SUMMARY

Gloria Naylor, who always has to have ‘a little bit of sky’, is a woman with a formidable intellect and a deeply ingrained sense of personhood. While talking about herself, Gloria Naylor primarily says that she is a black female writer and she has no qualms whatsoever with people saying that she is a black female writer. She is a female, black and American. She was born in New York City in 1950 but she claims her writer’s heart ‘was conceived’ in Robinsonville, Mississippi, where her parents once worked as sharecroppers. Her mother had little education but loved to read. When her mother encouraged her to read, Naylor listened attentively. And when her mother handed her a journal and urged her to write down her 12-year-old’s thoughts, she took the advice. After some time, during the missionary work, she nudged her out of a natural shyness and forced her to travel and meet people but it also sealed her into a hermetic world, where she remained unaware of the boom of black literature that was exploding around her. When it became clear that she preferred her literature classes, she transferred to a major in English. As an avid reader from childhood, she already admired such writers as Austen, Dickens, the Brontes, Faulkner, Ellison and Baldwin. She soon recognized that all of these writers were either ‘male or white’. College was a pivotal time for Naylor. While there, her black consciousness, especially as a black woman, began taking form and compelled her to explore her creative powers. Her eyes were opened greatly by reading the works of black female
authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Drawing on these authors as role-models, Naylor found her stride as a writer and was recognized for her talent soon after she began writing fiction. Fortunately, a creative writing class introduced her to Toni Morrison. In 1977, she read Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, the first book she had ever read by an African–American woman and she was suddenly suffused with hope. She began to see the possibility of spinning tales about what she knew, to conceive of herself as a real writer.

One of the first short stories she penned appeared in a 1980 issue of *Essence* and before long she had a contract with Viking because the editor convinced her she had a career. It was an inspirational discovery. Although Naylor considered herself a poet then, Morrison became a model for rendering one’s own reality and for crafting beautiful language. Naylor began to attend readings by Morrison and to hone her own skills as a fictionist. In 1980, Naylor entered into a marriage that lasted for ten days. That same year she published her first story in *Essence* Magazine. Two weeks later Naylor had a contract for the book that eventually became *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). *The Women of Brewster Place* got both a critical and popular success. *Publishers Weekly* called it a remarkable first novel from a gifted black writer that marks Gloria Naylor’s talent as one to watch. The novel was later made into a television movie starring Oprah Winfrey. A few years back, the period of the 1920’s, with the Harlem or Negro Renaissance, the black bourgeoisie passed out of fashion as a literary topic. Harlem Renaissance (1917-1939) was a time when black and white Americans alike ‘discovered’
the vibrancy and uniqueness of black art, music and especially literature. For the first time in American history, large numbers of black artists could earn their livings and be critically acknowledged in their fields. It was really a time of excitement for the younger generation of the Negro intelligentsia. Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling A. Brown and Langston Hughes began to celebrate the rich verbal and musical culture of the black masses—music and lore that the black middle class deplored as examples of the backwardness of the lower classes and as reminders of the slave past. Nonetheless, there were Harlem Renaissance writers who still followed a tradition epitomized in an earlier generation by Frances E.W. Harper and W.E.B. Du Bois, in whose fictional work black middle-class character and setting were coupled with the theme of racial uplift. Later on, in the 1960s Americans of all races and creeds took part in the Civil Rights Movements across the United States. Congress passed laws to support the fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments’ guarantees of equal rights. During the time span of the six novels by Morrison, Walker and Naylor (1973-1989), representatives of various organizations interpreted those laws as fundamental bases for equality among all people.

Element of protest plays a pivotal role in the novels of Gloria Naylor. One can be safely concluded that black male and female each and every time protest against exploitation, domination and sometime against each other. It is Naylor’s appreciating step that she not only highlights the issues and affairs of females but side by side, she also tries to project the same atrocities of males. Black female is a slave of a slave and almost time she is sustaining and
struggling against the male chauvinism. Beyond the other side, black males who are too slaves of white masters, pass their lives under the acute pressure of white hegemony and exactly under their black female partners. In Afro-American culture black female and male both are the puppets at the hands of white masters. Racial discrimination and financial crises are main reasons to exploit the black males and when they are oppressed by double jeopardy it is definite that the thunder will be fall over their wives in the form of violence and torments. Naylor’s each novel frankly shows the picture gallery of protest of blacks.

In 1983, Naylor won the American Book Award for her first novel The Women of Brewster Place, in which she created a ghetto of her own in an urban cul-de-sac. Set in an unnamed city or somewhere in urban America, Brewster Place chronicles the fates of seven black women of different backgrounds yoked together by confusion and circumstances yet emotionally vibrant. These female characters face acute anguish and torment to gain their social status, liberty, equality as well as economic and political advancement. After facing enough malice and exploitation, they come out together in order to protest against the ruling class. Mattie undergoes exploitation at the hands of her father and hitched lover, Etta at the hands of Preacher cum cheater, Lucielia and Cora Lee at the hands of their husbands, last but not least Lorraine is exploited by a brutal man, who is fanatic for his manliness or male hegemony. Amongst these women, Kiswana Browne is only one female, who deliberately rejects her black middle-class background in Linden Hills and has moved to Brewster Place to solve out the problems of blacks. Kiswana and
her mother confront each other about their seemingly different values and lifestyles. Mrs. Browne stands for the traditional values whereas Kiswana represents those middle-class blacks who reject the values of their parents and embrace those of black nationalists. These women ultimately encircle under the direction of Mattie, recollect their womanhood and stand firmly to protect themselves and to protest against males’ tyranny. Since the book was first published, critics have praised Gloria Naylor’s characters, their relationships and their battles represent the same intense struggle all human being in their quest for long as well as happy lives. So, most critics consider Naylor one of the America’s most talented contemporary African-American authors.

In her second novel, *Linden Hills* (1985), Naylor invokes the blues structure of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (hell, suffering and pain) to describe the experience of the black middle class—lost souls trapped in the American Dream. Driven by obsessive materialism, the people in this affluent enclave violate its embittered founder’s intent of creating Linden Hills as a Booker T. Washington model of black self-reliance. Having betrayed the values of black integrity, the residents descend into their own inferno. Naylor explores the possibilities of healing a community affected by the interrelationship of color, sex and class. In fact, Naylor has given a moving account of the lives of white wives of Nedeeds who were constantly subjugated, marginalized and oppressed. These women often faced dual oppression as they were ostracized by their own races for their marriage to a black man and by the blacks, as the Nedeeds were upper middle class blacks, thus, superior to
average blacks. The novel *Linden Hills* deals with the black man's effort to realize his American dream. The protagonist Luther Nedeed, who establishes Linden Hills and its black community, has frightening history. After the first Luther Nedeed, each subsequent generation has a son named Luther, who looks exactly like his father. Likewise, each generation marries a light-skinned woman, who is immediately absorbed into the identity of Mrs. Nedeed. However, these wives were not allowed to mix freely with other families. The isolation of these wives reflects the life of all the residents of Linden Hills. The life of Willa Nedeed, wife of Last Luther Nedeed, is a story of terror which is a direct result of Luther Nedeed's misconceptions about black women and life. Willa is dark skinned but bears a fair son and considering the child a bastard, Luther to punish his wife locks her and the six-year-old boy in the morgue-basement of their home till death. Though due to this ill-treatment, the boy dies but Willa survives for quite some days to take revenge against their heartless husband. It is in imprisonment in the basement that she understands her own predicament, confronts the truth about her life and determines to protest against Luther. Willa's act to self-affirmation instantly becomes an act of revenge. She eventually clasps Luther in a strong death grip and the three - Willa, Luther and their dead child, burn in the Christmas tree fire. In conclusion, Willa's journey from innocence to self-discovery is a dead end but she has also brought to an end the Nedeed dynasty and displays her identity and dignity among the other females.

Unlike *Linden Hills*, Gloria Naylor's third novel *Mama Day* (1988) portrays the story of a conjuring woman called Sapphira Wade and her
descendant Miranda or Mama Day. Abigail her sister, Ophelia alias Baby Girl alias Cocoa and the way all of them come to terms with the spirit of Sapphira Wade form the narrative element. The problem for the present generation of women is to continue with the heritage of Sapphira Wade. The novel is concerned with examining, deconstructing and redefining the past. Its strongest elements are the bonds shared within the female community and between the generations of women. According to Naylor it is about the fact that the real basic magic is the unfolding of the human potential and if we reach inside ourselves one can create miracles. In fact, anything can happen in Willow Springs as one can learn from the moment one meet the indomitable Miranda Day. She can tame lightning and heal wounds through magic or the ingredients of her medicine pot. Sapphira Wade establishes Willow Springs, a place only for blacks with every comfort to show her protest and boycott against white community. Mama Day, descendant of Sapphira Wade, extends her duties to protect and protest the islanders and after her, it will transfer her grand niece Cocoa. Naylor, through this novel shows the glimpse of matriarchal society and gets sufficient success to project this new theme.

In her fourth novel *Bailey’s Cafe* (1992), Naylor uses the multiple stories and multiple narrators, format once more but this time juxtaposing male voices and characters with female. The work shows Naylor’s wide technical range, all the while creating a world that is emotionally complex and varied. Its immediacy in setting and character is indelible. Bailey is the chief narrator and in order to avoid inadequacy in conveying the character’s
multiple experiences, multifarious voices are used to expose the diversity of life and to understand different layers of meanings. The novel explores female sexuality and also male and female sexual identity. According to Naylor that the core of the work is indeed the way in which the work ‘whore’ has been used against women or to manipulate female sexual identity. She also intends to employ the blues and jazz into the novel’s structure by using lyrical language. The characters tell their own stories and sing their own songs, which empower them to generate the hope for necessary living. There are seven chapters depicting the predicament of seven female personages, their struggle and their survival. These women are Eve, Peaches, Sweet Esther, Jesse Bell, Sadie, Mariam and Miss Maple alias Stanley. They all finally become denizens of Eve’s brothel. Eve, like Mattie Micheal of Brewster Place, is a survivor, who has suffered at the hands of her god father in Louisiana. She is making an effort to unite the women community in her own way, by giving a room in her brothel to these women whose horrific background Eve can relate to. Peaches since childhood is exploited by her father’s friend, Sweet Esther gets married at the age of fourteen and throughout her life she never finds her husband’s love, Jesse Bell exploits at the hands of her husband’s Uncle Eli, Sadie exploits at the hands of her drunkard mother as well as her husband, Mariam, who is pregnant at the age of fourteen and unluckily does not know the name of the culprit and the last character is Miss Maple alias Stanley, who is a man but after facing racial and sexual torture, he is compelled to become a woman. So, it becomes clear that these characters are oppressed and homeless; and after coming into an Eve’s
bordello they are trying to sustain and to get their lost identity as well as entity. In fact, being whore they are happy in this new house and feel deep contentment to do new job because they can live and breathe with their own desires. Thus, Eve’s bordello not only protests against whites but also against their own black community.

In the last novel *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor turns her attention towards the plight of the black men who are in dilemma and instantly want to regret in front of their female partners. Each and every seven male character, whether it is married or non-married, if he is attached with female with different relation, he is committing his mistake and want to live with them being a friend, husband, lover and father. All these characters are socially insecure and politically weak to face any problems and obstacles, so they want to restart their life with unity and also desirous to live with their family. In fact, this novel is a story of revenge and redemption. But somewhere, it seems opposed when Ben being a good husband always undergoes the bad behavior of his wife. He is not only oppressed by his wife but also oppressed by the white masters. Eugene, being a jobless always misbehaves with his wife. He is racially and sexually tortured and being frustrate repudiates his family. Moreland T. Woods, a reputed person but unfortunately he is a lewd and cheater so, is compelled to leave the ministership of Sinai Baptist Church. Basil feels redemption towards his doting mother to whom he had left previous. As he changes himself to be a good person and gets married but unfortunately he finds deceit to whom he gets married. Finally, he has broken away and wants to get back his lost individuality. C.C. Baker is a most violent
and stone hearted person. First of all, he rapes an innocent girl and then kills his stepbrother only for his fake male hegemony. Abshu such a decent person, always protests against injustice and supports his girlfriend Kiswana as possible. Whether the crime is committed by the blacks or whites, Abshu is always ready to take revenge against such mal-activities. The last character is Brother Jeroma, whose blues speak for everyone on Brewster Place. Though he is mentally retarded but somewhere he indirectly does some noble work for their black community through his piano playing so, the people regard him from the bottom of their heart. Thus, the black men of Brewster Place are somewhere suffered at the hands of white masters and on the other hand, they are similarly oppressed at the hand of their black females. They not only suffer injustice and humiliation but also undergo exploitation and discrimination in the society. These men to survive in the society protest against all atrocities dissipated by the ruling powers, whether it is whites or black females.

Gloria Naylor’s narrative techniques are somewhere outstanding and somewhere ambiguous. She, time and again, exhibits her orthodox thoughts creating the number of seven. In *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Bailey’s Cafe* she launches seven women and in *The Men of Brewster Place*, she again exhibits number seven but in the face of men. Her novel *The Women of Brewster Place* projecting the seven female characters won rapid distinguish fame and within five years it was made into a movie starring Oprah Winfrey. So, the number of seven plays a powerful game again during the writing of Naylor’s other work and she, over and over, uses this method in her fiction.
Naylor adds a distinctly feminine voice to this discourse, as she works to free the image of black women and also gets success to establish herself in the safe place with other remarkable feminist writers. Her fictionist characters are heroic, unforgettable and timeless.

When one tries to study deeply the bonding factors of black community, he finds that they are caring, loving and doting people, who nurture their family according to their culture and traditions but, the adverse circumstances prevail them under the whites dominated society. Their family lives are shattered under the compelling influence of socio-political and economic backwardness and eventually, they fall prey of such circumstances. These atrocities are main reasons to disturb to harmony between the couple and mostly it make males compel to repudiate their family. Thus, whether it is male or female both suffer injustice, humiliation and harsh realities for surviving at the hands of either folks, and commonly at the hands of white masters. They finally choose protest for surviving and try to unite themselves as possible. But still there is a question that the main causes behind such exploitation and injustice are poverty, colored ness, illiteracy and most probably domestic backwardness in the society of black community. Such injustice and exploitation would remain in the society until these shortcomings are eliminated. So, till such time, the elements of protest, however, will remain in the human society.