"I'm not Mad, I'm Black"

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Introduction

Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.

Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*

Oxford English Dictionary notes that ‘Trauma’ is originally a medical term which is used for referring to “a wound or an external bodily injury”, or “a psychic injury, especially one that is caused by an emotional shock, the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed” or “the state or condition caused”. “It is a liminal experience of radical deracination and calamity that brings a violent rupture of the order at both personal and social levels” (Hwangbo,1). It defeats the logic of consciousness in an individual’s life and his capacity to narrate one’s experiences by mirroring the exigency of life. It destructs the “fundamental assumptions” or the substratum of “our conceptual system”, which helps us to conveniently manage and confidently transform myriad random experiences into a certain view of our reality (Bullman,5).Thus, elements of shock and rupture are common to both the medical and contemporary usage of the term, as well as to the Freudian definition of trauma as “breach” in the “protective barrier”(Freud,29).

Trauma has played a vital role in literature. The traumatic effects on fictional characters in the literary sphere also affect readers while they read it. But, it is transferred in a controlled manner and mediated to the readers once it is wrapped in
the narratives of healing and defiance, the response to which is evolved by our sympathy towards the trauma sufferers. Trauma and records of its experience have gained a prominent place in slave narratives. Diana Miles in *Women, Violence and Testimony in the Works of Zora Neal Hurston* argues that “there is an inextricable link between trauma, survival and the ethical imperative to give testimony [to slavery]” (48). For this kind of analysis of testimony of trauma in South, we must be aware of the major changes that African people underwent during chattel slavery in America.

This chapter positions black women as marginalized and exploited characters who are witnesses to the written records of these narratives of trauma and slavery. The experiences of slavery vary and are not collective and thus, degrees of subjugation also differ with respect to gender. A reading of early slave narratives, journals and other writings clearly reveal the traumatic experiences of enslaved women. The two well-known narratives that give evidence to such levels of trauma by contextualizing the broad and unique circumstances surrounding black women’s lives are Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in The Life of Slave Girl* and Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Oladuah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African*. Equiano’s *Narrative* (published in 1789), which describe the conditions of enslaved women in pre-American Revolution transatlantic slave trade by addressing the inequality and brutal lawless nature of slavery. Harriet Jacob’s Incidents also describes the conditions of slave women before the initial draft of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862.

Many theorists share a common consensus on the definitive explanation of trauma and sometimes on a strong and powerful consideration about particular aspects of trauma, especially those which have its relation to memory. Judith Herman theorizes that a traumatic event overwhelms “the ordinary human adaptations of life” (133). He further says:

The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structure of the self, but also on the system of attachment and meaning that link individual and community. (133, 151)
In the novels of Toni Morrison, trauma is studied from a psycho-social perspective, which is focused upon the special issues of oppression and disempowerment of the marginalized group in America. According to Robert Jay Lifton, there is a group of individuals in every society that forms a part of “designated victims”. In America, the people of African origin form a group of such marginalized, discriminated and often exploited group. The term ‘marginal’ refers to a specific group of people who feel degraded due to their harrowing experiences in life. “The catastrophic site of trauma is the site of unacknowledged and unfathomable loss and pain need to be placed in the context of communal support and attentive, empathic listening” (Hwangbo,7).

Jenny Edkins observes that traumatic incidents are “overwhelming but they are also a revelation” (Edkins,5). She argues that “trauma is what happens when [what is] normally hidden by the social reality in which we live our daily lives, is suddenly revealed” (214). Traumatic events also shatter our perception of self and external world. Slavoj Zizek also compares trauma to Jacques Lacan’s concept of ‘Real’ because

It is a shock of contingent encounter which disrupts the automatic circulation of the symbolic mechanism” and is thus comparable to “a grain of sand preventing the [symbolic mechanism’s] smooth functioning”, for it “ruins the balance of the symbolic universe of the subject”. (171)

There is a wall constructed between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ that checks the reoccurrence of suppressed and confirms its societal constancy. The ‘other’ is trapped within the walls of fear and abjection and reveals itself as the dark side of the respected individuals of a society.

Trauma is also often called an “action schema” in which victims partially remember and repeat their traumatogenic pasts without cognitively and emotionally recognizing their meanings (Levy, 147). The sharing of traumatic experiences lessens its degree of suffering to some extent and relieves the burden of unspeakable and agonizing experiences. Charles Edward Robins also notes that narrative is a “symbolic work that lays a net over it” (128). It is this “wound in civilization” (Horkheimer and Ardorno) that unites the people of one race and increases their
awareness of the destructive forces of civilization along with which they need to associate to view themselves. Hence, the collective trauma of marginal groups such as of racial violence inflicted on African-Americans usually constructs a strict line of demarcation and a definite path of realization between the ‘self’ and ‘other’.

Generally, in medical science, the word trauma is used to define those experiences in which an individual experiences “an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical self or integrity of others” and is responded in the form of “intense fear, helplessness, or fear” (American Assoc.). Its effects are measured by the intensity of psychical disorganization caused by a traumatic event in life. The word is also associated with a sole destructive “blow” or “actual stab”, which pierces through defense mechanism of an individual, thus causing fatal physical and psychic changes.

The issue of the study of black woman’s oppression becomes more complicated and diverse when we explore it in depth. “She is seen as a victim of the myth, according to which a woman with a reduced physical and mental capacity should do degrading household work” (Davis, 7). Yet, the assumed benefits of feminist creed do not accrue to her. She is unprotected and unsheltered, but never remains unconscious to the anxious struggle for existence. She laboured equally under the sun with her man under the lash from light to dark. The irony of slavery laid in the fact that black woman was freed from the myth of femininity in order to procure optimum benefits from slave class, as “…. our women in black had freedom contemptuously thrust upon them” (Du Bois, 185). As a slave, black woman was seen equal to her man and was annulled from her historical position as a ward under the male hierarchical pattern. Their masters and ruling class could not confer any privileged position upon black men vis-à-vis black women. Due to the absence of any family unit or stable kinship structure, slave women did not enjoy any defined roles as wife or mother in a male dominated society. Slavery was directed towards the fullest utilization of each and every man, woman and child for the economic profit of slave holders. They were absolute servants to their masters and it resulted in their ultimate exploitation for the productive purposes. “The bell rings at 4’o clock in the morning and they have half an hour to get ready. Men and women start together, and
the women must work as steadily as the men and perform the same tasks as the men”. (Clarke, 127).

A complicated and vicious trap of oppression was laid at every moment in a slave woman’s life. But at every juncture of her journey, her subordination was a common theme. Slave women were transcending, refusing, fighting back, and asserting themselves by stepping beyond the horrifying hurdles. Their unbelievable strength was channelized against their masters; they were entrusted with a new responsibility to regulate their men according to the kind of work that they were assigned. Their presence was not authoritative, nor were they given a meaningful status, but ironically, they were required to leave behind the shadowy realm of feminine inaction to acquire their right place besides their rebellious man.

Prominent theorists like Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon have also foregrounded and maintained the idea that women empowerment is the best scale to measure the scale of social progress. Fanon has posited that the degree and eminence of female involvement in movements undertaken for social struggles is radical to measure the role of women in a nation’s development. The role of black woman in her community is a striking example of this principle. She is a brutal pursuit to white man’s profit but gains disparately an inhuman position of parity. Nevertheless, she takes part as an additional contestant in this fight against racist practice by motivating and partaking in acts of opposition undertaken by the people of colour. She resorts to self-protective measures whenever her position is at risk due to the slave system that has given birth to a heinous socio-cultural structure that turns partial in relation to the dominating strategies. Black women’s deeds increased the threat to challenge their white masters. They prove fruitful in reflecting the inherent potential of resistance and confirm their stance within their community.

As observed by social theorists, mothering is central to a woman’s role. They simply assume that it is socially, biologically and psychologically natural and functional (Chodorow, 11-3). It is also significant here to note that according to Julia Kristeva, motherhood is a cure for “feminine fatigue”. She maintains that woman’s extraneousness or strangeness to the symbolic order is manifested in a specific way during pregnancy and motherhood, particularly in a mother’s relation to the infant (6).
She even argues that maternal passion is a prototype of all human passions which makes us individuals who are empowered to speak as human beings rather than live as silent survivors. We are different from female animals because we can express and reflect our emotions and feelings. She also observes that “it is not passion that is distinctively human, but dispassion or sublimation of passion which is essential to successful mothering” (6). She further explains and elaborates on this sacred knowledge of motherhood according to which

…. passion takes on its most human aspect, which is to say, the furthest from its biological foundation, which nevertheless accompanies it (the famous drives of attachment and aggressiveness), and that it takes the path of sublimation without ceasing to be a passion…It is in motherhood that the link to the other can become love. (9)

Studies have proved that since ancient times, woman’s status as mother has been ambiguous and full of contrasting opinions, puzzling contrasts and struggles for authority. The patriarchal constructions of society have oppressed maternal body and its voice to dominate and rule over a woman’s body. It has also lead to a dichotomy between mothers and maternal experiences. In Of Woman Born, Andrienne Rich draws her readers’ attention to an ironically contrasting point that women’s body is viewed as “impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity; a source of moral and physical contamination; “the devil’s gateway” (13) and on the other hand, “woman as a mother is deemed beneficent, sacred, pure, nourishing, asexual”(73). Indeed, “a female body is a field of contradictions” (31), a place that is according to her is “invested with both power, and an acute vulnerability”(20). She argues that, “female body is a terrain on which patriarchy is constructed”(20) and “motherhood is sacred so long as its offsprings are legitimate”(20), which explains that woman as a mother gains her sanctity only when her child carries the legal name of her its father.

Motherhood is a dominant theme in postmodern feminist writings. We can infer from the prevalent and socially accepted theories that the role of mother in any society has an emotional and strong sense of bonding that makes it a core human relationship in family. A mother is the preserver, builder and custodian of new
generation. For a woman, motherhood is cherished as an ideal because it provides a new cultural base to the coming generations. This sole truth has individuated lives of most women in a society. When a woman becomes mother, she is not just giving birth to a child or merely completing an act of reproduction. She is actually fulfilling her social responsibility by giving birth to children, raising them and educating them in a socially and morally acceptable manner so that they can acquire their place in the external world. In this way, her role as a reproducer becomes important because she is also responsible for her children’s socially and culturally formulated identities. V. Geetha in her book *Patriarchy* has commented on the role of mother in reference to Hindu mythology where Lord Shiva also sees Earth as an embodiment of primal energy, of *prakriti*, or female power. In this manner, a female’s exploitation for greed and growth is seen similar to the exploitation and subjugation of a woman’s body for her reproductive powers.

The era of American Realism, Naturalism and Modernism (1940-1960) brings in a lot of new concepts to be explored, in relation to the themes of motherhood and representation of women as mothers. The most influential writers are Dorothy West, Ann Peter, Margaret Walker and Loraine Housebur. African- American mother has been portrayed from various points of view such as, a civil rights worker, a feminist, a slave woman, a tough worker in the fields, a mother sharing dual responsibilities in and outside the household, a woman abandoned by her man and left with all physical and economic burden alone or, an artist who emerges as a survivor in her combat against all the existing pressures. She is a nuance- layered and multi- faced character; the need is to interpret a ‘woman’ inside every Black woman. In her essay, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” (1974), Alice Walker elaborates on the depiction of black women since slavery, writing that

Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies their role in the world, the mule of the world, because we have been handed the burden that everyone else refused to carry. We have been also called “Matriarchs”, “Superwomen”, “Mean and Evil Bitches”. Not to mention “Castraters” or sapphire mama and states that when [“black women”] have pleaded for understanding, [their] character has been destroyed”. (405)
She illustrates the difficult position of an African-American mother, when she is opposed to the ills of white racist society.

According to Gloria Joseph, the relationship between a black mother and daughter cannot be discussed under the same paradigms under which the relationships between a white mother and daughter can be analysed, because the white ideology disregards black women’s own interpretations and experiences (76-81). The true role of a black mother cannot be studied and interpreted if we fail to perceive it against the backdrop of white racist society. There are several socio-cultural factors along with classism, adverse economic conditions, poverty and most importantly, the psychological factors which overall influence the psyche of black mother.

When we analyse the gender specific roles of white women, it becomes evident that her roles as a mother are restricted to the tasks of homemaking, taking care of children and husband and managing other household chores. They hold control over their own distinct domains by acquiring the desired social importance and influence. Their functions in their role as mother, wife and added to all, as preserver and custodian of culture, further strengthen and develop their identity in a traditional society. Thus, motherhood not only gives importance but also signifies a white female’s role in her family and society.

In some cultures, native women and women of colour are aware of the boundaries which surround their world and existence. Many cross-cultural studies have also proved that women of colour are aware of their limitations in their socially and culturally constructed roles. The changing dimensions and perspectives of mothering render new meanings to a woman’s role as mother.

But, if motherhood is seen as a source of power; it is also seen as a force to exercise and gain control over a female’s body to dominate her in a patriarchal society. Such patterns of governance also result in the absence of emotions like love and affection in a mother. They are replaced with other intense feelings such as dislike, joy, rage, satisfaction, anxiety, pleasure, fear, wonder, ambivalence and, sometimes they give birth to a desire to get rid of the child, followed by remorse and guilt. As Sara Ruddick argues, mothers can run gamut of feelings from intense love to
an intense desire to get rid of her child, but their actions count and their actions are a result of their commitment to their relationship with their children- their “preservative love” (70-1).

The feelings of power are combined with the feelings of love, responsibility and concern for others, which also rules the governing thoughts and actions of mothers which guide and govern her behaviour as mothers. They display their power by exercising their control over their community, which is evident in the context of African-American mothers. There can be no general theory about motherhood as there are several socio-cultural factors and a common history of oppression shared by the women of colour or third-world women as individuals and mothers. In both these positions, they are influenced by race, class, age, family, structure, religion, sexuality and economic position which also affect their ways of mothering. Nancy Chodorow’s most popular book *The Reproduction of Mothering* is very relevant to furnish further research in this field. It theorizes that maternal role is the root cause of female’s dependence and subordination on her man.

Black women were socialized to be independent women by their circumstances as well as by their cultural influences operating in the black community. The extreme circumstances of poverty and racism also burdened her with an additional responsibility of being the financial supporter of her family unit. They tried to inculcate the same values in their daughters who were also responsible to hold other duties of their household as grown-up women. The stance of black women actually found its articulation in varied relationships with black men and also in their ability to position themselves as independent beings in the existing racist society.

The relationship between a black mother and daughter can be of a friend or a competitor; they can challenge each other, or even share a synergistic relationship. Such relationships provide them space to resist their mother’s influence as they either counter, or accept their mother’s influence. At the same time, they see themselves as a shadow of their mother’s personality. Yet, this resistance is needed to maintain their identity. There is a “turbulence and tenderness” that characterizes black mother-daughter relationship at various points in their life cycle (Scott, xv). Yet, this conflict
imparts a message about womanhood to these daughters who belonged to varied social and family backgrounds.

The white society accords distinct roles to a mother, and she acquires a special place in the context of gender symbolism when we analyze their customary role in their position of a mother. According to Patricia Hill Collins, females as mothers can be divided into two groups—those who see motherhood as a source of power and others who see it as a mode of oppression. Mothers are not mothers only when they give birth to and raise their children; they can also be mothers without fulfilling the traditional role of mothers and ‘refusing to be mothers’. According to Patricia Hill Collins:

In postmodern times, motherhood, as an institution, is divided into two groups; first where it is seen as dismantling the power of a female and secondly, where we perceive motherhood as an institution which is completing the existence of a woman. The tenet has been challenged by White women themselves, wherein they believe that compulsory motherhood should be abolished and it can be enjoyed by women only by choosing not to be mothers. This third view stands between the above two dichotomies where mothers can be real mothers only when they are not just mothers. (43)

The analysis of a black woman or woman of colour as mother becomes difficult within the above mentioned three themes. The roles and duties of a mother in nuclear family are confined within a specific household and defined sphere and are narrowed to her tasks of rearing children. But it becomes difficult for black mothers because they lack a proper family structure.

The lack of economic resources and meaningful identity in a white society further increases their difficulties in meeting certain expectations. Secondly, their cannot be any discipline about role segregation, since black women and men share economic and social responsibilities equally without any prevalent family structure within these African-American communities. Thirdly, we cannot locate good mothers who perceive motherhood and economic dependency on men to be the judgmental criteria for good women. (Collins, 43-4)
Deborah Grey White argues forcibly that in slave communities, women “are the focus of familial relationships” (31) and the most important center of this ‘matrifocality’⁴ is “the bond of mother-child relationships”(32). It does not mean that sufferings of slave men were less. But, it clearly manifests the idea that slave mother was the pivot of relations and to submit her to their own demands, slave masters used her children as means to subjugate their mothers. The bond between man and woman was weak due to the legal demolition of family structure. Black men could not resist white men’s tyranny and lacked the required power to stand up for and support their women. This proves that appropriate answers to such weak man-woman bond lie in the weak stature of black man.

Whipping children was another very common practice of physical harassment. Mothers were always fearful that their children could be sold at an auction after being snatched from their breast. The separation of a mother from her child became a matter of constant fear for slave mothers. They were left bereaved, before they could count their children’s teeth. Slave mothers were forcibly put as labours in plantation fields for the whole day just after few days of giving birth to their child. They could not even breast-feed their child for the essential time. This kind of inhuman treatment further worsened their experiences of motherhood. This was a common brutal practice to snatch tender babes from the arms of mourning mother, widespread enough to feature in the Declaration of The Anti-Slavery Convention of 1833⁵.

For Toni Morrison, motherhood is a source of power because she sees the role of a mother in traditional African view according to which, an African woman proclaims herself as an individual who is entrusted with the sacred duty to take care of her children. She terms this heritage as her “ancient properties”⁶ - the traditional black values- what she calls the ‘funk’⁷, which dominants her concept and theory to define motherhood. According to Patricia Hill Collins:

Black women also typifies the role of “community other mothers” who take care of “biologically unrelated children’. This kind of social responsibility empowers these Black women as “social activists”. Motherhood invokes the symbol of power when slave mother takes the position of blood mother, other mother or community mother. Thus, the contribution of Black mothers in
African – American community was not only limited to their role of biological mothers, but also to their social contribution made as ‘community mothers”. These community other mothers work on behalf of Black community; in the words of the nineteenth century Black feminists, “to uplift the race. (51)

Morrison’s fictions also uncover the trauma suffered by a black female child due to the lack of motherly love, abandonment in early childhood, sufferings of their own mother and by the involvement of surrogate mothers who are also marginalized and can only look after and care for dejected children. The novels majorly focus upon the mother- daughter bonds which are either maintained or fail and collapse with their delicate balance that exists on the marginal level. The novels which are chosen here for study examine the mothering process and seek to explore reasons behind all unconventional depictions of a mother. The writer has crafted each novel in such a manner so as to unveil dilemmas of black women in their maternal roles. The unforgivable decisions taken by slave mothers sometimes forge the reader to delve into minds of black mothers to perceive the dark and traumatic truths of their life. The feeling of insecurity coupled with unresolvable complexities and risks in their children’s life make their responsibilities more evident, as they counter a series of hurdles in the path of smooth mothering.

As a black feminist writer, Morrison writes for those women of her community who try to preserve their cultural heritage and folkloric traditions. Carolyn Denard explains:

Among black women, who have historically suffered oppression because of both race and gender, there is usually a concern for both these issues. They abhor both sexist and racist oppression. But because of their minority ethnic status, which keeps their allegiance to their ancestral group foremost, most shun an advocacy of the kind of political, existential feminism embraced by many women of the majority culture. For black women their concern with feminism is usually more group centered than self-centered, more cultural than political. As a result, they tend to be concerned more with the female cultural values of their own ethnic group rather than of women in general. They advocate ethnic cultural feminism. (171-2)
African-American mothers are also defined as ‘Black matriarch’. The term presents a different image, distinct from this term that is developed by white women, which itself proves that they can be defined only in a negative image as ignorant mothers, emasculating wives and promiscuous women. Their powers and control over their family structure and children reduce within the socio-political and cultural realms. The acceptance of the myth of ‘matriarchal fallacy’ forces them to adopt such disguised power that adversely affects their and their daughter’s personality.

The cult of literature during nineteenth and twentieth century expounds the power of black mothers in homes and communities in times when the idea of black patriarchy is upheld by Black Rights movement. Thus, it becomes a process which marginalizes black women. Andrea O’Reilly draws our attention to the truth:

In African American culture motherhood is the pinnacle of womanhood. The emphasis on motherhood over wifedom and Black woman’s role as economic power means that the wife role...(as defined by white America’s domesticity) is less operative in the African American community.(10)

Stories about the lives of black women have been chronicled both inside and outside the realm of black literature. According to Trudier Harris:

They were towers of strength in taking care of their families . . . And they formed the pillars that supported the Black churches that in turn demanded a tremendous strength from them . . . Black women were the spiritual as well as the physical healers, putting hearth, home and family back together after the tragedy of lynching, nursing daughters brutalized by rape, soothing children who were attacked when they tried to integrate Southern schools. Black women provided the bandages for the wounds, the solace for the stricken. We have applauded this strength—and certainly not without justification. (109)

A major scholastic study has been done on the socio-cultural, political and economic restraints that construct the defined spatial boundaries for black mother. This study has further changed to a debate over the issue that black matriarchal theory is erroneous and destroys the social construct which is framed and propagated by white social systems. There has also been uproar against the matriarchal theory after
the 1965 Patrick Moynihan report—“The Negro Family: The Case for National Action”. The report truly upholds the challenges which are faced by blacks in their effort to acquire a steady position on socio-economic levels. Patricia Hill Collins has covered the same idea in the best possible manner in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Politics of Empowering*. She writes:

The Black matriarchy thesis argued that African-American women who failed to fulfil their traditional womanly duties at home contributed to social problems in Black evil society. Spending too much time away from home, these working mothers ostensibly could not supervise their children and thus were a major contributing factor to their children’s failure at school. A very aggressive unfeminine woman, Black matriarchs allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands. These men, understandably either deserted their partners or refused to marry the mother of their children. (83)

Moynihan’s humiliating report has neglected the roles and constrains of black mother and also ignores the tough realities of black women’s lives. It also ignored the fact that social ills constitute an important factor for the economic failure of black men and principally cast black women as the main reason behind the impotence of black men and their failed parenting. “This report presents matriarchal tendencies innate in black women and validates racist notions of racial biological distinctions” (Collins,77). Moynihan’s report also images black mother as static and stereotype. The titling of black women as a ‘matriarch’ is symbolically another viewpoint put forward by the white social structure, which accepts the flawed concepts of black femininity constructed by the racist society.

Scholars like bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Shirley A. Hill have seriously and determinedly opposed the above mentioned categorization of African-American women as given by Moynihan. They also support their concept with logical and reasonable arguments because such hostile descriptions ascribe particular stereotyped negative images to these women. The standards describing and defining the life patterns and roles of black mother are formulated by white society. As perhaps the most disadvantage group simultaneously facing sexism and racism, black women lack adequate economic security, significant political influence and an absolute control of their bodies due to the dependence of reproductive choice, in case
of unwanted pregnancies, on financial ability (hooks 72-4). Patricia Hill Collins also debates in *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective On Families and Relationships* that

> While a sense of power, creativity and authority may be engendered by the biological processes of bearing and breast feeding children, the social role of mothering is demanded by gender inequality and the general devaluation of women and unpaid labour. (131)

If we designate a black woman as ‘matriarch’, it seems to be a cruel misnomer because there is no such concept that gives rights to a mother to exercise her decisive powers. It disregards the trauma which is suffered by a black woman after her separation from her children in the economic interests of white slave holders. Though she does not play her role as a matriarch, her role towards her community and people cannot be denied. Her indispensible attempts for the survival and unity of her society cannot be overlooked. Her deeds have always been commendable in her vicinity. If we take into account the harsh situations of her existence, it is proved that she has to accomplish the task of inculcating strong resistance practices to raise black consciousness in her people. A great deal of writing falls under the canon of this literature, carved by black male authors, but not much has been said about the contribution of black women in these undertakings.

Historically speaking, black woman was very much written by patriarchal forces. Along with the labour on plantation fields, sexuality and motherhood were two other terrains in which she was prone to domination. Her children were considered an added source of income to renew the slave system. Slavery, as Elizabeth Fox- Genovese has noted, shaped the experiences of all women in South, affecting the domestic and child bearing roles of both black and white women. Geovenese asserts that despite the “shared experiences of life in rural households under the domination of men”(38), black and white women were “deeply divided”(43) by race and class. What bought them together was the diversity of their relations to their master- cum- owner.

Bell hooks notes in her book what Cheryl Gikes also observes about black women that, they emerged from slavery and were enshrined in the consciousness of
White America as “Mammy” and the ‘bad black woman’ (79). Each dominating group is responsible for the creation of several correlated and socio-culturally fashioned pictures of black women in their subordination. These controlling images covered various social relations that affected black women. The traditional values which were appropriated to the cult of true womanhood – purity, piety, chastity, domesticity, submissiveness- were titled only to white women, and as a result, black women were accorded an entirely opposing set of images.

The first controlling image applied to black women is of a ‘mammy’, a faithful and sincere domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women’s long-standing restriction to domestic service, the image of ‘mammy’ represents the yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior (hooks, 80). She loves, cares and nurtures ‘white children’ and their family and represents those relationships that are considered ideal for a black female’s relationship with the elite white male power structure. By knowing her status and place as an obedient servant, even after wielding considerable authority in ‘white family”, she accepts her subordination.

This controlling ideology of presenting black woman as “contented mammy” has been strongly criticized by many black women intellectuals. It is also important to mention that literary critic Trudier Harris’s (1982) volume From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature also investigates the major dissimilarities in the portrayal of African women by others in fictional writings.

The image of ‘mammy’ is constructed to control black women’s behaviour. It also gives birth to their second controlling image- ‘matriarch’. While ‘mammy’ typifies black mother in white homes, ‘matriarch’ symbolizes the presence of mother in black homes. If ‘mammy’ is an ideal picture of ‘good mother”⁹, ‘matriarch’ paints the picture of bad mother who oversees all conventional and cultural boundaries to be adhered by women to make them socially and culturally recognizable individuals. But the image of ‘matriarch’ also contributes to an erasure of self-confidence and resilient powers of black women. In essence, black women who are labeled as mammies for their submissiveness and loving nature are stigmatized as defiant
women in their matriarchal image as women who can step out to assert their authority as mothers.

The next image of ‘welfare mother’ becomes vital to the economic and political groups that work with an aim to regulate black women’s fertility. This function is fulfilled by labeling them unnecessary and dangerous. A close observation reveals that certain traits and features are similar to the images of ‘mammy’ and ‘matriarch’. She is tagged as “bad mother” like a ‘matriarch’, but unlike her, she is not too aggressive. Due to the absence of matriarch, her children suffer from lack of social education and in this case, the availability of welfare mother with her negatively attributed traits raises more problems for her children. She is portrayed as content, sitting around and collecting welfare, shunning work and passing her bad values to her offspring (hooks, 87), and exemplifies a failed mammy.

The final controlling image- ‘Jezebel’, whore or “hoochie”- is also central in the nexus of images that control the portrayal of black womanhood. Trudier Harris notes that “efforts to control black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of black women’s oppression” (14). Historically, words like “jezebels” and contemporary “hoochies” represent a divergent image of black women’s sexuality. The image of jezebel originated under slavery when black women were portrayed as, to use Jewelle Gomez’s words, ‘sexually aggressive wet nurses’ (Clarke,99). Jezebel’s function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women by providing a rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men, as it is typically reported by Black slave women (Davis, 5).

A serious study of the above mentioned images of black women prove that they are pictured as per the definitions that are given by the white males of a higher class, while defining them as sexual and fertile women. Analyses of all the three images reveal that they share common representation as mothers. But what is it that generates a sense of distinctiveness to black mothers? What makes the mother-child relationship, especially mother-daughter relationships different? To find answers to the listed questions, we need to loosen the complex threads of the lives of many such females to study several themes which are diverse and different, yet integrated with one another like these women who are also related to each other in the bond of
mother-child relationships. These relationships are formed by the commonality of existing Blackness in a White world.

Black mothers share a special relationship with their daughter which is strengthened by the common history that they share. Regardless of her response– even if silent– every African-American mother has wondered, in the words of Margaret Burrough’s poem: “What shall I tell my children who are Black”? (Cole, xiii) Even today, black mothers and daughters share the same racial memory, including African men, women and children who are torn from their land and transported like objects of production to lands of greed owned by ruling white population. Mothers and daughters are different in uncountable ways, explaining those various forms of the portrayal of mother-daughter relationships. It depicts countless moments of joy and pain of times when they they spend together in their blackness and womanliness. These females can be competitors or conspirators, friends or foes, in love with or hate each other or, can despise or devise for each other, create or destroy, strengthen or weaken and even kill or protect each other.

To understand and resolve these complex and diverse relationships, one must disentangle the interwoven, yet inextricable themes of racial and sexual oppression. When mother-daughter relationship is compared with any other relationship, it gains a strong position because we discover that it has received less attention as compared to mother-son relation. There is no satisfactory explanation to this difference. The most important reasons can be traced in the patriarchal structure and the operating gender discrimination. In other words, relationships between black mothers and daughters are deeply influenced by subtleties as well as brutalities of sexism in their imagined communities.

White feminist scholars such as Nancy Chodorow, Andrienne Rich and Carol Giligan also share the same view that institution of motherhood is an extended mode of subjugation by male-dominated society. But black feminist scholars have reversed these concepts and emphasized upon the theory that for black women, motherhood is a site of empowerment where the prime responsibility lies in raising their children. This ideology primarily originates from the slave era and its succeeding times of injustice. Critics and scholars like Sara Ruddick and Andrea O’
Reilley have suggested that raising children is considered the first and foremost task of African-American mothers. Though these critics and scholars have talked and discussed in detail about tasks and theories of white and black motherhood, no one elucidates upon the effects of the practice of child preservation upon African-American or white motherhood.

Stephanie Demetrakopolous, Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek, to name a few, are major critics and scholars of Morrison’s novels who have enriched black critical studies with their enlightening theories and discourses on black motherhood. According to Patricia Hill Collins, it is critical for African-American mothers to challenge the damaging notions of black womankind. Collins also comments on the negative conceptions of black womanhood which have been constructed during the era of slavery. She writes:

From the mammies, jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever present welfare mothers of contemporary pop culture, the nexus of negative stereotypical images applied to African American women has been fundamental to Black women’s oppression. (67-72)

These negative constructions become imperative to be restructured and are recognized to oppose subversive valuations. Collins also observes that “Black women’s ability to forge these individual, unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival” (26).

The liberation that black women find in self-defining themselves from what Morrison terms, “the ancient properties” and “the funk”, which are ‘traditional concepts of womanhood’ and “traditional black values” respectively not only empowers themselves and their ancestors, but also their children. (O’Reilley, 20)

Black mothers were not confined only to their domestic sphere. The socio-cultural and economic conditions pushed them outside the four walls of their household to procure minimum sustainable resources for their family and children. In this scenario, it became difficult and almost impossible for these mothers to enjoy
luxuries of motherhood as experienced by the mothers of white middle-class. These additional responsibilities were an auxiliary to their common sufferings as women but on the other hand, they also empowered them as mothers to preserve their children’s lives, central primarily to black ethos. According to O’ Reilley, a black woman’s role as a mother is very significant in terms of her contributions towards the welfare and strength of her society. The heart of black motherhood, ‘in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete” (O’ Reilley,4).

In many histories, black mothering has been mythologized and black mothers have been assigned stereotypical roles. Parvin Ghasemi and Rasool Hajizadeh, the two scholars on Morrison, write about her portrayal of black mothers in their article titled “Demystifying the Myth of Motherhood: Toni Morrison’s Revision of African-American Stereotypes”. They note:

Her revision of the concept of the black motherhood is a major step toward correcting the historical records concerning Black maternity which is just another form of victimization of the black woman and society’s exploitation of the mother-child bond. (477)

Though Morrison has depicted the black woman as a significant individual in her maternal role, she does not limit her role as a mother and delimits it by stretching it to define her individuality. Indeed, mothers are raised to the pedestal of individuals with distinct identities who are embracing motherhood and womanhood as independent but mutually non-exclusive constructs.

Toni Morrison has proved herself as a part of the long history of American literary tradition that finds its full and complicated bloom in her art. Firmly rooted in history and mythology, her work resonates with pleasure and pain and wonder and horror. As a revisionist, Morrison has challenged the validity of historical documentation of black culture, and especially the significance of women in defining and preserving this culture. As a realist, the strength of Morrison’s craft of fiction and more dominantly, the picture of black mother is another step towards liberating black woman from her stereotyped negative image, which is another face of her social
victimization. Her mothers are complex and diverse individuals who attest and confirm to the unique identity of black mother. Black mothers have proved by their infallible attempts that they can nurture, protect and raise their children and can cross any and every boundary to defend their children from horrors of slavery. They empower themselves to decide for their children’s destiny either by committing infanticide or self-mutilation. Motherhood is an integral state of a woman’s being in Morrison’s novels. Robert Staples also agrees that in an African-American community, “motherhood represents maturity and the fulfilment of one’s function as a woman” (153).

Morrison’s fictions resonate with an evolving pattern of themes on motherhood and survival of mothers. Her female characters are round characters whose transformations from stereotypes to self-proclaimed individuals justify their non-adherence to the old ideology of black matriarchy and maternity. These characters assume a self-constructed identity by defying all socially defined roles and definitions of mothering. The women characters also challenge the existing system and set a strong example by identifying and defining new standards of women’s identity that is distinct and unique from what has previously been defined by the deep-rooted patterns of social edifice.

Black writers depict mothering as a process which regulates socio-psychological process that is derived from the interpretations of race and gender. Patricia Hill Collins in “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships” details about relationship shared between mother and daughter by exploring three questions:

First, how have competing perspective about motherhood intersected to produce a distinctly Afrocentric ideology? Second, what are the enduring themes that characterize this Afrocentric ideology of motherhood? Third, what effect might this Afrocentric ideology of motherhood have on black mother-daughter relationships? (42)

Black women gain special status in their maternal role when they fulfil their responsibilities in their role as transmitter of culture, and are responsible for the
mature parenting of next generations. To answer these three questions, we should overview the three themes implicit in white perspectives on motherhood:

First assumption that mothering occurs only in confined domestic sphere applies only to white mother, because racial oppression denies sufficient resources to black mothers. Secondly, black society does not confer separate sex roles to its members on the basis of gender differences. Finally, the notion that economic dependence on men and motherhood are intertwined and interdependent, and a “good mother” is one who stays at home and takes care of her children is not fully applicable to black families. (Collins, 44)

Barbara Christiana also draws our attention to the point that “There is no doubt that motherhood is for most African people symbolic of creativity and continuity” (214). The West-African sociologist Christine Oppong suggests that the western idea of equating household with family should be abandoned because in African cultures, it obscures a woman’s role in a family. In West-African traditions, due to a woman’s active role in economic sphere, the act of mothering creates great influences on a woman’s life. The image of mother becomes more valuable when it is measured across cultures. Finally, “while the biological mother-child bond is valued, child care is a collective responsibility, a situation fostering cooperative, age-stratified, woman-centered “mothering” networks (Collins, 45).

Afrocentric views on motherhood should overview the above mentioned concerns to define and value the benefits and experiences of motherhood. In African-American communities, as Patricia Hill Collins suggests, “The boundaries distinguishing biological mothers of children from other women for children are often fluid and changing” (47). Though child-caring is considered an exclusive responsibility of biological mothers, in African-American communities it renders difficult or impossible situations to endow one woman with the entire responsibility of child-caring.

African-American women’s conditions during slavery forced them to toil physically, and it exercised a great impact on the maternal relationships of bloodmothers and ‘other mothers’ with black children. Mothers, whether they were ‘other mothers’, ‘community mothers’ or ‘blood mothers’, collectively framed
a strong mothering network wherein they contributed to the development of black community by laying grounds for community-based power structure where, as noted by the late nineteenth century Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins, these community mothers tried to “uplift the race”(102).

As a central theme in the novels of Toni Morrison, motherhood is often treated in an intricate manner, reflecting her deep thoughts on motherhood. Her description of mothers and definition of motherhood, as portrayed and presented against the backdrop of constructed diverse socio-cultural experiences of black women, is radically different from other contemporary feminist writers. To examine this distinct perspective of black women on motherhood, it is important to consider Patricia Hill Collins’ maternal theory. In Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, Patricia Hill Collins marks that “Every culture has a worldview that it uses to order and evaluate its own experiences” (10). She also discusses that

Black women fashioned an independent standpoint about the meaning of Black womanhood. These self-definitions enabled black women to use African derived conception of self and community to resist negative evaluation of Black womanhood advanced by dominant groups. In all, Black women’s grounding in traditional African-American culture fostered the development of a distinctive African American women’s culture. (11)

O’Reilley observes that black female standpoint, as also argued by Collins, grows from side to side interaction between the two treatises of awareness: “the commonplace taken for granted knowledge” and the “everyday ideas” of black women that are clarified and rearticulated by black women intellectuals or theorists to form a specialized black feminist thought (2). In response, Collins clarifies that “the consciousness of Black women may be transformed by [this] thought” (20). She further explains:

Through the process of rearticulation, Black women intellectuals offer African American women a different view of themselves and their world from the forwarded by the dominant group…By taking the core themes of black women’s standpoint and infusing them with new meaning, Black
women intellectuals can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes Black women’s everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge. Rather than raising consciousness, Black feminist thought affirms and rearticulates a consciousness that already exists. More, important this rearticulated consciousness empowers African American women and stimulates resistance. (31-2)

Critical and scholarly studies on black women have emphasized the idea that black women’s stance in her society is defined by her position and place at the edge of prevailing white patriarchal values. Collins writes: “An oppressed group’s experiences may put its members in a position to see things differently, but their lack of control over ideological apparatuses of society makes expressing a self-defined standpoint more difficult” (26). She phrases black female’s standpoint as, “an independent, viable, yet subjugated knowledge” (13).

“The centrality of women in African American extended families,” as Nina Jenkins concludes in “Black Women and the Meaning of Motherhood”, “is well known” (Abbe,206). Through the practice of ‘othermothering’, black women also contribute towards this purpose of extending communal network and helped in ensuring the survival of biologically unrelated children. Irrespective of the presence of a biological mother, these children were ensured physical and psychological well-being by those women of their community who were biologically unrelated, yet acted as their mothers in the absence of their biological mothers. This kind of mothering also ensured the empowerment of these children, along with fulfilling other basic needs.

The second thematic analysis comes under the theory of ‘Motherhood as a Social Activism and as a Site of Power’. To quote the most important critic Patricia Hill Collins:

Black woman’s experiences as other mothers have provided a foundation for Black women’s social activism. Black women’s feelings of responsibility for nurturing the children in their extended family networks have stimulated a more generalized ethic of care where Black women feel accountable to all the Black community’s children. (49)
It has been strongly argued by Collins that mothering strengthens the position of black women when they fulfil the duties of social work. To explain in her words, motherhood is “a symbol of power” (49). The custom of “community mothering” in African community broadened the sphere and networking of a mother’s role. These women contributed towards the development of their community by rendering their support in mothering. “More than a personal act,” writes Thomas Wanda Bernard and Candace Bernard:

Black motherhood is very political. Black mothers and grandmothers are considered ‘guardians of generations’. Black mothers have historically been charged with the responsibility of providing education, social and political awareness, in addition to unconditional love, nurturance, socialization, and values to their children, and the children in their communities. (47)

It has already been discussed that mothering in African-American community differs from mothering according to Eurocentric ideology in three ways. Miriam Johnson in Strong Mothers, Weak Wives argues that in a male-governed society, a woman is given a secondary status in her role of a wife, not as a mother. In contrast to this, in matrilineal societies, Johnson writes, “women play roles of cultural and social significance defining themselves less as wives than as mothers” (226). Greater gender equality and active support of black women in economic sphere and community-mothering enhances their role more as mothers as compared to their role as wives. Their economic activities are also integrated with their maternal roles. When it is compared and contrasted to the white cult of motherhood, it proves that it does not confer luxuries of motherhood to black women. Whether they enjoyed it or not, black women had to move out of their domestic boundaries to sustain their family and children. The matrilineal structure of black society and the added responsibilities of women as breadwinner in their household formulated the supremacy of motherhood over wifehood.

Next to ‘matrifocality’, black mothers lived with the aim to provide nurturance, in a hope that it shall inculcate values of resistance in their people by providing a ‘homeplace’\textsuperscript{14}. It is the fourth dominant ideology in which African-American mothering differs from the dominant model of motherhood where
nurturance of family is defined and experienced as resistance (O’ Reilley, 10). Black feminist writer bell hooks has observed that in African- American culture, home operates as a site of resistance. She emphasizes that for her, it is not merely a place to live in, but a safe place where, according to her, “black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal the wounds inflicted by racist domination...[a place where] [they] had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture [their] spirits” (42).

The importance of ‘home place’ could be critically examined and evaluated by the values of self- love and self- worth which were instilled by mothers in their children. The racist ideology which governed the black society also filled slave children with self- loath and self- hatred. Amidst such environment and socio-cultural conditions, mother’s love and her high sense of self-esteem inculcated those powers in them that were needed to defy and combat the dominant racist ideologies. hooks emphasizes that “African- Americans have long recognized the subversive value of ‘home place’ and ‘home place’ has been always been central to the liberation struggle” (hooks, 42). Like hooks, Collins also shares the same idea that the first teaching to resist the racial society is provided at home. They also learn to value their tradition and culture among their folks and family members. It is their home where they feel internalized and empowered to adopt the resilient practices against the tyrannic white society.

The last and final theme is ‘motherline’, which is considered another significant function of mothers in their role as cultural bearers and preservers of tradition. Hope Edleman elaborates and emphasizes on the concept of Naomi Lowinsky’s ‘motherline’ in her book Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss and writes that “Motherline stories ground a daughter in a gender, a family, a feminist history. They transform the experiences of her female ancestors into maps to which she can refer to for warning or encouragement” (201). These tales of motherline unite mothers and daughters when they feel a bond of association by sharing a common history. Black mothers share their ancestral and historical memories by transmitting these values to their daughters through the function of cultural bearing. Through their cultural teachings, they empower their children and present a model of African-American values. When these children are disconnected from their ‘motherline’, they experience a loss of womanhood that results in a psychologically crippled state.
The above mentioned theories are put forward by Andrea O’ Reilley in *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*. They form an essential and integral part of African-American culture and also strengthen the position of mothers and their tasks of mothering.

My thesis is an attempt to study the topic of mother-daughter and mother-son relationships in the four major novels of Toni Morrison—*The Bluest Eye, Beloved, Sula* and *A Mercy*. The major part of this project is devoted to an evaluation of mother-daughter relationships. This topic has grasped the attention of many black scholars and critics who have contributed a critical analysis of mother-daughter relationships. What makes it more interesting and complex is the fact that a common history of exploitation is shared by these females, and it equalizes their burdens and atrocities, inflicted by the racist and sexist society. It is a major factor behind generating the interest and concern of many black feminist critics. This thesis is an endeavour to throw some light on the changes incurred on the major characters in the select works of Toni Morrison due to their associations and disassociations from their ‘motherline’.

Very little concern has been paid to mother-son relationship in black studies. The only noteworthy AND exclusive works are by Joyce Elaine King and Carolyn Ann Mitchell’s *Black Mothers to Sons: Juxtaposing African American Literature with Social Practice* (1995) and *Saving our Sons: Raising Black Children in a Turbulent World* by the fiction writer Marita Golden. In a racist society, where black males are vulnerable, roles of black mother becomes significantly notable as it is the prime responsibility of black mothers to instill self-love in their sons also. When King and Mitchell wrote about mother-son relationship, they observed that “Considering the black vulnerability of black males in the society and the roles that black mothers typically play as primary nurtures, this focus on black mother to son is overdue” (2).

The initial research on an analysis of black mothers and sons posits many obvious questions such as- what are the efforts of mothers to protect their children in a racist society, to what extent they should shower protective love so that they do not harm or neglect their children or, how should they sustain the formation of families to nurture those relations that can teach them valuable relationships in a society which debars its slaves to sustain any relationships.
Andrea O’Reilley has done a major study contributing towards black mothering. She notes that “The aim of black mothering is thus to nurture and sustain the “soul”, “voice within”, and the ‘interior thing’ of black sons so that they are able to transcend the maiming of racism and grow into manhood whole and complete” (18). As mothers of black sons, it is important for them to root them in the soil of rich heritage of their African culture and tradition. The need for physical and psychological survival of black sons necessitates and enhances the presence and preservation of black mothers for their sons in a white hegemonic society. Such emphasis upon maternal involvement with sons as well as daughters underlines the prominence of mothers and motherline in black community.

O’Reilley devotes an entire chapter in her book *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: The Politics of Heart*, to define the four interrelated tasks of mothering; namely preservation, nurturance, healing and cultural bearing, enabling the mothers to- (1) protect their children physically and psychologically, (2) teach their children how to protect themselves, and (3) heal those adults who were unprotected as children. For a better understanding of Morrison’s theory of motherwork, it is necessary to introduce Sara Ruddick’s model of maternal practice. Ruddick argues that motherwork is characterized by three major demands- preservation, growth and social acceptance. “To be a mother”, continues Ruddick, “is to be committed to meeting those demands by work of preservative love, nurturance and training” (17). The first duty of mothers is to protect and preserve their children: “to keep safe whatever is vulnerable and vulnerable in a child” (80). “Preserving the lives of children”, she writes is “the central constitutive, invariant aim of maternal practice: the commitment to achieving that aim is the constitutive maternal act” (19). She further explains:

To foster growth…is to sponsor or nurture a child’s unfolding, expanding material spirit. Children demand this nurturance because their development is complex, gradual, and subject to distinctive kinds of distortion or inhibition…Children’s emotional, cognitive, sexual, and social development is sufficiently complex to demand nurturance; this demand is an aspect of maternal work…and it structures maternal thinking. (83)
The third demand, according to Ruddick:

is made not by children’s needs by the social groups of which a mother is a member. Social groups require that mother shape their children’s growth in “acceptable” ways. What counts as acceptable varies enormously within and among groups and cultures. (21)

There are various needs of children that make each demand of motherwork important and purposeful. Thus, such varied and diverse responses of mothers finally coalesce to form the discipline of maternal thought. “In a world beyond one’s control, to be humble is to have a profound sense of the limits of one’s actions and of the unpredictability of the consequences of one’s work”(Ruddick,72). It is motherwork which gives rise to what she calls “cheerfulness”15. By following and fulfilling the above mentioned demands of motherwork, mothers are involved in a set of beliefs by following a certain set of ideas, which is called ‘maternal thinking’16.

Morrison positions the theory of motherwork in the same way as it is adopted by Sara Ruddick. Morrison also strongly supports the view that ‘preservation’ and ‘nurturance’ have been the prime objectives of mothers. Focusing upon previously introduced discourse on motherhood, I will elaborate upon Morrison’s task of locating motherwork through a brief definition of the four tasks of motherwork, as propounded by Andrea O’ Reilley in her most critical work- Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Polotics of the Heart.

Morrison emphasizes that empowerment is one of the major task of mothers. But, she also lists preservation on the top of her roles of a mother. “Preserving the lives of children’, Ruddick writes, “is the central constitutive, invariant aim of maternal practice” (19). In a world with its racial and ethnic practices, black children are regarded in low self-esteem and regard. It is necessary to preserve self- respect and teach them self- love to develop a sense of self- worth in their children. It becomes the responsibility of mothers to build a safe and secure neighborhood to sustain and procure all possible and available means of living. Along with providing psychological and emotional well-being to the children of colour, Collins writes:
Physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle class. The choice to thus examine their psychic and emotional well-being…appears rational. The children of women of color, many of whom are ‘physically starving have no such choices however’ (Forcey 1987: 49).

Consequently, this preservative love is sometimes portrayed with negative consequences, as finely instanced in novels like *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*.

Once the task of ‘preservation’ is fulfilled, providing ‘nurturance’ becomes the next major aim of mothering. Its purpose is to ensure that children are raised in such a manner that they can learn to resist the racist and sexist practices especially with the daughters. It is this immunization process that nurtures black children with defensive practices so that they can fight against the racist ideologies in a culture which labels them as individuals who are contemptible of affection.

With passing time, it becomes an important duty of parents to nurture self-love within themselves so that they may instill the same in their children also. This depends upon the amount of self-love which is fostered in their children. Before children can love themselves, they should experience that they are loved by their social environment. Morrison’s writing resonates with her belief that mothering is essential for an emotional well-being of children because it is the mother who first loves the child and gives that child a loved sense of self (Reilley,33). Andrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born*: “The nurturance of daughters in a patriarchy calls for sense of self- nurture in the mother” (247). She continues saying that “[what] women [need] growing into a world so hostile to us…[is] a very profound kind of loving in order to love ourselves” (Rich,246).

In Morrison’s fictions, it is frequently another woman other than the biological mother who nurtures her community’s neglected and unmothered children. Morrison defines mothering by supporting her views on ‘othermothers’ and community centered mothering networks through different characters, situations and varied relationships in which they are involved. Patricia Hill Collins has also observed that it is a “generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability to all Black community’s children” (1991: 129).
The third aim of cultural bearing is the most challenging task for mothers in African-American tradition. It is a reforming task that needs to be fulfilled significantly because it checks and ensures the growth of children who are rooted in their ancestral beliefs and traditions. Through the task of cultural bearing, mothers teach their children to defy the ideals of ruling society by passing their cultural knowledge to successive generations. In this task:

mothering confers some affirming images of black people and their history, which, in turn, impedes an internalization of the controlling images of blackness which are put forward by the dominant culture and allows the child to develop a strong and authentic selfhood as a black person. (O’Reilley, 35).

In the act of meeting these three demands, mothers prove themselves as preventive or pro-active in protecting their children from the racist and sexist culture, by enabling their children to love themselves for their blackness. Such acts of preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing, in combination, remain alive in these black children who are physically and psychologically prepared to keep hold of their selfhood to hold it intact and upright. Morrison’s final task of ‘healing’ becomes a final act to restore, redeem and repair the self of black people, especially women who are psychologically and emotionally damaged. Thus, the novelist’s emphasis on the need to love oneself informs and runs through all her writings as one of the major themes.

Despite all existing disparities and divergence in theory and writings, Morrison strongly affirms the importance of mothers and their mothering by detailing and often excruciating the specifics of cultural and personal loss which is inflicted upon, and is borne by the women of colour for whom mothering becomes a challenging role when they have to perform it within all the defined dimensions which work under the parameters of attaining motherhood in a racist society, along with preserving its ancestral properties. In Morrison’s fictions, characters do not set any standards for mothering, rather they are characters who are struggling to mother, yet yearning to be mothered. They are mothers who are distressed at their failures that they experience while accomplishing the desired roles of a mother. These
fictional works are loaded with portrayals of children, mothers and community, suffering in the absence of maternal acts of preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing.

This thesis is a detailed examination of the four novels of Toni Morrison- *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *Sula* and *A Mercy*—under the critical lens of the above mentioned theories of mothering. The following chapters are an attempt to decipher the varied modes and models of mothering in these fictional works. There are characters like Pauline and Hannah Peace who exemplify the disruptions and disassociations from motherline, and there are also characters like Baby Suggs, Eva Peace, Sethe, Sorrow and Mrs. MacTeer whose preservative love proves harmful, and who attempt to build a strong role model for the concept of community-mothering while possessing the capability to delimit themselves from the restricted social domains to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of their children.
End Notes:

1. The Emancipation Proclamation was declared by President Abraham Lincoln on 1 Jan. 1863. It declared that slaves in all confederate states than at war with the Union will be “forever free” and will be eligible for paid militant service in the Union Army.

2. Jacques Lancel’s concept of ‘Real’ refers to material beings as per the definition mentioned in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The ‘Real’ is whatever is beyond, behind or beneath phenomenal appearances that are accessible to the direct experiences of the first-person.

3. Julia Kristeva explains that “maternal fatigue” occurs because of bisexuality that has not been cured. Unable to choose between father and mother, the girl child is exhausted in taking sides and tries to please her father in order to defend her mother. This leads to an unexhausted desire to love and be loved to fulfill every desire.

4. According to Miriam Johnson, matrifocality however does not refer to maternal dominance so much so as it does to the relative cultural prestige of the mother, a role that is culturally elaborated and valued. It is not the absence of males (males may not be quite present) but the centrality of women as mothers and sisters that makes a society atrifocal, and this matrifocal emphasis is accompanied by a minimum of differentiation between women and men. (226)

5. Anti-Slavery Convention of 1833 assembled in the city of Philadelphia to organize a National Anti-Slavery Society and promptly to seize the opportunity to promulgate the Declaration of Sentiments, as cherished by the slaves in relation to the enslavement of one-sixth portion of the American people.

6. According to O’Reilley, Morrison has used the term ‘ancient properties’ to represent that quality of black women through which they perform the task of culture bearing and recognize themselves in association to their tradition and history.
7. For Morrison, if ‘ancient properties’ implies black women who respect their culture and tradition, then ‘funk’ symbolizes the cultural black values preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations.

8. Patricia Hill Collins throws more light on the truth of the myth of the concept of matriarchy in relation to the position of black families during slavery. In *Black Feminist Thought*, she elucidates more on the idea and writes:

   Black women’s centrality in Black family networks should not be confused with matriarchal or family dominated units. Matriarchy theses assume that someone must “rule” in order for households to function effectively. African-American men’s and women’s position made it unlikely that either patriarchy or matriarchal domination could take root. (132)

9. O’Reilley describes ‘good mother’ as one who is chaste, moral, passive, obedient, respectable, controlled, altruistic, selfless and domestic.

10. ‘Blood mothers’ is a term used by black feminist critics like Andrea O’Reilley to refer to a child’s biological mother.

11. ‘Othermothers’, as described by Stanlie James, are women who are past their child-bearing age and take care of the children of their community.

12. In contrast to the role of “othermothers”, community mothers, “take care of the community” (Wane, 112).

13. Stanlie James defines ‘othermothering’ “as acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (45).

14. According to the black feminist theorist bell hooks, the black family or what she names as ‘homeplace’ functions as a site of resistance.

   Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenious (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, one’s homeplace was one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by
making home where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where one could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world. (42)

For hooks, homeplace is not only about black women providing space to their families, but it means the creation of a safe place where “black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination… [a place where] [they] had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture [their] spirits” (42).

15. According to Sara Ruddick, “to be cheerful means to respect chance, limit and imperfection and still act as if it is possible to keep children safe” (74).

16. O’Reilley observes that according to Toni Morrison, there are four different, yet correlated responsibilities:

   preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing and healing. When taken together, these enable the mothers to (a) protect their children physically and psychologically, (2) teach children how to protect themselves, (3) heal children who were unprotected children and hence harmed. This set of ideas formulates Sara Ruddick’s maternal thinking. (26)

17. O’Reilley theorizes that ‘healing’ as the final task of motherwork can be studied as a reactive or curative practice through which those people can be comforted, in particular women, whose self has been displaced and wounded under the pressures of a racist and patriarchal society.
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