “Luther told me
today that I have no right to my son. He owns the child he owns me. He grew terribly
enraged when I ventured a mild protest and showed me the papers that were signed
over to his agent in Tupelo”. (Lh117)

Her ability to be a mother makes her get freedom but not to be a mother to her
son. She considers this a humiliation. Her inability to be a mother to her son and get
recognition from him makes her insane. The taking away of her son from her, the
mother is not simply the severance of a relationship but a denial of motherhood. After
searching the history of Luwana Packervilla in the Bible, Willa discovers the history of
the second Nedeed’s wife, Evelyn Creton Nedeed. Evelyn’s history is revealed through
the recipe book that she maintains. She is interested in providing food to everyone.
Evelyn also suffers from negligence. Her desires and mother love are not fulfilled.
Through her documentation, Luwana’s insanity and her eventual death on Christmas
eve are revealed.

Priscilla McGuine, the wife of third Luther Nedeed, is more sophisticated
woman and she possesses artistic qualities. Her history is revealed through a photo
album. Even this woman’s laughing nature is taken away by her son. Her image in the
earlier photographs is something different from later ones. In the last photograph her
identity starts to fade away and finally it becomes blurred. Her loss of identity is very
well presented in the novel thus:

Her face was gone. The photo album trembled in her cold hands as she
realized there was no mistaking what she now saw: Priscilla McGuire
ended at the neck – and without her features, she was only a flattened
outline pressed beneath cellophane. The narrow chin, upturned nose, and
deep fiery eyes were a beige blur between the shadows cast by the two grown men on each side of her. (LH 249)

Thus, the story of Linden Hills revolves around the wasted and destroyed lives of generations of women. Adrienne Rich writes thus about the impact of patriarchal oppression on motherhood: “As long as society itself is patriarchal which means antimaternal there never be enough mothering for sons who have to grow up under the rule of the Fathers, in a public "male" world separate from the private "female" world of the affections" (212).

When Willa looks into a pail of water she finds that her face resembles that of Mrs. Tilson, a community mother. Mrs. Tilson, the grandmother of Lester, challenges Luther Nedeed and warns him about their loss of identity. Her rebellious attitude shows her courage and will power. Naylor's description of her strong will is authentic: "Her clear skin allowed people to see the firmness of characters that it covered. She had never minded staring down a Nedeed, because she liked what she read about herself in their bottomless eyes" (LH 13). The oppression of women in Nedeed family is passed on from one generation to another. In a conversation with Toni Morrison, Naylor states about Nedeed women thus:

After she had dug up the remnants of the other Nedeed women, I created a way for her to see her own reflection in a pan of water because she had no self until that moment. And when she realized that she had a face, then maybe she had other things going for her as well, and she could take her destiny in her own hands. (587)

Willa starts relying on dead women from whom she comes to know about the past. All the stories and pictures warn her of the present that awaits her. Based on the
experiences of all her foremothers Willa develops strength and determination. She decides not to go back to the community. So she concludes her life along with her husband and son by setting fire to herself. Willa, as a woman, is meant for the continuation of generation but she puts an end to a new generation. Willa who is supposed to remain a creator turns to be a destroyer in order to put an end to the atrocity of patriarchy. She emerges well as a Kali (Refer Appendix III) figure very much like Eva of Sula, Sethe of Beloved and Tashi of Possessing the Secret of Joy. Barbara Christian (1990) justifies the race-destroying attitude by pointing her finger at the mistakes done by Nedeed men:

By placing the pursuit of money and power above all else, the Nedeeds fragment the black community and destroy the goal for which they have sacrificed family feelings, love, fraternity pleasure – the very qualities that make life worth living, qualities central to liberation and empowerment. (370)

Thus the act of Willa is justified and through the bold and threatening act of Willa, Naylor warns patriarchy as well as the black women against forcing black motherhood to operate under patriarchy as an institution.

Gloria Naylor, who has presented the nature and effects of motherhood that operate under patriarchal world view in Linden Hill, makes an attempt to present the nature and effects of motherhood that operate under the matriarchal culture in Mama Day.

In Mama Day Naylor presents an isolated imaginary island Willow Springs that is far away from city life. As Naylor has created this island with Afro-centric view points the islanders could easily resist themselves from the white influence. As
Meisenhelder (1993) observes, Naylor in *Mama Day* “consistently (satirically) reveals... [the] white world’s attempts to control either nature or the decidedly black world” (405). Valerie Lee (1996) views *Mama Day* as a novel of cultural performance, since the characters and the community are totally immersed in the cultural process of healing. Through *Mama Day*, Naylor has shown the power of historical grannies and community mothers who have evolved as social and political activists. As a black woman writer, Naylor views motherhood as a social activity and mothers as social activists.

Daphne Lomathe (2005) considers *Mama Day* breathing with a “sense of historical continuity”(155). Naylor has constructed Willow Springs as a home, in which the inhabitants transmit the “African-derived tradition and values”(156) from one generation to another. In *Mama Day*, Naylor examines the cultural memories of African American society in which women play a crucial role in the transmission of these cultural memories through the oral tradition of folklores, quilting, herbal curing and voodoo practices. Naylor reveals the importance of women’s role in defining rootedness and collective identity.

*Mama Day* may be viewed as a documentary of African American community mothers, othermothers and motherline. As Larry R. Andrews states “in *Mama Day* the power comes from nature, as Naylor moves into the realm of matriarchal mythmaking”(285). Apart from foremothering Naylor asserts the bond that prevails among women in any form (especially maternal and sisterhood) as a means for achieving self-identity and as a source of strength for survival. In order to highlight the bonding among women, Naylor creates three women characters – Sapphira Wade, Miranda Day (Mama Day), and Abigail Day – who happen to perform the role of foremother, community mother and othermother respectively.
Mama Day begins with the description of the power of an African born “true conju woman” (3) Sapphira Wade. She is a primordial mud mother who produces earth men. She is the ancient mother of pure black that one day caught the world that the God spit out. It is revealed through the myth that she heated up her medicine pots with heat produced from lightning. She is the slave woman who took her freedom in 1823, when she subverts the master – slave paradigm and repositions the slave as master and master as slave. The myth of Willow Springs is given in the novel thus: “The island got spit out from the mouth of God, and when it fell to the earth it brought along an army of stars. He tried to reach down and scoop them back up, and found himself shaking hands with the greatest conju woman on earth”(3).

Sapphira Wade gives birth to seven sons in one thousand days who are "Satin Black" (1) in colour. Snow considers giving birth to seven sons is the material of legends as in folklores. He says:

...there is a widespread belief that the seventh sibling of the same sex, Seventh Sister or Seventh son (especially a Seventh Son of a Seventh Son), has unusual abilities. This idea seems to have appeared in Europe in the sixteenth century and is now found worldwide. The most powerful West African gods were seven in number as well, and appear in the New World as the Seven African Powers or Sprits. (qtd. in Lee 131)

Sapphira Wade – the conju woman and slave of Bascombe Wade – is the ancestor of the whole race. She has been sold as a slave to Bascombe Wade of Willow Springs in 1819. She has the capacity to be a midwife and serve as a nurse. She has an immense innate ability to heal people. Later on, she has married her master Bascombe Wade in the year 1823 and bore seven sons. Her intention to make the island free from slavery makes her marry her master Bascombe Wade. She has utilized her relationship with her
master to make the island to be a land of her own race. In contrast to the established notion of Mother Goddess, Sapphira Wade exhibits violent attitude in taming the people. It is evident from her violent act against her master. The relationship between the master and slave causes the genesis of another race. Theodore Parker states the master slave relationship thus: "[It] begins in violence it must be sustained by violence the systematic violence of general laws, or the irregular violence of individual caprice" (qtd. in Bryant 9). In the Sapphira – Bascombe Wade relationship violence is the whole issue.

As soon as she inherits the island every slave accepts her as the God mother. Eventually, they have fear as well as faith in her. They never pronounce her name in the island of Willow Springs. She becomes a part of the memory of the island. She possesses the quality of timelessness as she lives in everyone. Her story tends to be real on the one hand and myth and mystery on the other.

Sapphira Wade has seven sons of whom only the seventh son generates descendants. Again, his seventh son fathers three daughters namely Miranda Day popularly known as Mama Day, Abigail Day and Peace Day. The surname 'Day' has come from the belief that God rested on the seventh day. So, the seventh son's descendants are called Days. The last daughter passes away and the first one remains a spinster. Only Abigail gets married and becomes the mother of three daughters namely Peace, Grace and Hope. The plot of this novel revolves around the two of Sapphira Wade's descendants – Mama Day and her great niece Cocoa Day.

Mama Day is the aged matriarch of Willow Springs. She is a healer, midwife, potent reader of the past, the present and the future. She has the ability to perform magic to be the conjure woman of Willow Springs. She has inherited all these powers
from Sapphira Wade. As a perfect mode conjure woman, Mama Day shares, according to Lindsey Tucker, the following qualities of African conjurer:

Conjurers are said to be closer to their African roots than other, more acculturated African slaves. Also, conjure abilities are found to run in families; the conjure man or woman inherits his/her aptitude and the mantle of power, along with an expertise in herbal medicines. Conjure women often carry the names of Mother and hold considerable power within their communities, and conjurers are, almost without exception, especially gifted with psychic abilities or known to have second sight. (176).

As a person who has possessed the gift of miraculous power, Mama Day remains a walking compendium of earthly wisdom in the matters of love and hate, life and death. She uses her magical power to free the human mind from pain. In an interview with Rebecca Carroll (1994), Gloria Naylor says thus of Mama Day:

...a very strong woman, and the values that she lives by she got through the powers of her African Ancestresses. I think that the "strong black woman" stereotype in this country flattens the livelihood of black women. While there may have been in our collective history, our own individual histories, times that we have had to be strong or times that we have had to be sensual, and you can go on down the line -- nurturing, each mothers -- that is only one tiny aspect of everything that is going on in an individual or in a collective historical reality. (Carroll 162)

Miranda Day can be considered the female power that takes up the nurturing role in her family. After her mother's suicide Miranda Day becomes the nurturer and protector of
the family members. Apart from being the protector and nurturer of her niece Ophelia Day, she becomes the protector and healer of the whole of Willow Springs. Her conjuring magical power enables her to perform her maternal role efficiently. With her magical power she raises above the human level and performs her maternal duty as a Spiritual mother. Daphne Lamothe remarks thus:

Mama Day’s nature explores the question of the gender politics of tradition in Mama day, for example, who, unmarried and childless, embodies the idea of tradition as constructed through and conveyed by oral communities. Her designation as "everybody's mama now", an honorific given because of her multiple roles as mid-wife, healer and community leader expands traditional ideas of motherhood. (89)

Larry Andrews (1993) states that “Miranda’s woman power is thus presented as an expression of natural forces (note her gardening ability) and as an inheritance from the legendary ur-mother community”. (296)

There is a close bonding between Sapphira Wade and Miranda Day even though they belong to different generations. This can be considered the power of motherline. Lowinsky (1992) adds that the motherline transforms the experience of female ancestors into maps – a space which can be used to warn or encourage the young female members. Commenting on the disconnected motherliness of the contemporary women, she adds that motherline is one of the means to achieve empowerment. In African American society the motherline represents ancestral memory and traditional values of culture. Black mothers pass on the stories about their ancestors orally. They are the keepers of tradition. Through their mothers’ wit they teach their children to
survive. This kind of motheline is obviously visible in Sapphira Wade – Miranda Day – Ophelia Day relationship. Through Miranda Day, Naylor connects the contemporary generation with its ancestors. Larry Andrews (1993) considers her role as a model for full acceptance of motherline and its ongoing power. Valerie Lee (1996) views the role of Mama Day in Willow Springs as follows:

Mama Day is a social agent who protects Willow Springs....In Mama Day’s culturally mediated perspective, the welfare of the self and the welfare of her kin and community are inseparable. Her quilt making is a material demonstration of an Afrocentric belief, for she sews together clothing from the lives of various family members in order to give Cocoa personal, familial and communal histories. (135)

She is a protector of the land and its inhabitants. She is a ghetto goddess. In Hindu mythology, the land is always protected by the mother goddess who never allows any evil spirit getting to her boundaries and disturbs her inhabitants. This way Mama Day can be equated to mother goddess who is ageless and knows everyone. Rosellen Brown views Mama Day’s nature and her role in Mama Day thus:

Mama Day, a canny, confident mix of midwife and Conjure-woman, of soul and psychology, who knows dangerous secrets and can cure almost anything if she can get her patient’s commitment. Mama Day is the essence of all good things to Naylor: respect for life, for family and nature, a comprehension of the way to harness natural forces, an acceptance of death. Hers is the single face “that’s been given the meaning of peace”. (Rosellen Brown 24)
With her knowledge of herbal medicine and its use and healing ability she cures anyone who suffers from any kind of disease at Willow Springs.

Larry Andrews (1993) views Miranda Day as “a further development” of Mattie Michael of *The Women of Brewster Place* and Grandma Tilson of *Linden Hills* and she compares Miranda with grandmother figures of black women’s fictions, especially with Eva Peace of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*.

Miranda Day along with her biological sister Abigail Day nurtures Ophelia Day. They both replace Ophelia Day’s biological mother. They both act as surrogate parents. Commenting on Miranda Day – Abigail Day parenting Larry Andrews remarks that “as surrogate parents for Ophelia, Abigail and Miranda present balance – Abigail dotes and spoils Miranda enjoins values”(297). They both look after Ophelia’s physical survival and social acceptance. Owing to this strong parenting and good education, Ophelia could challenge the male centered professional world. This is due to the strength of training she received from her surrogate parents Miranda Day and Abigail Day.

At the same time, through Ophelia Day, Naylor highlights the negative influences of assimilation. Ophelia aspires more for cosmopolitan life and is unable to visualize her role in the family due to the influences of White culture. Ophelia Day tries to link the patriarchal domination of cultivation land with village life and she refuses to be at Willow Springs even after the death of George. Even though she is against the patriarchal domination in any form, she never devalues mothers and mothering aspects. This is well showcased in the concluding part of the novel in which Cocoa is presented as a mother of two sons. Thus Ophelia Day “carries the strength of Willow Springs”. (Rachel Hass 22)
Through Miranda, Naylor connects the motherline from one generation to another. Miranda establishes her connection with Sapphira Wade only by connecting herself with her biological mother, who committed suicide due to madness, which to her is an escape from her husband. Miranda views Ophelia as probably the last woman of her family line and a worthy descendent of great mother Sapphira Wade.

The lean thighs, tight hips, the long strides flashing light between the blur of strong legs- pure black. Me and Abigail, we take after the sons, Miranda thinks. The earth men who formed the line of Days, hard and dark brown. But the Baby Girl brings back the great, grand mother. (MD 210)

Ophelia inherits the power of her foremothers through Miranda. Her strength is derived from ancient African mother. Her life is valorized with wisdom, kinship and community. Through her ancestral and innate power, Miranda Day could fight any political battles. As a social agent she protects not only the children but the community itself. As a community mother and as a mother goddess, she protects her children, all the inhabitants of her land and also the community. Miranda guards her people and her land Willow Springs. As Valerie Lee observes, for Miranda Day “the welfare of the self and the welfare of her kin and welfare of the community are inseparable”. (135)

As the mother Goddess Isis, – who protects the fertility of women – Miranda Day rescues Bernice form her infertile nature. (Refer Appendix III). Miranda’s procreative energy saves Bernice by challenging Bernice’s biological infertility. Miranda Day as a rootworker and a healer treats Bernice homeopathically and blesses her with a baby boy. Through this, she challenges the very power of patriarchy. Like Pilate who helps Ruth to conceive and beget Milkman, Miranda Day cures Bernice to beget a son.
When Cocoa Day is poisoned by Ruby, Mama Day’s professional enemy, there happens and allegorical battle in which good (George) is wasted to destroy evil. As Larry Andrews argues, Miranda Day views Ophelia Day’s suffering in terms of the whole tradition of suffering of women from Sapphira’s slavery to Miranda’s mother grief. She decides to rescue Cocoa in order to make her motherline survive. Moreover the death of George in the process of saving Cocoa can be viewed as the defeat of his Western, masculinised rationality by African – driven matriarchy that rules over the island. Thus in Mama Day, Naylor advocates the importance of the procreative energy through Sapphira Wade- Miranda Day – Ophelia Day motherline.

Quite interestingly George’s mother appears in Bailey’s Café, the fourth novel of Gloria Naylor. Naylor sets this novel between 1948 and 1949. Like her other novels, Bailey’s Café is connected to earlier novel Mama Day.

In this novel Naylor has created a place which resembles more of Africa than America. By creating such a place, she creates a perfect community where the matriarchs could exercise their power well. In Bailey’s Café Naylor presents the lives of seven women – the alcoholic addicts Ester and Miriam, Sadie, a prostitute, Jesse, a Junkie, Mary, a beautiful girl and Eve, the indomitable woman – who belong to different racio-ethnic background. All these women are the victims of sexual exploitation, violence, of childhood prostitution, of sadomasochistic pedophilia and of genital mutilation. All these women reside at Eve’s Boarding House.

Bailey narrates the story of Sadie, an aging alcoholic. Sadie’s story gains importance as it deals with relationship between mother and daughter. Her mother looks at her as a burden and pushes her into prostitution to earn an income. Most of her customers refuse to accept the fact that she is a thirteen year old girl. Sadie’s mother, like Pauline of The Bluest Eye and Jessie of The Third Life of Grange Copeland, is not
a protective mother. Sadie’s mother hates her for no reason. Unlike the fictional mothers of Naylor, Sadie’s mother never fulfills her role as a mother and thus becomes a failed mother. As she failed to give enough love to Sadie, Sadie searches for maternal love in any kind of love that is offered to her. As Pauline’s failure leads Pecola to search for beauty, Sadie’s mother’s failure sends Sadie in search of maternal affection and recognition from her mother. It is well stated through Sadie’s words: “Mama, I’m doing so good here. Yes, I’m so proud of you, You’re a good girls, Sadie”( BC 44). Even after she gets into prostitution her longing to reunite with her mother never changes. She says: "And I didn't feel dirty with any of it, really I didn't. And Mama would take one of the orchids and pin it on her collar and say, I knew you could do it. I'm so proud of you. You're a good girl, Sadie”. (BC46)

All her desires are changed into love for a man called Daniel who is thirty years senior to her. He is a “silent quiet - drinking man” (Whitt 170). After the death of Daniel, she finds her way to Bailey’s Café from the streets of Chicago as a whore.

In Bailey’s Café, she meets Ice Man Jones, who knows about her past and is ready to offer her the love that she has never experienced. Naylor describes their love as she has described the love between Cocoa and George. The love for her mother is being substituted with love for two men as she does not find any surrogate or community mothers to support her. Naylor has shown the painful life of a black girl pushed by her own mother into prostitute and her struggle in socio-political circumstances.

In this novel, there is a community othermother who resembles Eva Peace of Sula, Eva Turner of The Women of Brewster Place and Miranda Day of Mama Day. Eve has a boarding house where all these women stay. Eve is “larger-than-life mother figure”(Montgomery:1995) Eve’s life in Plaquemines Peninsula and her arrival at New
Orleans are metaphorical. Even though she does not have any male partner, she presents herself as earth man Adam. When she arrives at New Orleans, she is naked and fully covered with mud. She is neither a male nor a female. She is described in the novel thus:

The delta dust exists to be wet. And the delta dust exists to grow things, anything, in soil so fertile its tomatoes, beans, and cotton are obscene in their richness....Mud forming and caking around the tear ducts in my eyes, gluing my lashes together. There was even enough moisture deep within my earwax to draw it; ...It seemed there was nowhere on earth for a woman like me. (BC 90-91)

Eve’s crucial role lies in her nature of protecting women who are targeted by various socio-political evils and she is a perfect mother figure to emerge as a community mother. Montgomery (1995) states about her nature thus:

Eve successfully recreates herself, however, in preparation for her role among a community outcast women. That she has no clear-cut parental ties suggests that she is at once natural and supernatural – more than a mere woman – and her song is replete with reference to organic matter, especially the rich delta soil (Montgomery).

After her arrival at New Orleans she constructs a house for herself with a garden and it is a symbolical garden that resembles Garden of Eden. Eve is symbolized as “Earth Mother” (Montgomery 2005: 116). Eve’s name refers to first woman created by the god father. Her parentage is not vividly explained in this novel. Eve, like Mama Day,
grows a flower garden which is filled with flowers and trees. She symbolizes herself with the flower lily, the queen of all flowers and other women who get into her house are symbolized by other flowers. Her garden is described in the novel thus:

Even the stone wall blooms around Eve's garden. And there's never a single season without flowers. The spring aubrietas and Russian mustard planted between the stones give way to summer pinks that kinda scent the air with clove before the autumn joys take over along with alpine poppies and columbines... you're gonna find circles and circles of lilies. Day lilies. Tiger lilies. Madonna lilies. Canna lilies. Calla lilies. Lilies of the valley. They grow in low clusters and stalks; they vive up the stump of her only tree. (BC 91-92)

She is a person of honest nature who does not bother about anything and she does not claim any superiority. Her only aim is to provide a safe haven to all single women. As the Convent in Toni Morrison’s Paradise provides accommodation to the psychologically wounded people, Eve provides accommodation to women:

Eve lets out rooms in her house to single women....Eve knows exactly what some people think about her. And she honestly doesn’t care. And all that I can honestly say is that the women who come straggling in here and ask about Eve’s look just like any other women in the café. Some are older than others. Some wear makeup, some don’t. Some are very pretty, some are quite plain. The only thing they have in common is that they need a place to stay. (BC 80-81)
In this novel Eve is a source of protection for those who are marginalized owing to the evils of society such as prostitution, migration and alcoholism. As a community mother, she takes the responsibility of black mother who empowers black women and their lives. She is an epitome of emotional and spiritual support to the marginalized black women. She uses her power to make a community and practises culture-sustaining mechanism as a mode of empowerment. She has understood the form of cultural work that the community needs to nurture the present and the future generation.

Eve fits in the African American grandmother tradition by fulfilling her duty in guarding the women. In this novel, Eve takes care of women who come from different ethnic background. This suggests that the novelist aims at recreating a mother figure who reaches/fulfils the need of women irrespective of their racial background. In her earlier novels the plots revolve around one particular geographical location where women belong to their African American root. In Bailey's Café Naylor brings in women belonging to different geographical locations who are the victims of patriarchal domination and social injustice. Montgomery comments on the nature of Eve who fits in the ancestral heritage of African American thus:

Eve, whose name means ‘mother of all living’ is essentially self-generated. She is what Karla Holloway describes as the ancestor, and it is her narrative in particular whose discrete patterns signal the recursive structure present in black women’s writing – a structure repeated in the other narrative which comprise the text. Not only does Eve’s song, with its references to the Louisiana delta soil, suggest a dissolving of traditional historiography, it reveals a freedom from imposed gender-specific labels. (Montgomery: 1995)
At the same time she is not a nurturing mother and she does not train any woman in this novel. Her mysterious nature and magical qualities are never utilized to nurture any woman. Naylor in an interview with Tomeiko Ashford (2005) says of Eve thus:

Eve is a strange kind of mother. She’s not a nurturing mother. She keeps her distance. In a sense what she offers them is what they used to call tough love. You get your act together because here you are, and no one’s going to sympathize with you ... I remember one of my favorite parts of the book is when she gets Jessie to come off of drugs. And Jessie says that, during the withdrawal period, Eve wouldn't have cared if she died. And Bailey says that Jessie's probably right. Eve wouldn't have cared if she died. But Eve was there to help her. (Naylor 2005)

Apart from providing space for women she also exhibits her midwifery talent. Like Mawu, the goddess who created humanity with clay and water, and as Isis, the protectress she is serving as a midwife in delivering Mariam’s baby George who has appeared as an orphan and Christ-like figure in *Mama Day*. (Refer Appendix III). Mariam, the “virginal unwed mother” (Montgomery: 1995) of George is presented in this novel in which the subject of circumcision is handled. In Beta Israel’s family, circumcision is compulsory for girl children. As part of the purification process, Mariam gets circumcised. When Mariam arrives at Eve’s place she presents a plum to Eve, which may be taken as a symbol of her womb. She has become pregnant without having been touched by any man. Eve takes a knife and cuts the plum which represents her mother-midwifery act of facilitating the birth of the baby. Her midwifery talent helps Mariam to beget a son which becomes a communal celebration.

Apart from Mariam, Eve rescues Jessie from heroin addiction with her conjuring power. She can be viewed as the reincarnation of Mama Day. As Mama Day
cures Bernice of her infertility through her root work and conjuring ability, Eve with her conjuring ability and unconventional treatment mode rescues Jessie back to life. Montgomery comments thus on Eve:

Eve’s role in Jessie’s recovery is questionable at best. Eve relies upon magic or the power of conjure in curing Jesse’s addiction to heroin by engineering a series of well-crafted illusions which allow Jesse to have unlimited access to the enslaving drug. (Montgomery 1995)

As Mama Day brings back the life of her niece Ophelia Day from the dreadful clutches of the evil-spirit Eve, the mud mother brings Jesse back to life. While fixing Eve within the paradigm of the universal mother, Montgomery (1995) says:

Naylor’s Eve is thus a character that can be placed within the antithetic poles Daryl Dance uses to define the mother-figure in African American writing. Neither an Eve, in the biblical sense, nor strictly a Madonna, she resides somewhere between the two extremes. Her ability to manipulate reality and her close affinity with the supernatural are qualities that invite a comparison with folk figures such the shape-shifting trickster or the revered conjure woman.

Thus, Naylor highlights the responsibility of community mothers rather than biological and othermothers in all her novels.

Thus in Gloria Naylor’s novels, mothers and mothering are presented as a source of empowering women. Naylor’s novels portray motherhood as the locale of dynamism. Being an inheritor, preserver and practitioner of cultural values, the African American women are capable of moulding the lives of children to perfection. They infuse the spirit of independence in their lives and enable them to protect themselves in
a racially prejudiced society. Naylor insists that the maternal power rests on its preservation of cultural values and she wants maternal power to be autonomous. Her mother-centered ideology of black motherhood contributes to the expansion of black culture by establishing an expanded notion of black motherhood.