Feminist consciousness is an awareness that the individual woman is part of a larger social group and that her personal problems, as a woman, are problems that affect all women and hence, are political problems – that the personal is political.

— Women's Studies Encyclopedia
CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The Black woman has emerged out of a history of oppression. The existence of this woman of Blackness -- the daughter of Africa -- has been characterized by nearly four hundred years of struggle. The history of Black women began at a moment when the European men met the African women in the “heart of darkness - Mother Africa” (Omalade 3). The confrontation between the conquerors and the conquered had its beginning in Mother Africa.

In the year 1619 twenty Africans, three of them women, were put ashore off a Dutch frigate at Jamestown, Virginia. From this event in the history of the United States till the present, these African- Americans continue to be oppressed and exploited. Barbara Omolade affirms the black woman to be a fragmented commodity. She further adds:

Her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands ....
Her back and muscle were pressed into field labor where she was forced to work with men and work like men. Her heads were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family as domestic servant whether she was technically enslaved or legally free....capital investment being the sex act and the resulting child the accumulated surplus worth money on the slave market. (7)
The American sexual history exhibits a development of patriarchal control ruled by the European men operating in a racial caste system where the white male was the only definition of a human being. This American patriarchy pushed the Black women outside the coverage of protection. The racial patriarchy of the white man politically overpowered all women. The white man claimed his sexual freedom and was irresponsible for the consequences of his sexual behaviour. He violently tried to eliminate his competition with black men for black or white women.

In the American society, from the beginning to the later colonial period, the whites ensured the race categorized as black to live in perpetual slavery. Laws were passed and practices instituted to regulate the sexual and social behaviour of black and white servants and slaves. As a result, the indentured servants who were designated as slaves became black. The 1662 Virginia statute stipulated “all offspring follow the condition of the mother in the event of a white man getting a Negro with child” (6). The first English slave code in New York in 1665 provided slavery for life. A slave looking back agrees that she had an aunt in Mississippi who birthed about twenty children by her master.

Slavery and womanhood remained interconnected even after the abolition of slavery. Being a black woman living with a black man could still be only slavery. She would not be separated from the colour. During the day, the black woman was a “wench, a negress, a sable Venus, a dusky Sal and Auntie” (17). At night the same white man would accuse her of raping herself.
These black women after years of oppression and brutal slavery learned to face the society. The black woman learned to use her dark experiences to create a light in future. She leant on Jesus for help and gathered around her children to make the world livable. The ruling elite men, who framed their own codes of sexual behaviour, often violated it, determined both the black and white family life. This elite group ignored the lamentations of the Black women and men even to have marriages and families of their own. This resulted in black single-motherhood. Even after emancipation it existed and resulted in second-class citizenship marginalized by racism, apartheid, pogrom and poverty. During the last thirty years of the desegregation era, people achieved citizenship and dismantled apartheid. New forms of racism characterized by economic injustice, contentious gender and class relationships began to prop up.

Patterson’s study of slavery defines a slave as “a socially dead person” (qtd. in Ranveer 12). The slave woman faced a kind of social death. She was denied marriage or any human right and invariably the female slave was a sexual vessel or a chattel.

Even when these Black single mothers were ignored and rejected, they considered themselves and their children to be their family. The Black mother protected and nurtured her children and fought against the patriarchy. She had to throng her life within the oppressive racial patriarchal system. When slavery came to an end legally, large numbers of newly freed people fought against the laws and economics of slavery and included themselves as citizens and people. By the mid-century racism, peonage and pogrom caused the Black people to move into urban areas giving rise to a Black cultural renaissance and Black Feminism.
Feminism originates from the perception that there is something wrong in the treatment of women in a society. It is a call to action and not just a system of beliefs. The term feminism, taken from the Latin Femina (woman), originally meant, “Having the qualities of females” (12). The first recorded use of the term “Feminism” in English was in 1894, according to the Oxford English Dictionary supplement published in 1933. In the nineteenth century it was referred to as a women’s movement, which aimed at advancing the position of women.

Teresa Billington Grieg asserts Feminism to be a movement and states:

The reorganization of the world upon a basics of sex-equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom. (qtd. in Feminist Dictionary, 158)

Though feminism is thought of as an entity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ideas and issues took a formal shape as an organized movement only with the Seneca Fall Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, signed at a village in New York, Seneca Falls, in the summer of 1848. It was a radical demand for suffrage. With the support of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a final resolution by Lucretia Mott urging men and women to work for equality, the feminist movement gained momentum.
Feminism was thought of as a movement of women and it rejected the idea of permitting men into it. The feminists both in America and in England had their targets of attack – the law, prohibition and social institution. Though these targets varied from country to country, feminists resisted the three factions: the kind of “misogynous attitude”, the glorification of the role – the wife and maternal role, and the third was the resistance to the scientific confrontation of a negative feminine stereotype.

There are several distinct ideologies within feminism. Alison M. Jaggar outlines four ideologies in the main: The Conservative view, Liberal Feminism, Classical Marxist Feminism, and Radical Feminism.

The Conservative view rationalizes the differences between women’s and men’s roles in two ways. One view considers the female role to be not inferior to that of the male. The other view asserts that women are better adapted than men to the traditional female sex role. Writers who have advanced their views range from Rousseau, Fichte and Sigmund Freud to Steven Goldberg.

Liberal feminism indicates a classical and traditional finding. This type of feminism finds its expression in John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869). These supporters emphasize a freedom to women to determine their social role. They desire to compete with men as equals. They enforce equality of opportunity. This feminism aims at the liberation of men too as it believes that men are also supporters of their families and the defense of the country.
Classical Marxist Feminism views historically the oppression of women. It equates the oppression to be the result of the phenomenon that women are a private property. The struggle can be ended only when this concept of private property gets abolished. Of the various reasons for Communism, Feminism is one. Though communists fight for the interests of the working class in general, Marxist Feminists’ fight is particularly focused on gender-based oppression of women. For them, though female oppression cannot be equated to the creation of capitalism, they believe that it intensifies the degradation of women. According to Fredrik Engels, “... within the family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat” (qtd. in Singh 29). Marxist Feminism considers women’s oppression as functional to the larger economic system.

Radical Feminism is a new conceptual model. It denies both the liberal claim and the Marxist belief. Instead they claim the roots of women’s oppression to be biological. Tigrace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone pioneered it. They conclude that women’s liberation can be achieved only through a biological revolution. They aim at artificial reproduction. Only by this advancement both the biological and economical bases can be removed. The radical feminists believe in the abolition of the role system. This conception is neo-Freudian. Firestone accepts the Freudian view that “the crucial problem of modern life is sexuality” (209). Firestone further explains, “... the heart of women’s oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles.”(18). She confirms that gender roles are psychologically formed. This psychological formation in women is related to Feminist Consciousness. When the position of women is altered within, a new concept arises both in the self and in the society.
Sandra Lee Bartky asserts, "Feminist Consciousness is the experience in specific contradictions. Feminist Consciousness can turn a fact into a contradiction. It is the "consciousness of victimization" (qtd. in Singh 29). The feminists apprehend that women are victims to an alien force and this hostile force is society or a system but for others it is men. The feminists believe that this 'Consciousness' would bring in a sense of solidarity with other victims. The feminists accept that the consciousness of being a victim determines her resistance, weariness and suspicion.

This Radical Feminism has given birth to a rising of the consciousness of an entire culture. Considering woman to be the "Other" as developed in Simon de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949), this new concept of radical feminism anticipates a just social order. Simon de Beauvoir confirms, "The situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (10).

Feminism has assumed different configurations pertaining to post-modernist approaches. It is seen as an agonizing struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. From Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft and from Simon de Beauvoir to the present day thinkers, a feminist theory seems to evolve. The new French feminist’s theories of difference have totally out rooted the concept of equality. The French post-modernists Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Gillis Deleuze and their theories have been used in the process of genesis, which the post-feminists have established.
Toril Moi has used the term Post-Feminism to cover the different trends of feminism and post-modernism. Toril Moi argues the term ‘Feminism’ to be in a defeatist position. She considers it to be a name to exercise power. Alice Jardine defines feminism as “a movement from the point of view of, by and for women” (qtd. in Singh15). The present feminist movement is a historically specific movement having its roots in Mary Wollstonecraft’s French Enlightenment thought and from John Stuart Mill’s British liberalism.

The bivalent argument of the difference, “difference makes” (Offen 139), constitutes the present feminist thought. The Psych et Po (Psychoanalyse et Politique) which developed as a post 1968 French movement has emphasized the biological differences between the sexes. These feminists challenge the culture of the women’s language.

Today feminism had developed as a critical ideology, and as a major system of ideas. Offen states, “... feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society” (qtd. in Singh 40). Today, the theorists prefer the term “transformational” to the term “revolutionary.” Robin Morgan defines feminism as crucial to the continuation of sentient life on this planet. She considers feminism to be a key to human survival and transformation. On the whole, these trends reveal that based on these ideologies a humanist revolution should be accomplished.
In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the African women journeyed the middle passage, they brought with them the lived experiences in which originated Black feminism. These African women were independent, self-reliant and resourceful. To the contrary, these socialized characteristic features of these African women were modified by slavery and so they had to call their own race for a transformation. In the nineteenth century, these Black women laid the intellectual and political cornerstone of Black feminism. It was in the twentieth century, Black feminism was brought out as a political movement and the Black feminist thought was considered as an intellectual voice and vision, which aimed at full fruition.

The fundamental goal of Black feminism is to create a humanistic vision of community. Black feminism is the process of a self-conscious struggle for empowerment. The period between Slavery and Emancipation helped the Black women to develop a specific perspective on the various types of oppression they had experienced. As these women faced not only oppressions like racism, sexism and classicism, but other forms too, their struggle helped them to have their own human potential. These Black feminists aimed at a vision of community based on fairness, equality and justice not only for their own women but also for all human beings. Black feminism focuses on an anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-elitist perspective. On the whole, its fundamental goal is for human empowerment.

Black feminism is divided into three periods — "laying the foundation" (1890-1920) wherein it was considered as a national political movement and the Black feminist thought found its first articulation; during the second period termed as "working for a change" (1920-1960), the Black women with their humanistic vision
of thought merged with the African-American communities; and the third period which represents the contemporary Black feminism dating from 1960 to the present in which the blend of the Black feminist thought with an intellectual voice took its shape. Each period has its own historical issues and institutional locations with the unique expression of Black feminist thought.

The Black feminist movement aimed at four core themes – the legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the interdependence of thought and action, and the significance of empowerment in everyday life.

The theme of the legacy of struggle has been against racism, sexism and social class exploitation. This theme has created a heightened consciousness among the Black intellectuals to think how the race, class and gender shape their Black women’s lives. Their main concern has been the transformation of a society in relation to race, class and gender.

The second core theme of Black feminism has been a search for a voice. Black feminists wanted to distort the already developed stereotyped images of Black women as being inferior. They challenged the four interrelated controlling stereotyped images of Black women – the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the jezebel. Their main aim was not to distort these images but to create positive empowering self-images.

The third core theme aimed at the interdependence of thought and action. This theme allowed the Black women to see these with concrete experiences and to create a self-defined voice in thought and a resistance in action. The last core theme aimed
to attain human empowerment. These Black feminists were conscious of the fact that without empowerment the race, class and gender oppressions could not be challenged. They realized the interconnectedness between Black women’s oppression and their resistance to oppression. They considered the world as a dynamic place wherein they were accountable. They also realized that though the empowerment of the Black woman to be important, only a collective action could root out all facets of political, social and economic inequalities.

Black feminists were aware of the struggle, which involved various strategies. The adage “make a way out of no way” captured African-American women to attain their empowerment enumerated by the Black feminists. African-American women struggled for suffrage and demanded their rights, particularly against the terrorism of lynching and towards their standards of living. These women organized activities on all levels. Clubs were founded in a number of cities. These clubs gave rise to a national Black women’s club movement with its main aim of satisfying the urgent needs of the poor. This movement gave rise to a national federation of Afro-American women founded in 1896 which elected Margaret Murray Washington as its president. The national league of coloured women was founded in Washington DC in 1892. The merger of these two organizations led to the foundation of National Association of Coloured Women (NACW) in 1896. Mary Church Terrell was elected president. The NACW became a unifying and authoritative voice, which stood for Black womanhood.

The Black feminist movement not only aimed at voicing out and eliminating the oppression but also with an intellectual endeavour tried to analyse the causes for
the Black women’s oppression. The merging of both the intellectual work with activities could be found in the twentieth century. Black women such as Ida B. Wells, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper and others involved themselves in analyzing subjects like the struggle for education, sexual politics, violence, racial pride and racial prejudice. The activities of these women intellectuals were on behalf of not only the middle class African-American women but on the entire humanity. As their women were burdened with long hours of agricultural and domestic labour and other responsibilities, these intellectuals shouldered the task of voicing for their race.

Though this Black women’s club movement did not identify themselves as Black feminists, women like Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper were closer to Sojourner Truth’s perspective: “I suppose I am about the only coloured woman that goes about to speak for the rights of the coloured women” (qtd. in Ranveer 46). These women were the first to shape and construct Black feminism as a movement with an intellectual humanistic vision.

Anna Julia Cooper, a Black woman born into slavery, in her book A Voice from the South (1988) describes the Black women’s legacy of struggle as:

I would beg ... to add my plea for the colored girls of the South – that large, bright promising fatally beautiful class ... so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction, often with a father to whom they dare apply the loving term, often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life’s blood; in the
midst of pitfalls and shares, waylaid by the lower classes of white men, with no shelter, no protection ...(24-25)

At a period of heightened racial repression, the Black women came up with a self-definition for their race. They viewed the Black woman, not as a defenseless victim but as a strong-willed resistor. They saw the Black woman as “irrepressible... she is insulted, but she holds up her head; she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect ... the most interesting girl of this country is the coloured girl” (Washington 7).

The refusal to silence themselves found its impact even in the literary works of a few black women novelists. Initially four women writers broke their silence and gave voice to Black women’s oppression- Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Gwendolyn Brooks and Lorraine Hansberry.

Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes were Watching God (1937), Ann Petry’s The Street (1946), Gwendolyn Brooks’ Maud Martha (1953) and Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun (1956) – all these works explored the Black woman’s voice to their oppression and womanhood. The Black feminists’ emphasis found its expressions in all facets of life. This period strengthened the voice of the Black feminists and not only analyzed their issues of oppression but also was active through the works of many Black intellectual workers from all wide ranging influences. The contemporary phase of Black feminists used their writings and teachings as a vehicle for the spread of their issues. Black women academicians like Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith devoted their critical inquiries to Black women’s studies. Katie Geneva Cannon’s Black Womanist Ethics (1988), bell hooks. Talking Back: Thinking

Black feminism both as a political movement and as an intellectual voice with a humanistic vision has found multiple expressions in various organizations. The expression of Black feminism and the African-American community has grown as a massive movement with a humanistic mission.

During the two hundred and fifty years of slavery, even when reading and writing were banned, black literature as a literature of social protest and human enlightenment began to flourish. Fredrick Douglass learnt to read in darkness with a candle in the forest. David Walker, a free black, was murdered for what he wrote. Black writing did not emerge from the inspirational muse. It was their oppression that motivated them to write. Black writing by virtue of its origin, nature and function has become mission-conscious. Being a black writer has been an ennobling exigency.

Ironically, though the oppression had its gateway even in the world of Black literature in the United States, it had been a world of black men's literature. The pioneers of black writing had been men. There had been no recognized mothers as there were only 'fathers.' Men have authored the quotations, essays, scholarly writings and literary works. These male authors have portrayed and imagined only the male experiences but the black female experiences have been fundamentally ignored.
From Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), the black women have been depicted only as a mammy figure. In *Native Son*, the protagonist Bigger Thomas’ mother Mrs. Thomas and sister Vera Thomas are portrayed as ragging bitches. Bigger’s girl friend Bessie Mears is a pathetic figure. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison portrays Mary Rambo, a warm, transplanted black southern woman and a female folk personage “Mother Gnesham” as folk personages.

It was James Baldwin, whose view of considering the people to be human first and viewing people pertaining to colour secondary through his works, who brought about a change in Black writing. For example, his *Another Country* (1962) highlights certain central issues like racial prejudice, sex and sexist attitudes, poverty, and alienation from family.

Though the Black women had involved themselves in the development of Afro-American writing since its inception, they had not been considered as major contributors. There were women writers like Effie Lee Newsome, Georgia, Douglas Johnson, Anne Spenser, Alice Dunbar-Nelsa, Nella Larson, Jessie Fauset, Dorothy West and Helene Johnson in the early twentieth century. Despite the lack of equal reward for equal work, black women like black men, continued to write throughout the depression years and also later. The Black male writers received literary dominance. The Black female writers received only secondary treatment. For example. Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) was hailed as a masterpiece and always remained in print. On the other hand Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), which is considered as the first writing in which a black man Boots Smith is killed by a black woman, Lutie Johnson, for being an unmitigated villain in the woman’s oppression.
was held to be out-of-print. Petry's works have gained recognition only since the 1950's. When the novel was reissued in 1985, *The Street* was sold in excess of one million copies and Ann Petry was considered the first African-American woman to have brought a sensation to the American literary scene.

As Ann Petry's works, there were other black women writers whose works and their female characters started to gain prominence only later. Paul Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), Sarah Wright's *This Child's Gonna Live* (1969), Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), and Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1967) - the first contemporary slave narrative novel, all these gained a worthy status in the black literary world only after the 1970's. It was Gwendolyn Brooks, an acceptable exception, who was the only woman to have attained a wide recognition, mainly for her unquestionable genius. She was the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, as Toni Morison was the first to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Although in the 1960's a plethora of black female writers emerged, male domination continued to exist. Particularly during the Black power and Black Arts Movement in the 1960's, women writers were accorded only a secondary position. According to Stockely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, "The only position in the revolution for women is the prone position. The women's place is seven feet behind the men!" (qtd. in hooks 51). For example, Angela Davis does not find a place in Stockely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power, the politics of liberation in America*. The first issue of the *Black Scholar* magazine came out in 1969, during the Black Arts movement in which nine articles were listed in the table of contents.
The issue was entitled The Culture of Revolution and men authored all articles. The editorial cover states:

... A black scholar ... is a man of both thought and action, a whole man who thinks for his people and acts with them, a man who honors the whole community of black experience, a man who sees the Ph.D., the janitor, the businessman, the maid, the clerk, the militant as all sharing the same experience of blackness, with all its complexities and its rewards. The Black Scholar is the journal for such a man. (5)

This statement stands as an evidence to prove that the black men have considered themselves to be the only representatives of their Black experiences. Though the black men had framed their own rules and strategies, black women during the 1960’s thronged the literary world. The black women began to actualize their talent by conscious-raising activities. In was in 1970, when Toni Cade Bambara published an anthology The Black Woman in which twenty-seven women writers expressed their demand for liberation from their mammy figures, the Black Feminist consciousness had its beginnings. This anthology brought out a revolution in terms of equality in African-American literature.

New women writers like Gloria Hull, Patricia Jones, and Michelle Cliff- to mention a few, started to scale the sexual mountain. Until 1978, there took place no revolution but with Ntozake Shange’s For coloured girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf (1976) and Michelle Wallace’s book, Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Women (1979), Black women’s writing proved its existence.
Shange's *For coloured girls who have considered suicide...* is termed as a Choreo poem by herself. It is also a feminist drama in which African-American women undergo the psychological, emotional and physical pain incurred by the black man. All the women characters decide to survive hostility and pain through a mutual bond among themselves. Shange looks at her characters from a feminist point of view.

The resentful emotions, which the black men felt towards the black women writers, were mainly due to four reasons:

- Black women writers are declaring their independence like never before.
- Black women writers are gaining autonomous influence over other black writers.
- Black women writers are causing their existence to be seen and felt in areas of American society and culture, which have been barred to them.
- Black women writers are at last wrestling recognition from the white literary powers. (Hemton 45)

The black men have considered the contribution of the black women to be “counter productive” (7) in their struggle. When black women expressed their oppressions, the black men criticized their exposures to be as sowing the seeds of “division” in their community. In spite of all these dispositions black men had towards black women writers, novelists like Toni Morrison have captured the entire race. She has published five highly commendable novels, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Tar Baby* (1981) and *Beloved* (1987). She is
considered as the foremost African-American writer of all ages. African-American literature has emerged as an adventurous one in which the contribution of black women writers, poets, novelists, dramatists, critics, scholars, researchers, intellectuals, politicians and ideologues are wielding their pens to unearth forbidden treasures. The readership has gained a wider audience.

The writings of black American women in the beginnings pointed out that the Negro, being both Black and American, shouldered a double consciousness. Now the realization and emphasis, as in the words of Barbara Smith equating it to "geometric oppression" (117) proves that the Black women are bearers not of double consciousness but triple consciousness. The triple consciousness perspective is expressed in the works of Alice Walker in her works like *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *In Love and Trouble* (1973) and *The Color Purple* (1982). She has consistently emphasized not only the triple jeopardy but also the triple consciousness. All the works of the present black writing is a woman-to-woman approach. It is black feminist writing. The form, language, syntax, experiences are entirely feminine and different from the male-authored literature. To record the life of a woman, the woman writer may prefer the genre of autobiography or biography. The powerful genre in which a woman may attempt to write either of difference or of oppression would certainly be fiction. Their expressions can be witnessed in the works of Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor.

Black men authored all the writings including political tracts and revealed scholarships: there were historians and essayists. Now a transformation has taken place. Black women are scholars, as black men. Black women have emerged as
foremost critics of Black literature and their lives. Barbara Smith’s *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* (1977) and Deborah E. McDowell’s *New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism* have been pioneer efforts in creating new criticism. Alexis De Veaux expresses the task of black women to be as follows:

A struggle to express ourselves. To be heard. To be seen. In our own image. To construct the words. To name the deeds. Confront the risks. Write the history. Document it on the radio, television and satellites. To analyze and live it. (9)

The works of the present day black women writers incorporate the black feminist consciousness through their writings. The readers and the whole world have witnessed the brotherhood of man. Now the sisterhood of woman is heard of in the black women’s contribution. They break loose of the phallogocentric world and aim at creating a gynogocentric one. To them, the terms ‘phallocentrism’ and ‘logocentrism’ have something in common, which is very detrimental to their independent existence. Both phallocentrism and logocentrism are monolithic systems which pre-close indeterminacy and play and thus perpetuate the unchallengeable authority of the phallus—the male, patriarchal authority. So they create a gynocentred system of thought which could empower them.

Bell hooks expresses the feminist consciousness in her book *Ain’t I a Woman?* (1981) as:

We, black women who advocate feminist ideology, are pioneers. We are creating a past for ourselves and our sisters. We hope that as they
see us reach our goal – no longer victimized, no longer unrecognized, no longer afraid – they will take courage and follow. (196)

To attain this goal the Black women writers decided to project self-love and self-respect through their writings. They have allowed their soul to enter into a struggle, which would transform the experience of all the people of the earth. They firmly believe that only through self-love, self-respect and self-determination they can heal their race. The contribution of the contemporary black women writers has been an experience, a vision, and a prophecy of a human possibility coming out of the triple jeopardy. Black women writers often compelled themselves in various spheres and arts to serve the socio-political need of their race. They have considered it an obligation to write with a crusading mentality of their race. Though these writers had to face more perils in politics and art than men, yet a number of contemporary women novelists like Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara have remained faithful to the art and to their race. They continue to write with a black sensibility and in a black vernacular, exhibiting a substance from the experiences of their black race in the United States.

This is the tradition in which Gloria Naylor placed herself. Born as the first child of Alberta McAlpin and Roosevelt Naylor in New York City on the twenty fifth of January 1950, she grew up in the urban United States. Her ancestral heritage was in the south. Her parents had been sharecroppers in Robins Orville, Mississippi. In 1963 Naylor and her family moved to Queens, a more middle class borough. It was in Queens that she increased her awareness of racism. When Naylor’s mother joined the Jehovah Witnesses in 1968. Naylor followed the footsteps of her mother. She came out
of the Jehovah's witnesses when she realized that things were getting worse. Naylor was supporting herself as a switchboard operator not realizing the explosion of black liberation. From 1975 to 1981 she worked as a full-time switchboard operator, pursued writing and attended classes at Medgar Evers College and later at Brooklyn College.

When in 1977, Naylor read for the first time an African-American novel, The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison, she received the inducement and the vigour to write. Naylor discovered feminism and the immense growth of African-American literature, which paved her two paths--to her thought and to define herself as a black woman. Naylor started writing a story and when she submitted it to the Essence magazine, the editor advised her to continue writing. When Naylor received her Bachelor's degree in English, she completed her first novel, The Women of Brewster Place {1983} and she began her graduate work in African-American studies at Yale in 1981.

Naylor's first novel The Women of Brewster Place is a celebration of the riches and diversities of the black female experience. It is a heart-wrenching story of seven women in a seedy urban neighborhood. Five years later this novel was made into a movie starring Oprah Winfrey. Naylor was awarded the American Book Award for this first work in fiction. The protagonist, Mattie Michael the leading healer, possesses a "magical ability" (Puhr 1) to save similar other women. Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place and her second novel Linden Hills depict the "black on black oppression" (Anand 154) as in Alice Walker's The Color Purple and Toni Morrison's Sula. In all these novels, "Women squabble; women support, women love and women heal each other" (Calvin 6). Male oppression strengthens the bonds of friendship and love among women and gives rise to a category of Women Healers.
Each of Naylor's quartet novels pronounces a voice representing some part of the black community. *The Women of Brewster Place* was meant to "celebrate the female spirit and the ability to transcend and also to give a microcosm of Black women in America – Black women who are faced by a wall of racism and sexism" (Cleage 57). Naylor uses the seven different notes of a musical scale to convey seven different stories.

With a "specificity of place" (Whitt 59) as in Brewster Place, Naylor launched her second novel, *Linden Hills* in 1985. She emphasizes in *Linden Hills* that a bond of sisterhood or friendship or love is not sufficient to encounter the patriarchal domination on women. It depicts a sense of self-healing attained through an identification of the self from the ancestral documents of their race like letters, cooking recipes and photographs of the three generations of wives in the Nedeed family. The protagonist Willa Prescott Nedeed heals the community of Linden Hills by destroying herself and her patriarchal monstrous husband, Luther Nedeed. In Willa Prescott Nedeed, healing is linked with a "restoration of identity, a relearning of the language of the self" (Puhr 3).

This novel portrays a world in which the black Americans have achieved status and power but have forfeited their hearts and souls. It is a story of resistance and rebirth. Naylor has followed Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* by adapting his geographical narrative strategy in the journey through hell. Through this organizing principle and allegory, Naylor warns and instructs her black Americans of their material cravings and their lack of the realization of their self.
With a change in her development, Naylor published her third novel, *Mama Day* in 1988. Though Naylor has examined, deconstructed and relied on the past in this novel, the strongest female bonds of sharing within their own community and even between generations of women prove to be the strongest elements in the novel. The novel, according to Naylor, deals with the fact that the real basic magic is the unfolding of the human potential and that if one reaches inside his or her own self, they can create miracles.

From an elderly healer in the present time to deceased healers, who have unconsciously healed the protagonist through their documents, Naylor in her third novel, *Mama Day* moves to a matriarchal mythical healing with “roots” in the past, strength in the present, and insight into the future. Rosellen Brown claims this novel as “a parent to the old mysteries of the irrational, and to the heroines who have, throughout history, wielded enormous powers of healing and wholeness” (74). The healing powers of Miranda alias Mama Day surpass the world of science and dwell in the magical powers. She possesses the powers of a nurse and midwife and of a matriarchal healer derived from a “degree of sensory awareness” (Puhr 3). The powers, which are a legacy from her ancestors, heal the whole island of Willow Springs.

Naylor’s fourth novel, *Bailey’s Cafe* (1992), explores the female sexuality and male sexual identity. Naylor herself stresses the main theme of this work as, “the way in which the word ‘whore’ has been used against women...” (n.pag). The characters sing their own tales, which empower them to render a hope for an essential living. With this fourth ambitious novel *Bailey’s Cafe*, Naylor completes a quartet series including *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*.
Naylor herself compliments her achievement as: "Bailey's Cafe took me through the final step" (n.pag). She once remarked, "I had envisioned four novels that would lay the foundation for a career. This one finishes that up" (qtd. in Due F2). As in the earlier three novels with a specific geographical place such as Brewster Place, Linden Hills and Willow Springs, Naylor does not create a birth experience to her fourth and final novel, Bailey's Cafe which completes her quartet. She asserts that the novel, "... sits right on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility" (BC 76).

It is with the language of music the maestro speaks to the readers of the "whole set to be played here" (4). Bailey's Cafe was hailed as a "virtuoso orchestration of survival, suffering, courage and humor" (Wakefield 11). Naylor's depiction of seven characters as in The Women of Brewster Place has been the recurring number in her last of the quartet novels, Bailey's Cafe. Naylor's choice of magic realism as the narrative technique has been rendered in a sharply detailed, realistic manner. As people have served as healers, here the place Bailey's Cafe heals its customers.

The maestro named Bailey and his wife Nadine do not run a cafe, but a way station - a place to rest. As his own experience in the war, he believes that there has to be "some space, some place, to take a breather for a while" (28). Two sites serve the purpose of healing- The Cafe and Eve's Garden. The ways in which they serve as a refuge for the afflicted of both the genders, especially women, who have been sexually abused, or "... drug - dependent or victims of their own physical beauty, these two places render them a solace" (Puhr 5). For all the battered, molested,
shunned, and exploited, these places provide a sanctuary for the physical and psychological healing. After the completion of the series of four novels, in an interview in the *Boston Globe* Magazine (February 13, 1994) Naylor stated about her literary career of the quartet of four novels as:

I conceived them as a quartet from book one. And I had a purpose for it. I felt that by writing those four books, I would go through an apprenticeship to my craft. Then I would feel, within myself that I was a writer. When I finished the last of that quartet, it was exciting, exciting moment for me, to realize that I had set that goal and achieved it. You know, a whole lot can happen in 10 years of an adult life, and I had written through all of that. (14)

The cognitive and psychic structures of women are the same as men. The way they split and heal is basically the same. It is the modes of embodiment and their position in the social, economic and political spheres that make their splitting and healing to be different. The Black feminists through their writing have projected the ways in which their personal experiences of violence in space and time, class and race have affected their innate desires and emotions and have developed strategies to heal their oppression thereby developing engendered models of emerging womanhood.

The four novels, which Naylor claims to be her ‘quartet’, have proved to fulfil her feminist mandate to end violence against women. Her women characters have served as role models in conceptualizing how women can exercise their innate capacities for thinking, feeling and acting in ways that promote wholeness through healing both in themselves and others.
After the completion of her quartet novels, Naylor published *The Men of Brewster Place* in 1998, wherein she turns her artistic and political attention to the plight of the black man. She revisits the dilapidated urban environs of her award-winning first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*. Naylor attempts to give a new life to the male residents, who once created havoc in the lives of African American women. The men of Brewster Place assume the centre stage in this fiction. Like a Greek Chorus, the voice of Ben, the fatherly alcoholic janitor is the 'male voice' to weave the story as in her fourth novel, *Bailey's Cafe*. One of Naylor's goals in this fiction as Montgomery states is: "... to elevate the men's personal situation from the individual to the collective realm" (3).

Naylor has also edited the anthology *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to the Present*. This is an encore volume, which gathers together the most gifted black writers. The varied and rich collection consists of thirty-seven stories arranged in four thematic sections – "Remembering", "Affirming", "Revealing the Self Divided", and "Moving on". A few distinguished authors included are – Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Ralph Ellison, Ann Petry, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, Shay Youngblood and others. For the readers to focus on a particular subject, for example, slavery or family, Naylor has assembled this collection, which captures the myriad facts of the black experience in America.

Naylor's contributions extend to a collection of essays in two volumes: *The Best American Essays of the Century* Volume I and Volume II. This collection
includes political and spiritual essays along with the personal revelations of America's materialistic modern age by foremost critics, commentators, activists and artists. In the introduction to this volume, Joyce Carol Oates describes Naylor's project as "a search for the expression of personal experience within the historical, the individual talent within the tradition" (16). After publishing the critically acclaimed quartet novels, Naylor has recently authored a fictionalized memoir titled 1996. According to the author, "1996 is not a novel, nor is it non-fiction. It is a conflation [blend] of the two genres" (White n.pag). This book serves as a critical response to a decade of targeting by multiple stalkers and through wall electronic technology. It is the writer's contribution to the fight to expose and stop the crimes of "vigilante stalking and electronic harassment" (n.pag).

Naylor's career encountered severe destructive and criminal interference, which started in 1996. She uses the phrase "mind control" for this interference. This novel 1996 describes Naylor buying a house on St.Helene Island, off the coast of South Carolina. She seeks to enjoy life, relax and write in tranquil mood and tend a garden too. Unfortunately, there is a neighbour, a white woman, who fears her presence and ruins her serene world. This woman spurs a massive covert surveillance operation against Naylor in 1996. This memoir proves to be another example of how racism translates into gross misunderstanding. Since 2001, readers had only one such book dealing with the harassment crime syndrome - David Lawson's Terrorist Stalking (2001) in America. Naylor's 1996 proves to be a second big gun for their fight. Though it is Naylor's own story, yet with her powers of observations and intellect, she has created fictional characters, serving in the U.S. National Security
Agency to carry out the operations. Eleanor White assesses this memoir as: “1996 is a priceless gift to the cause of truth, freedom and justice” (n.pag).

Though the critical and popular acclaim of Naylor ‘quartet’ novels is quite considerable, no book length or doctoral dissertation attempt has so far been undertaken with regard to the healing matrices attained with a Black feminist consciousness in her works. Hence it is believed that the present study will certainly be a rewarding experience and will provide a fresh perspective not only to the Black women race but also to the entire womanhood.

As is evident from the title, the present study is based on feminist approach for a critical interpretation of the works of Gloria Naylor. Feminist approach helps to establish the consciousness attained by Naylor’s characters. In each of her works, Naylor portrays the real and authentic experiences of her women characters that identify themselves both individually and collectively. She adopts different healing strategies in each of her novels and leaves no issue concerning her women to escape the purview of her healing matrices. Her works culminate in a ‘wholeness’ derived from a conscious faith in the healing process experienced by her characters.

The words “heal” and “whole” stem from the Anglo-Saxon root word “hale”. In modern German, “heil/heilen/heilig” is translated as “whole/to heal/holy” (qtd. in Martin 73). The relationship between health and wholeness gets interconnected which eventually suggests, “… physical healing is an external manifestation of spiritual and emotional healing” (Shiwy 19).
Feminism seeks to make conscious the conflicts within the lives of individuals and it is through this consciousness "... the repressions that has blocked the experiences gets lifted which results in healing with/in each other" (21). In the female system, healing is a process that occurs within a person with facilitation and help from the healer. In the male system, healing is something that is "done" by the healer, whereas in the female system, consciously or unconsciously created, healing takes place based on the relationship between the healer and the patient. The patriarchal forces that afflict the black woman's psyche in Naylor's novels are interpreted in the light of psychological studies. It enables the readers to understand how the women's human psyche is caught in the male-dominated world.

Though the present study is confined to only her quartet novels: The Women of Brewster Place (1982), Linden Hills (1985), Mama Day (1988) and Bailey's Cafe (1992), it is considered that they represent a 'wholeness' facilitating a concrete approach to substantiate the chosen topic and are sufficient for a study of this length and purpose.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters including this introductory chapter and the last one devoted for concluding remarks. The second, third, fourth and fifth chapters deal with different healing matrices adopted by the women characters and are significantly titled as "Women to Women Healing", "Inspirational and Documental Healing", "Matriarchal and Mythical Healing" and "Emotive Healing" respectively.
Chapter II entitled, “Woman to Women Healing,” investigates and examines the matrix of basic human healing in Naylor’s first and small start to her ‘creative engagement’, a novel entitled The Women of Brewster Place. This chapter traces step by step all the women characters involved in a struggle for survival in an atmosphere of poverty and prejudiced violence. It highlights how an ordinary human sympathy gets transformed into creative energy. The struggles of the characters in the six episodes, each undergoing a different struggle yet integrating themselves by a network of nurturing each other and finally getting healed, have been illustrated.

Chapter III, entitled “Inspirational and Documental Healing”, attempts to investigate the power of self-healing in Naylor’s second novel Linden Hills. The woman protagonist Willa Prescott Nedeed, deriving a consciousness not from the live women characters but through the written guidance of the ancestors, particularly women, who remain to be a source of inspiration, has been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter IV, entitled “Matriarchal and Mythical Healing”, establishes the same mythical healing yet with a difference in Naylor’s third novel Mama Day. In this chapter, Naylor’s portrayal of “matriarchs” with a positive power of wisdom and magical healing power that rule a world successfully has been dealt with. The strategy of proceeding from a gradual destructive end, which yet is bestowed with an optimistic note, towards positive empowerment in Mama Day has been critically examined.

Chapter V, “Emotive Healing”, establishes space as a healing force. This chapter underlines Naylor’s empathetic portrayal of the women characters’
multifarious agonies and their gradual attainment of a communal consciousness with the aid of a Cafe named ‘Bailey’s Cafe’ and a whorehouse called ‘Eve’s bordello.’ The strategies employed by even the most oppressed women due to child abuse who seek and render solace have been underscored. Naylor’s fourth and the last of the quartet novels Bailey’s Cafe universalizes the theme of healing with the emotive Blues music.

Chapter VI, “Conclusion”, recapitulates briefly the important points and issues discussed in the preceding chapters. It sums up the entire arguments chapter-wise. It also gives suggestions for further studies. Based on the discussions of the second, third, fourth and fifth chapters, the study establishes Naylor not only as a Black feminist with a humanistic vision of healing the oppressed community but also proves her to have attained the distinction of a universal healer irrespective of race and gender.

Gloria Naylor in her quartet novels “has celebrated the power of love as a force that heals, bringing peace and wholeness” (Puhr 1). Naylor’s depiction of the “unusual women” (7) with the power to heal themselves and others appears first in The Women of Brewster Place analysed in the next chapter.
We, the black women of today, must accept the full weight of a legacy wrought in blood by our mothers in chains. As heirs to a tradition of supreme perseverance and heroic resistance, we must hasten to take our place wherever our people are forging on towards freedom.

— ANGELA DAVIS