CHAPTER 3

Facets of Black Motherhood
Mildred watched her first baby grow like a long sunrise. … It made her feel like she had actually done something meaningful with her life, having these babies did. … These kids were her future. They made her feel important and gave her a feeling of place, of movement, a sense of coming from somewhere. Having babies was routine to a lot of women, but for Mildred it was unique every time; she didn’t have a single regret about having had five kids. (Mama 16)

Terry McMillan’s fiction celebrates the wisdom and enduring love of the African mothers apart from, highlighting the joys and sorrows of motherhood. Motherhood holds a special meaning in Black women’s lives. “Motherhood for black women was survival. Black women had children, set up households, nursed and cared for their children, and formed communities. As mothers, black women loved their children and cared for them in spite of the multiple tasks they performed” (Littlefield 57). Motherhood in itself is a significant marker of womanhood. It provides respectable social identity and also offers a space where certain qualities like self-expression and authority. African mothers are greatly respected in African society because they ensure their continuity of their people.

Whites devalued black motherhood by restricting its role. They could not view Black mothers outside the framework of slavery and regarded them as breeders rather than as mothers. Black mothers were brutalized and degraded by the social system of the time and their sacred maternal instincts were ignored. Commenting on this, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu says,
African American feminist writers own, define and celebrate their maternity, a vitalizing expression of freedom from white racist beliefs about black women. Whites defined black motherhood within the context of slavery, thereby devaluing black maternity, creating then reaffirming white stereotypes of black motherhood as occupying only certain roles Mammy, breeder or cook. (647)

Throughout the world, motherhood is shaped by the demands of patriarchal society. Thus it has became an established social role. It is considered the ultimate in femininity and has been accepted as a woman’s biological destiny. In the small town of Point Haven, Michigan, Mildred Peacock in *Mama* has suffered indignities varying from a public beating administered by her husband, Crook to the day-to-day ordeal of having to raise and provide for their five children by herself. Mildred does indeed eventually divorce her husband and finds herself going on and off resorting to Welfare system, in between stints of menial employment, as she goes through the process of raising her children alone. “In the early stages of her transformation, Mildred hangs on to dominant Eurocentric ideologies regarding femininity and motherhood” (Beaulieu 595). In the later stages she breaks free from all ideologies and proves her individuality.

McMillan’s novels do offer words of wisdom, hope and empowerment for mothers. It focuses on motherhood which serves as a stage where black women become self reliant and develop self-respect. The power of motherhood is further enhanced by the African norms in which child bearing in African society has a positive impact. It is taken as a path to freedom or a source of social standing.
Women belonging to the lower strata feel a great deal of pride in their roles as mothers since it is the only source of social acceptance, security and status. Motherhood gives these women a sense of authority. For example, Savannah’s mama in *Waiting to Exhale* asserts her position of mother even though Savannah has grown to a full-fledged adult, when she says, “And no, You don’t need my approval for anything, but I’m still your mother, so watch the tone of your voice.” (WTE 10)

Mildred, the Mama is depicted as a mutilated individual in the beginning since her marriage collapses, hence faces nothing but insecurity and instability in life. Mildred informs the kids about her idea to move out of Point Haven to Phoenix. All five of them protest especially Freda. Mildred exercises absolute authority as mama and brushes aside all their protests and says, “I thank it’s gon’be the best damn move I’ve made in thirteen years and regardless of who don’t like it, I’m the mama and daddy in this house and we going, as soon as I can get myself situated” (Mama 65).

Terry McMillan’s novels are celebrations of African women’s resistance and resilience as mothers in the public and private domain, in the face of social, cultural, economic challenges in the African situation. In her novels the concept of motherhood is deconstructed as a private role and at the same time it is elevated to the public domain through involvement in organizations and social activities.

Black mothers assume authority and responsibility despite many setbacks in society and the women’s history is evident enough to prove that the Black mothers are tough women who managed skillfully the dual task of bearing and raising children with confidence and courage. Shirley A. Hill in her *Black Intimacies* says, “The black
cultural ethos of motherhood tends to valorize African American mothers as tough, competent, authoritative women who excel at the work of raising children” (Hill 135). In *Mama* Mildred is an archetype of a tough and loving black mother who rises up to the situation fighting against the threatening forces in her life. She is a fierce character in a way who does not always inspire warm and encouraging thoughts. According to Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, “… *Mama* is a revisionary text that deconstructs the myth of motherhood to include discussions about the tension between ideal motherhood and realistic version of this role” (Beaulieu 594).

The Black mothers’ practice of tough rearing goes a long way to keep their children from going astray and if they do so, they are capable of rehabilitating themselves. This is illustrated in the character of Freda, Mildred’s eldest daughter, who shifts to New York for better prospects. But her alcohol addiction puts her in a miserable condition but later she comes out of it by opting for a course of de-addiction treatment. Every time she faces a crisis, she is reminded of her mother’s words, “Women were just like Queen bees. Could do everything except fly” (Mama 234).

Terry McMillan’s novels portray how mothers move beyond grief to new awareness. Mildred Peacock in *Mama*, Gloria and Bernadine in *Waiting to Exhale*, Marilyn Grimes in *The Interruption of Everything* and Zora Banks in *Disappearing Acts* go beyond their grief and manage to battle through life. In the end, the mothers are not the same as we see them in the opening of the novel. They have evolved and grown in stature. Most of them move from innocence to maturity at the end of the novel.

McMillan’s mothers never want to be burden to their children. Robin’s parents in *Waiting to Exhale* are married for thirty-nine years. Of late, Robin’s father becomes bed-
ridden with Alzheimer’s disease and his motor skills have also deteriorated. Initially he forgets little things but gradually bigger things like his address, Phone no, the usual routes etc. Sometimes he thinks his wife to be his “Mā”. He was an energetic man who had seen many countries. Now he is as helpless as a kid who has to be bathed and taken care of at every step. Despite all this, Robin’s parents do not want to burden their daughter even in such a crisis. When Robin comes to know of his deteriorated state she decides to quit her job and move in with her parents. Her mother says, “You have got a whole life ahead of you, Don’t stop living because of us, We’ll manage” (WTE 210). This shows that mothers are ever-givers and they do not want to be receivers. Mothers in general never want to be a liability to their children.

Similarly Savannah’s mother in Waiting to Exhale never informs her that she was getting a meagre twenty seven dollars worth of food stamps a month. She did not want to burden her daughter with feelings of guilt. But Savannah tells, “You don’t have to be too proud. You’re my mother. And I am your daughter” (WTE 481). This not only highlights the mother’s capacity for endurance but the decision to spare her child the strain of supporting her. Mothers in general never want to be a burden to their children financially.

Mother’s love can never be gauged by any parameter. One cannot determine her affection by means of the material things she offers or her own actions. In Mama Mildred, the mother wants to raise money for Angel’s wedding by pawning objects because she cannot bring herself to borrow from anyone. Yet she does not succeed in raising such an amount. Her incapability of gathering the sum cannot be inferred as lack of love for her daughter. Similarly Mildred was reluctant to visit her son Money in jail.
This too cannot be seen as lack of affection. Therefore mother’s love for her children is unfathomable.

The self-respect of McMillan’s mother characters is indomitable. Savannah knows that her mother has worked hard all her life. Now she’s old and helpless and so Savannah is all out to help her mama but she is reluctant to accept help. Likewise Mildred’s pride is unassailable when her house is damaged by fire. Her children invite her to stay with them but she refuses saying, “I don’t want to live with neither one of y’all. This is my house”(Mama 279). Similarly, at another instance, when Mildred takes a stubborn stand of not attending Angel’s wedding, Curly Mac convinces her of the fact that falling out with children is not new but showing pride to them is not good. She says, “You need to swallow some of the Peacock pride” (Mama 254). At times McMillan’s mother characters become blind with feelings of ego.

Since Patriarchy and the practice of polygamy prevailed, the female subordination was the norm of the African society. Yolanda Williams Page, critically comments on Georgia Douglas Johnsons’ works, who is one of the most anthologized women poets of the New Negro Era,

Her work formed a bridge between the genteel age and the age of the New Negro, presented the emotions and experience of women as valid subject of literary creation, and depicted dramatically how the evils of American society disempowered, victimized, and paralyzed black women in their roles as mothers and lovers. (315)

The challenges faced by Black mothers are very many. They have to put up a valiant fight at all fronts overcoming the impediments of life as a mother. Mildred Peacock in
Mama, keeps on thinking of ways to keep life going and in that battle she forgets all those delicate and fascinating moments of motherhood.

Mildred proves to be a strong and zestful young mother who supports her children in a poverty-stricken life. Despite Mildred’s care and all efforts to sustain her family her children are not spared from misfortune. Mildred relies more on the help of family and friends than religion in coping with each crisis. She says, “It ain’t that I don’t believe in God, I just don’t trust his judgment” (Mama 290). She tells this when her family moves towards economic doom. In this connection, it can be said that “…the narrative of Mama reminds us of the problematic relationship between dominant ideologies and black women’s realities” (Beaulieu 595). Mildred Peacock, the protagonist of Mama hates Crook, her husband whom she loved once upon a time. She detests his ways, his addiction to drinks, his illegal relationship with Ernestine Jackson and the manner in which he used to inflict verbal and physical abuse on her. “Most of all, she hated Crook. And if it weren’t for their five kids, she’d have left him a long time ago” (Mama 1). She slogs for the family and so at twenty-seven Mildred is “as tired as an old workhorse” (Mama 1). Celebrating motherhood Jane Campbell explicates,

Naturally many contemporary feminist would deplore the relegation of women to the domestic life that Harper’s romance appears to sanction. Yet given the few avenues open to Afro-American females in Harper’s day, one must regard her sanctification of motherhood as ingenious, a way of telegraphing to nineteenth century black women that child rearing designated them as instrumental in historical process. (29-30)
Most of black mothers worked as domestic servants and naturally, their long hours of work in white families curtailed their time and energy devoted to mothering their own children. A similar situation prevails in *Mama* wherein Mildred could not protect her own daughter from being sexually abused because she was engaged in various strategies to make both ends meet. Consequently children were pressed into accepting adult-like responsibilities too early in life. For example Freda in *Mama*, the eldest daughter of Mildred had to play mama to her siblings when her mother was taken mentally ill.

Terry McMillan’s novels resonate with mother figures and children. The trials and tribulations of Black motherhood are realistically pictured in *Mama*, *Waiting to Exhale*, *Disappearing Acts*, *A Day Late and a Dollar Short* and *The Interruption of Everything*. Educated Black mothers struggle to balance marriage, motherhood and employment. The same can be seen in the other novels of McMillan wherein her mother figures like Bernadine and Gloria in *Waiting To Exhale*, Zora Banks in *Disappearing Acts* and Marilyn Grimes in *The Interruption of Everything* run from pillar to post balancing their family and job. The dark lives of the black mothers filled with agony and despair is described in these lines:

Additionally, black wives who worked as domestics found their own roles as wives and mothers undermined while they tended the kitchen and children of white families, often laboring from five or six in the morning to eight at night.

When they returned home at the end of the long day, there was often little time left for their own children. (Landry 48)

A similar situation is encountered by Mildred who indulges in all trades to keep the family afloat - like scrubbing white folks’ floors, waiting on people in a bar, cooking
hamburgers and French fries, taking care of dying old people and so on. According to Paulette Richards, “...Mildred as the “Mama” ... embodies the power of God as a maternal force, which resides within the female self. Indeed, Mildred has an abiding faith that women in their maternal role are like queen bees they can do everything but fly” (47).

Motherhood and the oppression of women are linked inherently in a way though it sounds contradictory. Mildred, the mama in Mama is actually a victim of a trail of traumas. She suffers broken relationships, separation and alienation. Nevertheless, she overcomes all inhibitions and reconstructs her family and looks back at her life with immense satisfaction. As a mother she acquires self-realization, self-assertion and reconciliation. Michael Awkward emphasizes in his review, “Mildred’s self-protective scheme, almost militaristic in its multiple options and tactical flexibility, serves as an accurate reflection of the survivalist mentality that compels her subsequent adventures and misadventures ...” (49-50). Despite all problems, Mildred brings up her children to be sharp, alert, wise, self-reliant and independent in all ways. Money, her son led a wayward kind of life in the beginning but finally he finds the job of a Mechanic in an Aeronautics company in Los Angeles.

A Day Late and a Dollar Short appears to be a revision of the theme and issues in Mama. Viola in the former novel and Mildred in the latter have shades of resemblances. Mama focuses on the hardships endured by one woman in trying to raise five children all by herself and how far she was willing to go to give them a good life. In A Day Late and a Dollar Short, Viola the protagonist shares some of the strengths that Mildred showed in
Mama but is more vulnerable in that she admits her weakness. Her concern for her children is out of love but the tragedy is that she really does not have a life of her own.

The mother characters in Terry McMillan’s fiction come to terms with their inner-selves through a great deal of introspection which takes place in isolation as well as social interaction. In Disappearing Acts the protagonist, Zora Banks, a music teacher, is separated from Franklin, a construction worker after she has a baby. Despite conflicting situations in life she manages to keep herself afloat. The child is the anchor for the mother to pull her through unfavorable circumstances. Zora lifts Jeremiah, her baby and squeezes and wishes him New Year Greetings. “I didn’t want to let go of him. I needed to hold something. I needed someone to hold me” (DA 352).

McMillan is keen on drawing the readers’ attention to the challenges of single parenthood. Many African mothers manage to run their homes without fathers because of the lapses on the part of fathers. Thus many homes lack father figures and the mothers most often make their children the center of their lives. But at teenage, sons begin to assert their manhood and daughters their womanhood. Gloria in Waiting to Exhale has no idea as to how much her life revolves around her son Tarik. Gradually when his priorities change and take new shape he prefers playing with his friends to spending time with his mother. It was at this time that Bernadine advises her to come out of her shell and branch out socially. But by then Gloria has lost her social skills. She has been focusing throughout on enhancing her son’s personality and his education. Besides, she spent all her time and energy in running her Hair Saloon. “She forgot all about men, forgot that she was still an attractive woman, and became a supermom” (WTE 100).
Single parenting has its own disadvantages. A mother in a family can fulfill the physical needs and emotional needs of the child to a great extent. Yet the mother herself remains skeptical of her role and feels the need of a father figure in the family. In *Waiting To Exhale*, when Tarik, Gloria’s son, gets expelled from school for being in an unauthorized club, Gloria gets annoyed and exasperated and she feels, “Also at times like this, she wished Tarik had a father who lived under the same roof. She was tired of dealing with all this puberty and growing up shit by herself. She should’ve had a man in this house a long time ago. Somebody who executed authority much better than she did” (WTE 254).

Black mothers have the reputation of having mothered effectively and tactfully even in odd and difficult circumstances. Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale* as any typical mother is a disciplinarian as far as education of her son is concerned. She says, “At the rate you’re going, if you don’t hurry up and clean up your act, You may not see the inside of a College” (WTE 88). Though Gloria is strict and stern with her son Tarik and she has not slapped him since thirteen even under provoking situations. She encourages him by such remarks, “You are a smart boy Tarik, and I don’t want’ to see you end up like some of these hoodlums in the street. I just wanna know why your grades are going down” (WTE 88). Gloria as any other mother is anxious about her son Tarik’s future and hopes he is not messing around with drugs. She takes efforts to get him into one of the best schools in Phoenix. It is so, that “She would die if anything happened to this boy” (WTE 92).

Mildred in *Mama* is extremely innovative as a mother even in punishing her children. When she finds out that Money, her son and Bootsey, her daughter attempt to steal, she is not alarmed or angry but is very much embarrassed because she thinks that she had
taught them better. She does not lash them with a whip or explode but orders them not to leave home or watch TV for a month which she feels is an apt punishment for teenagers. As children, she used to lash them with a belt but once they entered the threshold of adolescence she stopped corporal punishment. Curly Mac, her sister-in-law, pays a compliment to Mildred for being a perfect mother as far as upbringing of her children is concerned. She says, “You ought to be proud, Milly you raised them kids right” (Mama 153).

One can see how the tactful mothering of McMillan’s mother figures go a long way in developing a healthy relationship between mother and child. Viola is one such mother character who finds all her four children caught in a maze but they feign to the world as though they have no problems in the world. Paris, the eldest is deserted by her husband Nathan, and she is the single-parent to Dingus, a seventeen year old boy. Charlotte, a bad tempered woman, always suspicious of her husband and is not on good terms with her siblings especially Paris. Janelle has problems at home when she is unable to safeguard her daughter Shanice within the walls of her own home. The news of her daughter being sexually abused by George, Janelle’s second husband appalls her. And Lewis, Viola’s son is a perennial loser in life. His wife, Donnetta leaves him for another man Todd and they plan to adopt her son Jamil. Viola, the matriarch has landed in hospital worrying about her kids. She says,

... they always accusing me of meddling in their business, but hell, I’m their mother. It’s my job to meddle. What I really do is worry. About all four of them. ... If I didn’t love ‘em, I wouldn’t care two cents about what happens to ‘em. But I do. Most of the time they can’t see what they doing, so I just tell ‘em what I see.
They don’t listen to me half the time no way, but as their mother, I’ve always felt that if I don’t point out the things they doing that seem to be causing ‘em problems and pain, who will? (ADLDS 1)

One can find distinct mothering patterns among black mothers because they are naturally equipped with child rearing skills. The black women are innately adept at mothering and they are extremely nurturing and protective when rearing their own children as well as the children of the white families.

Gloria is of the opinion that mothers are responsible for trifling and irresponsible sons. If their upbringing is not perfect they would be sending out such sons into the world who would cause immense pain to women. She also says that her son is the one man who hasn’t broken her heart. Then she goes on a long harangue on how she reared her son.

She proudly says,

I’ve tried to raise him so he won’t grow up to be as trifling and irresponsible as some of these fools running around out here parading as grown men. I’ve tried to teach him to treat people with respect and that includes girls. I’ve tried to teach him to be giving and unselfish, to not be afraid of his feelings, to be honest in everything he does, so he won’t grow up to be another Charles or John or Herbert.

(WTE 518)

Gloria is portrayed as a single parent to Tarik, who becomes very responsible, plays his saxophone regularly, becomes serious about everything once he becomes a senior and his report card too improves. Therefore his mother, “Gloria told him five hundred different ways how proud she was of him”(WTE 404). Besides, Mothers are very appreciative of their children when they have a reason. Tarik expresses his wish to apply to ‘Up With
People’, an organization. He expresses a desire to join a college and have a good educational exposure which would enable him to serve his community. When Gloria enquires the cost which was 8000 dollars, she said she could afford part of the amount and not the whole because “She didn’t ever want him to take her for granted. Didn’t want to raise a spoiled-rotten brat who’d grow up thinking he could have anything he wanted without earning it” (WTE 407). She tells, “All I am concerned about is you getting a college education. You can play saxophone and sing and dance all over the world if you want to, but without that piece of paper, you won’t have much of a future” (WTE 408). As a wise mother she gives him freedom of thought to become responsible.

Mildred Peacock in Mama is also a caring and a cautious mother and is not impulsive in her actions. She counseled her children and her wise counsels prevailed. She tells Freda, “Well, take it from your mama, there’s always something better out there if you keep your eyes open for it” (Mama 189). Freda’s friends themselves paid compliments to Mildred. They would drive thirty two miles from Los Angeles to see her even in the absence of Freda. They looked upon her as their surrogate mother and often gifted her in cash or kind in exchange for her hospitality.

Black mother’s adaptive abilities are so good that she is able to muster courage and confidence to tackle crucial problems in life. Mothers suffer excruciating agony when their children stop giving them primary importance and turn to other distractions in life. For instance Gloria in Waiting to Exhale is prepared to face the situation when her adolescent son Tarik begins to turn to other things in life.

In The Interruption of Everything, Paulette, the bosom friend of Marilyn, mitigates her mental angst by revealing certain known facts but which are painful to accept, especially
for mothers. She says that children give first priority to their friends when they grow up. Nevertheless it does not mean that they do not care or appreciate what their mothers do. Mothers must be practical enough to understand this fact and not find this as a flaw in their children. This comes as a revelation to Marilyn Grimes.

McMillan’s mother characters are prudent and wise enough to spend quality time with their children. Stella drives up to Lake Tahoe for five days and spends some time with her son Quincy with no distractions. She fears she might never get such opportunities when he goes on to the next stage of a Junior high school student. When Quincy started reading on his own Stella thinks, “My son can read; he can comprehend things, he is making discoveries and he will soon have even more opinions about the world”(HSGHGB 343). One can sense motherly affection in these words.

Streamlining sons into the main stream is a herculean task for the Black mothers. Like in many families, African and American families often have a Black Sheep. In A Day Late and a Dollar Short Lewis, Viola’s son, is a perpetual loser and an alcoholic is obviously the Black Sheep like Money, Mildred Peacock’s son in Mama. At any rate, the black sheep is usually shunned by the others, made to feel inferior and often becomes the family secret. Shirley Hill, expresses her view on Black mothers extending excessive protection to their sons,

Maternal protectiveness towards sons is already enhanced by the belief that being young, male and black is a high-risk venture, for eg, they are maligned as menaces to society and those living in poor neighborhoods are exposed to crime and a street culture demanding toughness. (149)
The black mothers, for example Mildred Peacock in *Mama* and Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale*, strive to streamline their children, especially sons, into the mainstream by counseling, admonishing and reprimanding them out of fear that they would take up wrong ways.

The same is true with Viola in *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*. Her only son Lewis is a loser in life in all sense. His wife left him and he is separated from his son, Jamil. He is unemployed and lands in jail frequently. Most often he seeks solace in drinks and easy affection of women. Besides, he always laments that if he was born a white, life would have been a lot more easier. He has made his life miserable by his own actions and has no company. He is unable to fulfill his son’s needs and is guilty about it. Despite all his failings Viola still has a good word for him. She conveys this through a letter which was given to after her death. This shows her unconditional love for her son. She writes,

> But anyway, Lewis, even though you done had problems dealing with your problems these past ten or fifteen years, I still wish I woulda had two more of you cause you got a heart of gold, and you ain’t got no qualms when it comes to showing your feelings like a lotta men do. . . . I don’t want you to spend the rest of your life in pain, trying to drink your way to happiness. (ADLDS 471-472)

Here one is easily reminded of the sincere and earnest utterance of a mother to her son in the poem *Mother to Son* by Langston Hughes.

> Well, son, I’ll tell you:
> Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.
> It’s had tacks in it.
> And splinters.
And boards torn up.
And places with no carpets on the floor-
Bare.
But all the time
I’se been a-climbin’ on.
And reachin’ landin’s.
And turnin’ corners.
And sometimes goin’ in the dark
Where there ain’t been no light.
So, boy, don’t you turn back.
Don’t you set down on the steps.
‘Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.
Don’t you fall now-
For I’se still climbin’ …

Black Mothers are often cast as perpetual mothers. Mothering becomes a life-long obligation for Black women irrespective of age, occupation or progeny. Having lost their parents young they have to take care of their siblings. Later their own children have to be mothered and still later they have to assume the care of their grandchildren. Thus they are pressed into perpetual motherhood. After the strenuous life of raising five kids as a single parent, Mildred babysits her daughter, Doll’s child, until Doll gets graduated and accepted to one of the State Universities.

Likewise, Marilyn Grimes’ role in *The Interruption of Everything* as a mother does not end even when her daughter Sabrina enters motherhood. It continues because she has
to take care of Sabrina’s daughter, Sage whom she cuddles and reads books to. When she reads books to her grandchild “She propped her feet on my thighs and listened with her eyes. I remembered when Sabrina used to do the same thing when I read her this story” (TIOE 52). Thus Marilyn Grimes relives her motherhood experience when she is a grandmother.

The Mother’s role never ends in an individual’s life. The Mother’s concern for the family and a sense of protection for her child is endless and unlimited. Bernadine’s mother adds, “But in this day and age women do too much” (WTE 194). She says, “You should get out and walk. I get more exercise than you and you’d be surprised at what exercising can do for your mind” (WTE 195). Most often mothers become too intrusive and invasive in their adult children’s lives. The same is true of McMillan’s mother figures. Mildred wants Freda to see the world and she says, “I don’t want none of y’all to end up like me with a house full of babies and then can’t go nowhere” (Mama 131). A Mother’s concern for her children does not stop even when their children become fully fledged adults.

Marilyn Grimes in The Interruption of Everything gives a standard lecture, which is the usual sermon given by all mothers across the world. When her son Spencer decides to leave for the South Shore of the Lake Tahoe along with his girl friend, she advises him: “Please drive carefully and responsibly up in those mountains and places and don’t drink and get behind the wheel” (TIOE 145).

Mothers, at times are not aware of their children’s emotional growth. When Bootsey, Mildred’s daughter reveals her plan of getting married to David and refuses to accept her Mother’s plan of shifting to California, Mildred receives the greatest shock of her life. Mothers undergo untold suffering and at times their own children seem to be the cause. It
is an ambivalent suffering which alternates between extreme resentment and extreme gratification. They experience the former because they are driven to the edge of life and the latter because they tend to carry the cross for the sake of their children. Gloria as a single parent of Tarik is at times, vexed with him and she voices her feelings, “I don’t know which is worse, trying to raise a teenage son or dealing with a husband who leaves you for a white woman” (WTE 265). Though both are equally difficult and equally worse, the former is more laborious.

Paulette, Marilyn’s friend in *The Interruption of Everything* is a mother with an aching heart and we see it when she relates about her son who has just got out of prison. She is driven to a state where she does not trust him any more in her house. Nevertheless, she has taken a small apartment for him on rent but he develops an aversion for her. Her husband offers him a job for a living but he refuses to take it up quoting unconvincing reasons that it was too early for him to fall into another routine. The mother in Paulette reflects, “She does not know how she gave birth to such a bitter child. She cries” (TIOE 225). Such situations can prove to be harrowing experiences for mothers.

Mothers have the reputation of being the best judges of their children. Mildred finds that behind Angel’s sweet exterior, she has a sneaky character and therefore does not trust her out of sight. Similarly she feels her second daughter Bootsey is never content with her riches and the big house, a mansion built by David in South Park. She wanted one with circular drive ways like the ones the whites have. Mildred didn’t approve of this avaricious quality. Mothers hold themselves responsible for their children’s flaws. Mothers evaluate their children rightly by instinct and they are rarely wrong and so is Mildred’s.
She anticipated Crook’s death that is why she made the kids go to him every week. The news of his death saddened her. She wished if she could turn the clock back and set things right. “Can’t do nothing but remember the way I loved him. And I loved him” (Mama 134). She realized that she had not stopped caring for Crook just because she had divorced him. Mother forced Freda to join her for her daddy’s funeral.

Viola Price, in *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*, has the mother’s intuition and insight into all her adult children’s problems. One can call it by any name like the mothers’ honing device or mother’s love or maternal instinct but Viola can see thousands of miles away into her children and grandchildren’s hearts.

Mothers in general and African mothers in particular forge deep and life-long bonds with their children. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu states that,

> The image of the mother is deeply rooted in every aspect of African society, folklore and culture and the image of the African mother filters through in all aspects of life. In African units the relationship between the mother and child is of primary importance in the foundation for a healthy kinship group. … The rape of Africa by white societies’ slave traders threatened to destroy the African family and most particularly the maternal relationship. (646)

The relationship between mother and child is of the greatest importance in African society. Though Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale* becomes an unwed mother by David she is determined to have the baby because she does not want to commit another major sin. She pleas...
her. “Tarik’s little body was so warm and when his tiny feet would rub against her leg, Gloria knew she was not alone in this world’ (WTE 94) certainly, he was the anchor of her life. The same feeling is echoed in Mama by Mildred as she recalls the nights when Freda would sneak into her bed. She loved the way Freda felt against her skin. When she brushed her children’s hair she felt like brushing her own hair. These kids were everything to her, her future, her life.

The bond between the mother and the child is strong but it has a special significance in Black community.

By definition motherhood suggests a unique relationship between the mother and child, one which is seen as the basic requirement for child development. Mothers nurse their children, provide love, affection, and guidance, and shape primary development. In 19th century American Society, motherhood was seen as a necessary act of procreation that ensured the lineage of a particular family. Motherhood for white women was viewed as the moral role for women.(Littlefield 54)

Bernadine’s mother sympathizes with her daughter in Waiting to Exhale and enumerates the household chores and manifold sacrifices made by her for her children.

It was you who read them bed time stories. You who took off work to take them to the doctor, the dentist. You who stayed home to nurse them when they were sick. It was you who didn’t miss a recital or a game. It was you who took them to school and picked them up. It was you who got the wax out of their ears, made sure they took their vitamins and later made sure they did their homework right …
and for the last eight years, it was you who co-ordinated their birthday parties and sat through hundreds of others. (WTE 47)

McMillan’s mother characters find separation from their children because it is unbearable to mothers. Gloria apprehends that her role as mother would end with her son being out of high school and this fear haunts her. “How was she going to survive? And just how do you go about making a life for yourself when you’ve been socially crippled and emotionally bankrupt for years?” (WTE 100)

A similar situation is seen in *Mama* when Freda poses such a question to Mildred. Freda is extremely concerned about her mama and that makes way for empathy. She wonders how much pain her mother would have had to endure, seeing her five kids grow and leave her one after another. When Freda asks her mama what she would do when everyone leaves her, Mildred evades giving an answer because she does not like such a question being posed to her. She was not prepared for a condition like that because Doll was just fifteen years old and she had four or five years to be worrying about that. This shows that though mothers are burdened with responsibilities they enjoy and find fulfillment. Without these responsibilities they feel they are lost. When Mildred looks at her children’s face she thinks her babies would soon be adults. This thought passes a current through her because the very thought of separation from her children fills her with excruciating pain. During Doll’s wedding with Tony, Mildred could not digest the thought that her kids henceforth belong to somebody else. This thought struck her and she was shattered.

At the time of Freda’s departure for Los Angeles Mildred experiences a living death. Mildred cannot act enthusiastic about it because she does not want to believe that Freda
was serious about leaving. But at same time Mildred cannot gulp down the sad departure of her children. She could not bring herself to hug or kiss her daughter because she is exhausted bidding goodbye to her kids. She does not express her sorrow and grief. Later when Freda decides to marry Delbert, Mildred feels, “Two babies left … and I started out with five. …” (Mama 191). One can feel the motherly love overflowing in these lines.

Mothers are bent on safe guarding their children and are ready to go to any extent to accomplish this feat. Bernadine’s mother in *Waiting to Exhale* empathizes with Bernadine when she is betrayed by her husband. She shares her agony and says, “He’s hurt you and it is the same as hurting me” (WTE 192). She consoles her daughter Bernadine and tells her, “Any way, baby, I know this is not an easy thing to go through … just need to be by yourself pick up that phone and call your mother” (WTE 193).

A similar situation is seen in *Mama* when Mildred fears the safety of her daughter Freda, in the hands of Delbert. Mothers act as protectors and guardians for their children. When Freda is stubborn about marrying Delbert, Mildred gives in. Nevertheless all she wants is that he should not ill-treat her. “If he ever do one single thang to hurt you, you pick up that phone and call me. And I swear, I’ll blow his brains to kingdom come” (Mama 189). Mothers experience supersonic strength when their children are in a crisis and feel that they can rescue them from the most distressing situation. Maureen Freely explicates, “Another heartwarming martyr story? Not quite. Mildred might be strict about household chores, but she also believes in having a good time … But like their mother, they (her children) are ferocious survivors of America’s worst nightmare. …” (20).
For mothers, children’s well being is of paramount importance. As a mother, Bernadine does not want to give in to any diversions that would hinder her taking care of her kids. Once she is so full of grief when her daughter Onika has high temperature at school. She is all guilty because, from the time she developed an affair with Herbert, she has been spending less time with the kids. She sternly decides to stop the affair. “Because her kids were important” (WTE 305). Further, she is more worried about her kids and wondered whether her children concealed their grief about the separation of parents. She is at a loss to probe their minds. Even when mothers have storms raging within, they put on a calm exterior from outside and feign to be normal. Bernadine’s mother is concerned about her daughter’s health condition. She says, “But in this day and age women do too much” (WTE 194). She says, “You should get out and walk. I get more exercise than you and you’d be surprised at what exercising can do for your mind” (WTE 195).

Mothers take utmost care not to reveal their grief to their children. Marilyn Grimes in The Interruption of Everything is one such character. After her miscarriage, Marilyn comes home when a party is on, in her house to celebrate her son’s home-coming with his girlfriend Brianna. Her home is teeming with people. Her daughter Sabrina and her husband Nevil and their kid, Sage, too joins them. Marilyn struggles to keep her emotions to herself and Paulette, her best friend pities her and says, “Lord have Mercy, this is too much to handle. How in the world are you gonna deal with all this psychological and emotional activity at one time, Marilyn?”(TIOE 113) Marilyn Grimes is so distraught and exhausted with the happenings of the day. Marilyn fears, the crowd at home would smell something fishy. “I’m praying no one will detect anything remotely
close to grief on my face. I don’t want to ruin the mood” (TIOE 124). Despite her health condition, she bakes a cake for her son Spencer when he comes home for Spring break for ten days with his girlfriend. She enjoys that “please-baby-baby-please look” (TIOE 131).

Mothers give first priority to their children’s happiness. Mildred does not disapprove Angel’s choice of a white man named Ethan. When Freda comes to know Angel was getting married to a white man named Ethan, she was in a fury. Her mama convinced her saying he is a good person and he loves Angel. She adds, “I wouldn’t care what color he was, so long as he make her happy”. (Mama 246) Money too adds fuel to fire but Mildred was firm. As a mother her only priority is her daughter’s happiness in life in getting a good husband. When Mildred sees Freda making progress in life, she wants the other kids to get the same kind of good life that Freda is leading. Mildred at the end of the novel is happy that all her kids have progressed in life.

The mother figure Viola Price, in *A Day Late and A Dollar Short* plays a vital role in bringing the children together. Each one of the Price children wants the other sibling to think his or her family is not having any problems related to husband or children. The son, Lewis is a whiner and does not take responsibility for his own life. Janelle has to face her own blindness and failure to protect her twelve year old daughter, Shanice within her own home. Charlotte, the resentful one, faces her own insecurities. Paris, being the eldest helps her siblings to find solutions though her own life is in a mess. She is deserted by her husband Nathan, after eight years of marriage. The mother’s concern for her children is never-ending. The conversation between Viola and her eldest daughter highlights their relationship:
She does not know what she’s talking about. I’m not lonely, Mama. And when was my heart supposed to have been broken?

She looks at me like I’m crazy. I guess she would be referring to Nathan.

You can’t fool me, Paris. I brought you into this world. I can see right through you. What you need to do is drop our guard and let somebody find the latch that opens the gate to your heart. You’ll feel a whole lot better.

What makes you think it’s not open?

‘Cause you shooting out radar that screams: Don’t talk to me, don’t bother me. I’m fine, I can manage all by myself. I don’t need nobody.

I think you’re overstating the point, Mama. But what’s bad about managing on my own?

Nothing, Paris. But stop focusing so much on Dingus. That boy’s already on his way. You’ve done a good job raising him, and he’s gon’ be alright. Now put some of that energy into you. (ADLDS 170-171)

All their problems need to be remedied and it falls on the mother’s shoulders to bring them back together. Ultimately it is love of the mother that calls each of the members back to the family circle. A mother’s love for her children is unconditional. She accepts total responsibility because of the total trust children repose in her.

McMillan’s mother figures are generally champion of tradition and culture. Moreover it is said that the African woman is associated with core values “and is revered as guardian of traditions, the strong Earth-mother who stands for security and stability” (Rushing 19).
The traditional role of a mother tends to reinforce the cluster of qualities central to motherhood. She is encouraged to be passive and dependent and to see herself as lacking in autonomy and authority. In the beginning, Bernadine fills in the slot of a traditional mother lacking in autonomy and authority. When her marriage collapses Bernadine is at the end of her tether with all the mental agony and anguish that goes with her divorce and other settlements. She says, “This shit won’t happen to me again. … For real. From here on out, I control my own money. I’ll never be in the dark like this again. No way” (WTE 296).

Most mother figures in McMillan’s fiction are portrayed as traditional mothers who prefer their daughters to be married and have a family. Mothers are always obsessed with the safety and security of their children. Savannah’s mother feels Savannah had been by herself for a long time living a lonely life. She tells: “Every woman needs a man and you ain’t no exception” (WTE 291). She tells categorically. “If you put as much energy into finding a man as you do worrying about promotions and what have you, you would have been married a long time ago” (WTE 292).

The same concern is voiced by Mildred Peacock in Mama to Freda, her first daughter. Mildred is happy that Freda got an admission in special minority programme in Stanford, the top university in the United States, where they would give her a grant and pay her tuition fees too. But she is disappointed that her daughter did not settle down in life with a family. She says, “That’s what you should’ a been thanking about, finding you somebody with some brains in his head and some money in his pocket. You be twenty two before you know it, girl, and all the education in the world ain’t gon’ make no babies or make you feel good at night” (Mama 182).
The mother-figures in McMillan’s fiction are considered preservers of tradition but they are ever ready to reject the society’s well-trodden path that threatens to suppress their human spirits. As Susan Z. Andrade has quoted the words of Hortense Spillers in a review, “Traditions are not born. They are made. We would add that they are not, like objects of nature, here to stay, but survive as created social events only to the extent that an audience cares to intersect them.” Mildred Peacock in *Mama* dissuades Doll, her fourth daughter from going for an abortion. She does not approve of her daughters shirking duties as a mother. Mildred disapproves the latest trend in the Peacock family where the Peacock girl deserts her man for trivial reasons. For instance Freda decides to desert Delbert, Doll has already deserted Richard and now Angel wants to desert Willie. Although the first two daughters have concrete reasons, Mildred does not approve Angel’s idea of deserting Willie just because she met someone better—a white named Ethan. Her mother’s instinct told her that her daughter Angel was sneaky and would grow up to be the kind of a woman who would betray her husband. She apologized to Willie on her daughter’s behalf. She tells her daughter proudly that she has never betrayed any man in her life including her husband. This again highlights the traditional quality of a woman who opposes abortions and unnecessary divorces. This again highlights her traditional quality of a woman who opposes abortions and unnecessary divorces which means breaking up of families.

Mildred Peacock in *Mama*, is a typical traditional mother who places great value to pregnancy and child birth. The idea of being a divorcee with five children on welfare system does not appeal to her. “Motherhood meant everything to Mildred”(*Mama* 15). Further, Mildred advises her children to visit their daddy often because Ernestine, his
live-in partner, would not be of help to him. she said, “He’s you daddy, gon’ always be your daddy” (Mama 119). The news of his death saddens her and she wishes she could turn the clock back and set things right. She realizes that she has not stopped caring for Crook just because she has divorced him. This again shows Mildred as a traditional mother who understands that certain relationships cannot be severed.

Mildred stands tall as a traditional mother because she espouses the traditional African American faith in education as the key to greater freedom within American society.

Terry McMillan portrays mothers who are orthodox and traditional at heart and are preservers of ancient values. In *Waiting to Exhale*, Robin’s parents are conservative and orthodox in nature and so they never visit Robin because they are unable to take in the fact that she is unmarried but lives with Russell. Another instance to highlight the orthodox nature of Robin’s mother is that she refuses to divorce her ailing husband even to get help from the State.

The ideology that motherhood made women inherently virtuous and superior to men is obvious in Terry McMillan’s fiction. Most of McMillan’s works portray women who possess all the requisites of being good mothers. The mother figure is crucial and vital in literature as well as in real life. The motherhood has an inspiring influence on woman herself which means the stage of motherhood brings out the vital life-preserving virtues in her. Motherhood is indispensable to a woman especially because it connects her to the world.

Mothers are blessed with an innate capacity to counsel others. They act as saviors to all who are weak and desperate. Though Mildred Peacock is bogged down by many problems she has an ear for other’s woes. Curly Mac, Mildred’s sister-in-law cries over
her children’s plight. Her kids have followed their father’s wayward ways. When she was hospitalized for two months, her daughter, Shelly ends up in prison, Chunky and Big Man become hopeless and Booboo accepts the ways of Money, because the head of the family is a drunkard and a womanizer. Mildred reacts in her usual way telling her that Curly should have divorced that man who brought her only misery. This reflects Mildred’s undaunted character, especially in times of distress. She says, “And sometimes I don’t want to believe I even gave birth to ‘em” (Mama 210). To this Mildred says that it was all due to her own fault. If she was a strict mother they would not have gone astray. Curly Mac opines that her kids adopted their father’s wayward kind of life. Once Curly suffered a stroke she could not give much attention to them. She was exhausted advising them to keep out of trouble, to abdicate drugs, to complete schooling and get a job. She was hospitalized for two months and the house turned into a sty. Her daughter, Shelly ended up in prison, Chunky and Big Man became hopeless and Booboo accepted the ways of Money because the head of the family himself remains a drunkard and a womanizer. Mildred reacted in her usual way. She suggested that Curly should have divorced that rogue who brought her no happiness but only misery. Mildred’s strength of character is evident in this situation. Maureen Freely explicates the character of Mildred how she stands tall against all odds. “Another heartwarming martyr story? Not quite. Mildred might be strict about household chores, but she also believes in having a good time … But like their mother, they (her children) are ferocious survivors of America’s worst nightmare…” (20).

Mothers possess inherent abilities to revitalize their lives and also the lives of those around them. Above all, a mothers’ love is unconditional at all situations. Looking at
Terry McMillan’s fiction from this angle one can call her works a recognition or an acknowledgement of Black motherhood. The virtue of motherhood is so unique that it surfaces and spreads outside the family. Marilyn Grimes’ motherly instinct gets aroused when she sees her foster sister Joy’s neglected kids—LL and La Tiece. Marilyn takes care of them like her own children. She is all sympathy for them because they are forced to fend for themselves as their mother Joy who is a drug addict does not seem to know, to express love to them. The children don’t understand anything of grace or tenderness or pride. They do not even know what it feels like to be loved. They would have got a taste of love from their grandmother, Lovey but not from their mother. Marilyn takes care of Tiecey and LL. She cooks dinner for them and they eat together in the kitchen like a family which seemed strange to them. She teaches them to pray and irons their dress to wear to school. She gives them a big hug and kiss before they go to bed. They seem to love all these loving actions which were deprived to them. They bore the brunt of their mother’s addictions to drugs and alcoholism. Joy is guilty of her actions and feels embarrassed. She overtly tells Marilyn “I look bad in front of my kids and I don’t want them to keep seeing me the way I been acting. I am ashamed of myself ....” (TIOE 210).

Although an alcoholic, Joy wants to maintain an image of a good mother which shows she desires to mend her ways.

Motherhood involves too many sacrifices. Mothers are depicted as self-sacrificing beings who place the needs of their children ahead of their own. Mother figures like Mildred Peacock in Mama, Gloria, Savannah’s mother, Bernadine’s mother and Bernadine herself in Waiting to Exhale and Marilyn Grimes in The Interruption of Everything are authentic characters and are recognized for their self-effacing nature.
Mothers postpone or sacrifice their dreams in order to look after their family. A vacation is the last thing on their minds when it comes to their children and their future. Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale* never remembers the last time when she went on a vacation. She says “Once Tarik graduates, I might be able to take some time off”. She also justifies and says that when one person runs his or her own business it is hard to get away from it. But Savannah affirms everybody needs a vacation once in a while and enquires what her son has got to do with it. Gloria answers proudly, “Well I am a mother, You know.” (WTE 517) Similarly Savannah’s mother desires to go on a tour to Arizona but she drops it to assist Sheila, her daughter after delivery.

In *Mama*, Mildred Peacock, the mama of the story is a complex and dignified mother, committed to raising her children to be capable, responsible adults. Mildred’s dedication to her children and their future is inextricable from her personal success which is a testimony to the fact that mother is an epitome of love, sacrifice and patience. In *Mama* Mildred desires to marry Big Jim but she defers the wedding because Doll, her daughter is in the family way.

Bernadine in *Waiting to Exhale* postpones her dream of starting a business for another five years until her children were at least at an age to go to school. Bernadine’s mother in *Waiting to Exhale* feels her daughter had already made enough sacrifices in life. She says, “When John Junior was born, You poured all your energy into motherhood and watched your husband’s business prosper”. (WTE 12)

McMillan’s mother figures are known for their selfless devotion to their families and their altruistic nature. Likewise, Marilyn Grimes, the mother figure in *The Interruption*
of Everything lives a self-effacing life. The paradox is that a mother is everything, yet nothing and it is brought out poignantly in the following words:

Being a lifetime wife and mother has afforded me the luxury of having multiple and even simultaneous careers. I’ve been a Chauffeur. A chef, an interior decorator, a landscape architect, as well as a gardener. I’ve been a painter. A furniture restorer. A personal shopper. A veterinarian’s assistant and sometimes the veterinarian. I’ve been an accountant, a banker and on occasion, a broker. I’ve been a beautician. A map. A psychic. Santa Claus. The Tooth Fairy. The T.V.Guide. A movie reviewer. An angel. God. A nurse and a nursemaid. A Psychiatrist and Psychologist. Evangelist. For long I have felt like I inadvertently got my Master’s in How to Take care of Everybody Except Yourself and then a Ph.D in How to Pretend Like You Don’t Mind. But I do mind. (TIOE 11)

The irony is that Mothers have been self-effacing beings all their lives but they cannot brook their daughters travelling the same path. The irony behind the feeling is extremely complicated to comprehend. The same theme runs through The Interruption of Everything. Marilyn Grimes, the protagonist is a forty-four year old mother. All her dreams are deferred, because she gives first priority to her big family. She and her dreams are last on the list. At times she reflects:

I just can’t believe that I grew up and became one of those women who got married and had kids and forgot all about my personal dreams. At first I just tucked them away and then as the years passed they got buried and I felt embarrassed or ashamed to have had them in the first place. I figured after I
finished raising my children I’d at least get back the interesting man I married (didn’t happen) and become reacquainted with my other self and pick up where I left off. (TIOE 9-10)

Marilyn Grimes does not want her daughter Sabrina to repeat history. Marilyn who is the leading character caters to everyone’s needs except hers. Her whole life gets wasted away fulfilling the demands of the man of the house, in effect the patriarchal society. She says, “I want to tell her again that being in love is a good thing but it shouldn’t mean you have to forfeit your dreams. Babies are not romantic. They require attention and care and almost all your time” (TIOE 101). When Sabrina, Marilyn Grimes’ daughter informs her about her pregnancy, Marilyn expresses regret. She feels that her daughter should have completed her Master’s Degree as planned. The mother in Marilyn Grimes does not want her daughter Sabrina to travel the beaten path. Instead she wants her explore the world and her role in it. She thinks, “I would love to tell her that I made that same mistake. Postponed my plans and dreams so your father would pursue his” (TIOE 137). One can see Marilyn’s apprehensions and speculations about her daughter’s future. She does not want her daughter to give up plans for her future to accommodate her husband’s. She opens up,

You remind me of twenty – two years ago when I put getting my master’s on hold to marry your father and because I was pregnant with you. The next thing I know, here come the twins. And your daddy wanted me to stay home and be a hands-on kind of mother, which I didn’t mind doing, but fast forward the film, Sabrina and here I am. I don’t want this to happen to you. Looks like you’re already on your way. (TIOE 241)
In contrast to this, the feminist Simone de Beauvoir points out:

The daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overwhelmingly affectionate and hostile towards her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it. The same process is to be found in pederasts, gamblers, drug addicts, in all who at once take pride in belonging to a certain confraternity and feel humiliated by the association: they endeavour with eager proselytism to gain new adherents. So when a child comes under their care, women apply themselves to changing her into a woman like themselves, manifesting a zeal in which arrogance and resentment are mingled; and even a generous mother, who sincerely seeks the child’s welfare, will, as a rule think that it is wiser to make a ‘true woman’ of her, since society will more readily accept her if this is done. (309)

Mother’s sense of responsibility is too acute that she wonders whether she is competent enough to rear her children. This fear haunts her and makes her feel her own incompetency might be the cause of her children’s failings. Her main objective is that her children should not suffer any loss which might further lead to other lapses in their lives.

The mother figures of McMillan do not exhibit feelings of affection because they are submerged by an acute sense of responsibility. Mildred Peacock is not expressive as far as affection for her children is concerned. Collins asserts, “For far too many Black mothers, the demands of providing for children are so demanding that affection often must wait until the basic needs of physical survival are satisfied” (55). Nevertheless
Mildred is a bundle of affection. Her son, Money, disgusted with his mother’s idea of shifting from Point Haven for better prospects, runs away from home. Curly Mac’s sons find him in a pond, all wet and frozen. Mildred does not chastise him but worries if he would catch pneumonia. She refrains from scolding him. Instead she longs to hug him but holds back her feelings. She does not meet his eyes because he might see in her eyes, her grief and how responsible she feels, hence she averts her glance. McMillan’s mother figures hold themselves responsible for their children’s failings.

In McMillan’s novels, Mother figures empathize with their daughters. Bernadine’s mother is concerned about her daughter’s welfare when she says, “Please don’t try to be super woman. You are doing too much as it is, working full time -that job uses up too much of your energy and I don’t know how women do it. Go to work, come home and cook and clean and still tend to the children. .. When do you have time for yourself?” (WTE 194).

Black women are capable of bringing about a change in history by proving their worth. In the face of multiple opposition they do not merely survive, but overcome obstacles and therefore can be called victors. Further, their roles as mothers is of paramount importance wherein they have to instill black pride in their children and thus take on the mantle of culture bearers. Commenting on this thought, Jane Campbell states her views on Frances Harper’s novel titled Iola Leroy. And what she states about Frances Harper’s character Iola Leroy, is equally true of Terry McMillan’s protagonists.

Harper infuses Iola Leroy with the central notion that black women possess the power to effect historical transformation. In order to change history, however, black women must insist on their dignity, shunning victimization and excoriating
Black Mothers portrayed in Terry McMillan’s fiction help their children to come out of their circumscribed lives. Slavery has limited their ability in myriad ways. The poem *The Negro Mother* by Langston Hughes will give a glimpse of the Black mother who can change history.

... But I had to keep on till my work was done:

I had to keep on! No stopping for me –

I was the seed of the coming Free.

I nourished the dream that nothing could smother

Deep in my breast – the Negro mother.

I had only hope then, but now through you,

Dark ones of today, my dream must come true:

All you dark children in the world out there,

Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.

Remember my years, heavy with sorrow-

And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
Make of my pass a road to the light
Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
Lift high my banner out of the dust.
Stand like free men supporting my trust.
Believe in the right, let none push you back.
Remember the whip and the slave’s track.
Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
Still bar you the way, and deny you life-
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs-
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.

The Black mothers teach their children to face problems which challenge their value, self-esteem and identity. Mildred counsels Freda and answers her queries thereby teaching her life skills:

I mean yes. But I’m still gon’ be rich anyway, ‘cause from what I see being poor don’t get you nowhere and just about everybody we know except white people is poor. Why is that, Mama?

‘Cause niggahs is stupid, that’s why. They thank they can get something for nothing and that that god they keep praying to every Sunday I gon’ rush down from the sky and save ’em. But look at ’em. What it takes is real hard work. Ain’t
nobody gon’ give you nothing in this world unless you work for it. I don’t care what they tell you in church. One thang is true and this is the tricky part. White folks own every damn thang ‘cause they was here first and took it all. They don’t like to see niggers getting ahead and when they feel like it, they can stop you and make it just that much harder. But with all you learn in them books at school, least you can do is learn how to get around some shit like that. Anybody can see through something that’s crystal clear. Just keep your eyes open and don’t believe everythang- naw, don’t believe half the shit people tell you ‘cause don’t nobody know everythang. Not even your mama. Believe me I ain’t gon’ steer you too far off in the wrong direction. Mark my words if y’all just learn to thank for yourself, don’t take nobody’s bullshit, I won’t have to worry about you. I don’t care if they white, purple or green. (Mama 33)

McMillan’s fiction conveys the fact that Black mothers can change history by passing on appropriate values to their children thus enlightening future generation about evils of society and ways to combat them. A similar portrayal is presented by Toni Morrison. Building upon black women’s experiences of, and perspectives on motherhood, Morrison develops a view of black motherhood that is, in terms of both maternal identity and role, radically different than the motherhood practiced and prescribed in the dominant culture. Morrison defines and positions maternal identity as a site of power for black women. From this position of power black mothers engage in a maternal practice that has as its explicit goal the empowerment of children. (O’Reilly 1)

Motherhood can be a joyful experience if the responsibilities are shared; or else it becomes tiresome and tedious. *Mama*, presents the thought that motherhood can be
rewarding but it can also become emotionally draining because women take the lion’s share of the domestic burden. This is true of almost all the mothers in Terry McMillan including Mildred, Bernadine, Gloria, and Zora. At one stage when life becomes very hard for Mildred, she tells her sister-in-law, “Curly, the way things is going around here, honey, I might have to pick up my kids and get the hell out of here. I can’t keep up these house notes. And the older these kids get the more they eat and more they want” (Mama 50). Mildred keeps innovating ways to keep her family above water.

Motherhood can become extremely dreary and monotonous is well illustrated in the *Waiting to Exhale*. Bernadine resents the fact that John lives like a Bachelor with no responsibilities other than sending a cheque and picking up the kids every other weekend. At one point she breaks down and says, “I’m doing everything. And I’m sick of it” (WTE 311). In this state she went on with her routine —dropped kids at school, went to work. She had no appetite, could not concentrate on anything and was self-conscious about everything. She gets into a depression and the doctor suggests she takes antidepressants. Her original being is stifled out of existence. Thus McMillan presents an accurate and realistic portrait of motherhood.

Every time mothers play the role of care-givers and care-takers which exhausts them and there are instances when they long to be taken care of by others. They long to play the role of a guest instead of always being a host. Marilyn Grimes in *The Interruption of Everything* yearns for these, “I want to eat food prepared by someone else. … I want my real feelings to be so well disguised that even I’m fooled into thinking I’m having a great time” (TIOE 123). It is evident that she never had a great time in her life.
McMillan’s thoughts are reflected in her characters. Becoming a mother in life is a momentous occasion in a woman’s life. It is an experience which brings a sense of fulfillment in a woman’s life. But becoming a mother at forty-four makes Marilyn Grimes react in a different manner. She confides in the doctor saying that she resents the whole thing because she would be robbed of her next eighteen years of her life. The doctor in turn pacifies her assuring that her thought is very understandable and stands justified. The doctor says, “Of course you’ve been a care giver and nurturer for a long time and now you feel like it is time to nurture yourself” (TIOE 106). In due course Marilyn Grimes has a miscarriage and she sees it as a blessing. She feels greatly relieved, “As if I’ve been cramming for a big test and the professor has just cancelled class and even though I was prepared, I now have plenty of extra time to study” (TIOE 109). All these feelings denote motherhood is a process which is tedious, self-effacing and at the same time exhausting. It sucks the last sap of the mother’s energy and Terry McMillan comes out with an unusual analogy to drive home the point.

It is interesting to note that Motherhood manifests many faces. McMillan has painted the varied aspects of motherhood accurately and meticulously. At times mother characters delineated in McMillan’s fiction seem to be mines of intolerance, when children are too demanding. At one situation Bernadine is all alone at home but the loneliness drives her crazy. She has prayed many times in the past, not to have to hear “Ma” for at least one day but when it is granted she feels lonely. Bernadine says, “She had five more hours of freedom. Five hours left to do nothing, a rare occasion” (WTE 294). And in the absence of children, mother’s life comes to a standstill.
Mothers in general, become very wild and ferocious when their children are put to any harm. In *Mama*, Deadman, Mildred’s neighbor, in his drunken state, reveals to her that he raped Freda, her first daughter when Mildred was away with Spooky to Niagara Falls. Mildred merely confirms this news with Freda at Wiggins and shoots him. Luckily he doesn’t get killed so Mildred is released from Jail. She tells the world that she shot him in self-defense when he tried to assault her.

A Mother can be unforgiving even to her own children, which makes her a complex being. During Mildred’s one month’s stay in Point Haven after her visit to Los Angeles, she enquires and visits everyone except her own son, in jail. She cannot excuse her son for being reckless and irresponsible. She does not want to discuss the subject even with Curly Mac. To that extent she avoids the subject because it is painful to her.

Terry McMillan’s novels reflect a profoundly authentic motherhood experience and provide loving portraits of mother. The mother figures projected in McMillan’s fiction are not infallible. They have their own shares of imperfections and weaknesses. That explains the multi-faceted character of McMillan’s mother figures.

The portraits of mothers in Terry McMillan’s novels oscillate between fortitude and frailty. One can see this in the character of Mildred Peacock in *Mama* who is a strong and a tough mother but she breaks down when separated from her children. Most of the mothers keep their sorrows to themselves like an introvert. When Doll, her daughter moves away from Los Angeles, Mildred is alone and she is not accustomed to being alone. Tears rolled down her cheek but “Mildred didn’t want God or anybody else to catch her whimpering like some baby. But she couldn’t stop. She felt so empty, like somebody had dug a hole inside her” (Mama 202).
Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale* never thinks about her future. Her life revolves around her son Tarik and she has locked herself in an emotional prison. Savannah poses a question to her many times as to what she would do when her son graduates and leaves home. The thought that she would be alone sends an acute pain, shooting through her. McMillan’s mother characters are a combination of these heterogeneous qualities of strength and weakness.

The mother figures portrayed in McMillan’s novels cannot tolerate anyone taking them for granted. Mothers can get upset when their own children take them for granted. For instance, Marilyn Grimes in *The Interruption of Everything* becomes extremely upset when her son Spencer, with his girl friend, Brianna decides to leave without having breakfast which she has cooked with great care. So she dumps all the expensive sea-food in the trash bin. She gets choked when she says, “... My son forgot I wanted to make dinner for him and on his last night being at home after a whole week of not seeing him, he’s going to a basketball game because that’s more important than having dinner with his frigging obsolete mother” (TIOE 231-232). Marilyn Grimes loses all self-control and in her outburst of emotion she says,

The thing that is bothering me the most is that my own child does not seem to appreciate how much time I was prepared to spend cooking this dinner. Which means they probably have not ever considered how many meals I’ve actually cooked for them or how many loads of clothes I’ve washed. I thought about it one year. I did over two thousand loads of clothes and cooked over five hundred meals: breakfast and dinner. I wonder if they have a clue as to how much time it takes to fold a T-Shirt, a towel, a sheet. How much patience it takes to roll up nine
pairs of socks, which don’t match or are too dirty to wash again. They are ungrateful and I feel like I’ve been taken for granted big-time. (TIOE 232)

Mothers are known to discipline, caution, punish and reprimand, at the same time apologize in certain situations, apart from showering love and affection. For instance, Savannah’s mama is annoyed with her for not entertaining Kenneth’s moves and reprimands her that she is too hard and that no man is going to want her if she does not become flexible. Savannah retorts that she was sick of her mother telling her about men in her life and added that she knows to handle them in her own way because she is thirty-seven years old. Immediately her mama apologizes and consoles her daughter. Despite their egoistic and proud nature, McMillan’s mother characters do admit their flaws.

Often Mothers are pictured in fiction in the customary and conventional manner but, in contrast, the African-American writers have paid tributes to the struggles and sorrows of Black Motherhood. The author Jacqueline Jones has drawn conclusions about the interplay of black woman’s family and work in her Labor of Love, Labor of sorrow. She finds that despite many great difficulties in making ends meet, many mothers derive extraordinary pride and satisfaction from the well being of their children. This would explain how Mildred, a high school dropout, can still insist that her Children, “Every last one of y’ all is going to college” (Mama 32). As McMillan tells us, “These kids were her future (Mama 16). Mildred Peacock, the mama of the house is the major driving force behind the children’s success, even if it is a success on a small scale. But for her, they would have lost themselves in the storm of life. Mama presents a realistic picture of the turbulent life of Mildred Peacock’s family.

Michael Awkward, the critic, stresses the uniqueness of Mama in his review,
*Mama* stands boldly outside of the mainstream of contemporary African and American Women’s fiction. Unlike the tradition’s most representative texts, *Mama* offers no journeys back to blackness, no empowering black female communities, and no sustained condemnation of American materialism or male hegemony. What it does provide, in its largely episodic depictions of the travails of Mildred and her family is a moving, often hilarious and insightful exploration of a slice of urban life that is rarely seen in contemporary African American women’s fiction. (49-50)

Mildred Peacock’s pride is obviously seen in her words and deeds. She is proud when she sees her contribution in each and every brick of her house, her garden, where she planted her weeping willow trees, and her kitchen.

Furthermore, she is very possessive about her children and possessiveness is a feature of motherhood. Her eyes scan the faces of her five kids framed in gold and black. She thinks, “And you got the nerve to brag about how pretty, how healthy and how smart your kids are. Don’t they have your color. Your high cheekbones. Your Smile. These ain’t your damn kids. They mine. May be they got your blood, but they mine” (Mama 15).

Mildred feels proud even more as a mother for having raised a stock of fine young ladies. When Freda comes home from Los Angeles after a year, mama is deeply impressed with her expression and sophisticated appearance. She takes pride in teaching her the rudiments of good taste. She brags to everyone in South Park that her daughter is in college in Los Angeles, meeting film stars, studying to be an English teacher and learning to be a socialist. She makes Freda feel like a celebrity and her pride knows no
bounds when she goes to California to visit her daughter. Seeing her independent, Mildred’s mind flutters with happiness that her daughter has started to scale great heights in the world. Commenting on the mother figure Mildred, Paulette Richards says,

Mildred exemplifies everything main stream society says a mother should not be, and yet, not only does she define herself first and foremost as a mother, but her children’s success vindicates her unconventional style of mothering. Mildred Peacock, then, in her fictional existence, suggests that black female headed-households might not be the unredeemable tangle of pathology they were commonly supposed to be.(63)

Motherhood is extremely rewarding when children see the mother in true light. It gladdens mother’s heart when children acknowledge her sacrifice. Witnessing their mother’s hard life, in Mama, Mildred’s children eventually become very responsible. Freda starts baby-sitting for Wiggins’s daughter and Money would shovel snow in winter to help the family. Freda, being the eldest child reveals her resolution to bring about a change in her family. She resolves to become rich when she grows up so that her mother need not do the petty household jobs for a living. Such revelations thrill the mother’s heart when her children understand her sufferings.

Mothers rejoice when they knows their children support them emotionally. This emotional support sustains them and helps them to survive all other losses. Bernadine’s husband, John in Waiting to Exhale gets married to Kathleen, a white woman. Bernadine’s children, Onika and John Junior, bring the news to her and as Onika was too young to understand what her mom was going through, she gave all minute details about the wedding. John Junior, who was old enough to understand his mother’s predicament,
slapped his sister for having made their mom cry. Witnessing this scene Bernadine was calm because “It was good to know her son was on her side” (WTE 458).

Terry McMillan pays rich tribute to motherhood by way of her characters. In The Interruption of Everything Marilyn Grimes wants to get back to her studies and she has asked for the catalogue from the Academy of Art. She shares her plan with her daughter, Sabrina who is all praise for her. She says her father owes a lot to her Mom for the endless sacrifice she has made for him. She says,

... the least he should be willing to do for the woman who raised his children, ran this household, spoon-fed him, and baby sat his Loaner Mother (God forgive me for I know not What I say), I think twenty grand a year for tuition is a very small price to compensate you for years of sacrifice. It’s time for him to ante up!” (TIOE 102)

The mother figures of McMillan’s novels are full of zest and they are zealous characters to the extent that they are not conscious of their age or state. Mildred never ignores her appearance and takes effort to hide the dark circles under her eyes. When she reaches California Freda decides to take her to Hollywood after some respite. Mildred, a zestful person unlike people of her age says, “You thank I’m some old woman or something. I’m only thirty-seven. I probably got more energy in my baby finger than you got in your whole body” (Mama 157).

A Day Late and a Dollar Short opens with Viola Price, the mother, lying in ICU in Las Vegas after a serious asthma attack. She is a feisty die-hard black woman like Mildred Peacock in Mama. Although she has tubes down her throat, she is evaluating her
life and is full of a mother’s regret. She feels she has not travelled, as she had once hoped and she hopes it is not too late.

Motherhood could be understood as a social as well as a personal and biological phenomenon. Hence becoming a mother has a biological foundation. The immense love a mother feels for her child can have a profound impact on her whole existence.

Mildred resolves to leave for Los Angeles without attending Bootsey’s wedding because she cannot stand watching another one of her babies leaving her. Moreover Bootsey feels that her mother wanted her to feel the loss. That is “She wanted Bootsey to feel like she was losing a mother instead of gaining a husband” (Mama 176). Possessive nature can explain this kind of behavior. During Dool’s wedding with Tony, Mildred could not digest the thought that her kid henceforth belongs to somebody else. This thought strikes her and she is shattered. Though strong from within, and despite the fact that she wants to see her daughters settled in life with a good man, moments like these make her weak.

Mothers in general always love to go back to their roots. Mildred in Mama wants to leave Los Angeles and return to Point Haven, where she feels a sense of belonging. She does not care to stay in Los Angeles any further now that her kids were gone. Her father, Buster and Curly Mac might need her service especially Curly since she had a stroke. “I could cheer her up … What good is roots if you can’t go back to them?” (Mama 202)

McMillan’s mother figures, illustrate by means of their lives that motherhood will not impede the mothers’ creativity or their originality. On the other hand it will inspire and stimulate their faculties as Zora says, “A baby can change your whole life. … And I don’t know where I’ve gotten all this energy.” (DA 323) Mildred in Mama is portrayed as an optimistic mother so she cannot accept the view that a baby would become a
hurdle to the mother. She says “I’m so sick of people always coming up with excuses about why they can’t do this and why they can’t do that. You can do anything you want to do” (Mama 197). A similar thought is expressed by Marilyn Grimes in *The Interruption of Everything*. When Marilyn Grimes discovers that she is pregnant at forty-four she thinks that the baby is going to be a burden to her in all ways but later she is full of regret for having entertained such a thought. She says,

Of Course I’m suddenly ashamed for thinking of an innocent child as a burden. No child asks to come into this world and once it gets here, should be entitled to as much love and joy as it can get. In fact it is often we, the parents, who are ill-equipped to give it what it needs, so in effect, we are really the burden, the albatross around its little neck. I loved mothering my children and I love being their mother. (TIOE 66)

In this connection, Patricia Collins speaks of black motherhood,

Black motherhood as an institution is both dynamic and dialectical. ... some women view motherhood a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labour and makes them partners of oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the black community and a catalyst for social activism. (176)

McMillan’s mothers look upon motherhood as an opportunity to affirm their original selves.

Black Motherhood has more depth than any other stereotyped picture of mother. She is unique in the sense, that African American Motherhood is a product of African American culture and this is evident in Mildred’s character. Mildred inculcates good
principles and positive thoughts in her children. She tells Freda, “That big fancy house ain’t the only thang in life worth striving for. Decency. A good husband. Some healthy babies. Peace of mind. Them is the thangs you try to get out of life. Everything else’ll fall in place. ...” (Mama 33). She also teaches them to think for themselves. She says, “Always remember that you just as good as the next person. ... All you gotta do is believe it” (Mama 34). Mothers are blessed with an innate sense of discrimination between right and wrong and inculcate these into children. Though Mildred is not a religious person she insisted her children on going to Shiloh Baptist every Sunday morning. Mildred made her children know the practical difficulties at home. When each one of them gave an elaborate list of things to be bought for Christmas, Mildred convinces them that daddy has not given her a dime since he had left. So first she would provide them with what she knows is essential for them, then she would get them what she can afford. Mildred Peacock was at times extremely rigid and at times flexible which helped her sustain through odd circumstances.

One can see the impact of effective mothering of Mildred Peacock in her children. Freda undergoes drastic changes when she begins to see new worlds. She gets seriously involved in an affair with Delbert and spends nights partying, smoking and taking drugs. Delbert made vain promises in the past that he would take up a real job. He posed himself as a person with a lot of energy and drive to carry out his plans for his future that impressed Freda. Now he does not seem to be serious about anything so Freda tells him categorically, “my mama didn’t raise me to live like this. Drinking Tequila, snorting cocaine, hanging out every night till the crack of dawn” (Mama 218). Freda instinctively knows that she is not on the right path, the path which her mama showed
her. This is impact of effective mothering of Mildred Peacock. So even in that drugged state Freda takes resolutions for the next year like quitting the habit of smoking, besides exercising, applying for real jobs and so on. She understands that she has got to do something concrete like getting away from such situations because she knew she was falling apart. Eventually, she is ready to take all measures to get her life back on the right track. This is evident of, the fact that she is her mama’s girl because though she goes astray she becomes alert and vigilant at every step later in her life. Wade - Gayles asserts that black mothers “Socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident” (12).

Mildred as a mother does not approve parents bringing up their children in a vulnerable manner - believing and accepting everything others say. She appreciates independent thinking. She feels it is stupid to be extremely gullible. She brought up her children to be sharp, alert, wise, self-reliant and independent in all ways. She refers to Money’s wife Candy who blindly believes everything told by Money. Money with his family decides to shift to Los Angeles to change his ways. Mama welcomes the idea and Bootsey offers to pay for the trip. But mama is very stern about Money finding a job within a month. Finally he finds the job of a Mechanic in an Aeronautics company.

Mildred is through and through a black woman who staunchly believes in her rich heritage and culture. Mildred could not stand Angel addressing her as ‘Mother’ instead of ‘Mama’. Immediately she retorts saying that she is not a white and warns her not to address her in the same manner. Mildred at the end of the novel is happy that all her kids have progressed in life. But even then, she is their mama and they, her kids, a bond which can never be severed.
A similar situation prevails in The Interruption of Everything when Marilyn Grimes monitors the language of her children. At one instance, when Spencer, her son talks to her over the phone he uses the word “Yo, Mom, what up?” Immediately she checks him because it sounded bad. McMillan’s mothers concentrate on every minute detail to make their children perfect men and women.

McMillan upheld the theme of motherhood in almost all her novels. McMillan’s female characters affirm that maternal instinct and feelings are dormant in every female. As a young girl Freda begins to define herself by emulating the only model of an independent woman in her life—her mother. She becomes proficient in all domestic chores in running a household and dominates her siblings like her mother. Likewise, when Mildred goes insane after the incident of shooting Deadman and Freda plays mama to her. Freda talks to her like talking to a child, bathes her and takes care of her. Mildred’s father, Buster takes her to his house and Freda has to look after her siblings for three weeks in the absence of her mother. She becomes a mama emotionally and makes her siblings comply with every demand of hers. McMillan unravels the maternal instincts in Freda on another occasion. She returns home from Los Angeles after a year and finds Money, her brother in Jail. She tries to put some sense into him telling him that Malcolm X in his autobiography relates why many blacks are behind bars instead of having a steady job and why blacks in majority drop out of school. She also tells him that he was doing just what the whites wanted him to do. She finally adds saying that the whites love to see young black men ruin their lives by depriving themselves of education and wasting themselves on drugs. Here again Freda can be seen playing the mother to her younger
brother. Freda is able to slip into the role of a mother easily and casually without any apprehensions.

Mildred’s perfect upbringing has contributed in making her children better human beings and instilled values in them. On one occasion, Bootsey advises her brother, Money to call mama over phone but he was annoyed with mama because she never bothered to see him in jail when she came down to Point Haven from Los Angeles. But Bootsey admonished him telling him that mama went out of the way to get him out of Point Haven for better prospects. But he went straight to prison owing to his own deeds. She counsels him to stay out of trouble, lest he might not get a job especially with a prison record. In this situation Bootsey seems to play the mama to Money. She seems to imitate her mama such that even in dire and desperate situations she is hopeful of something positive coming up. Mildred as a disciplined mother inculcated good habits in her children from young age. She did not want them to look like heathens with dingy faces. She taught them to keep the house spotlessly clean insisting on hygiene.

Black mothers have made an invaluable contribution to families even in a racially oppressive society. A mother’s role is highly complex because she creates and moulds human beings by way of building the character of her children. Sometimes, the mother figure, being a single parent, is guilt ridden, feeling she is unfit and not tailored to play this complex role. Gloria in Waiting to Exhale is anxious about her son Tarik at every situation in life. She is sceptical about her role whether she is a good mother to him or not. She speculates,

She had introduced him to God a long time ago, but still she worried whether or not she had taught him the right things at the right time: manners, kindness,
generosity, respect for others and respect for himself, pride in the color of his skin, how to eat at the dinner table and how to act in restaurants; why she had refused to buy him any kind of guns except water guns; how to talk like he had some sense; how to stick up for himself and fight if talking didn’t work. (WTE 93)

She exposes him to different kinds of cultural experiences. When he evinces interest in music at seven she admits him to Piano lessons. When his lungs grow stronger she introduces him to a Clarinet. She watches him do little things like eating without spilling, tying his shoe lace for the first time, presenting his first recital. At one instance, Gloria realizes that her son Tarik has gone astray and handles the situation tactfully. Being immensely patient, she says, “Tarik all I am trying to say is there’s a right way to do things and there’s a sleazy way to do things. If you don’t know it, it’s called discretion” (WTE 147). Indirectly she makes an attempt to instill the sense of discrimination in her son. All these are of paramount importance because “it dawned on her that she was responsible for moulding and shaping another human being’s life” (WTE 94). Later when she observes her teenage son with the first signs of hair on his chin and above his lip and when he reverses her car out the driveway the first time it dawns on her that, “She was the person who was preparing her son for manhood. What if she forgot something crucial? How would she know? And when would she know it? Who would tell her?” (WTE 94) Mothers place more value on their children’s character and a woman’s fulfillment comes from this aspect of motherhood. Gloria is an apt example of such a mother. Gloria says, “I’m proud of you, Tarik ... Because you haven’t given me any trouble. Atleast not the kind some of these teenagers are getting into out here. Drugs and
all that. I'm very lucky to have a son like you. … This was the kind of son she wanted to raise: Confident Responsible with a sense of direction” (WTE 409). Therefore McMillan’s mother characters take upon themselves the herculean task of moulding the personality of a human being.

Terry McMillan explores the significance of motherhood and its varied facets in her novels. African American mother is symbolized by the spirit of independence, a keen sense of personal rights and a deep love for her children, all of which is reflected in McMillan’s portrayal of mother figures. McMillan’s mother characters change history by empowering themselves and their children. African-American children are taught to be strong and self-reliant. Black Mothers spend more time and effort to instill values of pride and commitment in their children. They teach them the value of independence and also the tactics to strive towards self-affirmation.

Mother figures in Terry McMillan’s novels are not super women characters who hold clear cut solutions to their problems. They are ordinary women who are real-life characters. Nevertheless, the element of pride in the mother characters and their inimitable selves are shown in a powerful and clear manner. Their lives are ridden with conflicts and tensions which they struggle to cope with. Groping for identity, they encounter insurmountable difficulties and grapple with them in a hostile environment. Though motherhood empowers them, it demands tremendous self-sacrifice.

Terry McMillan’s novels show that racism intensifies the difficulties of motherhood. The double onslaught of white racism and black male sexism has sparked the personality of the black woman. The objective of the black mother is to define blackness in a positive manner.
Terry McMillan uses fiction as a tool to convey the state of young mothers torn between her socio-economic commitment and their search for a form of self-realization. Terry McMillan pays a great tribute to motherhood in her fiction. Mothers, here demolish all barriers and march across with fortitude to secure everything for their children. But it is to be noted that the mothers in her fiction are loved and yearned for, but not idealized. Black mothers in McMillan’s novels teach survival strategies to their children so that they will be able to cope with life’s problems. They have transformed themselves from being victims into self-possessed, dignified persons capable of responding to life’s negative forces in a positive way. Black motherhood in general can be seen as a site of resistance.

Terry McMillan’s novels show that African American mothers are very much family-centered as they are more concerned with the entire family than with themselves. Nevertheless they are strong-willed and they know to cope aggressively with life’s problems. They do not passively accept the blows life imposes on them. On the contrary, the unfavourable situations bolster their determination. They look upon motherhood as a pedestal of power and their children as the foundation of their identity. On the whole, Terry McMillan’s fiction extols Black Mother as the hope of the Black Community.

It is almost as if Terry McMillan holds a kaleidoscope on Black Motherhood for with every move, twist or shift in the narrative, she shows a new facet of Black Motherhood. Though Motherhood is common to all cultures, there are unprecedented problems and challenges encountered by Black Mothers and Terry McMillan’s keen insight captures every one of them. The mother figures we see are at once strong and weak, happy and angry, flexible and rigid, forgiving and unforgiving. The Black Mothers themselves find
Motherhood rewarding and taxing, fulfilling and frustrating - they go through every shade of emotion, but the one thing they never, never do is to give up on their children.