CHAPTER I

The author, Gloria Naylor wrote novels that emphasized the strengths of women and men especially African-American men-women and the effects on the lives of people due to racism, sexism and the drive for material gain at any expense. She, in the PBS series on African-American culture said that ‘I'll Make Me a World’ and it fairly sums up her dismay at the marginalization of black literature by America’s mainstream. Yet few have done more than this writer to make the culture of black America live on a page, Naylor has taken firm ground in African-American letters, and as her piece above suggests, she is eager to stake out new ways to give life to her craft. Gloria Naylor was born in Harlem on January 25, 1950 and a month later her parents, Alberta and Roosevelt Naylor arrived New York City. Her parents were sharecroppers from Robinsonville, Mississippi and her mother was especially determined that her children, Gloria and two younger sisters, receive the best education that could be provided for them. Even as a farm worker Alberta Naylor had used some of her meager wages to buy books that the segregated libraries of Mississippi denied her. When Gloria was old enough to sign her name, her mother began to take her to the library. Naylor became a fervent reader and began to write poems and stories as a child. Her mother encouraged her to read and gave her a journal to write down her 12-years-old’s thoughts, she took the advice to heart. During the interview with Donna
Perry, Gloria Naylor says that, “I think I kept writing as a child because I had my mother as a model.... I think I kept going through her.”

Alberta Naylor worked as a telephone operator and Roosevelt Naylor was a motor man for the New York Transit. The family eventually moved to Queens. As a good student, Naylor attended classes as a gift. After graduating, she decided to postpone college in order to serve as a Jehovah Witness missionary. This decision was greatly influenced by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. King’s death had a major impact on Naylor which left her bewildered about the black community and her own future. Her search for meaning led her to serve as a missionary for the Jehovah’s Witnesses in New York, North Carolina and Florida for the next seven years. Naylor felt that she needed to work to change the world and the Witnesses’ notion of a theocratic government seemed a viable solution to her. That is to say, from 1968 to 1975 she proselytized in New York, North Carolina and Florida. Naylor left the mission at age of twenty-five and went back to school. Troubled by the restrictions of the religion and spurred by the need to develop her talents, she matriculated at the Medgar Evers College and transferred to Brooklyn College to pursue her interest in English Literature. Working as a telephone operator in New York City hotels, she pursued a degree in nursing at Medgar Evers College. It became clear that she preferred her literature classes and 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 women, 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 place as a writer and was recognized for her talent. Soon after, she began writing fiction. Fortunately, a creative writing class introduce her to Toni Morrison. In 1977, when she read Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, her first book by an African-American woman, she was suddenly inundated with hope. She began to see the possibility of writing about what she knew to picture 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. The Secretary to the President of Viking Publishing Company, who was a friend of a friend, circulated four of Naylor’s stories among the editors in January 1981. Two weeks later Naylor got a contract for the book that eventually became *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). The novel is a cycle of interconnected stories about seven women of different ages, backgrounds and lifestyles. These women live in a decrepit building on Brewster Place, a dreary street cut
off from the rest of the city by a wall. Despite their differences, all of them are
united by their inability to fulfill dreams deferred by racism and sexism. In this
novel, one character yearns to see her fugitive son again. Another lives on the
edge, then meets a man who is even more daring than she. Naylor covered
the entire gamut of human experience, from a comfortable middle-class
existence to ally with the people of the street, to Cora Lee, whose overriding
passion is the core of her beloved babies. *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 appeared on the *Publishers Weekly* trade paperback best-
seller list and was later made into a television movie starring Oprah Winfrey.
*The Women of Brewster Place* won the ‘American Book Award’ for the best
first novel in 1983.

In 1981, Naylor received her B.A. from Brooklyn College and using an
advance from *The Women of Brewster Place*, set off for Spain in brief sojourn
patterned after the expatriate adventures of Hemingway and Baldwin. During
this year, she had enrolled in the graduate program in African-American
studies at Yale and finally, received her M.A. in 1983. Later on, as a single
woman traveling alone, she found herself approached often by men and
began to resent the fact that she did not have freedom. She shut herself up in
a boarding house in Cadiz and began to write her second novel *Linden Hills*
(1985). Featuring some of the same characters as her first novel, *Linden Hills*
was set in a well-to-do black suburb that would have been considered a major
move upward by the residents of Brewster Place. Critically consensus
regarded this novel as much more adventurous and broader in scope than Naylor’s first book. All over, Naylor made the point that attempting to rise in the ranks of white-dominated society through economic means, results in a shallow victory. The initial idea for this novel was influenced by her reading of *The Inferno* in a Great Literature course at Brooklyn. *Linden Hills* is an African-American middle-class neighborhood patterned after the circular geography of Dante’s *Hell*. Two younger poets, outsiders in Linden Hills who are looking for work the week before Christmas, discover the neurosis and crimes of the bourgeois inhabitants, who have relinquished culture and values for material gain. Simultaneously, they make their way through a series of drives that ring the suburban development in a fashion similar to Dante’s nine circles of hell. As the twosome venture down the hill, they meet those who have moved up in society. More or less cast in the role of the devil is Luther Nedeed, a local mortician and real estate Mogul whose family has reigned at the top of the Linden Hills hierarchy for over 150 years. Lester and Willie discover a series of last souls yearning for a piece of the American dream, which ultimately cannot give them the fulfillment for which they yearn. Victims of Nedeed’s carefully packaged optimism, these residents are in some ways trapped more inside Linden Hills than they would be on the outside. Some critics found the symbolism in *Linden Hills* too heavy-handed, while others felt the novel’s good points won out over its weaknesses.

Naylor’s third novel, *Mama Day*, was published in 1988. Its settings are New York City and Willow Springs, a sea island off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina whose most powerful inhabitant, a 90-year-old conjurer
woman named Miranda ‘Mama’ Day, healer and magician, serves as a spiritual guide. When Mama Day’s beloved niece, Cocoa, brings her husband George to visit, they all become involved in a plot to save Cocoa from a deadly curse. Naylor examined the conflicts between men and women, portraying the women as the repository of the sensual and emotional, and the male as the essence of rationality. Mama Day had also made an appearance in *Linden Hills*. Bharati Mukherjee in the *New York Times Review* states, “On this wondrous island, slavery and race relations, lover’s quarrels, family scandals, professional jealousies all become the ‘stuff as dreams are made on.’” Even Mukherjee called the novel ‘magnificent’ in its depiction of a host of bizarre characters ranging from rogues and frauds to martyrs and clairvoyants. *Mama Day* was called farfetched by some critics, however, who said that its characters were not fully fleshed out. It also suffered from the baggage of a subsidiary love story that resembled the plight of Romeo and Juliet. Like Naylor’s other novels, this one reverberates with the influences of traditional literature, this time Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

After it, Naylor has penned two other works *Bailey’s Cafe* (1992) and a dramatic version of the story for the stage in 1994. In *Bailey’s Cafe*, Naylor focused on the interesting lives of the proprietors of a diner and its various patrons. The cafe is a magnet that draws a wide variety of society’s detritus, each with her own story to tell. Naylor’s main concern here was female sexuality and all sides of it are brought to light by characters ranging from Eve, the madam of a local brothel, to Sister Carrie, a nun. There is even an Ethiopian child who may be the bearer of a miracle. While in the outside world
these characters may be thought of as misfits, in the cafe each one achieves a transcendent status and serves as a symbol of the triumph of perseverance over adversity. Once again, Naylor demonstrated her ability to find the heroism in the lives of everyday people, while at the same time showing their frustration at not being able to escape their position in life. In 1994, Naylor adapted Bailey’s Cafe; for the stage, which gave her the opportunity to dramatically display the rhythms of her characters’ lives and speech patterns.

In 1998, Naylor returned to Brewster Place, this time focusing on the male residents, in The Men of Brewster Place. Here she, according to African American Review turns her artistic and political attention to the plight of the black man and she does so in such a way, as to render a compelling fictional expose of his dilemma. The African-American Review noted that there is little, if any of the lyrical prose which readers have come to expect from this gifted novelist and that the male characters lack much of the emotional involvement and depth that make Naylor’s female characters so memorable. Despite these failings, however, The African American Review called it a much needed glimpse into the inner life of black men from a black woman’s perspective.

Naylor is currently working on her forthcoming novel, Saphhira Wade. She is also busy with her own production company, One Way Productions, which is intended to present positive images of the black community to as many people in America and around the world as possible. Naylor’s other writings have included one work of nonfiction as well as essays and screenplays. In addition, she served as editor of Children of the Night: The Best
Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to Present. She as a founder of an independent film company, One Way Productions, formed to bring Mama Day and other projects to the screen. The company has also produced a children’s play. After a brief marriage during her years as a missionary, Naylor has decided not to remarry or have children because she felt that her solitude is vital for her work. One of the few black women to win the coveted Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing, Naylor has been hailed, according to The African American Review, one of contemporary African American literature’s most insightful and significant writers. Since her first novel was published in 1982, Gloria Naylor has become one of the most critically acclaimed and popular writers. Along with Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, she is one of the key forces in the black feminist literary movement. At the same time, Naylor has avoided criticism leveled at her fellow black feminist writers for their negative depictions of black men. She was the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts (1985), a Guggenheim fellowship (1988) and a few African American women ever to receive this honor. She was a cultural exchange lecturer for the United States Information Agency in India in 1985. She served as the writer-in-residence of the Cummington Community of Arts (Summer, 1983) and as a visiting professor at George Washington University (1983-1984), University of Pennsylvania (1986), New York University (1987), Brandeis University (1988) and Cornell (1988). Naylor not only receives the American Book Award (1982) but also receives the Candace Award of the National Coalition of One Hundred Black Women (1986) and Lillian Smith Award (1989) for her valuable
contribution to the black literature. At present, she has American citizenship and as a professional novelist she continues her career.

In the last decade of the 20th century, it is amazing to find that Blacks have enriched American life with their contributions in almost all the fields including politics, science, business, Armed Forces, arts and entertainment, domains like music, painting, films, literature, media etc. One can hardly believe that less than three decades back, Blacks were legally not allowed public conveyances, hospitals, libraries, drinking fountains, hotels etc. For centuries Black women have been called the ‘mule of the world’ and ‘slave of the slave’ and had the status of the wretched on the earth. Uprooted from her native African culture and placed in a dominant white Euro-Christian culture, she was very often intimidated by racists. A glance, through the history of African ancestors reveal that there was no rigid compartmentalization based on sexual taboos like she often accompanied men on hunts and on to the battlefield during pre-slavery days. The black woman’s condition in exile was worsened. Her virtues were violated. Her silence was the silence of the oppressed. Initially, the main concern of the Black Women’s Organizations was to abolish all kinds of economic and political disparities against them. Now, they are mainly concerned with the issues of black women who are oppressed by both sexism and racism.

With black women, there are also black men who too suffer at the hands of white masters and mistresses. Black men’s oppression operates at different levels like the exploitation of Black man’s labor, the iron pots and kettles representing the economic oppression. Economic independence was the remotest thing with black male or female could have ever imagined. The
political dimension of oppression had denied African-American men and women the rights and privileges routinely extended to white male and female citizens. Their political status was the lowest in the hierarchy, from social point of view, the justice was denied to them. While the black woman looked after white man’s home and children, her own children were often neglected. But the saddest part of the story is that in the journey of life, she found herself alone with no protector around because even her own man was reduced to the status of a slave. She not only had to fend for him economically but satisfy his male ego too. On the other hand, when black males somewhere have soft corner for their partners, they always face female domination towards their routine life. In the novels of Gloria Naylor the Adamic strain attains a status of a kind of revolt against the stereotype depiction of slave narratives be white writers and even by male black writers. In the novels of Naylor, the black woman or man protagonist is neither a nigger nor a Negro but she or he is an individual being, in search of her or his identity. The black man and woman do not only think about themselves, their relationships but also about the female and male bodies and its desires. Bell Hooks has rightly pointed out that black women must make use of their marginality and, “...make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony and well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony.” Gloria Naylor finds success to portray the black woman as well as black man’s survival and sufferings through her novels. She wants to depict the awareness of self-definition in the minds of the black women or men as to who they are and what they would like to be. She even shows their existing predicament and what they would like to
be in future. As a critic Audre Lorde says, “If we do not define ourselves for ourselves we will be defined by others.”

The black women have been trying to reclaim their lost womanhood and self through their art and literature but they were given a sub human status, they were projected negatively in the form of types by the white men, women and by the black men. Through it, one understand that the concept taken up by Gloria Naylor though is not something new and it has been dealt with many other writers before but however, her efforts are remarkable. Naylor also reveals the differences between white women and black women. She explains that the white women have some support to fall back upon but the black women’s case is so, because she herself faces and feels her family’s experience. Naylor was profoundly influenced in her writing by her household conditions, her grandparents, parents and the culture at home. She is a marked storyteller and her novels are all handling the narrative technique. She deals with the situation of black women in social, political and in economic aspect and she has been successful to some extent to make an impact on their self perception. She depicts the triple consciousness which develops a peculiar dilemma in their lives. The black women and men are shown in her novels trying to arrange their lives and fit into the behavior of Western fashion or traditional value. These women and men also try to recognize their true natures and identify themselves. Gloria Naylor is sensitive and emotional writer who always tries to highlight the dilemma of this genre in her almost novels.
The term African-American is seldom problematic due to its imprecise cultural and geographic meaning. The term as originally applied refers to only those descended from a small number of colonial indentured servants and the estimated 5,00,000 Africans taken to British North America on the U.S. as slaves (of about eleven million Africans taken to the western Hemisphere in general). In slightly broader usage, the term can include West Indian and Afro-Latino immigrants whose African ancestors also survived the middle passage or recent African immigrants and children of immigrants with American citizenship but these groups tend to use the ethnic terms Latino or Hispanic or identify themselves by their countries of origin (i.e. as Nigerian, Dominican or Jamaican instead of Africans-Americans). The term does not comprise white, Indian or Arab immigrants from the African continent and they are not generally considered Africans on the continent. According to 2003 U.S. census figures, some 37.1 million African-Americans live in the U.S.A., containing 12.9 percent of the total population. At the time of the 2000 census, 54.8 percent of African-Americans live in the South. In that year, 17.6 percent of African-Americans lived in the North East and 18.7 percent in the Midwest, while only 8.9 percent lived in the western states. Almost 8.8 percent of African-Americans live in Metropolitan areas in 2000. With over two million African-American inhabitants, New York City had the largest black urban population in the U.S. in 2000. Among cities of 1,000 or more, grey Indian had the highest percentage in black inhabitants of any U.S. City in 2000, with 85 percent, followed closely by Detroit, Michigan with 83 percent.

Gloria Naylor’s concern is not only racism but also the oppressive conditions thrust on her protagonists and the traumatic effect caused by such
oppression. Like other black writers, Gloria Naylor analyses the social and political background of African-Americans. She is committed to survival and wholeness of entire black people, male and female. She very effectively tries to celebrate the strength of black people against the robust-odds of triple-jeopardy, by developing the necessary political, social and aesthetic consciousness. A number of factors contributed to Gloria Naylor’s developing social, political consciousness, environment, familiar background, community and African-American folklore, her educational background and her early life’s experience and last but not least her inspiration through Toni Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. These factors supported her to become more conscious of the nature of African dilemma, the crisis of the African personality, the reason and effects of it and her sincere commitment to solve it through her fictional work.

Naylor has successfully pictured the damaging influence of white standards and values on the lives of black people. It has exposed the devastation caused by white cultural domination in the lives of African-Americans. So, Naylor presents the live picture of present society in which having black’s own culture and own place means having everything-love, affection, acceptance, positive approach, friends and family, in short, an honestly enviable place in the society. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor has introduced us to seven female characters, who for their social status, liberty, equality and economic and political advancement, face and experience acute anguish and torment and after facing enough malice as well as exploitation they come out in order to close to the ruling class. In this first
novel Gloria Naylor is depicting distinctly the climate of revolution plus evolving black consciousness of the seventies-eighties, a period characterized by an almost evangelical struggle for personal and racial identity. It shows the obsession of blacks with an American standard of beauty that seems both inescapable and destructive. *The Women of Brewster Place* which expresses very frankly, a tragic tale of seven women who want to be successful as the whites but they do not have such spirit which are the existing American standards of victory, that is why they continue their struggle against male chauvinism and at any cost want to get and lastly get back their success and proper place in the community as well as society. In this first novel, one can see a vivid picture of African-Americans; especially they get success in giving us a true position of them through Naylor’s novels.

*The Women of Brewster Place* is a novel in which Gloria Naylor successfully highlights the social and political condition of the African-Americans. One of the chief inmates of this novel is Mattie Michael, who is oppressed sexually, socially and politically because she is unwed mother of only son and nobody dares to give her proper shelter. Her own community’s man rapes her and leaves her alone. After this incident, she is alone and even homeless. After the showdown with her father, Mattie leaves her hometown and reaches Asheville, North Carolina. She works hard to bring up her son, Basil but who falls into bad company, kills a man and is jailed. To get him out of jail, Mattie sells her house and ends up in Brewster Place. Mattie’s strong-spirited, thirty five year-old friend Etta has reached an age when she can no longer catch men. But however, she allows herself to hitch with a Reverend.
After this cheat, she realizes that there can be no permanent relationship with men of her choice and she does not allow her spirit to be broken. Another inmate is Kiswana Browne. Kiswana is a rebel and has left the home of her middle-class parents. She is in Brewster Place to realize and assert her blackhood and to help the other blacks living there. The next character is Lucielia. She has married and lives with her husband and a baby girl. Her husband Eugene neither can stick to a job nor a place and deserts his family for long periods. In fact, Eugene each and every time faces racial, political and social harrassment at the hands of whites and being exploited mostly misbehaves with Ciel. The next inmate is Cora Lee, who loves babies, wants babies and even has babies. Who their father is, is immaterial to her and she can not handle the children when they grow up. She has realized that husbands are tyrants and she feels confident that she can take care of herself and her children too. The last chapter is about two lesbian girls, Theresa and Lorraine, who have to face stiff antagonism from some of the inmates of Brewster Place and then Lorraine is raped by a gang of young hooligans. This harmless and timid girl, in a frenzy, kills an old man Ben, who had just tried to help her.

According to Naylor, these are the stories of the hopes, despairs, lust and caring of the women of Brewster Place. All these aspects indicate each and every woman’s solidarity with each other. Till the end, they remain women capable of love and trust and this love and trust is also the root cause of their problems, miseries and despairs. Through these female characters, one can understand their social and political backgrounds. They all are
tortured, annihilated and even hopeless but in spite of it, they stand together and fight for their rights. Thus, Gloria Naylor has effectively described the condition of African-American women, who were deviated not only by their husbands, their own sex but also by white masters.

The second novel Linden Hills, sets in an affluent suburb. This novel deals with two poets who support themselves by doing odd jobs in a black middle-class neighborhood, which has lost touch with its roots. In Linden Hills, there is one patriarch named Luther Nedeed, who deals people whether it is black or white with same eye. He is a very orthodox person and to raise his name he gets married with octoroon woman named Willa. Willa unfortunately delivers a white son and bears that punishment which she did not commit. She and her dead son pass seven days in the basement and finally, she comes out and takes revenge against Luther Nedeed. Naylor is noted for her searing portraits of abusive black males and the struggle of black women to surmount the double oppression perpetuated by their own male partners and the white majority. This novel is a story of resistance and rebirth of a female character. It portrays a world in which black Americans have achieved status and some measure of power but in the process they have forfeited their hearts and souls. It follows Dante Alighieri’s Inferno by employing Dante’s moral geography, adapting his narrative strategy as the journey through hell as her main organizing principle and offering an allegory intended to warn and instruct her intended audience-black Americans. So, this novel too portrays the scenario of African-American society.
Naylor’s third novel *Mama Day* has been set in all-black island community founded by a slave off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, is one of the writer’s most ambitious works, evoking comparisons with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) for likewise showing the haunted past of a family and community. A conflict facing many black Americans today is the loss of African roots and heritage in a modern society that does not encourage cultural identity but stifles it instead. Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* brings the all-black inhabitants of the island of Willow Springs for closer to Africa than the black folks of mainland America could ever be. Geographically, Willow Springs is set apart from the United States, separated from the South Carolina/Georgia border by water and is thus, closer to Africa than the rest of the U.S. Additionally, given the island’s location along the US East Coast, it is frequently a victim of hurricanes, through which, according to Naylor, the inhabitants briefly experience the feelings of Middle Passage, the voyage of slaves from Africa to the Sea Islands and other destinations. Finally, the idea of conjuring, coming from, among others, the lore of the Yoruba and Igbo religious (Yoruba and Igbo being the tribes that were more frequently taken from Africa as slaves), is a common and accepted part of life to the people of Willow Springs. Virginia Fowler Comments:

Geographically, socially, and culturally, Willow Springs is closer than any other location in the United States to Africa, and it thus allows Naylor both to celebrate the African heritage of black Americans and to contrast the values of that heritage with those of the white world.  

Mama Day’s ancestors had passed their lives under the suppression of whites and the forthcorning generation did not come under the influence of whites’
domination, the prime black power i.e. conjurer woman named Sapphira Wade took a grim step against the white’s hegemony and establishes the black community in front of white’s world, which is finally leaded by Mama Day. So, this novel shows the glimpse of socio-political background of African-American society.

The fourth novel Bailey’s Cafe is about a man, who runs a Brooklyn cafe frequented by an all black cast of characters, including Eve (a brothel owner), Sadie (an alcoholic and prostitute), Miss Maple (a heterosexual transvestite), Jesse Bell (a lesbian) and of course, Bailey himself, who provides asylum to these characters, who tell him their life stories. Naylor’s sensitive narrative and gift for characterization have been compared with Sherwood Anderson’s classic, Winesburg, Ohio. Each and every fictional character of this novel has a very horrible background and being socially and politically exploited they finally try to live their lives with their own methods. Eve is exploited by her godfather, Sadie is exploited by her alcoholic and harlot mother and her own husband, Peaches is exploited firstly at the age of nine by her father’s friend, Esther gets married at the age of fourteen and throughout her life, she has never seen her husband’s love, Jesse Bell is exploited at hands of her husband’s Uncle, Eli and later on, her own child, Miss Maple, who is actually a man named Stanley but after facing racial and sexual tortures is compelled to become Miss Maple. Last but not least the character Mariam, who is pregnant at the age of fourteen and unluckily does not know the name of unborn baby’s father. So, it becomes clear that the
social and political background of these characters were nothing but they are still hiring only for the sake of a good and prosperous future.

In her last novel *The Men of Brewster Place*, Naylor adds to her portraits of women living in an urban housing project in *The Women of Brewster Place*, a gallery of male profiles. In this novel, 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 character whether he is married or non-married, if he is attached with a female with different relation he is committing his mistake and wants to live with them being a friend, husband, lover and father. All these characters are socially insecure and politically weak to face any problems, so they want to restart their life with unity and are also desierous to live with their family. Whether black male or female, both are the puppets at the hands of white masters. Gloria Naylor stands as the vanguard of contemporary writers of fiction. Her success as a writer transcends both her racial identity and gender. She is not only a leading Afro-American woman novelist, though this is most noteworthy, but also one of the most significant and relevant writers on the literary scene today. So, in a few words it can be said that Naylor has got success in depicting the pathetic condition of the black women as well as men beautifully to draw the attention of socio-political background of African-American society.

In 1920s, a renaissance in the arts was created by a group of writers called ‘New Negroes’ or ‘Harlem Renaissance’ and we get many examples that the black writers were sponsored by even wealthy white patrons and mainstream *New York Publishers*. 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 a time of excitement for the younger generation of the Negro intelligentsia. What made this renaissance pivotal for Afro-Americans, most particularly artists and intellectuals, was the affirmation of a distinct cultural heritage and the Visibility of that culture’s manifestation. Another important thing of Harlem’s black cultural history is its role as a center for protest organizations. Although the Negro Renaissance was fundamentally a cultural movement, it can in no way be isolated from black protest of the period: protest movements formed an important psychological backdrop and many artists in fact wrote for radical magazines like The Crisis, Opportunity and The Messenger. There was a general belief that individual achievement by any Negro was a road to improved conditions for all members of the race. Although, many of the Harlem intellectuals severely criticized the movement, it was vastly popular with working-class blacks. The word ‘black’ is used for those Americans who are of African origin. They were earlier called ‘Niggers’ because the white men wanted them to feel that they were different. The word Nigger or Negro is a pure product of America. Black has replaced Negro just as the word Negro had replaced Nigger which had a derogatory cannotation, “The word ‘black’ is now used in the context of American civilization to describe a free man of color while the word Negro was used to designate a black slave.”\(^6\) It was amazing and never seen before. Those who were the believers of civil rights and even political leaders has come to believe that it would be through the arts that full social, political and economic liberation for the black elite would come.
At the turn of the century, stories about what was then called ‘the better class of colored people’ dominated fiction written by Afro-Americans. But with the Harlem Renaissance the black bourgeoisie passed out of fashion as a literary topic. 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.C. Du Bois, in whose fictional work black middle-class character and setting were coupled with the theme of racial uplift. In the 1920s, Walter White, who became the NAACP’s executive secretary and Jessie Fauset, the woman who served as literary editor of the NAACP’s Crisis magazine under Du Bois, both wrote first novels in order to present authentic portrayals of ‘Negroes of breeding’. By the mid-1930s, with the increasing emphasis on the lives of average, workaday blacks in literature, Afro-American writers more often treated the black bourgeoisie as the object of scorn, deriding them for intellectual superficiality and conspicuous consumption as well as for their shame of the slave past, of the culture that spawned blues and jazz and of physical features that linked them to Africa.

Moreover, in 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution declared, slavery ended. 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. Many of
those organizations, The National Organization for Women (NOW), The
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and
several activist groups for the equal rights of homosexuals and lesbians-
believe the constitution guarantees equal rights for everyone and believe
government does not consistently enforce those laws. This assumption that all
people, under God and under the American-Constitution, have the right for
equal treatment exists on paper--in theory--but does not always hold true in
practice. Foreigners in the United States are quite easy to spot, American
Indian characteristics are usually easy to recognize but the blacks in America
are probably the easiest to identify. After all they have black skin.

The term Feminism is an ideology in the making. According to the
Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘Feminism’ was first used in the latter part
of the 19th century and it was defined as having the ‘qualities of females’. The
meaning of the term has been gradually transformed and now it means a
‘theory of the political, economic and social equalities of the sexes’. In
general, feminism is the ideology of women’s liberation since intrinsic in all its
approaches is the belief that women suffer injustice because of their sex. And
feminist is a woman who recognizes herself and is recognized by others as a
feminist. That awareness depends on a woman having experienced
consciousness raising; a knowledge of woman’s oppression and a recognition
of woman’s difficulties and communalities. Consciousness, as a term of
feminist thought, according to de Lauretis, is poised on the divide that joins and distinguishes the opposing term in a sense of conceptual sets central to contemporary theories of culture, “…subject and object, self and other, private and public, oppression and resistance, domination and agency, hegemony and marginality, sameness and differences and so on.” Feminism basically is a critique of male dominance and of the male point of view which has forced itself upon the world and does force itself upon the world as its way of knowing. According to Catherine A. Mackinnon:

Gender itself is less a matter of [sexual] difference, than an insistence of that dominance, and the appeal to biology as determining the ‘fact’ of women’s sexual specificity. It is an ideological by-product of the male way of knowing… Sexualized objectification is what defines woman as sexual and under male supremacy.8

Basically, feminist consciousness refers to reality, regarding women’s socio-sexual existence. Consequently, feminist theory is not directed outward towards (the analysis of) and object reality but turns inward, towards the ‘pursuit of consciousness’ and so, ‘becomes a form of political practice’. A feminist changes one’s behavior; makes new friends, responds differently to people and events, one’s habits of consumption, living arrangement and whole style of life. These changes in behavior go hand in hand with changes in consciousness. Thus, by feminism, one can discern that women are aware of their political, social and economical rights or woman’s voice against injustice and inequality. A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about women’s life and problems. All African-American women share common experience of being black woman in a society that denigrates woman of African descent. Black women’s work and family
experiences and grounding in traditional African-American culture suggest that African-American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not black and female. The word ‘black’ denotes the race and feminist means a person who knows the exploitation of women is caused by patriarchal hegemony and that one is ready to end that hegemony to reconstruct the lives of women and to build a society based on no discrimination.

The black women were concerned about their identity, dignity as well as respect and they started to gain their lost humanity and collective and individual self through their art and literature. Not only this, they have also succeeded in establishing themselves as writers and creative artists of reputation. Though the black women were a major party in making and developing black literature, their contribution to ‘Black Literature’ was always denied and ignored till a few decades back. It is only recently that the literature of black women has come into vogue and is recognized as a literature of distinct sensibility. Some notable black female writers as: Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor do certainly share some commonalities with black men writers and white women writers. They have their own uniqueness and style to highlight the issues against white and in favor of black.

Throughout the novels of Gloria Naylor, she uses the theme of protest and gives mostly the touch of feminism. Returning to the novels, one can observe that almost all the male characters in the novel suffer from some of alienation and so non-alienation in the case of women become a burden. Women have to operate in a world in which those who are powerful have no
sense of belonging. If the powerful do possess the positive values of human life, such as love, trust, care, forgiveness, hope, etc., these values are used as instruments to achieve control. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Mattie suffers because she loves her son, Lucielia because she loves her husband, Cora Lee is a victim of her desire for babies and Lorraine is raped for she does not accept a participant male in the act of sex. These women understand one another’s emotions and help one another in their hour of distress. They stand firmly against male domination and geometric-jeopardy.

In *Linden Hills*, the male character, Luther Nedeed though throughout his life protests against white supremacy but in front of his wife, he was a failure and murderer. What he did against Willa and his own son is not forgivable. So, by taking revenge and protesting, she kills her husband and herself too. Gloria Naylor continues to discuss the problem of color in her next novel *Mama Day*. *Mama Day* is from the island of Willow Springs located in the South off the U.S. coastline but belonging to no particular State. The island belongs to the black people who live on it. The people of Willow Springs have their own ‘rules’ and ‘laws’ which have never needed to be written down as the United States constitution was written down. That is the open protest of blacks against whites. In *Bailey’s Cafe* Naylor’s main concern was female sexuality. Though these characters are professionally harlots but primarily they were not prostitutes. While in the outside world these characters may be thought of as misfits, in the cafe each one achieves a transcendent status and serves as a symbol of the triumph of perseverance over adversity. Once again, Naylor demonstrated her ability to show the non-violence protest in the lives of
everyday people. *The Men of Brewster Place* is a male oriented novel, here Naylor repeatedly draws our attention towards the plights of the black men and, side by side, she exposes the dilemmas of these men. ‘Ben’ from beyond the grave, serves as the Greek Chorus: he sees it all and comes as close as one can to understanding the men and women of Brewster Place. He as exploites at the hands of white master exactly exploites at the hands of his wife. Finally, he leaves his wife and his house to find some solace. ‘Brother Jeroma’ whoes blues speak for everyone on Brewster Place. He is a doting child of his mother but his mother always tries to take some advantage through his piano playing. Though Jeroma is a retarded person but his music always gives some message to blacks that they should aware about their shortcomings and struggle against whites’ hegemony. ‘Basil’ instead of becoming the man his mother wanted him to be, his obsession with repaying his debt to her forces him to become a victim of his own devotion. He repents because he was the last support of Mattie and in spite of it, he runs away to leave her alone. In this novel, though Basil atones but however, he faces sorrow and most probably deceit by that; from whom he loves from the bottom of his heart. At last, being alone he starts on his journey to find out his lost identity. ‘Eugene’, who is the best example of multiple jeopardy, now is torn between the pull of his family and the urge to re-create himself into a person even he does not understand. His wife leaves him and to punish himself he chooses to whip himself beyond the limitations. ‘C. C. Baker’, is a most brutal character. He finds that his desire for power over people and places, he cannot control, renders him powerless. He rapes Larraine and kills his
stepbrother Hakim. He commits it because he cannot see anyone superior to him. ‘Moreland T. Woods’ after putting his own self-service before that of others, he finds himself mocked by his selfishness. He is a deceiver and to breach his hocus-pocus Abshu and Deacon Bennett take bold step to remove him from the ministership of church. Thus, these characters who are exploited and someway, on the other hand exploit others, are richly used in these novels with various shades and notions. Throughout the novels, Naylor’s every fictional characters are protesting and sustaining their lives with some problems and troubles. Naylor is a substantial talent and through her talent she always gives a message of African culture, which is included in her novels. Gloria Naylor’s works show us such resolute women or men, who are united in their struggle. The black women or men know the fact that they can help only one another, if they want to survive for that they must unite. So, it becomes clear that Gloria Naylor is a remarkable fictionist of African-American Literature and stands firmly in the vanguard of contemporary writers of fiction through her outstanding works.
REFERENCES


3 Bell Hooks, Feminist Theory From Margin to Centre (Boston: South End Press, 1984) 15.


