CHAPTER – V

SOCIAL IDENTITIES OF BLACK WOMEN

Toni Morrison:  *The Bluest Eye, Sula & Beloved.*

Buchi Emecheta:  *The Family, Double Yoke & The Joys of Motherhood.*

Toni Morrison elaborates upon the vulnerability of a black girl child. Since a girl child is born, she lands into the hands of her parents as a helpless and fragile human being. This social role of being a daughter has not much choice as a minor – physically, emotionally and mentally. *The Bluest Eyes* (1970)\(^1\) is a novel that depicts the quest of a black girl child, Pecola, for white values amidst poverty and abuse with a longing for ‘blue eyes.’ The novelist explains the content and purpose of this novel in detail in these lines:

> I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female. In trying to dramatize the devastation that even casual contempt can cause, I chose a unique situation, not a representative one ... In exploring the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart, I mounted a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous, all the while trying hard to avoid complicity in the demonization process Pecola was subjected to ... (Morrison 1999: 168)

Further, Morrison paints the character of Pecola, the protagonist, more vividly by saying that she is visible to herself only when “she hallucinates a self” and it becomes more of “a kind of outside the book conversation” (171).
Kashinath Ranveer says that Pecola’s longing for blue eyes indicates the symbol of white beauty which unfortunately culminates into madness because in reality her eyes cannot be changed.  

Gender division starts as soon as a baby is born. Patriarchy puts boys above girls based on male lineage that carries the family line. Here, Morrison’s take upon gender preference is neutral. So, there is no special inclination given towards son/s in *The Bluest Eye* whether it is Junior or Sammy. Junior nurtures deep sadness and frustration because of his mother’s emotional vacuum. As a result, he transfers his dejection towards black boys and girls. On the other hand, Sammy is always running away from home. He is also almost an absent figure for Pecola, his sister. Therefore, in the novel, the boys seem damaged, crude and childish when compared to the girls.

Surprising, Pauline actually wanted to conceive Pecola deliberately. It is rather opposite to how she conceived Sammy. Pauline recollects that she did not try to become pregnant the first time. But her second pregnancy is intentional. And she admits that she shared a very special bond with the unborn baby too as she “used to talk to it” while it was still inside her womb like “good friends” as she always “felt good about the baby” (96). Unfortunately, it happens all before Pauline getting dumb-struck by white prejudices. And ironically, Pauline’s jaundiced outlook resulted into damaging her love towards this specially awaited daughter as well as the doom of her entire family.

On the other hand, Buchi Emecheta’s novel, *The Family* (1989) has the case of Gwendolen. She is able to join her family in England only when she turns twelve. She newly discovers about her three younger siblings when she
reaches England. Her new siblings included two younger brothers and a baby sister who “was in the cot looking at her” (Emecheta 2003: 52). Such is the negligence she has been facing since a little girl. And she becomes a mother-surrogate-cum-helper as soon as she landed there.

However, Gwen could not help recognizing a very big difference between her and her brothers – Marcus and Roland – as she cannot help “marveling at their freedom” for “she sensed they had a kind of confidence she lacked” (53). In other words, she was awe struck by the freedom enjoyed by them as opposed to her limitations and restrictions being a daughter. More unusual is the shocking pang she encounters when her mother Sonia turns jealous and suspicious of her. Her young chest gets the hard blow under her mother’s suspiciousness and aloofness like a total stranger. Indeed, it is burdensome for the daughter and creates fear as she cries out:

Oh please God, don’t let me be blamed for laughing with my Daddy. She could foresee the same play rolling on again, and she did not care very much for the repeat. It was bound to be different. After all, this man was her Daddy. But why did her mother give her the eye of suspicion Granny Naomi gave her a long time ago in Granville. (88)

On the other hand, there is the preference shown over boys by the traditional black community in the case of Mr. Azu Ilochina and his two wives – Cecelia and Maureen. To quote the narration of his not so mundane life and family:

He [Mr. Azu] was thirty-nine … He had sneaked into England, in the late fifties, with a young and beautiful student of his, leaving an older girl-friend at home. Unfortunately the older and plainer girl had become pregnant … had a set of identical male twins and they
were the picture of the father … He could imagine the joy of his parents at home and also their sorrow when they learned that he was in England with another girl. He was an only son, so his mother made sure that the plain woman was in England too with her two sons … The older one kept having boys. It looked as if God was on her side … Maureen had five girls and Cecilia six boys and a girl. The house he was struggling to pay for was like a zoo. (101-2)

Similarly, gender differentiation is imposed upon young children. For instance, there is the dress-code where Marcus and Roland were dressed like their father, Winston, “with their new haircuts and dark suits with matching bow ties” but Gwen did not favor Sonia’s choice of “wide near-circular skirts” and instead went, “for the slimmer look” and yet make sure it was longer to suit the modesty of “a girl from a Christian home” (114).

One important point evident in *The Bluest Eye* is the presence of difference in perceptions of survival techniques. In fact, the two different households namely the MacTeers and the Breedloves are perfect examples. In the case of the MacTeers household, the parents are strict and harsh but practical enough to provide survival tactics to the two girls Frieda and Claudia from a very young age. For example Claudia says:

> Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration. How they ask us, do you expect anybody to get anything done if you all are sick? We cannot answer them. Our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black drought, and castor oil that blunts our minds. (Morrison 1999: 5-6)
However, there is another side of this strictness of parents. And such undeniable child-parents bond based on discipline is like a medicine which is bitter and yet heals. Claudia proves this point in her wish for Christmas. She says: “I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone” (15). In fact, according to Monika Gupta, both Claudia and Frieda “get nurturing care and rough but sustaining love” as such that the MacTeer family even in poverty “offers a stable home where children are looked after and are even offered presents at Christmas” (Gupta 2008: 67).

Quite contrary is the chaos that the Breedlove household represents. It has such lapses and loopholes created by its weak parenting. According to Dorothy H. Lee, Cholly’s life represents “rejection and humiliation caused and intensified by poverty and Blackness” (Evans 1984: 347). Similarly, she says that Pauline by being the “ideal servant” of the white household pathetically nurtures an illusionary “power, praise and luxury” (347). In fact, neither of them is eligible to possess self-esteem to pass it on to their children. For instance, there is chaos all around when Cholly and Pauline fight. To quote one such episode:

Sammy was awake now too, but pretending to be asleep. Pecola held her stomach muscles taunt and conserved her breath ... To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zests and reasonableness of life. Cholly, by his habitual drunkenness and orderliness, provided them both with the material they needed to make their lives together ... The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. In the name of Jesus. (Morrison 1999: 30-1)
The two children react differently – aggressive or submissive – towards the fights between parents. Here, Sammy screams, “kill him! kill him!” while Pecola just wants herself to disappear. In other words, Pauline as a mother is not nurturing. In fact, she manages to create more fear as she stones “a loud desire to run away” into her son and “into her daughter a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life” (100). And instead of realizing her shortcomings she “felt she was fulfilling a mother’s role” as she pointed out Cholly’s faults by punishing “them when they showed any slovenliness” while she was working “twelve to sixteen hours a day to support them” (100).

Similar to the Breedloves, there is the reality of false parenthood portrayed in *The Family*. For instance, Gwen on her first day at school starts “to doubt the sense of parents giving their little girls names they could not pronounce” and so she was determined “to learn how to pronounce her name right” on her first day at school (Emecheta 2003: 70-1).

In addition, there is another unpleasant experience that the children have to face in both the novels. It is none other than the demonic fangs of ‘racism’ that try to suck the liveliness and innocence out of the young minds. There are two important instances of such confrontation. In *The Bluest Eye*, the first instance is Maureen, the colored girl’s outburst targeted towards Pecola, Claudia and Frieda shouting “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I am cute!” (Morrison 1999: 50). According to Karen Carmean, Maureen has fully internalized the traditional white associations of “darkness with ugliness” as well as “sexuality” (Carmen 1993: 21). And that’s when the reality strikes hard inside the young minds. To quote Claudia:
[They] were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen’s last words ... Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? ... Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us. (Morrison 1999: 57-8)

The truth of racism makes Claudia make this above quoted lines with power and insight. She admits that she destroyed white dolls. However, to dismember them was “not the true horror” because actually “[t]he Thing to fear was the thing that made her [Maureen] beautiful, and not us” (58).

Another instance happens when the young black boys shouted insults to them, “Black emo ... yo dadd sleeps nekked. Black emo ...” (50). But the reality is something else because it is “their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth” (50). However, the innocent victim has neither control nor willingness in the accusations. On the other hand, it is also a fact that majority of the black fathers practise such habit. Likewise, Gwen is not free from the clutches of racism in The Family. To quote her:

By the time Gwendolen became fourteen, the school had become a place of humiliation, a place of shame. A place where her parents were regarded as black illiterates who could not come to parent’s meetings or come on open days. The thoughts of going there every day were not dissimilar to the thoughts she sometimes experienced when she recalled the fact that an older man had invaded
Further, in *The Bluest Eye*, as a daughter of a lustful father Pecola falls into grave downfall without any chance of rising up again. And she never gets the opportunity to survive or fight back unlike others like Claudia or Frieda who is lucky to observe, adapt and become stronger to fight back for survival. Such tactics for survival and existence is evident from the difference in their upbringings by their respective families.

In the case of the damaged family, the Breedloves, everything seems artificial with no solid ground of values to guarantee their survival. To cite one such narration:

> Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family – Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove – wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them ... Mrs. Breedlove handed hers as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of character, for support of a role she frequently imagined was hers – martyrdom. Sammy used his as a weapon on the basis of it: people who could be fascinated, even intimidated by it. And Pecola. She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed – peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask. (Morrison 1999: 28-9)

However, Gwen’s experience is even worse than Pecola. Her pain and trauma is always hers alone. That’s why she admits her dilemma as well as emotional whirlpool lurking inside her. She says:
If she said that she was being locked up in a ward for the mentally sick so that her Daddy would not be put away in jailhouse, this woman might not understand. She would tell someone one day … But why wouldn’t her Daddy stand up and tell the world that he did it? … Instead he went to that room and her mother. She wanted to hate the two of them. But if she did, then she’d have nobody to love. She had to love people around her. She had been brought up that way. To disperse love, although very thinly, to all her aunties and uncles. She sighed. She suddenly felt so old. Her childhood has been stolen from her. (Emecheta 2003: 180-1)

The relationship between a father and a daughter is a complex and multi-layered one. A father is a loving but also a protective shield of a delicate and vulnerable daughter because ‘fatherhood’ in the traditional sense represents the protective figure within parenthood. He is the one who provides the needs of his wife as well as his children. In fact, he is the roof of the social institution called ‘family.’ There are two different types of father figures present in *The Bluest Eye*. Cholly is damaged and invisible father of Pecola while Mr. Macteer is protective and is always present for his daughters namely Frieda and Claudia.

In the case of Cholly, he represents the damaged product of a non-existent family. Both his parents abandoned him as a child and he was brought up by his mother’s aunt. So, it is no wonder that he is introduced to the reader as a damaged person from the beginning of the novel. Claudia says that he was in jail after he “put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration” like some animal and “indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger” while “Mrs. Breedlove was staying with the woman she worked for; the boy, Sammy, was with some other family; Pecola was to stay
with us [the MacTeers family]” (Morrison 1999: 12). In fact, Cholly’s doubtful attitude towards family and children is apparent in these lines:

But the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise children; and never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be … As it was, he reacted to them, and his reaction were based on what he felt at the moment. (126-7)

Almost similar to Cholly is Gwendolen’s father, Winston, in The Family. He is absent and is merely a biological father in the social scenario. Gwen recalls very vaguely “what Daddy Winston looked like” on the day he left for England because any of his memory before that day was “nothingness and void” (Emecheta 2003: 9). In fact, all Gwen could remember is that during Winston’s visits he would let her sit on his knee and give her boiled sweets. And so, for young Gwen her father is equivalent to lap service and boiled sweets only. Consequently, no emotional attachment or bond ever develops between them. However, surprisingly he turns out to be a natural father for the rest. And yet, he can never connect with her completely like a father with her even after living together in England. Such ironical connection between Winston and Gwen is expressed vividly in these lines:

She had never known what it was like to have a full-time Daddy, but from these first few minutes she knew she was going to like it very much. She was going to like saying my Daddy and Mammy, and not Granny Naomi and Uncle Johnny. She pressed her Daddy’s hand and smiled at him. Winston was surprised and uneasy at the antics of this little girl, who was his daughter, and whom he was beginning to realize he had to work hard and wake up fatherly feelings towards. He
tried to smile back, but gave a mechanical grin instead. He was uneasy with her. (49-50)

On the other hand, Mr. Macteer of The Bluest Eye is unlike Cholly and Winston who are the absent and unconnected fathers. Mr. MacTeer is always present for his two daughters as a protective and caring father. The fond and vivid memories of love towards him are evident in this narrative by Claudia. She says:

My daddy’s face is a study. Winter moves into it and presides there. His eyes become a cliff of snow threatening to avalanche; his eyebrows bend like black limbs of a leafless trees. His skin takes on the pale, cheerless yellow of winter sun; for a jaw he has the edges of a snowbound field dotted with stubble; his high forehead is the frozen sweep of Erie, hiding currents of gelid thoughts that eddy in darkness. Wolf killer turned hawk fighter, he worked night and day to keep one from the door and the other from under the windowsills. A Vulcan guarding the flames, he gives us instructions about which door to keep closed or opened for proper distribution of heat, lays kindling by, discuss qualities of coal, and teaches us how to rake, feed and bank the fire. And he will not unrazor his lips until spring. (Morrison 1999: 47)

However, trouble starts to linger when the protective roof collapses immediately above the residents of the house called ‘family.’ Such are the cases of Pecola and Gwen when the father figures become lustful towards the innocence and vulnerability of these girls. In the case of Pecola, Cholly’s inability to love and control his ‘free love’ destroys her completely in The Bluest Eye. Shruti Das says that Cholly’s love for Pecola subverts the normal
father-daughter relationship which contradicts the very concept of fatherhood (Das 2009: 53). Bhaskar A. Shukla further adds that this dangerously free kind of love depicts his experiences of losing his “mother, father and community and home” (Shukla 2007: 76). His mixed emotion towards Pecola evolves into a wicked crime that breaks the sanctity and affection of father-daughter relationship. To quote:

She was washing dishes. Her small back hunched over the sink. Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or felt … The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love … The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck – but tenderly. Guilt and impotence rose in bilious dust. What could he do for her – the ever? What give her? What say to her? … If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him – the love would move him to fury… (Morrison 1999: 127)

It might sound insanely ignorant or negligent to many people but Morrison through the character, Claudia, manages to give a very unique and insightful glimpse behind Cholly’s action. According to Shukla, his free love is rather fatal for Pecola. However, he also adds that Claudia is the only person who believed that he “was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her” (Shukla 2007: 76). However, it turns out that “his touch was fatal” because “the love of a free man is never safe” (Morrison 1999: 163).

Likewise, Gwen is a victim of the incest rape during her mother’s absence. The main cause is Winston’s inability to look at or accept Gwen as his daughter. B. Indira clearly reveals Winston’s mentality: “But Winston feels that
a father has a right over his daughter as he is responsible for his life. The daughter fades away from his mind and in her place he sees a well-shaped youthful flesh. The mother-surrogate becomes sex-surrogate” (Agarwalla 2000: 76). In fact, he sees her as the younger version of his wife Sonia in The Family. This lengthy quote will clarify this claim:

Winston narrowed his eyes and studied the daughter more. She was growing into a pretty young woman. She had a smoother skin than Sonia. She had the alluring hesitant attitude of the disciplined young, still unsure of her steps and frightened of making mistakes. Then it struck him. Gwendolen was going to be a beautiful and stimulating woman. … Gwendolen had her mother’s small frame, but she tilted her head to one side as if to get a better view of life. She had inherited Sonia’s rickety legs and, when she walked, this tendency to tilt to one side looked like an affectation. And she had changed so rapidly within a few months. Women grew so fast huh? (Emecheta 2003: 85-6)

However, Mr. MacTeer’s instinctively protective mode for Frieda is quite contrary to these twisted incest acts and mentality of confused fathers like Cholly and Winston. His protective instinct as a devoted father is evident during Frieda’s molestation by Henry, their tenant. Its description has a very comical tone. Nevertheless, the serious and genuine anger of a father is much prominent in the following lines:

And Mr. Buford came running out with his gun, and Mama told him to go somewhere and sit down, and Daddy said no, give him the gun, and Mr. Buford did, and Mama screamed, and Mr. Henry shut up and started running, and Daddy shot at him and Mr. Henry jumped out of his shoes and kept on running in his shocks. Then
Rosemary came out and said that Daddy was going to jail, and I hit her. (Morrison 1999: 77)

Yet, another very disturbing similarity shared by Cholly and Winston is their repeated rape of their daughters. Unfortunately, the consequence of their monstrous acts is the pregnancy of the helpless daughters. If the rapes were only once, then they can be considered as accidental crime or incest under a moment’s spur. But repetition of the sinful act only proves the point that they were actually enjoying themselves as some kind of forbidden pleasure based purely on lust. For instance, Cholly finds Pecola’s virginity too much to handle during her rape. To quote his incest lust and confusion:

The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours towards her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke… The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her – tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. … Removing himself from her was so painful to him he cut it short and snatched his genitals out of the dry harbor of her vagina. She appeared to have fainted. Cholly stood up and could see only her grayish panties, so sad and limp around her ankles. Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up; the tenderness forced her to cover her. (128)
In the case of Gwen’s rape by Winston, there is a twist of emotions unlike the tenderness of Cholly before and after the rape. In fact, Shivaji Sengupta adds that “the way Gwendolen let him [Winston] take her made him aware that she was not a virgin” (Umeh 1996: 243). When Winston discovers that she is not a virgin, he is rather disappointed and even takes it as an insult to his manhood. However, Indira further adds that he freezes time and self “as he makes love to the daughter night after night for two years turning blind to the risk of destroying both her and himself in the process” (Agarwalla 2000: 77). Moreover, he never feels sorry or else cares to empathize for his young daughter’s unfortunate condition. His rape is purely lustful with no regrets or concern for his daughter. To cite his lust and mediocre of manhood:

… she was sixteen. Her young bosom taunted him. What could he do. He was not drunk … He remembered vaguely that when he was overcome by desire he had begged her to give him herself, because he was her Daddy, and if she loved him she would not deny him the little favor. He did not expect Gwendolen to believe him, Men say all kinds of nonsense when roused. No woman with her head rightly screwed on believed such rubbish. But Gwendolen did. The girl was stupid. (Emecheta 2003: 144)

However, the other side of the story from Gwen’s own narrative has so many unspoken truths that she could never share with anyone else. To quote her painful experiences of sexual assaults:

But Gwendolen remembered Uncle Johnny. He had said to her, ‘Every gal done it. Dat’s why they’re girls.’ … But she wished her father would not ask her to do this. She could not scream, because though he begged, he covered her mouth with that strong hand of his. It was soon over. What she did not expect was her father’s
reaction. Yes, she fought timidly, but she was not a novice. She had been taught what to do. In this project she was already adept, much much older than her age. (145)

Unfortunately, Gwen has to go through repeated experience of this heinous torture much longer with a never ending guilt haunting her. She says:

She was a wicked girl, he had said himself. Uncle Johnny had messed her up … Now that her father had known and had condemned her, she had somebody else too. And for this somebody else, she had to lie very still, because she had no solid and protective Daddy to shield her any more. Also, no one was going to know about it. Oh, what was her mother doing in Jamaica all this time anyhow? (146)

Thus, Winston’s lust and inability to connect with Gwen damages her both physically and emotionally in a disruptive manner. He rapes her repeatedly and as a consequence she becomes pregnant. In other words, it also means that her future and existence is totally damaged because of her pregnancy. However, she manages to resurface and emerge again like a phoenix with a new identity as a mother. For that she sprungs out of the entrapment of her family like a butterfly from a cocoon. And it is because of this fact that there is so much hatred towards her father. Despite everything she manages to fight the battle all alone for herself and the baby. Indira very aptly sums up that Gwendolen unshackles “herself from the incessant maze of conflicts, fear, guilt and shame,” becomes emancipated in her new identity as a mother (Agarwalla 2000: 76).

Unfortunately, in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola ends up into a delusional world of madness after facing the same fate. And finally, Pecola along with her baby die without a voice of their own to shout back. It may be the writer’s intention
or not, but both the sinful fathers die in pitiful states before the end of the novels. It may be poetic justice for this tragic tale because without justice the novels would have given a rather disturbingly pessimistic message. On the other hand, it is optimistic to find Gwen’s refusal to break down after hearing the news of Winston’s death being remarkably significant in her quest for ‘self-identity’ and ‘survival.’ Emecheta is so upright and inspiring in these words by Gwen who says, “Why should I cry? Because little girls cry when their fathers die. Well, I am not a little girl any more, I am a woman carrying a child’” (Emecheta 2003: 204).

A girl child shares a very delicate relationship with her mother. This unbreakable bond forms the most important and life-defining relationship that any girl child experiences in her life-time. In other words, if father is the protective roof of the family, then mother definitely is the nurturing foundation of the household and family. Contrarily, Kavita Arya has quoted Toni Morrison, “when the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks in opposed to what one is, we are in trouble” (Arya 2010: 29). And so, if the mother’s presence is hollow and weak under such false beauty then the following generation can neither survive nor exercise any confidence to evolve or adapt. Similar to the presence of two kinds of fatherhood, there are also two kinds of motherhood in The Bluest Eye. According to Morrison, Pauline’s motherhood is destructive and phony because she neglected her own family while working for a white family. In fact, she believed that “[p]ower, praise and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she had never had – a nickname – Polly” (Morrison 1999: 9).
Unlike Pauline’s selfish illusions are the love, support and care of Mrs. MacTeer towards her daughter when Claudia is sick. It includes scolding as well as tender care. Claudia says:

Her hands are large and rough, and when she rubs the Vicks salve”, then “she scoops a little of the salve on her forefinger and puts it” in her mouth to swallow. Then a hot flannel is also wrapped around her neck and chest. Finally, she is “covered with heavy quilts and ordered to sweat. (6)

On the contrary, Mrs. MacTeer’s other side of love for Claudia is her strict and tough side. To quote Claudia:

My mother’s voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia. She wipes it up as best and puts a scratchy towel over the large wet place … My mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness “take holt.” By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, but I can’t stop. (6-7)

Further, Claudia continues that when she coughs hard in the night, her mother’s “hands repined the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment” on her forehead; and so when she remembers autumn she can only think about her mother “with hands who does not want me [Claudia] to die” (6-7).

In addition, Mrs. MacTeer not only cares but also gives lessons for survival. There is sweetness and hope in her songs even when she set rules and
expresses hardships of life altogether in such songs. Claudia reminiscences in the following lines:

Saturdays were lonesome, fussy, soapy days. … If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn’t bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and- left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, … Misery colored by the grebes and blues in my mother’s voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet. (17-18)

On the other hand, Mrs. MacTeer’s love and concern for Frieda also emerges especially during the latter’s molestation episode. Frieda admits, “[My] Mama would take me to the doctor, because I might be ruined, and Mama started screaming all over again” (78).

Similar to Pauline’s negligence is Sonia’s absent nature towards Gwen’s needs which started when the latter was just a girl. Sonia left her baby girl in the care of Granny Naomi when she joined Wilson in England. Young Gwen’s reaction was different because she did not miss her father who did not live with them; but “she was going to miss her small Mammy Sonia” (Emecheta 2003: 17).

In Sonia’s absence, sadly Granny Naomi as a mother-substitute is not good enough for Gwen because Gwen as an only child used to enjoy whole undivided attention from her mother. Thus, Gwen’s loss is very deep because she feared that “when she saw her Mammy Sonia again, things would never be the same as before” for sure (19). Indeed, for her Uncle Johnny and Granny
Naomi could never take her parents’ places even though they “both very much tried to be kind” (21).

There is a presence of certain role played by surrogate mothers in the black community life. Unfortunately, there is no surrogate mother for Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* although Pauline was herself one for her younger siblings and the white baby. Pauline ignores Pecola’s burn and instead she soothes the white baby by cooing to hush and to “cry no more” and saying “Polly will change it [the baby’s dress]” (Morrison 1999: 85).

In the case of *The Family*, Granny Naomi is Gwen’s mother substitute in Sonia’s absence. Similarly, Gwen is mother-substitute for her younger siblings during Sonia’s absence. But the reactions and treatment of Granny Naomi are different. For instance, Gwen as eleven years old “had learned to run away whenever Granny’s voice started to rise” and yet she found that “life with Granny Naomi was becoming almost impossible” (Emecheta 2003: 37). Further, it was Granny Naomi who hurt her more by taunting and accusing her that “her walking attracted old men like Uncle Johnny” because “she knew Mammy Sonia [also] walked that way” (37). Indeed, Granny bundles a mixture of fear, insecurity and trauma for young Gwen.

Surprisingly, the role shift of Gwendolen as a little mother during her mother’s absence is emancipating for her. To quote her:

> Fourteen, going on fifteen, she was a real little madam. One happy thought that struck her as her mother left, was that at least she could skip school as often as she liked. Her father was always out, working on the site. Roland and Marcus would not notice as long as she took
Cheryl to her little school down the road. She could cook and eat what she wanted and clean the house when she felt like it. Somehow instead of dreading the responsibilities placed on her, she felt a kind of freedom which she could give no name. Her mother would be all right in Granville among her old friends, and they would help her with the new baby when it was born. (118)

In fact, in both the cases of Pauline and Sonia, there emerges the significance of the role played by racism. It is especially complex upon a black mother’s perception of her self-identity and her children. Such effect is seen in the transformation of a mother’s nurturing love into something subjugating and colonizing in Pecola’s case. The gradual shift in Pauline’s motherly affection is disturbing. In fact, Pauline’s original longing and connection with the unborn Pecola before the latter’s birth loses the emotional attachment soon after the baby’s birth. Surprisingly, Pauline even declares Pecola as ugly. Unfortunately, such perception is based on white ideals of beauty which is indeed biased and phony. To quote her:

Anyways, the baby come. Big old healthy thing. She looked different from what I thought. Reckon I talked to it so much before I conjured up a mind’s eye view of it. So, when I seed it, it was looking at a picture of your mama when she was a girl. You knows who she is, but she don’t look the same. They give her to me for nursing, and she liked to pull my nipple off right away. She caught on fast. Not like Sammy, he was the hardest child to feed. But Pecola looked like she knowed right off what to do. A right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her. You know they make them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly. (Morrison 1999: 97-8)
Similar is the case of Sonia in *The Family*. This dotting mother changes after embracing white hypocrisy and genteel manners of England. In the earlier part Gwen shares a special bond with her where mother-daughter were like “two women growing together” with no secrets as such that Gwen “could be impulsive, she could be her real self, open and trusting” which was not possible with Granny (Emecheta 2003: 42). And so, in England, “[Gwen] she rushed into her mother’s open arms” and felt reborn “as if she was entering her mother’s womb again: new June-June, a new her” (52).

However Gwen’s joys of reunion with Sonia are short-lived. For instance, Gwen soon has noticed that “the others did not refer to her as ‘Mammy’ but called her Mum or Mother” (56). Then, there is the dangerous part of jealousy, suspicion and hatred of Sonia that asked Gwen with anger why she “sit dere laughing with men” (87). And thus, “that slow trust that she [Gwen] had begun to nurture towards Sonia began to waver” and also she “now knew that she had to tread warily” (89).

Then there is another side of this misunderstanding too. Sonia feels that she can “understand Marcus and Roland demanding their freedom early because they were boys” who were born in England but “Gwendolen was supposed to be her ally, and to be hers, and to be under her” (90-1). To cite Sonia’s worries:

Sonia worried that probably she was too harsh on Gwendolen. She was not that educated but she had always lived among other people and that native West Indian sense had taught her so many things not found in books of psychology. She knew she was wrong, but how could she apologize to her young daughter about the uneasiness ‘me feel in me
bones? It was ridiculous, that she did not wish to give it another thought. (90)

On the other hand, the false conception of self-identity in *The Bluest Eye* is vividly visible in both mother-daughter namely Pauline and Pecola. Morrison has portrayed their mentality as the impact given by racism in the form of shallow and colonized white ideal beauty. However, the strong sense of individuality imparted by Mrs. MacTeer to her two daughters makes so much difference. The children reacted differently according to differences in their upbringings. In the case of the Breedloves household, within insecurity and fear, Pecola starts nurturing a longing for white beauty. In fact, the ‘blue eyes’ seem to be the only means to grant her the freedom from all worries and bad things. Unfortunately, the deceptive nature of her self-identity is much devastating in the long run. In fact, Arya says: “… Claudia sustain herself because she saves herself from the adverse effect of the White Euro-centric standard. She was taught by her parents’ survival technique, which Pecola’s parents never give to their children” (Arya 2010: 38).

On another instance, Pecola wonders, “maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too” if she had pretty ‘blue eyes’ (Morrison 1999: 34). In addition, Pecola eats Mary Jane candies because to eat “the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane” and so the nine candies from three pennies “had brought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane” (38). In fact, according to Shukla, it depicts Pecola’s “denial of self and substitution of the self into the store bought image” of white beauty (Shukla 2007: 73).
However, in the case of Gwen, freedom has different connotation. Embracing motherhood as her own choice emancipated her. In other words, the word “motherhood” created and flourished her self-identity too. For instance, she confesses that she felt that something tickled her stomach. She actually realized that it was “not only the baby but also her future and her reason for being alive” because the baby was the only thing “she could call her own” (Emecheta 2003: 179). But the name of her young daughter, Iyamede, has such significance for her as this Yoruba name meant “mother, my female friend, my female saviour, my anything-nice-you-can-think-of-in-a-woman’s form” (210). This choice of embracing motherhood also gives her the hope and confidence that “she and the baby would not be a burden to her [Sonia]” as she “would educate herself and get a good job” and also someday “she would talk to her [Sonia]” free and frank “woman to woman” about all the misunderstandings (182). Surprisingly, at one point, Sonia planned to kill her own daughter after she “confirms that the daughter is the evil one, out to destroy her and ‘her’ family” (Agarwalla 2000: 77). But fortunately, Sonia while looking at her daughter and her baby girl realized the incest truth that the baby’s father was her own husband.

Another contradictory point is Sonia’s discovery a rather different meaning of freedom in her absence from her family. In fact, her self-identity emerges after excluding herself completely from family, children, and motherhood in Jamaica. Her confession is evident clearly in these lines:

Suddenly Sonia started to see the possibility of a new life away from Winston. She truly loved her children and as she got better she longed for them. But the thought of living by herself as a person, with no mother to look after, no children to feed and no man to cook for was at
first disconnecting. She felt frightened ... She knew that good women were not supposed to live and exist for themselves. They were expected to remain alive for others. They were created to look after members of their families, to boost the ego of the man in their lives, be the man a father, a husband and even a son. ... There must be something awfully wrong with her to discover such happiness in the selfish habit of doing exactly what she wanted to do. ‘Lawd, forgive me, a terrible sinner,’ she prayed. Previously she used to pity single woman, but now she was not so sure … (Emecheta 2003: 135)

However, there is so much irony regarding the treatment of motherhood in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola’s motherhood never gets to flourish into anything fulfilling. Her mother gives the coldest shoulder to her that forces Pecola to be unable to talk about her repeated rape. In her insanity she tells her split personality, “You’re right. No use of telling her when she wouldn’t believe you” (Morrison 1999: 158). Tragically, that’s why both Pecola and her child never get the chance to heal and reconcile.

Fortunately, there is realization of reality and reconciliation between Sonia and Gwen by the end of the novel. Sonia encounters the dirty secret when she saw Gwen’s baby. She later confesses her blindness and shock over the incest crime to Mrs Odowis. To quote Sonia’s shocked reaction:

> She saw Winston’s round face shrink to the size of the child and the child’s face balloon to the size of Winston’s; Winston, the baby, the baby, Winston, in rotation. Sonia held on tightly to the edge of the basket to stop her feet from buckling under her. Her eyes wandered to the square nails, the very shape of the nails by which she identified Winston’s body. Those nails had now shrunk on the tips of
the baby’s fingers. And Winston’s square-shaped hands seen in miniature were now waving a rattle. (Emecheta 1990: 236)

After the unusual reunion and reconciliation of mother and daughter, Sonia accepts the new addition of her grand-daughter with open arms. But there is certainly a novice’s resolve as she fiercely plunged the kitchen knife into the rubbish bin. And then, “she seemed exhaustedly satisfied, she heaved a sigh as if at a job well done, and used her bare hands to bury the knife in the bin” and then placed back the lid of her bin carefully “like a ritual” (238). Finally, the novel closes with this declaration that the burial was for “Winston Brillianton!” and “Sonia’s voice had the finality of a closed door” (239).

The first social role of a girl as an adult is to get married and settle down to maintain an ideal household. Moreover, marriage is the universal criteria for legitimate procreation in the traditional sense. In other words, it is considered the social norm where two individuals are united both physically and spiritually. However, Morrison’s novel, Sula (1974) questions the validity and impact of such beliefs and thoughts regarding marriage. There are two different choices made by different persons – Nel and Sula regarding marriage.

In the case of Nel, it is all about traditional ‘choice’ of marriage and motherhood. However, she forgets that she had already discovered her ‘me-awareness’ and ‘self-identity’ before making her traditional choices. It happened in her childhood trip which made her more experienced in terms of her “me” consciousness. And Nel also encounters a special person in this discovery of ‘me-ness.’ In fact, Kavita Arya observes that this realization
results into the “intimate relationship” that she shares with “Sula despite the objection of her mother” (Arya 2010: 51). To quote Nel’s new change:

Leaving Medallion would be her goal. But that was before she met Sula, the girl she had seen for five years in Garfield Primary but never played with, never knew, because her mother said that Sula’s mother was sooty. The trip, perhaps, or her new found me-ness, gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother. (Morrison 2005: 29)

However, Nel’s choices of marriage, motherhood, and her stand for her children after her separation from Jude are not so bright and fulfilling. Arya is of the opinion that for Nel Jude was her identity and so after their separation she becomes “thighs [that] were truly empty” and “a woman without a man and unable to raise her eyes” (Arya 2010: 45). Thus, she sighs and says:

For over twenty-five years since Jude walked out … She spent a little time trying to marry again, but nobody wanted to take her on with three children, and she simply couldn’t manage the business of keeping boyfriends. (Morrison 2005: 165)

On the other hand, according to La Vinia Delois Jenning, “Sula’s mercurial birthmark and events leading to her acquisition of the “funny-shaped finger” mark her as a traditional witch” (Jennings 2010: 40). Consequently, the free-spirited Sula’s choice is quite shocking and untraditional for people around her. As a child she decides to save her friend by cutting her own finger and even daringly challenges the boys, “If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?” (Morrison 2005: 55).

Likewise, later as an adult Sula chose freedom over attachments of love, marriage and children. In other words, “Sula is a rebel and, so, represents
protest by denying the institutions of society, family and the self, in regard to their [society’s] rules” (Gupta 2008: 234). In the case of her love-interest namely Ajax, she was attracted for very unusual reasons such as:

His clear comfort at being in her presence, his lazy willingness to tell her all about fixes and the powers of plants, his refusal to baby or protect her, his assumption that she was both tough and wise – all of that coupled with a wide generosity of spirit only occasionally erupting into vengeance sustained Sula’s interest and enthusiasm. (Morrison 2005: 128)

Parallel to Sula’s challenging choices comes her grandmother, Eva’s choices. Eva’s choices are rather the combo of traditional-cum-radical ones. On one instance she decides to kill her only son Plum when she feels that he is better off dead than living ‘the most miserable life.’ Similarly, in favor of her children she decides to lose a healthy foot while fighting for survival when after “five years of a sad and disgruntled marriage Boy-Boy took off” and “Eva had $1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel” where the “children needed her, she needed money, and needed to get on with her life” (32). Moreover, Jayita Sengupta has quoted Barbara Christian’s words to describe the infinite tenderness and cold-blooded nature of Eva’s love for Plum. Christian says, “Like the primeval Earth Mother goddess, feared and worshipped by man, like the goddess of antiquity, older even that the biblical Eve, Eva both gives life and takes it away” (Sengupta 2006: 125).

On the other hand, in the early part of Emecheta’s novel, Double Yoke (1983) Nko makes traditional choices of love, marriage and children like any good girl with a traditional background. To quote her dreams of a bright future:
She would work hard at her studies and she was going to get not just a degree, but a good one. Then she would marry Ete Kamba and they would have about six children. They were not going to lack anything because she would be working and Ete Kamba be working as well. Theirs was going to be a good marriage, a marriage in which the two of them would complement each other. (Emecheta 1990: 92)

In fact, according to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Emecheta debunks the myth of male masculinity by using new African women “who are encumbered by tradition and at the same time are expected to carry the burden of acquiring suitable education” (Umeh 1996: 156). But Nko’s fairytale dream is short-lived. Her choice of having education and a career of her own with a ‘double yoke’ identity burdens her. Indeed, she has to bid adieu to her traditional choice of happily married life with children and an additional career when Ete Kamba’s doubts cloud their trust and relationship. She gets confronted with some unusual and highly conflicting choices that appear in the form of Professor Ikot. To quote her split and unwanted choices:

She must either have her degree and be a bad, loose, feminist, shameless, career woman who would have to fight men all her life; or do without her degree, and be a great loving wife and Christian woman to Ete Kamba and meanwhile reduce her family and herself to being beggars at Ete’s table. Oh blast it all! She was going to have both. She was going to maneuver these men to give her both. They thought they could always call the tune and women like her must dance to it. With her, they were going to be wrong. (Emecheta 1990: 135)
In *Sula*, the results of certain choices seem both contradictory and burdensome afterwards. One such case is Nel’s choice of children over her husband. It turns out that after being separated from Jude for twenty-five years and staying as single mother for the sake of her children is not very fulfilling. To quote her disappointments:

> It didn’t take long, after Jude left, for her to see what the future would be. She had looked at her children and knew in her heart that would be all. That they were all she would ever know of love … For the mouths of her children quickly forgot the taste of her nipples, and years ago they had begun to look past her face into the nearest stretch of sky. (Morrison 2005: 165)

In another instance, Eva’s decision to kill her only son, Plum, creates misunderstanding between her and Hannah. But unfortunately, on one hand it brings more tragedy because Hannah kills herself when Eva tried to reason her ‘mercy-killing.’ Her reason is plain and straight:

> He [Plum] give me such a time … Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time, I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn’t do it again. He was growed, a big old thing. God have mercy, I couldn’t birth him twice … I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man. (71)

And all she could tell Hannah was that she “held him close first” and cried out “Sweet Plum. My baby boy” (72). However, it is rather ironical to
find her suspecting her own grand-daughter, Sula, capable of deliberately watching her mother’s death with detachment.

In the case of Sula, her choice to love Ajax makes her fragile and vulnerable for once. And thus, it later leads her to an early death with a broken heart in *Sula*. Unfortunately, Sula receives only dejection when she chooses emotions over reason. In other words, according to Arunima Roy, “Sula’s surrender to Ajax places her inside the circle of women whom she had rejected and humiliated.”⁶ The attachment and detachment that follows in Sula-Ajax relationship is narrated in the following lines:

> Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it. She was astounded by so new and alien a feeling … not only was the green ribbon still in her hair, but the bathroom was gleaming, the bed was made, and the table was set for two. Ajax blinked. Then he looked swiftly into her face. In her words, in her voice, was a sound he knew well … Every hackle on his body rose, and he knew that very soon she would, like all of her sisters before her, put to him the death-knell question “Where you been?” His eyes gleamed with a mild and momentary regret. (131-3)

Thus, Shukla rightly says, “The loss of Ajax, and with him Sula’s one attempt at joining with another in marriage and with the community of Medallion, destroys Sula” (Shukla 2007: 106).

On the other hand, in *Double Yoke* the burden of virginity and traditions overlap with Nko’s choice of double yoke, i.e. career and happiness. However, when Ete Kamba questions her ‘virginity’ as well as shares his own doubts with Professor Ikot, it becomes certain that the doom of her dreams and happiness
has become inevitable. And she actually has to make a rather painful choice and “like a wooden doll” and “let the man [Prof. Ikot] have what he wanted” (Emecheta 1990: 140). But she demands a First Class Honours degree with a threat. In fact, the truth is that her determination was something Professor Ikot “had never seen on the face of any woman” and for “a moment his gaze betrayed fear” (141).

In Sula, Morrison has brought out the mutual understanding shared between Nel-Eva. It actually reads and reflects the unspoken truth of Nel-Sula relationship with depth. Similarly, Nel is the only person who understands the actual choice and reason for Eva’s refusal to attend Sula’s funeral. To quote Nel’s narration:

The others thought they knew, thought the grandmother’s reasons were the same as their own – that to pay respect to someone who had caused them so much pain was beneath them, Nel, who did go, believed Eva’s refusal was not due to pride or vengeance but to a plain unwillingness to see the swallowing of her own flesh into the dirt, a determination not to let the eyes see what the heart could not hold. (Morrison 2005: 171)

Likewise, Eva makes Nel realize the invisible and unacknowledged connection between Nel and Sula since childhood in Sula. Nel cannot help lingering her thoughts back to a particular instance. She questions herself:

What did old Eva mean by you watched? … “Why didn’t I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall?”

All these years she had been secretly proud of her calm, controlled behavior when Sula was uncontrollable, her compassion for Sula’s frightened and shamed eyes. Now it seemed that what she had
thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little’s body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment. (170)

In fact, Nel turns out to be the tough one while Sula is the softer one with compassion. According to Shruti Das, “Sula’s self destructive frankness is opposed to “Nel’s habit of camouflaging the truth” (Das 2009: 67). In one instance Sula cuts a finger in order to protect Nel. Unfortunately, when Sula looks for safety and support from Nel, contrarily to her belief, Nel actually drives her towards destruction and sorrow. However, Nel is able to realize their invisible and yet unbreakable bond that they share much later. Then only she finally breaks all the earlier bridges of doubts and denial but it is already too late as Sula is dead. But Shadrack is the only one who saw the softness and vulnerability of little Sula on their first encounter itself. To quote him:

But when he looked at her face he had seen also the skull beneath, and thinking she saw it too – knew it was there and was afraid – he tried to think of something to say to comfort her, something to stop the hurt from spilling out of her eyes. So he had said “always,” so she would not have to be afraid of the change – the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath. He had said “always” to convince her, assure her, of permanency. (Morrison 2005: 157)

Similarly, things change for both better and worst in Double Yoke. The concept of ‘New Woman’ and ‘Feminism’ are (re)defined by Emecheta in the choice of Nko as a double yoke embracing both career and motherhood. Indeed, career and motherhood both blend together in her choice to be a single mom
without any male support as the conclusive decision. Nko decides to have the child of Professor Ikot as a single mother after breaking up with Ete Kamba. Instead of her ideal six children, now she decides to have only one child. There is certain finality in the end of the novel where the new Nko does not seem completely different; but she surely has “just grown because she is going to be a sure academician and a mother” (Emecheta 1990: 159).

On the other hand, in *Double Yoke*, Emecheta has very aptly revealed the mutual understanding shared by women in general through their various opinions on virginity, marriage, beauty, etc. Such opinions have certain juxtaposition. It is so because the reality is opposed to traditional prejudices and biases nurtured by patriarchy within the society. Some important examples are:

1. “Did you ask him if he were a virgin too?” (154).
2. “You mean Ete Kamba had to tell a confessor so that he could pray to God to make Nko a virgin again? Honestly our men are so childish. When will they wake up” (155).
3. “I am not asking you to understand. But if I am a whore, you two made me one. Always remember that” (150).
4. “I am sorry to shatter your dreams girl. Virgins don’t make good wives, not always. They are so cold. So go to sleep Julia” (157).
5. “… Ete Kamba, the question is – are you strong enough to be a modern African man? Nko is already a modern African lady, but you are still lagging … oh, so far, far behind” (162).

The second characteristic feature within marriage is ‘compulsion’ which is opposed to choice. The society nurtures various values and codes that are not always attainable and realistic. Among such superficial values are the
traditional concepts and ideals of beauty, marriage, groom/bride, etc. Young Nel harbors such dreams. To quote her:

When Nel, an only child, sat on the steps of her back porch surrounded by the high silence of her mother’s incredibly orderly houses, feeling the neatness of pointing at her back, she studied the poplars and fell easily into the picture of herself flying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the mattress of flowers, the voile sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs. (Morrison 2005: 51)

Then there is the pressure of being beautiful. In fact, Mrs. Wright’s constant reminders for her young daughter, Nel, “to pull her nose” and in addition “the hateful hot comb to suffer” for “smooth hair” are all burdensome (55).

However, there are paradoxical sides of the idealized motherhood. The process of giving birth is painful and yet for every mother there is the universal statement, “Can’t stop loving your own child. No matter what they do” (57). But surprisingly, Hannah confesses bluntly, “I love Sula. I just don’t like her” (57). When Sula accidentally hears this statement, it instills in her a feeling of insecurity by distorting her psyche. It is further supported by Monika Das (in her quotation of Salvator’s claim) that even though Sula was free from abuses in her childhood “Sula still experiences an emotional void in her family life that infects everything she does” (Das 2009: 65).
According to the patriarchal value system and its beliefs of ideal woman and conduct, Sula is considered the vamp who has done the worst of all forbidden things. She is rumored to have slept with white men. Moreover, in the Bottoms she continues to sleep with men and discard them rapidly like used paper napkins. But she has her own reasons and interpretations of her sexuality. To quote her:

It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. She had not always been aware that it was sadness that she yearned for. Lovemaking seemed to her, at first, the creation of a special kind of joy … Sexual aesthetics bored her … During the love making she found and needed to find the cutting edge … And there was utmost irony and outrage in lying under someone, in a position of surrender, feeling her own abiding strength and limitless power … She wept then. Tears for the deaths of the littlest things: the castaway shoes of children; broken stems of marsh grass battered and drowned by the sea; prom photographs of dead women she never knew; wedding rings in pawnshop windows; the tidy bodies of Cornish hens in a nest of rice. (Morrison 2005: 122-3)

On the contrary, there is an irony behind Nel’s decision to marry Jude. It is not because of love or understanding. Instead it is simply to fulfill her need to be needed as “greater than her friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly” (84). However, it soon fades away after he cheats her with Sula. Similarly, Nel’s decision to struggle twenty-five years as a single mother for her children is also not that fruitful because “the mouths of her children quickly forgot the taste of her nipples, and years ago they had begun to look past her face into the nearest stretch of sky”(165). Likewise,
Eva’s anticipation for reconciliation with her husband, BoyBoy, is her wishful choice. But it shatters and turns into sheer hatred when he turns up with a bimbo. Then it hurts her “like a sledge hammer, and it was then that she knew what to feel. A liquid trail of hate flooded her chest” (36).

On the other hand, Morrison strikes the point that the romantic notions behind ‘love’ between a man and a woman are not necessarily passionate and lasting ones. In Sula, it may seem untraditional but lovers cannot be companions for women. There is also a feminist vibe given to the friendship between Nel and Sula. Nel’s traditional marriage with Jake collapses after her discovery of Jake-Sula affair. To quote Nel:

Nibbling at each other, not even touching, not even looking at each other, just their lips, and when I opened the door they didn’t even look for … And finally you got up and started putting on your clothes … somehow she didn’t look naked to me, only you did … And even when you began to talk, I couldn’t hear because I was worried about you not knowing that your fly was open and scared too because your eyes looked liked the soldiers’ that time on the train when my mother turned to custard. (105-6)

Unfortunately, Sula’s choices of freedom and ‘free-love’ are never free from confrontations. Nel confronts her and says: “You can’t do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don’t” (142). But Sula’s defense is equally demanding and startling, “What you mean take him away? I didn’t kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn’t get over it?” (145). However, there is an unusual interpretation of this event by John N. Duvall. He
claims, “Sula’s having sex with Jude, I wish to argue, is not a function of interest in him per se or in men and heterosexuality generally but rather in her desire to better know her female friend’s desire” (Duvall 2000: 60).

More shocking is Sula’s treatment of ‘love making’ and ‘sexuality’. It is so much complex and revolting. This applies to all the three women Eva, Hannah and Sula. They are all unconventional – Eva with acceptance of male presence, Hannah with mere physical pleasure while Sula for certain mental connection with pain and suffering during the intimate physical contact. Sula’s example is striking:

Whenever she introduced her private thoughts into their rubbing or goings, they hooded their eyes. They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave nothing but money. She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be – for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to add touch with an ungloved hand. (Morrison 2005: 121)

In fact, there is an interesting interpretation of her postcoital moment by Duvall is that “Sula seeks identity not with men but, as the postcoital moment suggests, in a solitude that is figured as two women together – her self and her other self – which completes the equation” (Duvall 2000: 59).

In Double Yoke, Emecheta puts pressure upon the idea that love evaporates into thin air due to the burden imposed by the patriarchal outlook towards women’s ‘virginity.’ However, patriarchal notions also change when modern ideas are introduced in the case of Ete Kamba. In other words, Nko’s
choice of career and motherhood are not completely shattered as Ete Kamba realizes his mistakes and joins her in the end of the novel. But she is definitely more fragile than Nel because Nko collapses under the pressure of her father’s sudden death. However, Nel is also lucky as Eta Kamba goes to rescue her like a knight in shining armor in the traditional sense of a fairytale union.

Above all, many independent choices are also found to take reverse turn. Eva’s love for her children forces her to lose a leg which seems like a choice but turns out to be a compulsion. Similarly, the use of ‘bottom power’ by Nko turns out not to be a choice because it was Ete Kamba’s stupidity that forced her to fall into the traps of Professor Ikot in the first place. Nevertheless, Nel has regrets for losing Sula due to her choice of a shallow marriage and an equally unfulfilling motherhood.

In general, there are various social obligations expected from women within a patriarchal society. In other words, the meticulous gender politics of patriarchy is targeted at women. And as a consequence, these subjugated women are often forced to neglect or worst lose their self-identities. In Sula and Double Yoke, both Morrison and Emecheta have highlighted upon the conflict between social obligations and personal choices. In fact, in the case of black women, social obligation is almost equivalent to loss of self identity.

Traditional concepts of ideal woman, marriage, groom, etc. are actually ironically seen from the perspective of reality in Sula. There is so much venom in the voice of Nel’s mother, Helen, which was targeted at her own mother, Rachelle. Helen says bluntly, “Much handled things are always soft” (27). Here, the daughter questions the morality and virtue of her own mother.
Likewise, there is the social notion of ‘ideal marriage’ with the yardstick of church wedding and grand reception:

This wedding offered a special attraction, for the bride-groom was a handsome, well-liked man – the tenor of Mount Zion’s Men’s Quarter, who had an enviable reputation among the girls and a comfortable one among men. His name was Jude Greene, and with the pick of some eight or ten girls who came regularly to services to hear him sing, he had chosen Nel Wright. (Morrison 2005: 80)

However, the truth behind ‘manhood’ and ‘marriage’ as a choice is quite different where wife is expected to act as mother-surrogate of a grown man and also a token to boost his ego and needs. To quote Jude:

It was while he was full of such dreams, his body already feeling the rough work clothes, his hands already curved to the pick handle, that he spoke to Nel about getting married. She seemed receptive but hardly anxious. It was after he stood in lines for six days running and saw the gang boss pick out thin-armed white boys from the Virginia hills and the bull- necked Greeks and Italians and heard over and over, “Nothing else today. Come back tomorrow,” that he got the message. So it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man’s role anyhow that made him press Nel about settling down. He needed some of his appetites filled, some posture of adulthood recognized, but mostly he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care very deep. Deep enough to hold him, deep enough to rock him, deep enough to ask, “How you feel? You all right? Want some coffee?” And if he were to be a man, that someone could no longer be his mother. He chose the girl who had always been kind, who had never seemed hell-bent to marry, who made the whole venture seem like his idea, his conquest. (82-3)
And in a similar manner, Nel’s response is also romantic in nature without much depth or love. To quote her response:

Nel’s indifference to his hints about marriage disappeared altogether when she discovered the pain. Jude could see himself taking shape in her eyes. She actually wanted to help, to soothe, and was it true what Ajax said in the Time and a Half Pool Hall? That ‘all they want, man, is they own misery. Ax em to die for you and they yours for life’. (83)

However, in *Double Yoke*, the perception and manifestation of social norms like manhood and masculinity has so much violence and force associated with them. For instance, Ete Kamba is often violent whenever his manhood is questioned. He turns violent when he feels that Nko was not virgin when he had her. To quote his reaction:

He desperately penetrated deeper and deeper inside her, so deep that she could feel him thrusting at the mouth of the womb. He was desperate, he was searching for the virginal blood his mother and friend had talked to him so much about … He dug, he groped, then he despaired. His mind was wandering … He was now in tears, very alone, very lost. (Emecheta 1990: 54)

But the ideal woman is all about submission and someone who nurtures the family and children. Ete Kamba’s ideal woman is like his mother who “had been the epitome of womanhood, the type whose price was above the biblical rubies” and the one “who took pride not in herself but in her man” as she “would always obey her man, no matter what, even if he commanded her to walk through fire, the type that never questioned” (37).
Quite similar is the hypocrisy of the Bottom’s people in *Sula* regarding Sula’s individuality that denied both marriage and motherhood. To quote her:

> But it was the men who gave her the final label, who fingerprinted her for all time …

> Every one of them imagined the scene, each according to his own predilections – Sula underneath some white man – and it filled then with choking disgust. There was nothing lower she could do, nothing filthier. The fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent of their bile. Nor was the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of white women a consideration that might lead them toward tolerance. They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable. In that way, they regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did. (Morrison 2005: 112-3)

But unlike Sula, Nko’s choice of double yoke is supported by her female friends. Her choice includes a career and motherhood. On the other hand, Sula is unfortunately exposed to much criticism and misunderstanding. Nko’s double yoke is not exactly opposed to the traditional ideal woman with motherhood. But things turn ugly when the social pressures of ‘virginity’ eclipse free choices of women. Emecheta has brought out so much wisdom in these words of Nko’s illiterate mother who says, “Now you have this new thing, this mad education for women and yet still, you want to have everything we had ... it is going to be difficult ... you are under a double yoke. So you need a stronger shoulder with which to carry it” (Emecheta 1990: 94). However, unfortunately, Emecheta’s take upon women’s emancipation is limited and vague. For instance, Nko is unable to fight back Professor Ikot’s sexual
advances. Nevertheless, the consolation lies in Ezenwa-Ohaeto’s view which says that Emecheta attack upon “certain masculine “preserves” like having children out of wedlock and expectations of humility from women especially in the traditional sense” (Umeh 1996: 164).

On the contrary, Sula’s self-identity brings jealousy and false representations of motherhood and wifehood in the Bottoms as a kind of uniting factor for these women. It is an amusing change. And its effect is also noticed at once when Sula who is the common object of their hatred dies. To cite the hypocrisy of the Bottoms’ women fired towards Sula which also comes to an end:

Other mothers who had defended their children from Sula’s malevolence (or who had defended their positions as mothers from Sula’s scorn for the role) now had nothing to rub up against. The tension was gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made. Without her mockery, affection for others sank into flaccid disrepair. Daughters who had complained bitterly about the responsibilities of taking care of their aged mothers-in-law had altered when Sula locked Eva away, and they began cleaning those women’s spittoons without a murmur … Wives uncoddled their husbands … (Morrison 2005: 153-4)

More evidences pile up against Sula where she is the symbol of ‘New Woman.’ In fact, she is a threat for the patriarchal order of the Bottoms because of her unconventional choices of freedom and identity. To quote the mediocre of the Bottoms people:

Among the weighty evidence piling up was the fact that Sula did not look her age. She was thirty and, unlike them, had lost no teeth, suffered no bruises, developed no ring of fat at the waist or pocket
at the back of her neck. It was rumored that she had had no childhood
diseases, was never known to have chicken pox, croup or even a
runny nose. She had played rough as a child – where were the scars?
Except for a funny-shaped finger and that evil birthmark, she was free
of any normal signs of vulnerability. (115)

Likewise, the community is bound in their refusal to mourn for Sula in
her death. However, according to Bhaskar A. Shukla, “The people accept the
news of her death as good and attend the funeral” in order to verify that she was
really dead and finally put away (Shukla 2007: 107).

Correspondingly to the above mentioned conflict is the clash visible in
the argument between Nko and Ete Kamba when the latter beats up Professor
Ikot. He shouts, “If I kill him. It’s not because of you, you cheap whore, I am
killing him because I am a man.” But he gets a big blow in Nko’s reply, “I am
not asking you to understand. But if I am a whore, you two made me one.
Always remember that …” (Emecheta 1990: 150). In other words, here, Ete
Kamba faces the conflict between his patriarchal ideal woman and the new
woman. Indeed, Nko’s individualism as an independent woman is intimidating
for him as a much tabooed characteristic of feminism. But finally he is able to
realize his narrow-mindedness with the help of the new lady teacher, Miss
Bulewao’s argument. She reveals the true self of Nnu Ego and also asks the
core question, “Ete Kamba the question is – are you strong enough to be a
modern African man? Nko is already a modern African lady, but you are still
lagging … oh, so far, far behind” (162).

Unfortunately, Sula’s true self in her community is only recognized and
acknowledged by Nel. Nel changes and evolves after her encounter with Sula.
Her metamorphosis towards maturity completes when she meets the latter once again ten years after her marriage. She also realizes the deeply loving bond she had suppressed for so many years. To quote her revelation:

Although it was she alone who saw the magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula’s return to the Bottom. It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home, Sula. Who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself … Sula never competed; she simply helped others define themselves. Other people seemed to turn their volume on and up when Sula was in the room. More than any other thing, humor returned … Even Nel’s love for Jude, which over the years had spun a steady gray web around her heart, became a bright and easy affection, a playfulness that was reflected in their lovemaking. (Morrison 2005: 95)

Thus, it is only natural for Nel who never missed Jude to suddenly miss Sula and call out her name. Shukla has aptly quoted Nel’s final realization: “There was no difference between them” (Shukla 2007:109).

According to the traditional social belief, ‘motherhood’ is often considered the greatest achievement of a woman’s existence. Therefore, in one hand, a woman is bestowed with respect and anticipation in ‘motherhood.’ On the other hand, the polar side of motherhood is ‘barrenness’ where she is constantly humiliated and rejected as a failed and incomplete woman. In fact, Morrison’s Beloved (1987) and Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood (1979)
deal with the main theme of motherhood. They include the various shades of social norms that paint the concept of ‘motherhood’ in all its full glory along with their dirty and hidden sides are portrayed with so much truth and conviction by these two amazing authors in a very heart-warming manner.

Sethe and Baby Suggs are mere slave women but they are blessed with many children. But there are clearly two sides of motherhood presented in *Beloved*. On one hand, according to Baby Suggs, Sethe is blessed to have four children from a single father in addition of having the privilege to make the choice of a husband. She says, “Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that “somebody” son who had fathered every one of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one ... A bigger fool never lived” (Morrison 2007: 28).

On the other hand, Baby Suggs is not fortunate enough like Sethe in both marriage and motherhood. She is a mother of eight children but there is no choice or pleasure associated with it except Halle. She confesses rather sullenly and says, “I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody’s house into evil” (6). She further narrates the tragedy of being a slave mother with least choices given to her. To quote her misery:

So Baby’s eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for the hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling up with a straw boss
for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her – only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. “God take what He would,” she said. And He did, and He did, and He did and then gave her Halle who gave her freedom when it didn’t mean a thing. (28)

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the experiences of the protagonist, Nnu Ego, are double-edged when compared to the earlier two cases. On one hand, there is the bitter tag of being barren and also the loss of her first baby who proved her fertility. On the other hand, there is the failed motherhood in her tragic end as a lonely mother. Her loss of her first baby is especially a big blow for her as “her failed transaction with Nnaife: sex for babies” (Umeh 1996: 237). Even other people empathized with her plight because she “lost the child that told the world that she is not barren” (Emecheta 1994: 62). In addition, this statement also brings out the worst case scenario where ‘womanhood’ is portrayed as mere equal to ‘motherhood.’ So, when this proof of womanhood is lost she turns almost mad with suicidal tendency. Her plight resounds tragically in the following lines:

Nnu Ego’s arms involuntarily went to hold her aching breasts, More for assurance of her motherhood than to ease their weight. She felt the milk tickling out, wetting her buba blouse; and the other choking pain got heavier, nearing her throat, as if determined to squeeze the very life out of her there and then … There was only one way to rid herself of it. For how could she be able to face the world after what had happened?
No, it was better not to try. It was best to end it all this way, the only good way. (8)

Motherhood is specially challenging for slave women. For instance, Sethe’s motherhood is a big challenge with almost an absent help from her husband, Halle. It is not mere giving birth; but she has her shares of a big challenge of rearing them. In fact, when she is pregnant with her fourth child, Denver, she decides to run away for the stake of the safety of her children, Denver. To quote Denver’s own perception:

Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl – a year older than herself – walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She’s tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker’s quiet step. (Morrison 2007: 91)

Unfortunately, Baby Suggs’s case is even worst. She has neither the choice nor the control to keep her kids by her side. Alongside are her sexuality and its compromises. Her reaction upon Halle’s death reveals her painful experiences of motherhood. To quote her:

News of Halle’s death? No. She had been prepared for that better than she had for his life. The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn’t worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into the adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own – fingers she never saw become the male or
female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn’t know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous’ skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny’s chin or just a dimple that would disappear soon’s his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? All seven were gone or dead. What would be the point of looking too hard at that youngest one? But for some reason they let her keep him. He was with her – everywhere. (163)

Unfortunately, Baby Suggs’s misfortune does not end here. The pangs of separation go worst during her search for her unfortunate children who got separated from her. To quote her:

Great God, she thought, where do I start? Get somebody to write old Whitlow. See who took Patty and Rosa Lee. Somebody name Dunn got Ardelia and went West, she heard. No point in trying for Tyree or John. They cut thirty years ago and, if she searched too hard and they were hiding, finding them would do them more harm than good. Nancy and Famous died in a ship off the Virginia coast before it set sail for Savannah. That much she knew. The overseer at Whitlow’s place brought her the news, more from a wish than to have his way with her than from the kindness of his heart. The captain waited three weeks in port, to get a full cargo before setting off. Of the slaves in hold who didn’t make it, he said two were Whitlow pickaninnies name of ... But she knew their names. She knew, and covered her ears with her fists to keep them from hearing them come from his mouth. (169)
Similarly, there is the excruciating and tragic aspect of Nnu Ego’s life with her ‘barren tag.’ Her first husband abandons her. However, it is rather ironic to discover that her much valued and anticipated motherhood is so much degrading and unfulfilling. In fact, her second husband gives least help to maintain her family and children. Another aspect is the ritual called ‘sarah’ where women who want children give unofficial parties to children. It is because these desperate women harbor the faith that they can conceive children by feeding other children. One additional instance is the case of Ego-Obi. She is branded and abused as a bad woman by her husband’s side mostly because she has no children; and she is even forced to voluntarily leave for her parents’ house. Similarly, the barren Mrs. Garner has not much control over her life or property in Beloved.

Among all these features of motherhood for women, a very innovative and unexplored side of ‘female sexuality’ emerges in both the novels. In The Joys of Motherhood, barren Nnu Ego stays in Lagos with her new husband whom she dislikes solely because she thought that “suppose this man made her pregnant, would that not be an untold joy to her people” (Emecheta 1994: 44). Indeed, the hunger for motherhood creates a very unconventional form of barter system where sex is given to gain motherhood or else other benefits and favors. For example, Nnu Ego out of desperation exchanges sex with her new husband in order to conceive a baby. Likewise, in Beloved, Baby Suggs has to exchange sex with many men whenever she tried to ask favors related to her children without much choice. Sethe also trades sex. In fact, Bhaskar A. Shukla bluntly says, “Sethe, alone at the grave of the child she murdered, trades ten minutes of sex for seven letters: Beloved” (Shukla 2007: 95).
Even amidst all the cravings and love of a mother, there is also a presence of an unusual and peculiar characteristic of motherhood. There is the difference in the treatment of children (Denver and Beloved) by Sethe. Likewise, Halley is the special one for Baby Suggs as he bought her freedom in _Beloved_. Sethe’s perception of Denver and Beloved is evident in this narration:

Sethe understood Denver. Solitude had made her secretive – self-manipulated. Years of haunting had dulled her in ways you wouldn’t believe and sharpened her in ways you wouldn’t believe either. The consequence was a timid but hard-headed daughter Sethe would die to protect. The other, Beloved, she knew less, nothing, about – except that there was nothing she wouldn’t do for Sethe and that Denver and she liked each other’s company. Now she thought she knew why. They spent up or held on to their feelings in harmonious ways. What one had to give was pleased to take. They hung back in the trees that ringed the Clearing, then rushed into it with screams and kisses when Sethe choked – anyhow that’s how she explained it to herself for she noticed neither competition between the two nor domination by one. ... There was no question but that she could do it. Just like the day she arrived at 124 – sure enough, she – had – milk enough for all. (Morrison 2007: 117-8)

However, in _The Joys of Motherhood_, the preference is always given more to male child by both parents but no such presence is found in _Beloved_. In the former case, there arises gender issues where bearing only girls is equivalent to being barren. For instance, there is the conflict between Nnu Ego who is the first wife with many sons and Adaku with only two daughters. The reaction of the male consultants is very typically unfair because as soon as the case started “instead of laying the whole blame on Nnu Ego, they made Adaku
feel that since she had no son for the family she had no right to complain about her senior’s conduct” (Emecheta 1994: 166). In other words, patriarchy interprets motherhood in different ways. In fact, it actually interprets mothers with no sons as inferior and subordinate beings when compared with mothers with sons. Indeed, it creates an imbalanced and false hierarchy that cracks and sours mutual relationship between women. It also gives the impression that in traditional Igbo society, no son means no child or being barren. And that’s why it is so apt for Adaku to represent all the wise women who know and challenge such doubled-standard of sexual politics. So, she admits this fact as she says, “we women set impossible standards for ourselves” (169).

Another new aspect of motherhood among slave women is the choice of barrenness when confronted with racist subjugation. In such rare cases, the hatred for the exploiter is so extreme that motherhood’s embracing aspect evaporates into thin air. There are two such instances in Beloved. First, Sethe’s mother rejects all her other children except Sethe, her love child. Similar is the case of Ella who refused to nurse “a hairy white thing” fathered by “the lowest yet” that died soon after “five days never making a sound” (Morrison 2007: 305). But the most extreme and tragic example is Sethe’s own interpretation of security for her children in these lines:

By the time she faced him, looked him dead in the eye, she had something in her arms that stopped in his tracks. He took a backward step with each jump of the baby’s heart until finally there were none. “I stopped him,” she said, staring at the place where the fence used to be. “I took and put my babies where they’d be safe.”… This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn’t know where the world stopped and she began. Suddenly he [Paul D] saw
what Stamp paid wanted him to see: More important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him. (193)

However, Sethe is out of choice when it comes to the protection and safety of her young children. Kashinath Ranveer opines her reasons clearly: “The schoolteacher maintains a notebook. His notebook symbolizes the dispassionate and cold-blooded scientific racism that has marked the Western culture.” When she realizes the actual truth behind all the observations then there is no looking back. She tries to escape with her children and when she finds herself trapped once again she is more determined not to send her children to slavery and decides to give “safety with a handsaw.”

Motherhood and fatherhood are quite different. Parenthood includes two different roles where father is the provider and protector; and mother is the nurturer. However, motherhood is no easy responsibility as it is more demanding than fatherhood. So, in the absence of father figures, the mothers are exposed to more challenging situations that can often break them from many levels – physically, emotionally and financially. In Beloved, such absence is seen more vividly in the case of slave mothers. Sethe desperately attempts to give security to her children when the schoolteacher arrives. Morrison indeed reveals an insight of the absent father’s unintentional cruelty upon his wife who also happens to be the mother of his children.

The father has almost zero presence for the children of both Sethe and Baby Suggs. However, in their absence, mother-daughter relationship becomes more close and mutual. Such is the case of the relationship shared by Denver-Sethe and Sethe-Sethe’s dead mother. To quote Sethe:
My woman? … She must have nursed me two or three weeks – that’s the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman. … She never fixed my hair nor nothing. She didn’t even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember. Too far from the line-up, I guess. One thing she did do. She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, ‘This is your ma’am. This,’ and she pointed. ‘I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can’t tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.’ Scared me so. All I could think of was how important this was and how I needed to have something important to say back, but I couldn’t think of anything so I just said what I thought. ‘Yes, Ma’am,’ I said. ‘But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me, too, I said ‘mark the mark on me too.’ ” Sethe chuckled.

“Did she?” asked Denver.

“She slapped my face.”

“What for?”

“I didn’t understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own.” (72-3)

In addition, there is the instance in which gradually the flashbacks of African heritage of Sethe’s mother’s from overseas, ventures to seep once again after many years inside Sethe’s mind. However, according to Andrea O’ Reilly, she is “the archetypal motherless child, emotionally and physically orphaned, with no family or history to call her own” and is deprived of her “motherline” (Reilly 2004: 89).
For Denver, Halle is son/husband/friend for others but not a father for her. However, Paul D is not welcomed by Denver when he tries to take over the place of her absent father. In fact, she “ran a mighty interference and on the third day flat-out asked Paul D how long he was going to hang around” (Morrison 2007: 52). Similarly, her thoughts of disappointment and alienation regarding Halle’s absence surfaces without much dirt in these lines:

That her own father’s absence was not hers. Once the absence had belonged to Grandma Baby – a son, deeply mourned because he was the one who had bought her out of there. Then it was her mother’s absent husband. Now it was this hazelnut stranger’s absent friend. Only those who knew him (“knew him well”) could claim his absence for themselves. … Again she wished for the baby ghosts – its anger thrilling her now where it used to wear her out. Wear her out. (15)

The type and level of a father’s presence is different in The Joys of Motherhood. Nnu Ego’s father, Agbadi, is a loving and protective father who stood by her side in every tragedy she came across in life whether rejection by her first husband, Amatokwu, with the barren tag or the disappointment she faced after meeting her second husband, Nnaife. On the other hand, there is the example of Nnaife who is only the biological father of his children by being a lazy and useless provider. However, there is a strong presence of both surrogate and biological mothers for the children. For instance, Nnu Ego is always there for her children while she herself gets healed by the other wives of her father in her own mother’s absence during her days of dejection. She is also lucky to get encouraging words from her father and brother-in-law.
In *Beloved*, there is also a presence of shallow concept of ‘fatherhood’ represented by Paul D’s delusional implication of fatherhood. It is very much ironical to the loving and nurturing motherhood represented by Sethe and her sacrifices. Surprisingly, when he could not admit the fact that he was sleeping with Beloved, “he said something he didn’t know was on his mind” like “I want you pregnant, Sethe. Would you do that for me?” and “suddenly it was a solution: a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl’s spell – all in one” (151).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, socially the concept of fatherhood has more significance. For Nnu Ego’s first husband, Amatokwu, fatherhood is an achievement. For him, it is more important to be a father than remain just a husband of a barren woman. That’s why he gets a new wife and completely ignores her. He declares, “I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line” (Emecheta 1994: 32). He even lets her go without regret by saying “she is as barren as desert” (39).

In fact, the traditional role of the father is being the provider of the household while the mother is child-bearing and rearing. But in the process she is exposed to humiliation too. For instance, the poor household forces Nnu Ego to make so many new changes and she has to stay happy believing “the old saying that money and children don’t go together” (80).

On the other hand, a father’s love or hatred is self-centered. According to Nnu Ego, some fathers “especially those with many children from different wives” is capable of rejecting a bad son, but a mother can never do such thing
because when he is damned “she is damned with him” (214). Thus, only good male children are Nnaife’s children while Nnu Ego has no such choice. When Kehinde, their daughter, elopes with a Muslim butcher’s son, he even accuses and blames Nnu Ego that her daughter “is responsible for their taking me [Nnaife] to jail” (210). Likewise, his hatred and anger is equally venomous for his wife and son when he says “sometimes I curse the day you [his son] were conceived” (202). But a mother’s love is unconditional. And, indeed Nnu Ego’s joy was to know that “she had brought up her children when they had started with nothing, and that those same children might rub shoulders one day with the great men of Nigeria. That was the reward she expected” (202).

Another significant feature regarding fatherhood is the presence of gender politics. In *Beloved*, fatherhood is never questioned. But motherhood for Baby Suggs has to face prejudices associated with the burden given by racism and slavery for bearing eight children from different fathers. The double-standard shown towards sexuality is loud and clear in the following lines:

Grandma Baby said people look down on her because she had eight children with different men. Colored people and White people both looked down on her for that. Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to whoever owned them. (Morrison 2007: 246-7)

According to patriarchy, a woman’s gender specific roles as a wife and a mother “is to cook and bear children” (Emecheta 1994: 71) and also look after them since “a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman” (62). However, such traditions and thoughts are burdensome for women like Nnu Ego.
Finally, in Beloved Morrison also acknowledges the fact that the importance of surrogate mothers has more varied forms and multiple connotations. Sethe herself has three important surrogate mothers – her childhood slave nanny (Nan), Baby Suggs and even Sixo (a male slave of Sweet Home). Regarding her childhood nanny Sethe says, “Nan was the one she knew best, who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked, had one good arm and half of another. And who used different words. …The same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back” (Morrison 2007: 73-4). While Baby Suggs is the one who nursed her wounds to recovery during her escape with utmost care and dedication. In fact, Baby Suggs is the priestess who taught her the rites to connect with “the wisdom and beliefs and souls” of her ancestors and her people (Jennings 2010: 140).

However, Sethe’s first untraditional help is Sixo. He helps her grow-up as a new mother. In fact, she admits clearly her plight without any help from her husband along with her gratitude for Sixo’s help. She says: “Halle was good, but he was debt-working all over the place. And when he did get down to a little sleep, I didn’t want to be bothering him with all that. Sixo was the biggest help” (Morrison 2007: 189). Similarly, Denver is Sethe’s merely eighteen years old daughter, who also plays the role of a surrogate mother when Sethe loses herself around Beloved’s demands. Denver is hurt to see Sethe “carrying out Beloved’s night bucket” and rushes to “relieve her of it” but then “the pain was unbearable when they run low on food” and she had to watch “her mother go without” food (285). And then, Denver realizes that “it was on her” and decides “to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help” (286). In other words, in the final part of the novel “the roles of mother and daughter are reversed” where she
protects Sethe from Beloved as she realizes that “her sister [Beloved] could eventually kill her mother [Sethe]” (Shukla 2007: 53).

In both the novels, Morrison and Emecheta have successfully portrayed the false glory bestowed upon the misery of motherhood whereas the reality is so heart-wrenching and disappointing. And thus, the big question whether ‘motherhood is always universal’ strikes the psyche again and again. However, it is not immune to various social factors based on certain interest groups. In *Beloved*, double standard of racism and society are burdensome for Sethe’s normal existence.

According to the schoolteacher, the value of Sethe is much more than healthy male slaves like Paul D. According to Andrea O’Reilly, “Under slavery, black women are viewed as object and breeder; this denies slave women their own subjectivity, the very requirement for an attainment of selfhood in children” (Reilly 2004: 90). It is a dehumanizing process by the former to treat her solely as a property of Sweet Home. She is indeed a slave to be used for breeding. To quote him:

> He would have to trade this here one for $900 if he could get it, and set out to secure the breeding one, her foal and the other one, if he found him. With the money from “this here one” he could get two young ones, twelve or fifteen years old. And maybe with the breeding one, her three pickaninnies and whatever the foal might be, he and his nephews would have seven niggers and Sweet Home will be worth the trouble it was causing him. (Morrison 2007: 267)

The perception and treatment of slaves are quite contrary to the trust, love and care that Sethe showers upon Mrs. Garner. Sethe actually wishes to
serve Mrs. Garner like her own mother and says, “I couldn’t have done more for that woman than I would my own ma’am if she was to take sick and need me and I’d have stayed with her till she got well or died” (237). However, there is much irony in the events that follow. The nightmarish character, the schoolteacher, arrives as the care-taker of Sweet Home after Mr. Garner’s death. With a sarcastic tone targeted towards Mrs. Garner, Sethe says, “Four Sweet Home men and she still believed she needed her brother-in-law and two boys” and that’s why “she wrote to schoolteacher to come take over (232). And very soon after his arrival, Sethe starts to realize all the degrading facts of dehumanization based on her color. She narrates her first hand experience in these lines:

I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, “No, no. That’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up.” I commenced to walk backward, didn’t even look behind me to find out where I was headed. (228)

Consequently, the degrading experience forces her to run away from Sweet Home in search of her children’s security. And unfortunately, when she finds that she has no escape then she is forced to do the only thing she could think of – to save her children from such lowly life – by deciding to kill them. Kavita Arya has supported the perception of Sethe’s drastic decision as “a senseless crime but as a necessity” (Arya 2010: 84). However, the schoolteacher’s colonized version of such tragic act brings out the harsh reality of being a slave woman in a very sarcastic manner. Shukla recalls the schoolteacher calling her “gone wild” while the nephew stands shaking and lost
in a kind of confusion that his uncle had warned him against (Shukla 2007: 137).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, direct racism is not visible and instead social norms or traditions of patriarchy take over the aesthetic beauty behind motherhood. The imposing nature of patriarchal values resounds in Agbadi’s death-bed wish for his beloved daughter, “You have already proved you are a good daughter, but a good daughter must also be a good wife” (Emecheta 1994: 155). In fact, it’s a reminder to her to balance the three roles of being a good daughter, mother and wife simultaneously. Indeed, Emecheta has clearly shown that the concept of ideal woman turns out to be a myth and not a reality. In other words, a woman’s sexuality and identity are lost under the patriarchal order. For example, Akbadi’s treatment of his wives and mistresses is very misogynic and degrading. Except for Nnu Ego’s mother who refuses to be tamed, all his women are worthless for him. Ironically, Nnu Ego did not have a choice like her mother in marriage or motherhood.

Again, it turns out that motherhood is not always productive in both novels. Morrison has shown that the ‘thick love’ of Sethe in *Beloved* is capable to kill an innocent child on the name of giving security. On the other hand, Sethe is also aware of the difficulties and responsibilities of bearing and rearing a child which is opposed to Paul D’s sudden craving for fatherhood. To quote Sethe:

Tucked into the well of his arm, Sethe recalled Paul D’s face in the street when he asked her to have a baby for him. Although she laughed and took his hand, it had frightened her. She thought quickly of how good the sex would be if that is what he wanted, but mostly she was frightened by the thought of having a baby once more. Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, that caring –
again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. O Lord, she thought, deliver me, Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer. What did he want her pregnant for? ... He resented the children she had, that’s what. Child, she corrected herself. Child plus Beloved whom she thought of as her own, and that is what he resented ... They were a family somehow and he was not the head of it. (Morrison 2007: 155)

Further, motherhood’s burden is not fulfilling or glorious in any sense in *The Joys of Motherhood*. M.J. Daymo opines that Emecheta treats Nnu Ego’s subsequent lonely death as an indicator of the son’s negligence and “betrayal of the concept of motherhood” that killed the dedicated mother (Umeh 1996: 286). Emecheta through Nnu Ego’s character proves the hidden truth regarding the false glory behind glorified nature of motherhood in these lines:

Nnu Ego had allowed herself to wonder where it was she had gone wrong. She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. She had had children, nine in all, and luckily seven were alive ... Still, how was she to know that by the time her children grew up the values of her country, her people and her tribe would have changed so drastically, to the extent where a woman with many children could face a lonely old age, and maybe a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman? She was not even certain that worries over her children would not send her to her before her *chi* was ready for her. (Emecheta 1994: 219)

On the other hand, Morrison finds that the blunt blow of racism’s reality creates alienation within the community. Sethe is falsely perceived, rejected and mistreated by her own black community after the tragic incident as she lands
herself into jail for her young daughter’s murder in *Beloved*. Even the loving Baby Suggs faces such dejection in these words by Stamp Paid:

> Her [Baby Suggs] marrow was tired too and it was a testimony to the heart that fed it that it took eight years to meet finally the color she was hankering after. The onslaught of her fatigue, like his, was sudden, but lasted for years. After sixty years of losing children to the people who chewed up her life and spit it out like a fish bone; after five years of freedom given to her by her last child, who bought her future with his, exchanged it, so to speak, so she could have one whether he did or not – to lose him too; to acquire a daughter and grandchildren and see that daughter slay the children (or try to); to belong to a community of other free Negroes – to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed – and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance – well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, wholly.

(Morrison 2007: 209)

Both Ella and Stamp Paid have their own stands regarding Sethe’s fatal measure. Ella bluntly says, “I ain’t got no friends take a handsaw to their own children” (221). On the other hand, Stamp Paid’s deliberate encounter with Paul D has also negative consequences as he admits, “I told him about – I showed him the newspaper, about the – what Sethe did. Read it to him. He left that very day” (221).

Similarly, certain juxtaposition is seen in Baby Suggs’s perception of ‘freedom’ before and after truly attaining freedom. In other words, false reality converts into actual reality. It creates Baby Suggs’s self-identity in this particular situation. She admits the significance of freedom as she asks herself:
'What does a sixty-odd-year-old slave woman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?' And when she stepped foot on free ground she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn’t; that Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in the world. (166).

Further, she realizes its significance as she says, “These hands belong to me. These my hands” and then she also “felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat” (166).

Unfortunately, Nnu Ego is moreover very slow to understand her own worth and identity as she continues to be too busy rearing seven children and trying to be an ideal mother. Such is the effect of false glory of motherhood nurtured by the community and society. Indeed it is how the self identity and existence of women while using the disguise of fulfilled motherhood gets played with. Nnu Ego herself has minutely analyzed her own downfall in these lines:

Nnu Ego told herself that she would have been better off had she had time to cultivate those women who had offered her hands of friendship; but she had never had the time … the fact that she never had adequate outfits to wear to visit her friends, she had shield away from friendship, telling herself she did not need any friends, she had enough in her family … that man[Nnaife] would never stop blaming her for what had happened to him; his people, and many of the Ibuza people in general, blamed her for bringing up her children badly. (Emecheta 1994: 219)

Another important revelation in Beloved is that men germinate and practice double standard views. They are furthermore unable to give solace
unlike the surrogate mother figures like Baby Suggs after Sethe’s tragedy. Such is the case with the denial that Paul D manifested after Stamp Paid’s revelation of Sethe’s dark past. Paul D recognizes something unacceptable. To quote him:

The roaring in Paul D’s head did not prevent him from hearing the pat she gave to the last word, and it occurred to him that what she wanted for her children was exactly what was missing in 124: safety...

This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn’t know where the world stopped and she began. Suddenly he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him. (Morrison 2007: 193)

Paul D’s fear towards Sethe creates a crack in his relationship with her when he gives the judgement that Sethe was wrong to do such deed. And an argument follows that makes “a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet” (194). But Sethe is wise enough to see the depth of his unexpressed emotions and thoughts. She perceives it and says, “He must think I can’t bear to hear him say it. That after all I have told him and after telling me how many feet I have, “goodbye” would break me to pieces. Ain’t that sweet.” (195)

Baby Suggs, on the other hand, is a solid pillar of support for both Sethe and Denver. She gives her legacy of wisdom regarding survival tactics against all odds. The last moments of her has so much wisdom and insight associated with her existence and identity. To quote her dejected last years:

Except for an occasional request for color she had practically nothing – until the afternoon of the last day of her life when she got out of bed, skipped slowly to the door of the keeping room and announced to Sethe and Denver the lesson she had learned from her
sixty years as a slave and ten years free: that there was no bad luck in the world but white people. “They don’t know when to stop,” she said, and returned to her bed, pulled up the quilt and left them to hold that thought forever. (122)

However, in the society of *The Joys of Motherhood*, there is a presence of more instances of gender discrimination and double standard available which is more than racism. Unlike the special value and importance shown towards the daughter in *Beloved*, it rather reveals an unwelcomed and subjugated position of daughters. Both mother and father equally share such ‘male-favored’ attitude. The sons are almost worshipped at the cost of the daughters’ plight. The sons get inheritance and education while the daughters are just a means to harvest bride-price or free help. Such is the case of the teen daughters of Nnu Ego. They do not get educated and instead help Nnu Ego to earn money for survival as well as to educate the boys. Fortunately, Adaku’s two daughters get their chance for education and prove their worth in the later part of the novel with a surprising twist. Thus, here, Morrison also proves that the double standards shown towards girls as burdens can actually backfire. Yet, the twisted truth is that they get such privileges only due to certain chances of life. First, Adaku’s only male child dies within weeks of his birth. And indeed the death causes Adaku deep depression and she becomes “almost impossible to live with” as she “blamed everybody and everything for her loss” (127). In the boy’s fateful absence, she starts business and later ends up getting separated from Nnaife. However, she educates her two daughters as an investment to secure her own future without any male heir to inherit her property.
But the final truth behind the glorified motherhood still remains unchanged. It is vividly apparent in Nnu Ego’s lonely and tragic death at the young age of forty-five. In fact, her story goes on:

Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death because, however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did. Poor Nnu Ego, even in her death she had no peace! Still, many agreed that she had given all to her children. The joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children, they said. (Emecheta 1994: 224)

However, the reality that debunks all such glorified claims is heart-wrenching and even gains empathy. To quote: “And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? … That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want to have sons who would give her a decent burial?” (224). And thus, the novel ends with a debatable statement, “Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children” (224).

To conclude, patriarchy has hidden propaganda in these three social identities of black women. The most vulnerable of all is a black girl child. She needs the protection and love of her parents for her survival and self identity. Her next role as a wife has no choice in the real sense. In both her choices of acceptance and rejection of marriage and sexuality she is destined to suffer. And in her most glorified and anticipated role of an ideal mother, she dedicates herself completely. However, except for a few lucky ones ‘motherhood’ is burdensome and false because “thick love” can kill both mother and child. The following chapter is the last chapter of this thesis. It will conclude with the summing up of the extensive analysis and the findings of the research.
NOTES


