

Chapter Five

Black Motherhood

If the mother is physically and emotionally distant from the child, if she withholds her body, the visual will become hypercathectic for the child.

- Heinz Kohut

Another aspect of black feminism is black motherhood. Black mothering is a fundamental issue for the black feminist theory. In addition, motherhood is an obstinate charisma in the works of Toni Morrison. In the book, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, Andrea O'Reilly exemplifies how Morrison builds upon black women's proficiencies of and perspectives on motherhood to develop a view of black motherhood that is, in terms of both maternal identity and role is radically different from motherhood as practiced and prescribed in the mainstream culture. Morrison's portrayal of mothers is unique in their realistic depiction. Notable mothers in Morrison's work include Mrs. MacTeers, Pauline (*The Bluest Eye*), Eva, Helene, Hannah, Nel (*Sula*), Minha mae, Sorrow (*A Mercy*), Pilate, Ruth (*Song of Solomon*), Baby Suggs and Sethe (*Beloved*). These characters corroborate to the inimitability and uniqueness of mothers. Morrison insists that what makes these women remarkable individuals rather than types are their actions and reactions in the time of adversity. Morrison's mothers meet with hardships from a tyrannical social system, which considers them only as the nurturer, protector, and servant of their children. They in turn go to any stretch to execute their motherly duties, even by self-mutilation or infanticide. However, what distinguishes Morrison's mothers from the stereotyped

mother figures is their attempt at determining the course of their own and their children's destinies. According to Andrea O'Reilly,

Morrison defines motherwork as a political enterprise that assumes as its central aim the empowerment of children. Motherwork, in Morrison, is concerned with how mothers, raising black children in a racist and sexist world, can best protect their children, instruct them in how to protect themselves, challenge racism, and, for daughters, the sexism that seeks to harm them. (1)

The second-wave feminism had a propensity to weaken the connotation of motherhood. Morrison is against this. Motherhood, especially black motherhood, is a multidimensional theme that has been explored by Morrison in all its different and loaded connotations. Morrison emphasizes through her work the fact and the significance of black motherhood in the emancipation and empowerment of black womanhood and thereby the black community. Morrison's novels run the gamut of Afro-American motherhood in all its multiplicities and complexities. Since the mothers of all the five female protagonists of these select novels are unique females, it is worth analyzing their roles in the novels. It is well understood in these novels that, mothers of these characters are more responsible for what they are. They play an important role in shaping these individuals. Andrea O'Reilly has done a comprehensive study on Morrison and motherhood. "Black Motherhood" is an element of "Black Feminism," in that it empowers black women and thereby black community.

Gender is a socio-cultural construct that has assigned certain roles to women. These roles are associated with their biological ability for child bearing and consequent necessity of child rearing. Sherry Ortner in her essay "Is Female to Male as Nature is to

Culture?” argues that it is the woman’s physiology and her specialized reproductive functions make her appear closer to nature. She says men, unlike women, have to seek cultural means of creation, technology, symbols. Women are the pre-social or not yet culturally created persons (77). According to Bell Hooks (2014), the theory of feminism on motherhood is racially codified. He says,

During the early stages of contemporary women’s liberation movement, feminist analyses of motherhood reflected the race and class biases of participants. Some white, middle class, college educated women argued motherhood was the locus of women’s oppression. Had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education... would have been at the top of the list—but not motherhood. (133)

Sethe of *Beloved* and Minha mae of *A Mercy*, both try to protect their female children from the clutches of slavery and sexual abuse. Eva in *Sula* wants to empower all her children. Other characters such as Baby Suggs of *Beloved*, try to bring up their children and empower them. Ondine in *Tar Baby* is an example of “Othermothering” or “Community mothering.” Andrea Reilly says that black motherhood is different from other cultures in two different ways. She says,

Feminist theory on motherhood, as hooks identifies, is racially codified. Drawing upon contemporary womanist thought on black motherhood, I will argue that there exists a distinct African American tradition of motherhood. Two inter-related themes or perspectives distinguish the African American tradition of motherhood. First, mothers and

motherhood are valued by, and central to African American culture. Secondly, it is recognized that mothers and mothering are what make possible the physical and psychological well-being and empowerment of African American people and the larger African American culture. Black women raise children in a society that is at best indifferent to the needs of black children and the concerns of black mothers. The focus of black motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect, and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete. (4)

In the midst of slavery, black mothers could not take care of their children along with their field and house work. Patricia Hill Collins in her article “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother/Daughter Relationships,” says that a woman has to evaluate her identity based upon motherhood. She says, “The cult of true womanhood emphasizes motherhood as a woman’s highest calling. It stresses a motherhood that is confined to the home and children, under the protection of a husband” (qtd. in Williams 164). However, during slavery, it is obvious that African female slaves had little or no chance to form a mother-identity. Hence, “the idea of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, [and] racial oppression has denied black families significant resources to support private nuclear family households” (Williams 164). Community mothering is a culture that was followed in West Africa. In this culture, women of the family and neighborhood in raising black children share a collective responsibility. In this way, a woman is not only responsible for her own black child, but she is considered a mother for the entire black community. This kind of a system shows the unity among black womanhood and

communities in West Africa. This also shows the individuality and independence of black woman in Africa. Ondine in *Tar baby* and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* are examples of this type of mothering. The other culture of Matrilocality is also practiced in Africa. This is such that woman is the center of the family unit. It is not that there are no men around or they disregard any men. It is simply that women are given a paramount importance in the African community.

According to O' Reilly, African motherhood is unique and distinct in its own way. Mothering gives women great influence and status in West African societies (Reilly 6). These West African cultural practices were retained by enslaved Afro-Americans and gave rise to a distinct tradition of Afro-American motherhood in which the African custom of mothering was emphasized and elaborated. The Afro-American tradition of motherhood centers upon the recognition that mothering is concerned with the physical and psychological well-being of children and it focuses upon the empowerment of children. Motherhood has cultural and political import, value, and prominence and is a consequence and a site of power for black women. The African motherhood differs from the European motherhood in five ways. Reilly discusses the difference between both the entities under five major elements. They are, Othermothering and Community Mothering, Motherhood as Social Activism and as a Site of Power, Matrilocality, Nurturance as Resistance: Providing a Home-place, and The Motherline: Mothers as Cultural Bearers.

Motherhood is fundamental when it comes to comprehending Morrison's "perspective about black womanhood" (Valdes 259) because in Morrison's worlds, motherhood is a substantial power that supports human actions and decisions, and that holds together members of the same community. Motherhood has always been an issue

of controversy for feminists since it reinforces patriarchal idea of race and gender. The assumptions that mothers are unselfish nurturers help to shape and construct social practices that automatically make women responsible as care givers. Mothers commit infanticide intentionally in *Sula* and *Beloved* and accidentally in *Paradise*. The mother protects her child in *A Mercy*. There is severe neglect of children in *The Bluest Eye*. Moreover, there is child abuse in *Tar Baby*. The outright abandonment in *The Bluest Eye* and *Paradise* is distressing. In her latest novel, *God Help the Child* that was published in April 2015, Morrison talks about another light-skinned mother who abandons her child because she is black. Mothers in Morrison's novels are raped, thrashed, sold, hanged and shot dead. Mothers throw themselves down wells, ramble wild in the woods, and are just generally disturbed.

In Morrison's novels, the readers understand what mothering can do for mothers, children, and the community. Most female characters in Morrison's novels pertain to motherhood in some way. Most of the women characters in her novels are single mothers. Some are mothers, some were mothers, some act as mothers, some long for mothers. Indeed, motherhood is so much at the core of her novels that the concept of the mother deserves special attention. In an interview, Morrison says about the uniqueness and importance of black mothering. Black motherhood is an integral part of black feminism. She says,

Black women [need to] pay. . . attention to the ancient properties -- which for me means the ability to be 'the ship' and the 'safe harbor.' Our history as Black women is the history of women who could build a house and have some children and there was no problem. . . . What we have known is how to be complete human beings, so that we did not let

education keep us from our nurturing abilities. . . [T]o lose that is to diminish ourselves unnecessarily. It is not a question, it's not a conflict. You don't have to give up anything. You choose your responsibilities. (qtd. in Wilson 8)

Minhae mae and Sethe are examples of Morrison's good motherhood. Even Eva of *Sula*, is a strong and enabled woman who raised her children without any external support. Andrea Reilly in her book, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* explains Morrison's desire to train children to become socially acceptable individuals includes the instillation of the Afro-American custom of cultural bearing. Reilly analyzes connections between Sara Ruddick's model of maternal practice and Patricia Hill Collins's standpoint theory of black mothering to study ways in which Morrison defines mother work as a political enterprise that undertakes 'Empowerment of Children,' as its central aim. Reilly suggests a creative understanding of the work of mothering theorists and the concept of maternal practice and analyzes intersections between Anglo-American and black feminism.

Pauline of *The Bluest Eye* and Sweetness of the novel *God Help the Child* are bad examples of motherhood. Pauline does not care for her little girl Pecola. She is unable to prevent her from being ruined. Sweetness abandons her child Bride outright just because she is black. These negative stereotypes provoke resentment towards such characters and sympathy for the victims. Pauline Breedlove of *The Bluest Eye* considers motherhood as a burden. She wears the burden of motherhood like a cross self-righteously, proudly but bitterly. She is simply unable to connect emotionally with her children and viciously berates her own daughter Pecola. Morrison says, "More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man—they were like the afterthoughts

one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely” (*TBE* 127). Pauline, as a mother, has failed to protect her daughter from rape by her husband. In addition, annoyingly, she showers her affection and attention on her white master’s daughter. She works for the Fisher’s family and has become an ‘ideal servant’ for their family. This role “filled practically all of her needs” (*TBE* 127).

Andrea O’ Reilly affronts the dominant view of motherhood and values the ancient properties of black womanhood and mothering as a site for social and political emancipation. Reilly points out Morrison’s belief in,

Raising children in accordance with the values, beliefs, and customs of traditional African American culture and in particular the values of the funk and ancient proprieties. In each of these [maternal] tasks – preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing – Morrison is concerned with protecting children from the hurts of a racist and, for daughters, sexist culture, and with teaching children how to protect themselves so they may be empowered to survive and resist the racist and patriarchal culture in which they live and develop a strong and authentic identity as a black person. (28)

Many a time, the black motherhood is threatened and its existence endangered. The troubled relationship a black mother has with her children has many reasons. Slave mothers neither are let to live with their children, nor made to offer any kind of protection to their children. Many traumatic experiences affect the psyche of the black mother. In *Black Feminist Criticism*, Barbara Christian defines stereotype, whether positive or negative, “as a by-product of racism... one of the vehicles through which

racism tries to reduce the human being to a non-human level” (16). Black women, imported to the United States of America primarily as laborers were exploited ruthlessly by their white masters of their sexuality and fertility (Christian 16). Black women continued to be a thrice-marginalized group, facing the triple jeopardy of racial, sexual and class exploitation.

Moreover, during times of slavery the system did not care for the integrity of the family unit of slaves. Often, fathers were in different plantations or sold perpetually to break unity among slave families. Though a slave girl had her slave husband somewhere near her, all her children were not born through him. The white owners abused girl slaves and made them bear their children. Such was the nastiness of the system. This brutality caused the loss of self-integrity among slave men and women. Basically, the impression of black maternity, born out of the system of slavery, developed as a result of the preordained separation of fathers from their children. In the absence or unavailability of fathers, mothers became the only connection, which identified the black slaves’ parental heritage. Years after slavery was gone, the nastiness brought in a lack of self-discipline and self-worth that has to be seen with black males. This loss of self-worth and interest in black family life made these black men wander and not care for families even after slavery was abolished.

In slavery, mothers were made powerless to protect their children and save them. Reilly points out the need a black mother should possess to carry on her duties. Reilly says, “Black mothers require power to do the important work of mothering and are accorded power because of the importance of mothering” (4). Baby Suggs of *Beloved* is affected the most in rendering her care to her children. Her internal conflict is that she could not remember any of her children. Of her eight children, she only gets

to keep Halle, but Halle disappeared, too. She only remembers how her first-born likes the burnt bottom of the bread. Four of her children are taken away by the slave owners and four are chased away. She says, “I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody’s house into evil... My firstborn. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burnt bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that’s all I remember” (*BD* 6). Baby Suggs, is able to keep only one of her eight children. Her two girls, “neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye” (*BD* 28).

Sethe’s mother also suffers many losses in her life. The white sailors tamper her life during the Middle Passage to the New World. Morrison’s mothers move through the history of America from slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. In her book, *Killing the Black Body*, Dorothy Roberts historicizes black motherhood in chapter one titled, “Reproducing in Bondage.” She writes, “Bearing children who were their masters’ property only compounded the contradictions that scarred slave women’s reproductive lives. It separated mothers from their children immediately upon conception” (39). During slavery black women did not own their children. Instead, they were the property of slave masters.

Florens has to be given away by Minha mae in order to save her. Minha mae begs Jacob Vaark to take Florens because she believes he would treat her as a child, not as a sexual possession. The mother sends her daughter away not from a failure of love, but to save her from “the lips of an old married couple.” They, at that time are Vaark’s debtors. She is one of the kinds of strong African women like Eva of *Sula* and Sethe of *Beloved*. She is another good mother in Morrison’s work. She tries to save, emancipate

and empower her child. *A Mercy* has lot of other illustrations of motherhood through other characters.

Florens initially thinks her mother abandoned her outright and sold her. She is nurturing the mortifying feeling of deprivation and abandonment in her mind for a long time. In an attempt to find a way out of these feelings, Florens develops a daughter-mother relationship with Lina. Lina, who is childless, loves the girl as her own child and tries to guard her from harm. This bond highlights the duality in the motherhood experience in *A Mercy* as much as in the Afro-American culture in general. All through the long years of her childhood, and before she reaches maturity and regains a mother-child bond with her biological mother, Florens has enjoyed Lina's motherly care. Andrew Billingsley emphasizes the definition of the African family construct as "an intimate association of persons of descent who are related to one another by a variety of means, including blood, marriage, formal adoption, informal adoption or by appropriation" (Bell-Tolliver 3). Therefore, a mother is not only the one who gives birth. Oyewumi asserts that every woman can be any child's mother, and "if anything binds women together, it is the mothering of a child, each other, and consequently the community. Mothers were present in all generations within and outside the household and the family, and motherhood was also great leveler for women" (21). Therefore, it is not hard for Florens to accept Lina as a replacement for her real mother. She instantly substitutes *Minha mae* with Lina. Morrison says, "the girl belonged to Lina. They slept together, bathed together, ate together. Lina made clothes for her and tiny shoes from rabbit skin" (*AM* 122). Denise Segura highlights the notion of motherhood and the multiple mother figures as "a feature of family life as mother and aunt work together both to make meals and to nurture the family and each other" (62).

Reilly asserts that the ironical absence of traditional mothers in Morrison's works emphasizes just the importance of their presence. Reilly argues that

Morrison affirms and confirms the importance of mothers and mother work by describing in poignant and often agonizing detail the personal and cultural suffering and loss that occur when children are not mothered and do not receive the preservation, nurturance, and cultural bearing needed for personal resistance and cultural renewal... frequently, we understand or appreciate the importance of something or someone only when that something or someone is lost or absent. (46)

Consequently, the characters who lack a mother's love suffer desolation in the novel and they have a sense of love hunger. Of all the characters in *A Mercy*, Florens is the best example. Her deprivation of Minha mae makes her suffer "mother's love hunger." This mother's love hunger remains through her life in spite of the love, care, and tenderness she finds with and from Lina. The lack of the "traditional," wise, Afro-American mother, as well as her eagerness for approval makes her "munch like a rabbit" whenever she hears words like "well done" or "it's fine." Florens is so eager to please anyone and to get approval that it explains why the blacksmith could take her "when and where he wants, and she hunts him like a she-wolf" (*AM* 149). However, this need for love that results from the absence of Minha mae makes Florens very aggressive and wild at times when she feels disapproved or unwanted.

Updike, in "Unmastered Women in Colonial Virginia," sees "motherhood as so powerful a force in Morrison's universe as to be partly malevolent; its untidy agents, menstruation, and sex and birth, come with a menacing difficulty" (Updike n.p.). Sorrow's motherhood experience is more menacing than anything else in *A Mercy*.

Beset by the hard struggle in life, Sorrow renames herself as “Complete” when she gives birth to a daughter. Her tale tells a lot about the tragedies that has shaped her past. Being shipwrecked and living in the sea for a long time and unable to step down on the earth she faces a lot of hardship from nature. For her earth was so “... mean, hard, thick. Hateful that it shocked her” (*AM* 124). She lives in a mongrelized state that makes her imagine that she is saved by “mermaids, I mean whales” (*AM* 117). Then she is raped and abused by many men, including the sawyer’s two sons at the same time. She is impregnated twice by men, the details of them not known. Her first child is born prematurely and dies. Morrison says she “never forgot the baby breathing water every day, every night, down all the streams of the world” (*AM* 122).

Symbolically, the birth of the child turns Sorrow into a “Complete” being, and her identity as a woman is asserted through motherhood. The new name and new identity remain with her forever. Sorrow, when she hears that she is pregnant for the first time she is happy as her “jaw dropped. Then, she flushed with pleasure at the thought of a real person, a person of her own, growing inside her” (*AM* 121). Though she loses her first baby, the happiness is reborn with the birth of the second one. At the death of the first baby, she becomes withdrawn and empathic. She starts to rely more and more on her imaginary friend Twin. She talks less to others and is indifferent to all but Twin. It is the astounding experience of the second child’s birth and motherhood that has reshaped Sorrow’s identity and has helped her get rid of her imaginary soul mate “Twin.” It is after the birth of the second child Sorrow comes out of her mongrelized state once for all. She comes out of illusion and delusion once for all. She becomes happy like she had never been before. In addition, with this change her imaginary friend Twin disappears. The birth of this baby girl makes her “Complete” and convinces her that “this time she had done something, something important, by

herself" (*AM* 131). Willard, the indentured servant, comments Sorrow's change as the only "improvement" in the farm after Vaark's death, because Sorrow becomes "less addle-headed, more capable of handling chores" (*AM* 144). It is the only happiest occurring after Vaark's death, since everything else has been unpleasant. This incident of Sorrow gaining confidence and sense of living, takes the events back to the very beginning and to the title of the novel. Mercy is personified in this child's birth and the incident that more significantly marks the birth of a "mother" and a "complete woman." Her child gives her the "faith" she has needed in herself more than anything else. Her expressive words such as, "I am your mother, my name is 'Complete'" reveals a lot about the importance of this new role to her (*AM* 132). Motherhood means a lot, if not everything. Morrison says, for her, "her baby came first and she would postpone egg-gathering, delay milking, interrupt any field chore if she heard a whimper from the infant always somewhere nearby" (*AM* 144). Sorrow becomes "a mother, nothing more, nothing less" (*AM* 157). Despite Lina's disgust and Rebekka's silence, Sorrow regains her identity.

Eva Peace of *Sula* is portrayed as a strong lady who goes out all the way to save her children. She is one of Morrison's magnificent women who commit themselves to face any obstacles to protect their dependents. Eva is left in a situation, where her husband deserts her and she has barely anything to raise her children. At this juncture, she leaves her children with Mrs. Suggs saying that she would come back the next day. However, she returns after 18 months with a new black book and one leg. Eva conforms to Alice Walker's understanding of mother. According to Alice Walker a "mother's life was a sacrifice... A blind, enduring, stumbling --though with dignity - through life" (71). Eva sacrifices one of her legs in order to get money and aims to save her children with that. It is a shock for others to see Eva with one leg. People start

spreading rumors about Eva's one leg. After her return, she reclaims her children and starts to build a new house to settle them. She sacrifices her own leg to save her children. Though this may be an illustration of a brutal self-inflicted violence, her determination to save her children stands foremost and deserves credit. Eva is fiercely devoted to her children. Eva Peace is a true example of a matriarch. Her lost leg is a representation of the physical sacrifices that has been made by women for their children.

Plum is the hope of Eva's family. He returns home after serving as a warrior in World War I. He is completely shackled, tattered, mentally disordered and he is literally turned into a destitute with a sack on his shoulder. Out of three children, it seems only Pearl is settled in her life. The other two, Hannah and Plum return home to spend the rest of their life with their mother. Eva, without hesitation, warmly extends her hands and welcomes both of them. She gives them shelter, protects them, tries to mold their confidence, and further shows a new path to travel. In her attempt, Eva succeeds in Hannah's case, but fails in Plum's, because he returns home beyond recovery.

Lucille P. Fultz points out, "When Plum returns from the war mired in heroin addiction, Eva is not able to accept his self-destructive behavior, slovenliness, and diminishment to a mere shadow of himself" (41). Eva finds it more difficult to take care of a grown-up son who is completely diseased by bad habits that he has practiced in the war field. She could not tolerate her son's dilapidated condition. On seeing Plum's struggle to give up his last breath, she decides to ease his pain by killing. As Sethe has done to Beloved in *Beloved*, Eva practices mercy killing on her own son. Lucille P. Fultz expresses his view with regard to Eva's act of euthanasia,

She takes away his life by engulfing him in fire... In what we at first perceive as merciless, inhuman act, we find, although in exaggerated form, a lesson in the ultimate importance of the self-reliance that Sula must come to realize and accept. Scarred, too, like Shadrack, Plum seeks to escape independence through drugs rather than to act responsibly to establish an order and chart a direction for his fragmented life. His infantile behaviour is a metaphor for lack of independence. He wanted to return to the womb... As Eva suggests, what Plum sought was not incestuous cohabitation, but escape through rebirth and childhood. He wanted to become a child again, to return to the parental shelter she once offered, to avoid responsibility for self, as well as to be resorted and made new. Unable to accept either her son's dependence or his inevitable decay, Eva destroys him. (41)

Definitely, Eva has a very strong mind to lose her leg. She uses the strength of the mind positively. Her priority in life is to nurture her children. The act of self-mutilation is accomplished to save her children. Hence, there is intense love for her kids in her strong mind. Such is one of the kinds of black womanhood. Nellie Y. McKay in her book, *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* published in 1998, points out to Eva's perception on death as, "To Eva, death was the ultimate reality. Having given Plum life through tremendous struggles, she could not endure his meandering in the artificial pastiche of death; she took him out of his dope-ridden misery and gave him the real thing" (26). Eva is a very positive portrayal of an African woman. Although she is disabled, she is not weak. Eva, being a black woman, her color is an issue that could have been considered negative. However, her color and appearance does not disturb her even slightly enough to consider her inferior. She is a very resilient

character, physically, mentally and emotionally. Eva is an inspiration for other black woman because of her strength.

Though Eva has lived for her children, the same attitude is missing with her daughter Hannah. Hannah is free going and more concerned about her own pleasure than her daughter's well-being. Sula once overhears her mother stating that she does not like her: "I love Sula. I just don't like her" (SA 57). Sula becomes less interested in her mother thereafter. When Hannah catches fire and struggles for life, it is Eva, with one leg, who jumps out of the window to save her daughter when Sula stands there simply watching her mother engulfed in fire. This act of Eva to save Hannah even with profound disability proves her love for her children. Similarly, she saves Plum from dying at a very early age when he has impacted stools. Plum is at the verge of dying because of the complete block in passing stools. Eva tries many measures to solve the problem. She finally has to put her finger deep into his anus to retrieve the hard, impacted stools. A doctor or a health care worker can easily do this. However, Eva just being a common woman dares to do and succeeds in her attempt. The determined act and the concern for saving Plum when he is a child is another illustration of her motherly love.

Hannah feels that she and her siblings have not received enough love from their mother when they are children. Therefore, Hannah comes to Eva and asks her whether she loves them: "Mamma, did you ever love us?" (SA 67). This question makes Eva furious: "You settin' here with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you? Them big old eyes in your head would a been two holes if I hadn't" (SA 68). Both Eva and Hannah have different views about love. Hannah thinks that a mother should show more affection to her children if she loves them: "I know that you fed us and all I was

talkin... bout something else. Like. Like. Playin with us. Did you ever, you know, play with us?" (SA 68). Hannah could not understand that Eva has no time to play with her children when they are small because Eva has gone through a tough time just to make ends meet and to secure the fundamental needs for her children. Nevertheless, Hannah's feelings of insecurity about her mother's love subsequently project into her relationship with Sula and neither Hannah nor Sula possess the sense of unique self-worth; Hannah is looking for her self-worth in her relationships with men and Sula finds it in her relationship with Nel. The mother and daughter relationships portrayed in *Sula* suggest that the historical experience of Afro-American women has had a great impact on parental relationships. Mothers in the novel fail to provide their daughters with the sense of unique self-worth because they are still struggling with their own memories of childhood. Motherhood does not represent a fulfilling relationship in the novel and does not provide protection or affection.

Reilly connects black motherhood with the emancipation of black women. The fundamental nature of black motherhood and its function is vital for empowerment of black community. Reilly says, "Morrison in her rendition of mothering as a political and public enterprise emerges as a social commentator and political theorist who radically, through her maternal philosophy, reworks rethinks and reconfigures the concerns and strategies of African American, and in particular black women's emancipation in America" (11).

Similarly, Collins also stresses the importance of mothering. Collins defines one perception of mothering: "... motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black

women's empowerment." (16). She further states, "Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism." (qtd. in Reilly 16)

In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's mother Pauline is an example of how a mother can lose her child by not caring enough. According to De Beauvoir, motherhood is not always as natural as many people believe it to be. "There is no such thing as an 'unnatural mother,' to be sure, since there is nothing 'natural' about maternal love, but, precisely for that reason, there are bad mothers" (538). Both Pauline of *The Bluest Eye* and Sweetness of *God Help the Child* are examples for bad mothers. As a young woman, Pauline finds solace at the movie theatre. A virtual newlywed, pregnant and lonely, Pauline describes her time at the picture show as, "The onliest time I be happy" (*TBE* 123). In the novel, it is quite easy to find out that it is the parents of Pecola Breedlove, who are responsible for her eventual dysfunctional sense of identity. Moreover, it is Pauline, who fails to preserve the integrity and protect her child. She gives up the attitude a black mother should have and sells her heritage and cultural values to the monster "White Idealism." She violates Andrea Reilly's idea of black motherhood; "The focus of black motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect, and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete" (4).

Pauline Breedlove is born as Pauline Williams, in Alabama, and she is the ninth of eleven children. Pauline leads a very difficult life as a child. Problems with her foot cause her to feel separate and unworthy. When she is two years old, she has stepped on a rusty nail and impaled her foot. Forever afterwards, she walks with a slight limp, and

her foot flops whenever she walks. Pauline believes that this accident will determine her destiny. Her family moves away from Alabama to Kentucky for better job opportunities. During her childhood, she is isolated from other family members when everyone goes for their jobs and the small children to school. When alone, she starts to cultivate her own pleasures. Pauline loses herself in church songs and romantic fantasy. She always imagines of someone who could love her and save her. From Hollywood movies, she learns about beauty and begins to emulate white celebrities like Jean Harlow. Pauline blames her foot for disconnectedness and unworthiness of her just as her daughter blames her unworthiness on her eyes. Morrison says, "Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot" (*TBE* 111). Pauline rejects her heritage and sinks into white idealism. The disastrous effect is documented in the life of her child, Pecola. Reilly stresses the importance of acceptance and absorption of African values by black women to prevent disasters in the family and the life of the children. Thus, Reilly points out;

To fulfill the task of empowering children, mothers must hold power in African American culture, and mothering likewise must be valued and supported. In turn, African American culture, understanding the importance of mothering for individual and cultural well-being and empowerment, gives power to mothers and prominence to the work of mothering (23).

Pauline Breedlove lacks strength and is alienated from her community, rejects her children, denying them any means of survival. Pauline could only succeed in passing on to her children her own misleading vision and self-loathing which is a destructive legacy. Pauline passes, "into her son she beat a fear a loud desire to run

away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of people, fear of life” (*TBE* 128). The distorted image of self has damaged Pauline and has been passed on to Pecola to completely erase her identity and wipe out her existence. According to William Grier, the problem of the low self-esteem of many black girls can be linked to the role that the dominate culture and black community play in the devaluation of the worth of black womanhood. He says that young black girls see themselves as the “antithesis of American beauty.” Besides this problem, there is a “discouraging, depreciating mother-family-community environment which pushes them towards the development of a ‘damaged self-concept’ which might virtually impair and retard the development of a positive self-image” (Grier 33). There is a sharp contrast between Eva of *Sula* and Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*.

Pecola’s quest for personal integrity is upset by denials of “being,” from both of her parent. Her mother and father are so caught up in their own racial oppression, self-hatred and misery that they cannot provide warmth and love for their children. Their love is tainted, displaced, twisted and lost. They breed no love. The childhood days of Pauline have not added to her understanding of her children’s needs, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that she herself is a neglected and abused kid. Sumana in her book says, “The Breedloves despise themselves because they believe in their own unworthiness which is translated into ugliness for the women of that family” (51). Pecola’s parents block her avenues toward self-reconciliation. Pauline, who is the most closely related person to Pecola, does not give her the love she needs.

Pauline is seduced by glamorous illusions produced by the Hollywood film industry into a figural identification with the white ideology of beauty. In *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Teresa de Lauretis focuses on the centrality of

“the look” in cinema and dissects the process of the double figural identification to seduce the female spectator into acceptance of femininity. The woman in a narrative cinema, Lauretis contends, “is framed by the look of the camera as icon, or object of gaze: an image made to be looked at by the spectator, whose look is relayed by the look of the male characters” (139). By seeing through the eye of the hero, the female spectator identifies the narrative image with both the subject and the space of the narrative movement, with the figure of movement and the figure of its closure. Both are figural identifications, and are readily possible. These identifications are synchronously borne and conjointly implicated by the process of narrativity. This custom of identification would support both positional ties of desire with both active and passive intentions. The spectator gets an intense desire for the other, and the desire to be desired by the other. Narrative and cinema request the spectators’ approval and seduce women into femininity, by a double identification, a surplus of pleasure produced by the spectators themselves for cinema and for society’s benefit.

From Lauretis’s theory of identification, one can infer that for an ethnic woman, the seduction into “white femininity” is a process of “triple identification” which allows her to identify with not only the gaze, the subject of the movement (white male hero) and the narrative image (white heroine) but also with the power and privilege represented by the white skin. Pauline’s figural identification with the white visual icons is exemplified in her attempt to dress her hair like “Jean Harlow” (*TBE* 123). Her disappointment that is brought on by her lost tooth alone breaks her illusion of this figural identification. However, the spell of Hollywood is still on her, which only makes her sink lower and into acceptance of her own ugliness. Pauline is a black female spectator who fails to cultivate what Bell Hooks calls a decolonizing “oppositional gaze.”

A part of Pauline's education is the "denigrification" of her mind. Franz Fanon has analyzed mental colonization in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pauline Breedlove is a good example of such mental colonization. Franz analyses the psychological and existential alienation of black people. His argument is that black people's "inferiority complex" is the result of "a double process." Economic disadvantage is the main reason for the inferiority complex of blacks. The materialistic incompetence results in severe damage to the psyche when black people internalize and epidermalize this inferiority complex. Basically, Fanon claims that all black women want to be white "because the Negress feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world. In this endeavor, she will seek help of a phenomenon that we shall call affective erethism" (60). In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline is identified by the power of her white employers. The creditors and service people look down upon her when she goes to them on her own behalf. All these result in her racial inferiority complex. She is happy with the nickname they assigned to her. Pauline's mental colonization and her motivation to submit to the authority of the white look demonstrate her affective erethism that Fanon explains. In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Friere discusses similar issues. The psychic build of the oppressed depends on many factors. Pauline is one similar example of the "oppressed." Friere says, "... one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, one cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis for to do one at the expense of the other is to fall prey into a sectarianist position, which is as despicable as the racism that we need to reject" (15). The power of the dominant ideology is irresistible for Pauline. Pauline's process of denigrification prefigures Pecola's suppression to the white gaze.

As Pauline believes that she is ugly, she quits herself to being virtuous and good. Morrison says, "She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role

filled practically all her needs” (*TBE* 127). Pauline’s own home is deprived of order and domesticity. However, Pauline strives to create this order in the home of her employers, the Fishers, a white family. In her own home, Pauline is victimized by poverty and despair and she has given up trying to care for her family in the midst of ugliness and need. She internalizes this role to such an extent that she cares merely about just being an ideal servant. She does not realize or care about what she is for her own family. In fact, Pauline rejects her own blackness and identity with a role defined for her by a dominant white culture. The beauty of the house, people and neighborhood of her employers get huge worth from her eyes; “Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront or to her children” (*TBE* 128). Pauline thus executes her psychological need for domestic order using the rich resources of the Fisher household. She never speaks loving words to her daughter, nor does she speak to her lovingly. She violently rebukes Pecola for disrupting the order of her white world and the security of her white “daughter.”

When Pecola enters this white world, she is punished:

In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly... ‘Crazy fool... my floor, mess... look what you... work... get on out... now that... crazy... my floor, my floor... my floor’ (*TBE* 109).

The repetition of “my floor” emphasizes what Pauline cares about most. She does not care about her burnt daughter, but the soiled floor. Over her shoulder, Pauline spit out

words to Pecola like rotten pieces of apple. “Pick up that wash and get on out of here, so I can get this mess cleaned up” (*TBE* 109).

Pecola picks up the laundry bag that is heavy with wet clothes and she steps quickly out of the door. As Pecola puts the laundry bag in the wagon, Mrs. Breedlove is seen hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink-and-yellow girl:

‘Who were they, Polly?’

‘Don’t worry none, baby.’

‘You gonna make another pie?’

‘Course I will.’

‘Who were they, Polly?’

‘Hush. Don’t worry none,’ she whispered, and the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake. (*TBE* 109)

Phyllis R. Klotman writes “after [Pauline] works for a time for the Fishers, a white family, she begins to emulate them. Their values become hers and their lifestyle takes on more meaning than her own... Polly even begins to see her own daughter through the acquired astigmatism of the Fishers’ world” (124). Morrison thus makes clear Pauline’s complete abandonment of her natural role as Pecola’s mother and her distorted identification with the Fisher household.

Carolyn Denard points out the destruction of “self,” of both mother and the daughter because of the notion of white idealism. The acceptance of white culture and values is devastating for them. He says,

In the novel, the self-esteem of both Pauline and Pecola Breedlove is destroyed by their and the black community’s acceptance of the

standards of feminine beauty glamorized by the majority white culture... in lieu of white skin, they prefer yellow or light brown skin, if not blonde hair, long straight hair of any color, if not blue eyes, then sharply chiseled features that look more Caucasian than African. To have none of these was to be completely hopeless, the subject of constant ridicule and rejection. Pauline was not 'pretty' by these standards, so she gave up on caring for herself and her family and settled down, she said, to 'just being ugly.' (172)

Morrison makes painfully clear Pecola's innocence of her mother's history as well as Pecola's rejection by her mother. As Suranyi notes, "In *The Bluest Eye*, the black mother hates her own child as a reminder of her hopeless situation and adores the young child of the white family she works for. Morrison clearly condemns a racist culture for its worship of white standards of beauty" (13). Shortly after, Pecola is raped by her father. Her spirit is violated by her mother, her father violates her body and the society violates her security. All tenderness and love removes itself from Pecola's life. It is unfortunate also that Pecola must live with her mother on the outskirts of town after Cholly and Pecola's brother escape the scandal that follows the incestuous rape and the ill-fated pregnancy. However, when Pecola's mother does not answer to her overwhelming dilemma, Pecola seeks to break away from her mother and leans closer to madness. Nancy Chodorow contends that girls need connection to their mothers to grow. In an analysis of Freud's Oedipus Complex theory, in her book *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond*, Chodorow contends that girls want or need the phallus for "the power which it symbolizes and the freedom it promises from her previous sense of dependence, and not because it is inherently and obviously better to be masculine" (123). Pauline is not "grown" enough to do what she can do for her

daughter. Thus, Pecola's passage from childhood to womanhood leaves her confused and angered, which translates into feelings of powerlessness, feelings that she has lost control of her own circumstances.

In all societies, mothers are expected to fulfill certain roles; in African societies in particular one of the roles is to prepare the daughter and empower her for her own culture. Speaking primarily on Afro-American mothers and daughters, Patricia Hill Collins says,

Black mothers of daughters face a troubling dilemma. On one hand, to ensure their daughters' physical survival, mothers must teach them to fit into systems of oppression... On the other hand, Black daughters with strong self-definitions and self-valuations who offer serious challenges to oppressive situations may not physically survive... Despite the dangers, mothers routinely encourage Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions... Emotional strength is essential, but not at the cost of physical survival. (Collins 123-24)

It is the mothers who prepare the daughters for the journey from a confusing childhood to a stable adulthood. Pauline is a brilliant woman, but she is impotent, dispossessed of the power to prepare her daughter for the journey of survival, for the survival of the culture and to make her fit for the society. The mother in Morrison's new novel, *God Help the Child* is also an example of how a mother should not be. She neglects the child outright. She does not care for her. She simply does not like her daughter calling her mama. She makes up a name, Sweetness, which she definitely is not. She is disgusted by her baby's dark skin and she considers smothering the infant or putting her in an orphanage. She says, "It didn't take more than an hour after they

pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black” (*GHC* 1).

Sweetness is proud of her own light skin and she raises her daughter Lula Ann harshly, without a mother’s loving care. She says repeatedly, “It’s not my fault.” The novel centers on the problematic mother-daughter relationship, and probes the considerable damage that childhood abuse can inflict into adult life. In a way, the protagonist of this new novel can be called as a victim of her own society unlike Sethe who is a victim of brutal slavery in the hands of whites. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is a victim of racism, white idealism and finally her father pushes her into the clutches of insanity. All three women protagonists are victims. Sethe manages livelihood at the end of the novel after the ghost of Beloved is chased out. Pecola is doomed forever. However, Bride of *God Help the Child*, though she is a victim, she later learns to live in her own style facing all absurdities. She empowers herself, only enough to just live independently.

Ondine a black servant-maid in *Tar Baby* takes the role of mother first to Michael, a white child, and then to Jadine, a black girl, and later on to Margaret a white woman. Ondine gives love and consolation to the abused child, Michael. Michael is violated and abused at an early age by his young mother Margaret, who has an unstable mind. Michael gets consolation only from Ondine and copes-up with his suffering. Even his father Valerian does not know about the suffering of Michael. Later, even Margaret needs support and care from someone and it is Ondine who shows her great compassion and cares for her. The motherly affection from Ondine changes Margaret and makes her stable and confident. When Margaret is deprived of love from Valerian, Ondine plays the role of a sister to comfort Margaret. Ondine takes care of the lonely

Margaret who has a disturbed mind, which often compels her to harm her own child in seek of escape from her clustered thoughts. Later, when Margaret delivers the secret of abuse of her own child, she asks why Ondine has not directed and stopped her violent actions towards the child. Ondine is not in the position of revealing the secret, because she wants to secure her job. If she has told the secret, then along with her husband, she would be out of job. If she has no job, then her other-daughter Jadine will become stranded and her life will become difficult. Ondine sacrifices her life for Jadine, even though this “child” [Jadine] is only her niece.

Ondine, in *Tar Baby*, teaches her niece Jadine that apart from motherhood, she should know the duty of a daughter. Whether Jadine may accept or not, Ondine passes on the values of the community she considers worthwhile. Ondine urges Jadine never to go away from the duty of a daughter and the importance of motherhood by declaring, “A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her” (*TB* 281). It is a duty of a mother to teach her daughter about motherhood and her responsibility. When Ondine expects Jadine to look after her foster parents in their old age, Ondine says that it is a duty of a daughter to remember and take care of her parents in their old age.

Ondine, in *Tar Baby*, is portrayed as the co-mother for Jadine. The practice of co-mothering is an important element of African practice of mothering. Motherhood is very important in African society and sisterhood relates to co-mothering in Africa. Co-mothering is a practice of sisterhood that gives women the chance to take care of children and form bonds with other women as well. Oyeronke Oyewumi argues, “In many African societies, there is no sisterhood without motherhood. The most profound sisterly relations are to be found in co-mothering, which is the essence of community

building. Co-mothering as a communal ideal and social practice is not reducible to biological motherhood, it transcends it” (13). Motherhood is considered as a source of empowerment of women in African society, black women’s access to female solidarity and sisterhood which allow them more freedom. Other mothering or co-mothering is an element of “Black Feminism” as argued by Stanlie James. Both othermothering and co-mothering are unique to the West African society. He says that the practices of othermothering and in particular community mothering serve, “as an important Black feminist link to the development of new models of social transformation” (James 45). Community mothering and othermothering also emerged in response to black mothers’ needs and served to empower black women and enrich their lives. Othermothers usually care for children. Othermothering is in fact an element of community-mothering. Njoki Nathani Wane says that community mothers “take care of the community” in contrast to just doing othermothering (Nathani 182). These women typically have gone past their childbearing years. Arlene Edwards says that the theme of community mothering must have arisen from the concept of othermothering and co-mothering. She says, “The role of community mothers often evolved from that of being othermothers” (88). This shows that the West African society is known for its communal lifestyles and interdependence of communities.

In the novel *Beloved*, sisterhood is depicted between the characters Sethe and Amy Denver. There is also a good sisterly relationship between Denver and Beloved. Amy Denver is a white indentured slave who escapes slavery. She has a good heart and helps Sethe during her crisis. It is after her, Denver is named. Denver once tells Beloved about how Amy Denver has helped Sethe during difficult times. Amy finds Sethe and detects the image of a chokecherry tree in Sethe’s bleeding scars. After Amy has cleaned the wounds, the two women Amy and Sethe spend the night in a lean-to

shelter. The next morning, Amy helps Sethe come down to the river. There they find a leaky boat with only one paddle. Just after they have stepped into the boat, Sethe gets labor pain and her water breaks. Initially, it appears as though the newborn Denver might die. However, Amy finally coaxes a cry out of her. Then that evening, Amy leaves Sethe waiting by the riverbank for a chance to cross the river to Ohio. Amy is the redeemer for Sethe by being a “savior figure” who has helped her heal to almost full recovery. Amy’s care and helpfulness for Sethe allows for a change in the novel because it’s the turning point from the suffering of Sethe to her future. If not for Amy, Sethe would have died being pregnant. Ella is another character who has helped Sethe in times of trouble. She is a black woman who is one of Baby Suggs’s neighbors in Cincinnati. She escorts Sethe and Denver from the riverbank to Baby Suggs’s house when they have first arrived. Later, she organizes the local women to exorcise Beloved from the house. Therefore, in both the novels *Beloved* and *A Mercy* there is sisterhood among women of different ethnicities.

Andrea Reilly draws black feminist ideas in the unique culture of other-mothering and community mothering. Collins argues that these complementary dimensions of mothering and the practice of communal mothering or othermothering give women great influence and status in West African societies. She elaborates the feminist ideology in this behavior. She says,

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 culturally elaborated and valued across diverse West African societies... Finally, while the biological mother-child bond is valued, childcare was a

collective responsibility, a situation fostering cooperative, age-stratified, woman centered 'mothering' networks. (121)

This type of mothering provides black community Social activism and it establishes "Motherhood," as a site of Power. Collins argues,

Black women's experiences as other mothers have provided a foundation for Black women's social activism. Black women's feelings of responsibility for nurturing the children in their extended family networks have stimulated a more generalized ethic of care where Black women feel accountable to all the Black community's children. Such power is transformative in that Black women's relationships with children and other vulnerable community members is not intended to dominate or control. Rather, its purpose is to bring people along, to in the words of late-nineteenth-century Black feminists—"uplift the race" so that vulnerable members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance. (123)

In a racist culture, that deems black children inferior, unworthy, and unlovable, maternal love of black children is an act of resistance. By loving her children the mother inculcates in them a cherished sense of self and high self-esteem, enabling them to confront and challenge racist discourses that naturalize racial inferiority and commodify blacks as other and object. Bell Hooks (1990) emphasizes, "African Americans, have long recognized the subversive value of homeplace and homeplace has always been central to the liberation struggle" (42). Children learn at home how to identify and challenge racist practices and it is at home that children learn about their heritage and community. At home, they are empowered to resist racism and particularly

when it gets internalized, it is the mother who can help them wipe out the internalized insult. According to Reilly, black motherhood is needed for the empowerment of black women and children. Pauline and Sweetness in Morrison's novel have failed in this regard. However, Minhae mae, Sethe, Eva and Ondine have strived to stick on to this unique African heritage of Mothering. Reilly says,

The empowerment of minority children through resistance and knowledge occurs at home and in the larger cultural space through the communal mothering and social activism spoken of earlier. This view of mothering differs radically from the dominant discourse of motherhood that configures home as politically neutral space and views nurturance as no more than the natural calling of mothers. (4)

Patricia Hill Collins argues that black children must be taught how to survive in a racist white society. However, she stresses the value of African Heritage and self-esteem. Black children can imbibe white values and lose their self-esteem and still find a way to survive in a dominant environment. This is not what Collins wants. This situation is not healthy. This would kill the value of black heritage and culture.' Moreover, Sula and Jadine, who are emancipated, do not give much importance to the black culture. Pecola has problems of white idealization. Nobody exists in her world to correct her. Pauline fails to teach Pecola. Pauline has lost her self-esteem and is already caught up with white idealization. Hence Morrison's women are never empowered. There is failure at one or the other level that has prevented empowerment. According to Collins,

Racial ethnic women's motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society

that denigrates people of color... [Racial ethnic] children must first be taught to survive in systems that oppress them. Moreover, this survival must not come at the expense of self-esteem. Thus, a dialectal relationship exists between systems of racial oppression designed to strip a subordinated group of a sense of personal identity and a sense of collective peoplehood, and the cultures of resistance extant in various ethnic groups that resist the oppression. For women of color, mother work for identity occurs at this critical juncture. (Collins, 57)

Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* provides the basis which women-centered psychologists have since used to discuss the origins of gender-identity differences between men and women. Significantly, although Chodorow explores individual psychological development, her theory overtly rests on the social fact of women's having been the primary caretakers of children. Chodorow perceives the creation of an individual, gendered self as the result of inexorable social context. In "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," Chodorow states, "a woman identifies with her own mother and, through identification with her child, she (re)experiences herself as a cared-for child" (47). Besides this, a girl forms her gender identity by observing female role activities that are "immediately apprehensible in the world of her daily life" (51).

Hence, it could be argued that a flawless black motherhood along with black Sisterhood is essential in paving the way for empowerment of the black community. The importance of flawless motherhood cannot be over stressed. The acceptance, appreciation and remembrance along with holding on to ancestral values and black heritage would save the black community from perishing. The same would empower

them in any absurd environment. Hence, one can say that Morrison would agree with Lowinsky in the importance of “Mother” in initiating the five successive stages of development of a girl child. Anglo-American feminist writer Naomi Lowinsky, in her book *The Motherline: Every Woman’s Journey to find her Female Roots*, defines the motherline:

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)

Hope Edelman also shares the same view in her book *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss*. She points out that the feminine history depends on flawless motherline. It is the “Mothers,” who act as a check to the ideas and deeds of her children and help in promoting progress in life. Furthermore, they are responsible for teaching the children to gain knowledge about the ancestors. She says, “Motherline stories ground a... daughter in a gender, a family, and a feminine history. They

transform the experience of her female ancestors into maps she can refer to for warning or encouragement” (201).

The influence of the milieu and the result of suppression by the dominant culture can have devastating effects on the “self” and thereby on the values of living and “life.” This could ultimately result in broken families and lost identities. Such a situation will be a major hindrance for any women to play the role of a good mother or a sister. Consequently, it will result in bringing negative effects on the individual and on the community. Here, looking from a broader sense, an individual alone cannot be blamed for a result. It is the inhuman nature of the humans, which brings in the trouble. It is the failure of one brother to show love and affection on the other for mere selfish motives. It is the suppression of one by the other for selfish motives that has ultimately proved to be the roots of all other evils such as racism, failed sisterhood and motherhood and broken families, etc. Enhancement, Emancipation and Empowerment of human society is the harvest of sound motherhood.