CHAPTER-IV

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In 60’s and 70’s there rose a wave of black literature when America discovered the richness of black oral tradition. The literature was created out of need for self-expression and a search for identity. Moreover, that wave of black literature was created in a large part by black women novelists. Marie Steward challenged African American women to reject the negative images of Black womanhood. She pointed out that racial and sexual oppressions were the fundamental causes of Black women’s poverty. She urged Black women to forge self-definitions of self-reliance and independence. To Stewart, the power of self-definition was essential, for Black women’s survival was at stake. She challenged the Black women to use their special roles as mothers and to forge powerful mechanism of political action. She was the first Black feminist to champion the utility of Black women relationships with one another to provide a community for Black women activism and self determinations. She spoke about the sexual politics of her time and knew the sexual abuse visited on the Black women. Black women intellect was dominated by self, community and society. Inspite of this suppression African-American women have managed to do intellectual work. Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, Toni Morrison, Barbara Smith constantly struggled to make themselves heard and used their voices to raise essential issues affecting Black women. The new writers present images of black womanhood and provid a source of reference for the study of the problems that existed among black women.
For too long, black women have been depicted as emasculating matriarchs, guilty of making black men feel they are being "castrated." Many problems of sex have been discussed by social sciences and the world, but usually from the black males perspective only. Typically, the experts (usually black or white males) tend to combine the problems of black men and women and discuss them in general terms of what white people have done to oppress blacks. Prior to 1960, relatively few works were produced by black women. Early black women writers dealt very little with their blackness or their womanhood. Many of these writers (e.g. Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley) were more concerned with imitating the literature of white America. Moreover, many literate and cultured Americans were not aware that black women had produced meaningful literary works. This mis conception is due in part to the fact that our society still suffer from the harsh traditions of rejection of blacks in society especially rejection women as, "viable producers of aesthetic forms."²

The 1960's produced a marked increase in the number of literary works by black writers. They were the direct result of the oppressive conditions. A renewal of black identity was brought on by a strong social and political upheaval designed to move more blacks into the mainstream of American life. Few novels by black women were seen during this time; rather, poetry and drama dominated this literature. Alice Walker and Toni Morrison addressed their first novels directly to the black communities, and insisted that they had deeply internalized racist stereotypes which radically affected their definitions of woman and man. Their novels were a switch from the tenets of the Black Art Movements which sought to project the positive images of blacks.
"to idealize the relationship between men and women, to blame sexism in the black community solely on racism or to justify a position that black men were superior to women" 1

Today a new set of black women writers have arrived on the scene. Women such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor, believe in sharing their experiences and letting their Cries be heard through the medium of the novel. They have studied Black women oppression along three interdependent dimensions. First, the exploitation of Black women labour the "iron pots and kettles" symbolizing Black women's long standing ghattooization in service occupation - giving the economic dimensions of oppressions. They had little intellectual work but the drudgery of enslaved African-American women work and the griding poverty of "free" wage labour in the rural South show the high cost Black women have paid for their survival. Second, the political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights to vote, excluded African-Americans women from public office, and withheld equitable treatment in the criminal justice system all substantiate the political subordination of Black women. They were denied literacy and were underfinded. There were the political dimensions of Black women to oppression. Thirdly, the controlling images of Black women originated during the slave era to the ideological dimension of Black women's oppression. Ideology represented the process by which certain assumed qualities were attached to Black women and how those qualities were used to justify oppression. From the mammies and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas, ubiquitous Black prostitutes and ever-represent welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, the nexus of negative stereotypical images applied to African-American women has been fundamental to Black women's oppression. Taken together, the seamless web of economy pohty and ideology function as a leacey
effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite white male interests and world views. This suppression of Black women ideas has had a pronounced influence.

Toni Morrison stresses,

“high quality writing in her duties as senior Editor at Random House urges women to value their experiences enough to write effectively about them.”

Pultizer Prize winning writer, Alice Walker has stated,

“my fictional preoccupation is exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women.”

She describes black women as the “most fascinating creatures in the world”.

Gloria Naylor, is a new comer to the field of black women writers. She has won the American Book Award for her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, in this novel she writes about a number of black women from all walks of life. These women share the common experiences of living on a dead end street called Brewster Place. Each woman’s story is so vividly told that we experience each one’s oppression, triumph, and discovery.

These Black writers have come to the forefront to share their experiences. They send common message to the black woman that it is imperative for her to find her identity, on her own moral centre and there in develop a feeling of completeness. Gloria Naylor’s *The Women*
of Brewster Place shows women,

"from variety of black grounds, with individual goals
and dreams, they experience, fights against and some
time transcend...the fate of the black women in America
today"²⁶

The importance of this character's message becomes evident
when one views their wide appeal to the general American audience.
When they are analysed, using elements of literary feminism, it becomes
understandable why, although they were written by blacks and about
blacks they have captured the interest of the broader audience.

Feminism as discussed by Agate Krouse is,

"For some any lesbian, career woman, man-hater or
anyone
who rejects the traditional role of a woman is loosely
described as a feminist."²⁷

Alice Walker prefers to be labeled a 'womanast' to designate an
aspect of female sensibility and experience pertinent to the black women
in America. Ammiss Pratt and Ellen Morgan have provided a helpful
discussion of feminism in fiction. Pratt finds most definitions to be too
narrow suggesting that many critics have a "stereo typed understanding
of feminism"²⁸ Mary Evans restricts feminism to a "primitive subjectivism"²⁹
which is characteristic of some of the most reactionary social
organizations in existence.

In relation to black feminist criticism, Barbara Smith, in her essay
Towards a Black Feminist Criticism, expresses the opinion.
"the politics of feminism have a direct relationship to the state of black women's literature."^10

She discusses the necessity for non-hostile and perspective analysis of works by black women and alleges that their literature has been discriminated against due to racism. She embodies the realization that politics of sex, race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers.

Krouse describes literary feminism under several elements.

1. Elements of literary feminism may appear in the work of both men and women. It is more likely however, that certain feminist elements occur much more frequently in the work of the women.

2. In the work with characteristic's of literary feminism the protagonist will be female or there will be several female characters who are significant to the theme or central action.

3. Feminism in characterization may be distinguished by the authors, avoidance of stereotype and stock characters of women occasionally striking unpleasant female characters can still be used to make a feminist point.

4. Literary feminism may be evident in the attention given to the details of the lives of women, especially with attention to areas ignored or sentimentalized:

   (a) Women's sexuality,

   (b) Experiences of old women.

   (c) Women's friendships and

   (d) Injustices suffered by women either because of the nature of society or because of their relationships with
individual men or both.

5. Point of view, characterization, departure from stereotypes, examination of social cause for unpleasant characters, and attention to the details of lives of women are all elements of literary criticism.

Each novel of Gloria Naylor's has any one of these elements present in her novels. Gloria Naylor's first novel, The Women of Brewster Place has many elements of literary feminist. As the name suggests the protagonist is a women and the theme of the story is based on seven women characters who reside at the same lane. Mattie Michel plays the key role on Brewster Place with her strength and timeless wisdom. Besides her there are other women characters like Kiswana, a middle class black women, Etta Mae Johnson a middle aged woman having relations with many men, Luciellia. Lorraine are the two lesbians, Cora Lee the unwed mother present the literary feminism characterization. The novel presents the women sexuality through the lesbians and characters like Etta Lorraine Cora, a patriot of obsessive and arrested desire. The rape of Lorraine by C. C. Baker and his friends identifies the novel possessing literary feminism.

Black feminist thought encompasses two interrelated tensions, it classifies all African-American women, those who possess some version of a feminist consciousness. It claims all those women’s experiences with both racial and gender oppression that results in needs and problem distinct from white women and Black men, and that Black women must struggle for equality both as women and as Afro-American. On analysing the Black feminist thought we find that all Afro-American women share the common experience of being Black women in society that denigrates women of African descent. There are certain characteristic themes in the commonality of experience and are prominent in Black
women’s standpoint. One core theme is legacy of struggle. Katie Cannon observes,

“throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman’s reality as a situation of struggle - a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black exploited and oppressed.”

Black women’s own vulnerability to assault in the work place, on the street, and at home has stimulated Black women’s independence and self reliance. This legacy of struggling constitutes one of the several core themes of a Black women’s standpoint. Her interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression, call for replacing denigrated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images, belief in Black women’s activism as mothers, teachers and Black community leaders and the sensitivity to sexual politics. They are all the core themes set by a variety of Black feminist intellectuals.

Work, Family And Black Women’s Oppression:

One core theme in Black feminist thought consists of analysing. Black women’s work, especially Black women’s labour market victimization as “mules”. Zora Neale Hurston in her novel Their Eyes Watching God explains Black woman’s place in the eyes of white man as “mules of the world”. On analysing the status of black women in the society there is inequality in race and gender. Black women are the domestic workers or slaves. Black women intellectuals show a sustained effort to examine the connection between race and gender oppression in analysing Black women’s work in capitalist political economies. Their
unpaid labour within extended families were fully developed than their paid work. Be them the "coloured daughter", in *The Women of Brewster Place* carrying the groceries or strunging the wet clothes or the teachings of a mother to her daughter in order to keep the family united. Race and gender play a very important role in analysing the Black women's work. In *Linden Hills* Willie and Lester are hired to take out the garbage where as white are hired as servers and waiters. But Black women see their unpaid domestic work more as a form of resistance to oppression than as a form of exploitation by men. In the family too the Black women face the race, gender and social class position. Unlike the white the Black women are ill-treated and harrassed in her family. They are subjected to mental and physical torture. The female characters of *Bailey's Cafe* undergo emotional and psychological oppression. Ophelia in *Linden Hills* come across 'second grade' treatment when she leaves the Spring Island and goes to New York in search of a job. It is not the qualification but the colour which responds.

**Mammies, Matriarch and Other Controlling Images:**

Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images, as part of a generalized ideology of domination. Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients and not mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering Black women's oppression. Challenging these controlling images has long been a core theme in Black feminist thought.

The dominate ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four inter related, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood. Each reflecting the dominant group interest in maintaining Black women's subordination As per the cult of true womanhood, "true"
women possessed four cardinal virtues piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. The elite white women and the emerging middle class aspired for this virtue, Afro-American women encountered a different set of controlling images.

The first controlling image was that of mammy the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves. The mammy image represents the loving, nurturing, caring for her white children and ‘family’ better than her own. Mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power. Inspite of getting all love and affection from the white family still the mammy knows her ‘place’ as obedient servant. The mammy image is central to interlocking system of race, gender and class oppression. It is important as it aims to shape woman’s behaviour as mother. It also serves a symbolic function in maintaining gender oppression. The mammy image is of one of the asexual women, a surrogate mother in black face devoted to the development of a white family.

Inspite of getting all love and care from the white ‘family’ the Black women domestic workers remained poor because they were economically exploited. For reason of economic survival, African-American woman played the role of mammy in paid work setting. But within African-American communities they often taught their own children something quiet different. Barbara Christian’s analysis of the mammy in Black slave is,

"Unlike the white southern image of mammy, she is cunning, prone to poisoning her master, and not at all content with her lot"12

The second controlling image of Black womanhood is, the image
of Black matriarch. It explains Black women’s placement in interlocking systems of race, gender, and class oppression. While the mammy typifies the Black mother figure in white homes, the matriarch symbolizes the mother figure in Black homes. Just as mammy represents the ‘good’ Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the ‘bad’ Black mother. She is overly aggressive, unfeminine women and allegedly emasculate their lovers and husband. These men either desert their partners or refuse to marry the mothers of their children. From an elite white male’s standpoint,

“the matri-arch is essentially a failed mammy a negative stigma applied to those African-American women who dared to violate the images of the submissive hard working servant.”

Black women intellectuals examining the role of women in African-American families discover few matriarchs and even few mammies. Instead they portray Afro-American mothers as complex individuals who often have tremendous strength under adverse conditions. In A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry (1959) examines the struggle of a widow Lena Younger to actualize has her dream of purchasing a home for her family. In Browngirl Brownstone Paul Marshall, 1959) presents Mrs. Boyee, a black mother negotiating a series of relationship with her husband, her daughter and the work she must perform outside the home. Ann Allen Shockley’s Loving Her (1974) depicts the struggle of a lesbian mother trying to balance her needs for self actualization with the pressure of a child in a homophobic community.

Like the mammy, the image of matriarch is central to intertwoking systems of race, gender and class oppression. The source of the matriarch failure is her inability to model appropriate gender behaviour. It also supports racial oppression. The images of mammy and the
matriarch place Afro-American woman in an untenable position. Those who work are labelled mammies they are stigmatized as matriarchs for being strong figures in their own homes.

The third controlling image of Black womanhood is that of the welfare mother or the breeder woman. It portrays the Black Women as more suitable for having children than white women. By claiming that Black women are able to produce children as easily as animals. The image of welfare mother provides ideological justification for interlocking system of race gender and class oppression. They are typically portrayed unwed mothers, she violates one cardinal tenet of Eurocentric masculinist thought: She is a woman alone. As a result, she feels that a woman’s true worth and financial security should occur through heterosexual marriages.

The fourth controlling image is of the Jezebel, whore, or sexually aggressive woman. The image of Jezebel originated under slavery when Black women were portrayed as being, to use Jewelle Gomez’s words, “sexually aggressive wet nurses” (14). Jezebe’s function was to relegated all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women as having excessive sexual appetite. In Bailey’s Cafe the novel of Gloria Naylor there is a beautiful characterization of whore.

The fourth image of the sexually denigrated Black woman is the foundation underlying elite white male conceptualizations of the mammy, matriarch, and welfare mother. Connecting all these is the common theme of Black woman’s sexuality. Each image transmits clear links about female sexuality, fertility and Black woman’s roles in the political economy. For example, the mammy, is a desexed individual The mammy is portrayed as over weight, dark and with...
African features as an unsuitable sexual partner for white man. She is asexual, hence free to become a surrogate mother to the children whom she acquired not through her own sexuality. Mammy is the split between sexuality and motherhood present in Eurocentric masculinist thought. Both the matriarch and welfare mother are sexual beings. But their sexuality is linked to their fertility hence this links makes them a negative image. The matriarch represents the sexually aggressive women, not passive thus stigmatized. The welfare women represents a women of low morals and uncontrolled sexuality.

These four prevailing interpretations of Black womanhood form a nexus of elite white male interpreting of Black female sexuality and fertility. In *Lindem Hills* Gloria Naylor portrays a world in which black Americans have achieved status and power, but the price they pay for this is the forfeiture of their heart and souls. *Bailay’s Cafe* explores female sexuality and sexual identity. Naylor says,

> “the core of the work is indeed the way in which the word ‘whore’ has been used against women or to manipulate female sexual identity.”

**The Power Of Self-Definition :**

The power of dual consciousness generates in the lives of Afro-American women. They become familiar with the language and the manner of the oppressor. They and adopt them for some illusion of protection for hiding a self-defined standpoint from the prying eyes of dominant groups. The Black women takes the help of the voice to articulate about her self-definition. The Afro-American women finds a voice to affirm self-definition and this involves Black women’s relationships with one another such as friendship and family interactions. These relation-
ships are informal and private dealing among individuals, as mothers, sisters, and friends to one another.

The mother/daughter relationship is one fundamental relationship among Black women. In *The Women of Brewster Place* there is such a relationship between Mattie and Ciel, in *Linden Hills* it is between Robert Johnson and Laurel Dumont's grandmother. Similarly, Afro-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity and rights to exist. This is visible in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* (1974), *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1978) where Black Women's friendship is taken seriously. In Gloria Naylor's novel it is between Michael and her mother in *The Women of Brewster Place*, and Evelyn Creton Neece and Priscilla in *Linden Hills* and Abigail and Ophellas in *Mama Day*. The Black women are the ones who really listen to each other. One distinguishing features of Black women's literature is that their friendships with other women-mothers, sisters, grand-mothers, friends, and lovers are vital to their growth and well being. They take up relationships within family and community, between men and women and among women are treated as complex and significant. In the novels of Gloria Naylor we find such relationships are between the seven women of the Brewster Place or the residents of Linder Hills or among the customers and owners of Bailey's Cafe, the conjour woman and other women of *Mama Day*.

African-American music has provided voice to the Black women. Spirituals, blues, jazz and the progressive raps of the 1980s all form part of a continuum of struggle which in at once aesthetic and political. The blues tradition is an essential part of African-American music. It was not just entertainment—it was a way of solidifying community and commenting on the social fabric of Black life in America. Blues has occupied
a special place in Black women’s music as a site of the expression of Black women’s self-definitions. Like Ellison, Naylor invokes the blues in *Bailey’s Cafe*. Naylor reveals, that

> “the music, itself, format the songs / chapters in Bailey’s Cafe .. where Bailey is [her] bridge or riff to introduce. . the characters and their songs” (BC Mood 502-503)

Naylor gives the headings to her chapters as “The Jam”, “The Wrap”, “Maestro”, “If you Please” and “The Vamp;” this structures the novel as if it were a blues session. Bailay prepares his audience with a patron’s song. He is the lead performer in this session, demands patience as he warns his audience,

> “...if you are expecting to get the answer in a few notes, you are mistaken. The answer is in who I am and who my customers are. There is a whole set to be played here if you want to stick around and listen to the music.” (BC 219)

The music Bailey describes, though it may not provide conflict, resolution, and reasons through Naylor’s text as the blues, but it is repetition and improvisation which gives structure to the work.

Besides the blues, Black women writers since 1970 have engaged in dialogue among one another in order to explore formerly the taboo subjects. The problems are discussed between two and more characters of the novel and voice is given to the conversation and presented before the public.

Black women stresses the importance of self-definition as part of their life from being victims to oppressions to a free mind in their blues.
Through relationships with one another, music and literature, Afro-American women create self-valuation that challenge externally defined notion of Black womanhood. The right to be Black and female and respected pervades every day conversation among Afro-American women. Respect from others - especially from Black men - is a recurring theme in Black women’s writing. Whether by choice or circumstances’ Afro-American women have possessed the spirit of independence, they have been self-reliant, and have encouraged one another to value this vision of womanhood that challenges the prevailing ideas of femininity. The works of prominent Black women blues singers also counsel the importance of self-reliance and independence for Afro-American women. In Gloria Naylor’s *Bailey’s Cafe* the characters tell their own stories and sing their own songs which empowers them to generate the hope for necessary living.

**Black Women and Motherhood:**

“Just yesterday I stood for a few minutes at the top of the stars leading to a white doctor’s office in a white neighborhood. I watched one Black woman after another trudge to the corner, where she then waited to catch the bus home. These were Black women still cleaning somebody else’s house or Black women still caring for somebody else’s sick or elderly, before they came back to the frequently thankless chores of their own loneliness, their own families. I felt angry and ashamed. And I felt, once again, the kindling heat of my hope that we, the daughters of these Black women will honor their sacrifice by giving them thanks. We will undertake, with pride, every Transcendent dream of freedom made possible by the humility of their love.”

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These words express the need for Black feminist to honour their mother’s sacrifice by developing an Afrocentric feminist analysis of Black motherhood. Until recently the white and the black male gave their analysis about black mothers which has still prevailed. Black mothers have been accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters and of retarding their children’s academic achievement. But Barbara Christian says,

"the concept of motherhood is of central importance
in the philosophy of both African and Afro-American
people."\textsuperscript{17}

Black motherhood consists of series of relationship that Afro-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African-American community and with self. These relationship occur in specific locations or the individual households that make up the Afro-American extended family network. Moreover, there is difference in the Black motherhood during the transition from slavery to the post World War II and political economy.

Black motherhood is both dynamic and dialectical. The controlling images of mammy, the matriarch and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress. It is through motherhood they learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women’s empowerment. Some women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploit their labour, and makes them partners in their own oppression. While some see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism. Under these changing relationship there are five themes that characterize a Black women’s
standpoint on Black motherhood. The Black women’s relationship with one another, children, community and self, actually depends on how this relationship is between the oppressions faced by the Afro-American women and between their actions in resisting that oppression is expressed.

In Afro-American communities there are biological mothers and other women who cares for children. Biological mothers or bloodmothers, are expected to care for their children and other mothers-women who assert bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities - traditionally are also central to institution of Black motherhood. In Gloria Naylor’s *The women of Brewster Place*, Mattie Machael is the biological mother and Eva Turner is the other mother of Ciel. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins act as other mother by taking on child care responsibilities for one another’s children. When needed, temporary child care arrangements can turn into long term care or informal adoption. Othermothers not only support children but help the bloodmothers who lack the preparation or desire for motherhood. In confronting racial oppression, maintaining community based child-care and respecting othermothers who assume child-care responsibilities serve a critical function in Afro-American communities.

Afro-American mothers try to protect their daughter from the dangers that lie ahead by offering them a sense of their own self-worth. Alice Walker, Paul Marshall and Gloria Naylor make special claims about the roles their mother played in the development of their creativity,

“The bond with their mothers is such a fundamental and powerful source that the term ‘mothering the mind’ might have been coined specially to define their experiences as writers.”
In the novels of Afro-American writers there is a physical and psychic base between the child and the mother and emotional intensity of Black mother-daughter relationship. As Gloria Wadi-Gayler points out, “mother’s in Black women fiction are strong and devoted... they are rarely affectionate” 19 This is evident in Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and in Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* where Eve leaves Peace and runs away leaving her alone with their three children and no money.

Othermothers often help to defuse the emotional intensity of relationship between bloodmothers and their daughters. Black women experience as othermothers provide a foundation for Black women political activism. The use of family language in referring to members of the Afro-American community also illustrates the dimension of Black motherhood serving the women of the Black community as other mothers can be seen in the novels of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, in Alice Walker’s *Meridian* and Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*.

The community othermother tradition also explains the “mothering the mind” relationship that develops between Black women teacher and their Black women student. Like mother-daughter relationship, this “mothering the mind” among Black women moves towards the mutuality of a shared sisterhood that binds Afro-American women as community othermothers. Such mothers have made important contribution in building a different type of community in political and economic surroundings. The three residents of the community in Brewster Place-Ben, Mae and Mattie form bonds among themselves to over come the difficulties which comes in their life and in their race.
Motherhood—whether bloodmother, othermother or community other mother can be invoked by Afro-American women as a symbol of power. Many Black men attain their status in Afro-American community not only as mothers in Black family network but from contribution, as community othermothers. This power assigns them as “strong Black women” and it is transformative in Black women’s relationships with children and other vulnerable community members. It is not to dominate or control but its purpose is to bring people along,- in the words of a late nineteenth century Black feminist - “uplift the race” so that they attain self-reliance and independent.

Within African - American communities there is a great value of motherhood. The Black mothers had the ability to cope with race, class and gender oppression. They had many problems to face in their motherhood. They had to bear with unwanted pregnancies were left oppressive when they found themselves unable to care for their children. The pain of knowing what lies ahead for Black children while feeling powerless to protect them is another problems atic demonsions of black mother. Black mothers pay the cost of giving up their own dreams for achieving full creative ability. Because they spend much time feeding the physical needs of their children. Many give up their freedom for the sake of their children. Despite the obstacles and cost, motherhood remains a symbol of hope and mothering an empowering experience for many Afro-American women. This special relationship that Black mother have with their children.

This fosters a creativity, a mothering of the mind and soul. Such a relationship is evident between Mattie and Ciel in “The Women of Brewster Place” Mattie nurses Ciel as though she is her real mother.
Rethinking Black Women’s Activism:

The Afro-American women’s activist tradition of individual and group actions bring about social change in two dimensions. The first is the struggle for group survival. This includes actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing structures of oppression. The second dimension of Black women activism consists of the struggle for institutional transformation - those efforts to change the existing structures of oppression. All individual and group actions that directly challenge the legal and customary rules governing Afro-American women’s subordination can be seen as part of the struggle for institutional transformation. Participating in civil rights organization, labour unions, feminist groups, boycott and revolts exemplify this dimension of the Black women’s activist tradition.

These two dimensions of Black woman activism are interdependent. Most Black women workers neither organize for better working conditions nor confront their employers by demanding better pay actions represent the struggle for institutional transformation because they need their jobs in order to look after their families. But these women resist the ongoing attempts to dehumanize them. The women share stories of acting grateful for the handout given to them by their employers while throwing the things away as soon as they leave their jobs. They alter their physical appearance to look worse than normal. While they pretended to be mules and mammies and thus appear to conform to institutional rules, they resists by creating their own-self definitions and self-valuations in the safe spaces they create among one another. The Black women sustain an independent consciousness as a sphere of freedom which enables them to engage in additional forms of resistance Black women’s community work, with its duality of internal and external
efforts, also incorporates the interdependence of these two dimension of a Black women’s activist tradition. By conserving and recreating an Afrocentric worldview, they expressed their dimension of activism. The importance of a black women’s culture of resistance is often overlooked. But the culture which is Afrocentric and feminist is essential because the Black feminist consciousness nurtures and articulates it. The presence of a culture of resistance allows Black women to live with the contradictions inherent in being valued individuals in a devalued occupation. Simultaneously, they engage in maintaining the culture that is both conservative and radical. Black women can not be satisfied with only creating culture and providing for families and communities because the welfare of them is affected by American political, economic and social institutions. The dual nature of the Black women activist traditions shows the need of both types of actions in order to bring about a social change. Racism Sexism and poverty has made it difficult for the Afro-American women to participate in organized political activities. They neither have the opportunity nor the resource to confront oppressive institutions so many of the Black women have engaged in the struggle for group survival.

Afro-American women’s action have typical struggle for group survival in political and economic institutions. As bloodmothers and othermothers in Black families, are very important to transmit an Afrocentric world view. Black women are confined to underpayment, demanding and menial jobs. Black women have defined images as mules, mammies, matriarchs, and sexually denigrated women. They used their families as effective Black female spheres of influence to foster their children’s self-valuation and self-reliance.

The Black women worked to create Black fema influence, authority and power. This culture was a culturã
essential to the struggle for group survival. The Black women gave importance to education and this reveals a fundamental dimension of Black women political activism. Education became a powerful symbol for the important connections among self change, and empowerment in African-American communities. The Black women realized that it is their ignorance which has left them powerless. So they adapted education as a liberating force to portray the centrality of Black women as an activist. Education was to uplift the race in the economical, political and social fields. Working for race upliftment and education became interwined. By placing family children, education and community at the centre of our political activism, Afro-American women drew on Afrocentric conceptualizations of mothering, family, community and empowerment.

Moreover, offering a vision of what is possible in human relationships futhers the recurring humanist vision in Black feminist thought. Black women’s activities in the Black church have also been profoundly influenced by the vision of Black women as educators of Afro-American families and communities. The older women advised the younger ‘sisters’ or less experienced women the skills necessary for their survival as Afro-American women. Education, sisterhood self-definitions, self-valuations and economic self-relations permeated other Black women’s organizations. By the turn-of-the-century the Afrocentric feminist sensibility was brought to the political activism of Afro-American women.

The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood:

Sexual politics examines the links between sexuality and power. Sex and gender though are related words but are totally different. If sex is a biological category attached to the body-humans are born either male or female. In contrast, gender is socially constructed. The sex/gender system consists of making the categories of biological sex with socially
constructed gender meaning masculinity and femininity. Sexuality is constructed by the society through the sex/gender system on either personal level of individual consciousness or the interpersonal relationships based on the social structural level of the society. This multilevel sex/gender reveals the need as per the social constructions of sexuality change according to the changing social condition.

Afro-American women inhabit a sex/gender hierarchy in which inequalities of race and social class have been sexualized. The upper class or the white privileged class alleged sexual practices as the mythical norm. The Black Americans too lived in sexually repressive culture. They had to repress their sexual/role urges feelings or desires. So in order to gain power and attain domination on the social structural level of racism sexism and social class privilege - they had to take shelter under the power of the erotic on the personal level.

The Black women sexuality is embedded in this larger overarching sex/gender hierarchy designed to attain power as energy for race, gender and social class domination. The study on work, family and Black women’s oppression attempts to control Black women’s fertility, analysis of mammals, matriarchs and other controlling images of Black women regulates Black women’s sexuality and fertility, and the analysis of Black women and motherhood explore efforts by the dominant group to control and exploit Black women’s reproduction. Pornography, prostitution and rape are the specific tool of sexual violence and are the key to sexual politics of Black womenhood. They form interrelated components of the sex/gender hierarchy framing Black women’s sexuality. Black women were used as sex objects for the pleasure of white men. This objectification of African American women parallels the portrayal of women in pornography as sex objects whose sexuality is available for men. Black
women were treated as breeders and exploited. In contemporary pornography women were objectified through being portrayed as pieces of meat, as sexual animals awaiting conquest.

The Afro-American women were raped, and violence was a major theme in pornography. The rape of Black women linked sexuality and violence, which were the other characteristic features of pornography. Besides rape, the other forms of sexual violence act such as to strip victims of their will, to resist and make them passive and submissive are other features of pornography. Female passivity, that women have done things to them, is a theme repeated over and over in contemporary pornography. The profitability of Black women’s sexual exploitation for white “gentlemen” is in parallel with the pornographers. The actual breeding of “quadroons and octo zoons” not only reinforces the themes of Black women’s passivity, objectification and malleability to male control but reveals pornography’s grounding in racism and sexism. The fate of the Black and white women were intertwined in this breeding process. The ideal Afro-American women as a pornographic object was indistinguishable from white women and thus the black women was the image of beauty, as sexuality and chastity but from inside she was a sexual whore.

Contemporary pornography has a series of icons or representation that focus on the relationship between the portrayed individual and the general qualities ascribed to that class of individuals. Pornographic images are iconographic representing realities of pornography as the representation of women’s objectification, domination and control based on the treatment which the Black women had on their bodies in the nineteenth century.
Afro-American women were usually depicted in a situation of bondage and slavery, typically in a submissive posture, and often with two white men. White women and women of colour have different pornographic images applied to them. The pornographic treatment of Black women's bodies challenges the present assumption of feminism that though pornography primarily affects white women, racism has been grafted onto pornography. The racist and sexist beliefs are sexualized in pornography and it appeared within a specific system of social class relationships. Contemporary pornography can thus be assessed by keeping in view the body, social constructions of race and gender and class oppression. Alice Walker points out that,

"White women are depicted as objects in pornography while black women are depicted as animals where white women are depicted as human bodies if not beings, black women are depicted as shit."20

The Black women are exploited like animals. As animals can be economically exploited, worked, sold, killed and consumed so are Black women treated. This linking of Black women and animals is evident in the nineteenth century scientific literature. In pornography women become non-people and are often represented as the some of their fragmented body parts. They are dominated either cruelly or exploited with no affection. They embody no existence of the victim and the pet, and experience the harsh lives which victims are forced to lead.

Prostitution represents the fusion of exploitation for an economic purpose. Sex can easily be purchased for economic exploitation and it shows that Afro-American women can be bought. Prostitution is interlinked with race, gender and the social class structure of the European political economy. This race/gender nexus fostered a situation whereby men
could differentiate between the sexualized woman as body who could be
dominated and had sex relations and the asexual women - as - pure -
spirit who was idealized and brought home to be a mother. The sexually
denigrated woman, whether she was victimized through has rape or a pet
through her seduction, could be used as the yardstick against which the
cult of true womanhood was measured.

Force was important in creating Afro-American women’s sexual
image and in shaping their experiences with both pornography and prosti-
tution. They were not willing to do so hence were forced to do so.
Enslaved African women were often beaten and killed if they refused
while black domestics who resisted the sexual advances of their employ-
ers often found themselves jobless. Both the reality and the threat of
violence acted as a form of social control for Afro-American women.

Rape has been one fundamental tool of sexual violence directed
against Afro-American women. Rape and sexual extortion has been a
prominent theme in Black women writings as in Maya Angelou’s, I
Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the
Life of a Slave Girl record examples of actual and threatened sexual
assault. Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, Alice Walker’s The Color
Purple, and Gloria Naylor’s The Women of Brewster Place all examine
rape within Afro-American families and communities.

Rape and other acts of violence that Black women have experi-
enced such as physical assault during slavery, domestic abuse, incest and
sexual extortion, accompany Black women’s subordination in a system
of race, class and gender oppression. Gloria Naylor shows that practi-
cally all the women of Brewster Place are victims of sexual abuse and
exploitation. Matti is seduced by Butch Fuller and then deserted Elta
Mae Johnson meets the same fate at the hands of the various men she meets including Rev. Wood. Ciel receives a brutal treatment at the hands of Eugene, Cora Lee is burdened with half a dozen kids who are not sure who their father is; Ben’s lame daughter is offered by her own mother to satisfy Mr. Clydes lust in exchange for the extra land he has rented them. Finally, Lorraine, who has been living a life of alienation and ostracism with Theresa also becomes a victim of the savage sexual violation by C.C. Baker and his buddies. Though Lorraine’s gang rape and her subsequent death, Naylor that women is very vulnerable. Talking about Lorraine’s rape, Naylor says,

“The thing is Lorraine wasn’t raped because she is a lesbian, they raped her because she was a woman. And regardless of race, regardless of social status, regardless of sexual preference, the commonality is the female experience. When you reduce that down in this society even to something as abysmal as rape there is no difference between women.”

One can sense Naylor’s outrage and contempt for the rapist when she says,

“Lorraine found herself, on her knees, surrounded by the most dangerous species in existence - human males with an erection to validate in a world that was only six feet wide.” (TWBP 170)

The brutality and savagery which the boys of the alley perpetrate on Lorraine show the sexual harassments on Black woman. The Black woman continue to deal with the legacy of the sexual violence and they are twice victimized, first by the actual rape and the other by the family members, community residents and social institutions. Thus these
sexual politics of Black womanhood requires investigating how the social structural factors infuse the private domain of Black women's relationship.

Sexual Politics And Black Women's Relationship:

Along with pornography, prostitution and rape the Black women experience how sexuality is socially constructed within the sex/gender hierarchy on the social structural level of social institutions. Equally important is how the sex/gender hierarchy pervades Black women’s interpersonal relationship and infuses the consciousness of Black women. Political economies of domination like slavery try to thwart the power. The sex/gender hierarchy and the sexual politics that Black women encounter within it represents a powerful system of repression because they intrude on people’s daily lives at the point of consciousness.

Exploring the tension between Afro-American men and women has been a long standing theme in Black feminist thought. In an 1833 speech, Maria Steward broadly challenged what she saw as Black men’s lackluster response to racism,

"Talk without effort, is nothing you are abundantly capable, gentlemen, of making your self men of distinction; and this gross neglect, on your part, causes my blood to boil within me."22

Black women’s troubles with Black men have generated anger and from that anger grew self-reflection. Not for what men have done to them but for what they have allowed themselves to become, since the past

Another theme in Black feminist thought is the great love Black women feel for Black men. Afro-American slave narratives contain many
examples of newly emancipated slaves who spent years trying to locate their lost loved ones. Love poems written to Black men characterize much of Black women’s poetry. Black women’s music is also filled with love songs. Afro-American women have long commented in this “love and trouble” tradition in Black women’s relationships with Black men. Both the tension between Afro-American women and men and the strong attachment that they feel for one another represent the both/and conceptual place in Black feminist thought. From this love and trouble tradition we assess the influence of Eurocentric gender ideology - particularly with emphasis on the sex roles, on the work and family experience of Afro-Americans.

Black women intellectual directly challenge not only that portion of Eurocentric gender which has the controlling images of mammy, the matriarch the welfare mother but often base this rejection on a more general critique of Eurocentric gender ideology itself. Sojourner Truth’s 1851 query,

“I could work as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it - and bear the lash as well ! and ain’t I a woman.” 23

This proves the true womanhood that “real” women were fragile and ornamental. Toni Cade Bambara feels that Eurocentric sex roles are not only troublesome for Afro-Americans but damaging, while some women criticize Eurocentric gender ideology few have challenged Black men who accepts externally defined ideas of masculinity. They want that men should not prove that he is a man by using or abusing women though it is a man’s world. They want that the men should show some respect for the women they want Afro-American men to reject the Eurocentric gender ideology. If they show respect to women, be faithful, financially reliable and sexually expressive then there will be no tension
The Eurocentric ideology objectifies both sexes so that when Black men see Black women he looks at her as nothing more than mammmies, matriarchs or Jezebels. Some Afro-American men feel they cannot be men unless they dominate a Black woman. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* portrays Mister Q black man who abuses his wife Celie. In Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*, Lucielia Louise Turner tolerates abuse from her husband Eugene Turner. Miranda bears indifferent behaviour of George in *Mama’s Day*.

The Black feminist analyse Black women experience as victims of physical and emotional abuse. In Toni Morison’s *The Bluest Eye*, for PecolaBreed love is a study in emotional abuse. Morrison portrays the internalized oppression that can affect a child who experience daily assaults on her self. Pecola’s family is the immediate source of her pain but Morrison exposes the role of the larger community in condoning Pecola’s victimization. Similarly in Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*, Eugene’s preoccupation with his manhood and his distorted notions about what constitutes manhood is revealed in his conversation with Ben.

Investigating the problems caused by abusing Black men often exposes Black women intellectuals to criticism. This ‘conspiracy of silence’ about Black men’s physical and emonational abuse of Black women is a part of a larger system of legitamated, routinized violence. Because of its everyday nature some women do not perceive of themselves or those around them as victims. In Gloria Naylor’s, *The Women of Brewsler Place Eugene* hits his wife knowing she is pregnant but she considers his behaviour a daily routine inspite of being so beastly.
Many Black women have exhibited independence and self-reliance to ensure their own survival but they can be troublesome for women in violent relationships. Abused women are often silenced by the image of the "superstrong" Black women. But still the relationship between the black women and men who abuse them show the linking of sexuality and power, the potential for dominating through domestic violence.

The Black women are also oppressed by white men. They too have exploited, objectified and rejected Afro-American women. Because white male power is largely predicated on Black female subordination, few delusion of sharing that power and enjoying the privileges attached to white male power have existed among Black women. The relationship among Black and white women is through the sexual politics that seduce white women with an artificial sense of specialness and give them the power to sustain that illusion. The relationship among Black women and white men have long been constrained by the legacy of Black women's sexual abuse by white men and this creates unresolved tensions. Black women who have willingly chosen white male friends and lovers are accused of being like prostitutes, demeaning themselves by willingly using white men for their own financial or social gains. Inspite of the powerful restrictions imposed by the sex/gender hierarchy on interpersonal relationships many Afro-American women maintain close loving relations with whites. But given the legacy of sexual politics of Black womanhood it is out of reach for them to have relations with the white.

One of the most important challenges from and to thought Black feminist though has come through the voices of Black lesbians. One theme raised by Black lesbians concerns the extend of homophobia in African-American communities. For Black lesbians homophobia represents a form of oppression that affects their lives with the same intensity
as does race, class, and gender oppression. Black feminist writers, especially Black feminist lesbian writers, have started investigating Black lesbian relationship in Black women literature. In 1980s attention to Black lesbian relationship was given attention. Black feminist critic Barbara Christian points out,

"While Black women writers have written about Black women friendships, their writing in the 1980s explores relationships between women who find other women sexually attractive and gratifying."

This is evident in Audre Lorde’s, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Barbara Christian examines the “Buried lives” of Black lesbians.

"The stereotypical body type of a black lesbian was that she looked mannish,... she was not so much a woman as much as she was a defective man, a description that has sometimes been applied to any Negroid-looking or happily acting black women."

The image of lesbian has been linked with that of the prostitute and with images of Black women as the embodiment of the Black ‘race’. The Black women writers have broadened the physical image of lesbians. In Afro-American literature the role of prostitutes and lesbian is different. Black woman suppress their own strong feelings for other Black women for fear of being stigmatized as lesbians. Black heterosexual women’s treatment of Black lesbians reflect the fear that all Afro-American women are essentially the same.

The novels of Gloria Naylor are based on these core themes of feminism. Each novel posses at least one of the themes.
CHAPTER-IV
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