CONCLUSION

In the hands of a creative writer like Gloria Naylor, protest is an effective tool to generate change and also highlight the plight of the exploited. In fact, protest is the only weapon to assert one’s identity and attain dignity. Naylor has actively registered her voice of protest in every possible form against the political, social, cultural, racial and other related problematic areas of black people. In one sentence, one can discern that protest is ‘essential for survival’. Protest is not negative, it is, instead, something to be respected, celebrated and analyzed, as a source of continuous inspiration. While the media highlights freedom fighters, Olympic athletes and wealthy entrepreneurs as today’s national heroes, writer Gloria Naylor points to another, unsung group of heroes, the hidden majority of black men and women who work hard all their lives to preserve their families and communities against the odds of poverty, discrimination, dangerous neighborhoods and despair. Naylor has focused on their stories in her novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and *The Men of Brewster Place* (1988). African–American women face discrimination at the hands of the white society and their own menfolk and on the other hand the black men too face same atrocities at the hands of their own women and whites. Naylor’s male and female characters, in their common cause, are mute spectators to this pain, humiliation and injustice. They are caught between this unending cycle
of despair and violence at the hands of their own men on one hand and the menace of the larger white society, on the other hand. When Gloria Naylor first burst onto the literary scene with her exploration of a small urban town, she grabbed the attention of readers and critics alike, propelling her towards literary stardom. Of race relations in the United States, Naylor has said, “I think the best way to increase racial harmony is to get to know each other. Blacks and whites in this country now live in separate neighborhoods, worship in separate churches … it is difficult to get tolerance. The first step is simply to get to know each other.”

Naylor’s novels offer one way to bridge that gap of ignorance and isolation. Her companion novels about a block of tenement housing on the fictional Brewster Place, for example, introduce struggling Afro-Americans who may never see the real American Dreams, those for whom victory is only survival itself. *The Women of Brewster Place*, her landmark first work, noted for its portrayal of black women’s relationships and search for identity. Its female characters reappear but take a back seat in *The Men of Brewster Place*, written fifteen years later, in which Naylor examines the particular challenges, are faced by black men in their families and communities. In her novels including *Linden Hills*, *Mama Day* and *Bailey’s Cafe*, she tries to explore something new about black culture. In those efforts she consistently exposes the backwardness of blacks in the society dominated by the whites and finally in response, she makes the black men and women to protest and fight against white’s hegemony.
Black literature or protest literature, by the time of Harlem Renaissance came into the forefront and got enough popularity. It has played a significant role in African American cultural history in challenging the racist hypocrisy of America from its earliest period. Protest remains integral to African-American not only to denounce the technologies of power and brutalities of institutionalized practices but also to forge a distinct black American national identity and citizenship. The most influential twentieth century protest writers include Richard Wright, Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor. Naylor’s novels are essentially a literature of implicit protest against social, cultural and political realities of America. In the writings of Gloria Naylor, one evermore finds out the issues pertaining to the lives of hapless black women and men. These hapless women and men are not only deprived of the basic human rights in the society but also lack the very sense of genuine and authentic black human identity. To recognize and retain their lost identity, Gloria Naylor gave them the important role of protest to fight against injustice. Whether the protest is covert or overt, whether it has a specific political, social or economic objective, whether it is a manifestation of the unconscious or a conscious attempt to alter the social order, literature gives ample voice to the conflicts and sufferings, centers around the marginal or marginalized, stimulates rethinking and guides reforms and also it is the distinctive features of contemporary literary protest. When protest depends on the mob, it becomes a political matter and once it is politicized then it becomes sure that the affairs come open in front of people. Gloria Naylor’s novels generally deal with the theme of hard handedness of black men and the oppression of black women. In an interview with William Goldstein, Naylor has
expressed her aim in writing *The Women of Brewster Place*, “I wanted to immortalize the spirit I saw in my grandmother, my grandaunt and my mom.”\(^2\)

Naylor, while writing this novel perhaps depicts the role of her grandmother, great-aunt and her mother in the seven characters of Brewster Place and narrates the story which is actually related to her grandmother, great-aunt and her mother. Gloria Naylor is heartily influenced by her mother and comparatively both women Kiswana’s mother and Naylor’s mother both women look after their children and give them advice from time to time.

The novel *The Women of Brewster Place* highlights the lives of seven women, who come together to protest and survive against the dominance of black men. These women are displaced from their world by triple threat. Hence, they yield a world of their own – the Brewster Place – where their power and reign is supreme. In fact, the novel is a story of a community in which some women are unwed mothers, some are surrogate mothers and some are deserted wives. And all of them, however, want to survive in the society according to their own will. It is however, remarkable to note that in the lives of most of these black women, black men play a very vague and ambiguous role. Naylor bravely and excellently dramatizes the world of women and exposes the black patriarchy which is responsible for women’s plight and exactly vice-versa. Naylor’s character exhibits their protest equally against male and female domination and against a worse society and also against adversity and unfortunate conditions. Therefore, in this sequence we first discuss about Mattie, who protests against her parents and her ditching lover Butch, against the cruel society infested with sexuality, diversity and
most probably against poverty and injustice. Mattie’s struggle starts ever-since she is baffled by Butch. Mattie as a woman would have her biological needs in the form of sex but beyond it, she restrains herself from such needs and proves her a strong character against all odds. Mattie one of the Naylor’s main characters is depicted as a glistening star among the other six women and proves a great protestor. Thus, Mattie protests against male chauvinism and triple jeopardy and proves as a role model to other womenfolk who are equally and constantly suppressed in the society.

The second woman protestor is ‘Etta’. In Brewster Place, Etta is the only woman who rejects the sexual advances of a white man and refuses to submit to the pressures of Southern racism and sexism. ‘Kiswana,’ is another much more aggressive female character in Brewster Place. Since college days, she takes part in black movements and for the sake of her black community she changes her Euro-centric name ‘Melanie’ into the African name ‘Kiswana’. Yet another character is ‘Lucielia’ who marries Eugene. Eugene never finds a regular occupation and mostly in frustration, uses hostile language against Ciel. Ciel, after bearing a lot of torture finally, decides to leave her husband forever and starts to live alone. ‘Cora Lee,’ is a mother of seven children and her husband’s share is only giving babies after babies without bearing any responsibility for them. She, for the rest of the life, never thinks about male support. All alone, she nurtures her children and provides them good education. The last but not least example of protest in this novel is ‘The Two’. The lesbian girls: Lorraine and Theresa show their open rejection towards male hegemony. Lorraine, an innocent girl becomes
the booty of black male chauvinists, such as C.C. Baker and his gang. After it, the women encircle under the direction of Mattie, recollect their womanhood and they stand to protect themselves. One can very easily understand:

The depiction of physical appearance is not a trivial matter, for it has been used as a societal weapon to restrict woman … as well as being an indicator as to whether she is literally the right or wrong kind of person.³

Thus, although both are rejected by their own community yet being lesbian, they openly challenge men dominated society.

In Linden Hills, Naylor describes the experience of the black middle class—lost souls trapped in the American dreams and the oppression of black women as well. The novel clearly shows the conflicts between blacks and whites and mainly between black males and black females. Although the discrimination at the hands of the white people helped the blacks to unite and realize the importance of their own cultural and traditional values yet the shortcomings and prejudices within their own community remain unchanged. The protagonist of the novel, Luther Nedeed increasingly wants his community to be powerful through materialistic achievements but not through the collective efforts of his people. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Luther Nedeed does struggle and protests single handedly against whites for the progress of his black community. For this purpose, he establishes his own land named ‘Linden Hills’. Although Luther Nedeed is very possessive towards his own black community yet he remains traditionally against the freedom of his own womanfolk and very much believes that woman should remain as ‘child bearing machine’ to enhance the family and community. As a result, Willa
Prescott Nedeed, the last one of the Nedeed Women, is confined to solitary isolation by Luther Nedeed. She consciously ponders over her state of oppression and while searching for the cloth to cover her dead son, she finds out in the morgue basement the Bible journal of Luwana, the recipe entries of Evelyn Cretan and the photo–album of Priscilla McGuire. She becomes afraid of her plight and finally decides to rebel against her husband. With a tremendous effort, she comes out of the basement and with a strong suicidal move she grips Luther Nedeed along with her dead son and jumps over the Christmas tree fire. So, it can be conspicuously concluded that Naylor, indeed evaluated and deeply examined the possibilities of healing a community affected by the internal conflicts of color, race, sex, class or other social discriminations through the courageous protests put forth equally by the male–female characters depicted in her fictional works.

The third novel *Mama Day* is a novel about Miranda (Mama) Day, a descendant of Sapphira Wade, a slave, who is the matriarch of Willow Springs, a small sea island off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. The place Willow Springs especially meant for blacks, in itself is an open protest against white world and the janitor of this place i.e. Mama Day always protects it from the flaws. So, Sapphira Wade or Mama Day both are the daring protestors and have their own existence and recognition in the community. Naylor, in order to make them enormously powerful, provides them the supernatural powers to guard their black community.

*Bailey’s Cafe*, Gloria Naylor’s fourth novel, where the novel itself is comprised of a series of loosely connected stories – each one from a different
woman’s point of view – and culminates with a magically real, communal celebration of the birth of Mariam’s son George during the Christmas season. For the first time, not only is there oneness among a culturally diverse group whose traditions and customs span the globe, but the voices of women also unify in the ritualization of George’s birth. Each and every fictional character, likewise – Eve, Jesse, Sadie, Esther, Peaches, Mariam and Miss Maple (Stanley), all are exploited at the hands of their own kinship or knower. Eve is the first customer to arrive at Bailey’s. Sexual escapades with Godfather, the stern, dictatorial preacher who rears her and with the childish prankster Billy Boy result in her ostracism from her small Louisiana delta home. But it is in her highly symbolic trek from Pilottown to Arabi to Bailey’s Cafe that Eve, who emerges as a strong and sensitive woman with an acute sense of business and a love for well kept gardens, manages, somehow to escape the tragic fate toward which she seems destined. After Eve, all characters reach Bailey’s cafe and try to fight against their own miserable backgrounds. To coming out from the severe anguish, they accept Eve’s bordello and start to live with a sense of dignity and respect. Though the way they choose to survive is rather wrong but in spite of it, they are happy and mostly they are satisfied. So, it is clear that these characters whether male or female after facing shrill tortures, finally come into Eve’s and consistently protest against triple whammy and male chauvinism of blacks as well as whites.

In The Men of Brewster Place, Gloria Naylor cast her passionate and knowing eye on a world she has made her own, a world of sadness and glory. She depicts the stories of some black males, who are affected with their past
incidents and extremely attached with the women characters of Brewster Place. The writer, on one hand, has expounded the women protests towards their own male society as well as the white community but at the same time, Naylor also highlights the sufferings of black menfolk which are faced and experienced by them at the hands of their own women as well as white mistresses. From the beginning to the end of novel every character struggles and protests against injustice and diversity. If injustice is caused by any blacks then nobody would leave him without punishment. In the case of Moreland T. Woods, who is a black and the minister of Sinai Baptist Church but someway, he is involved in an illicit relationship with certain women and has made some of them pregnant. Hence, to remove him from ministership, Abshu, another black character, takes a bold step to collect the mob of a hundred women against Moreland. He organizes the protest against obscenity of an officer belonging to his own black community is remarkable. Ben, who is puzzled by his wife and tortured by the whites, finally leaves his wife alone even though he loves too much. It is his protest against his wife’s rude attitude because somewhere, he feels that his wife is responsible for his daughter’s running away from home. Basil, the son of Mattie, always feels guilty and tries his best to regain his lost self-respect. Though he gets enough success but in spite of it, he fails because he is not successful with his married life. Gradually, the spouses separate and taking the vital step he never comes back in the life of his wife Keisha. Throughout his life, he never gets such pleasure that he deserves but however, he sustains against the unpleasant circumstances that prevailed in his life. Eugene, who is torn
between the pull and pressure of his family and the urge to re-create himself into a person even he, does not understand. He loves his wife Ciel very much but being constantly jobless, he is compelled to leave his wife. Eugene however, becomes helpless and impatient with this decision and for redemption; he chooses to whip himself till death. It is his unbroken protest against the adverse circumstances that forced him to be separated from his lovely wife. In addition to this, while Naylor depicts the black men’s negative approach but at this very moment she has described their positive approach towards their community rules and values. Naylor’s task in projecting the female’s as well as male’s problems, exploitation and persecution in the society and their successful protests and repentances is indeed quaint and unparalleled. Thus, it becomes perspicuous that the men as well as women of the black community both suffered injustice, humiliation and tyranny at the hands of either folks and commonly at the hands of whites. They evermore do protest and try to unite themselves but at the same moment, it may be mentioned that the main reasons behind such oppression and trauma are poverty, coloredness, illiteracy, domestic backwardness and most probably acute diversity in the society of black community. Such trauma, inferiority complex and exploitation would remain in the society until these shortcomings, are eliminated. Till such time, the element of protest, however, will remain in the hands of human beings to guard them in the society.

In addition to it, apocalypse, morality, transcendence and redemption take centre stage in Naylor’s novels. But it is racism and politics that hang about in the wings. She has a reason for this. To be Black in America,
according to her, is a political problem. Just as it took time to feel, she had a voice and she says that 'we have yet to feel within this country that we are at home'. Naylor’s particular triumph as a contemporary African-American women writer has much to do with her success at moving beyond the multi-dimensional portraits of male and female figures that brought her criticism with the publication of *The Women of Brewster Place* and *The Men of Brewster Place*. Her female characters in the novels, come together, form an association and fight collectively against the exploitation and racism and sexual atrocities meted out by the black and the white males. Naylor gives the tool of activism and association in the hands of her female characters to share the responsibility of family and render their duty towards their husband and children. Indeed, Naylor while actively projecting herself as a feminist writer by writing these novels, she has also shown her moderate reflections about social obligations bestowed upon subaltern and trifling women in the society by supreme power. She not only projects the issues about women but someway she is also concerned about male haplessness. As such, the fictional characters of Naylor, on one hand protest against male chauvinism and white hegemony but on the other, they are very much caring about their friends, husbands or wives and the children too. As Jill L. Matus has rightly pointed out, “Further reasons for Naylor’s negotiation between persistent yearning and violent protest are to be found in the novel’s reflection of history and moment.” Creation of these fictional novels in a daring manner has established Gloria Naylor a strong feminist writer in the history of African-American Literature.
REFERENCES


