CHAPTER-IX

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER-IX

CONCLUSION

Gloria Naylor's major concern in her novels has been to give a different picture of the women in the society. She uses her writings as a means to dismantle the constructing walls of the traditional role of women. She uses the black women as a metaphor for all women and for that matter all people who are caught in the social trap and are known as stereotype. Each of the women appeal to the masses, and not to the elite.

Gloria Naylor received the American Book Award for her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, where she depicts a micro-cosm of the black community. The book is told in seven stories and reveals much about the self-searching of black women. Her characters are caught in the traps of society: stereotypes racism and greed. But as they fight against these traps, they learn about humanity, change, and life. They know that they can survive only by extension of their ideas.

Her second novel *Linden Hills* extends a part of the story of Kiswana found in *The Women of Brewster Place* and shows the struggle of the black family. With *Mama Day* we are intrigued by the character Mama Day, the magic surrounding her and her people. Naylor gives up important lessons about stereotypes, motherhood and marriage, about human fallibility and about the life of women in general.
Every woman faces the role of marriage and motherhood, whether she accepts it or not. Naylor warns each woman to be careful in these roles, for a fine line exists between success or failure. For which characters who fail to recognize their mistakes and who continue making those mistakes over and over again are either destroyed or finally recognize their problem. In all her novels we find, 'Blackness' 'A Common Bond—Sisterhood', 'Marriage and Motherhood', 'Racial Identity', 'Feminism and Feminist theory of double-consciousness' demonstrating the complexities of life and the universality of all people and situations. We are all searing for our identities, all of us making wrong turns beens and starting afresh. She presents us with new role models. For black women these role models demonstrate how to live a life outside the stereotype found in literature created by white men, women and black men.

The women characters of her novel are black women who have experienced the tortures. They hope that they overcome the problems that the society and their attitudes have placed in front of them. The women characters in the novels of Gloria Naylor are not just role models for black women but are the women who face specific problems of heritage, and survival in the male dominated world. They search for the patriarchal definitions of "Woman" and of characters. As mostly they are women who learn to overcome these obstacles by creating their own identities something which all women especially the black are required to do.

Blackness is a common aspect of all the novels of Gloria Naylor. From her novels it is evident that she is aware of the 13th Amendment of the Constitution which ended slavery in America.
Her novels respect the period 1973-89 when Americans of all races and creed participated in the Civil Rights Movement across the US. They were representatives of various organizations as NOW-NAACR interpreted those laws as fundamental bases for equality among all people. In her novels *Linden Hills, Mama Day*, her female characters are members of this association. While in *Bailey’s Cafe*, Miss Maple tells about the Civil War. They all group for the equal rights of homosexuals and lesbians and believe the constitution guarantees equal rights for everyone and that the government does not consistently enforce these laws.

Gloria Naylor points out that in reality few people treat those different from themselves as equals. And one of the easiest way to determine is in Orwells classic phrase who is “more equal” than others, by physical characteristics mainly by skin colour and skin tone. Foreigners in the US are quite easy to spot, Americans and Indian have equal characteristics so are usually easy to recognize but the blacks in America are probability the easiest to identify as they have black skin.

“Black” is the most common feature found in all the novels of Gloria Naylor. “Milk shakes” is a commonly used metaphor by one of her characters interchangeably for “White” (Caucasian) of this notion are concerned with skin tone, the blacks are just as concerned about skin tone, facial features, hair textures and hair length of their own race. Like the other Black women writers, Gloria Naylor’s works prove,

“The subject of the black woman’s physical beauty occurs with such frequency in the writings of black
women that it indicates they have been deeply af-
fected by the discrimination against the shade of their
skin and the texture of their hair."

In Naylor's novels the characters are described as "golden", "golden brown" ebony and the hair texture as "kinky straight, wirey thick or fine." The literature of Gloria Naylor support the belief that the birth of light skinned black is the cause of celebration and pride. Colour is of utmost importance in the novels of Gloria Naylor.

Gloria Naylor has a talent for writing because she puts her personal life and familiar past into every story. All her novels reveal an autobiographical touch. She establishes her individual voice in all her novels. With this character she introduces the central theme of *Mama's Day*. She makes a space for her own story among the text of her novels. She asserts her racial and gender difference in all her novels. *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* the narrator gets her voice which is distinct from that of the characters. In *Mama Day* the voice of Mama Day is spiritual and a guide to religious truth. She dreams of a better condition for America and its natives. The tearing of the bricks of Brewster walls is an act of resistance against the conditions that prevails within it. The females of *The Women of Brewster Place* or *Bailey's Cafe* are frustrated with perpetual or unwanted pregnancy, the burdens of poverty and single parenting each with a different story but all unite in hurling bricks and breaking down the boundaries. The male boundaries of harassment and tortures are also faced boldly by the women characters. Naylor captures the cathartic and purgative aspect of resistance and aggression. Demonic imagery which is accompanied with the venting of desire that exceeds known limits, becomes apocalyptic in her novels.
In the Afro-American tradition Gloria Naylor gives account of partially disposed characters who, despite the abuses they suffer, somehow manage to keep moving. Gloria Naylor explores the practices and beliefs that help to sustain the black folk and community during slavery and afterwards. Narrative emphasis on cooking, clearing or even nurturing reveals the place of occurrence (Brewster, Linden Hills, Willow Springs and Bailey's Cafe) more than just a physical or geographical place, they are symbolic reality far removed from a white patriarchal space. Women serve as bearers of culture and tradition, or have the power of conjurer, even as they accommodate themselves to life. Naylor mentions,

"The women character who appeared out of nothing but serve as muses as she wrote offering her guidance and direction."

Her women character are mostly transplanted southern who journey to the north suggests the viability of a rural folk tradition in an urban setting. They are aware of all the tortures a women has to face being a black women. These women form bonds between themselves like – Ben, Etta Mae and Mattie (The Women of Brewster Place,) Mama Day, Miranda, Cocoa in (Mama Day) Eve, Jesse, Mary in (Bailey's Cafe) Willa, Wille, Luwana Packerville and Evelyn in (Linden Hills) they over come difficulties which come on their way and find the necessary strength to survive in the changing world. They also succeed at perpetuating the culture that supports the race.

Gloria Naylor’s women characters collectively dream of freedom. Each women is symbolically united with the one main woman character. There is a vital oneness created among all women as a result of the vulnerability of black womanhood. The women choose to respond
to the perceived evil of their intrusive dreams as best as they can by placing open Bibles near their beds or by visiting church. Such conjuring on their part suggests the reliance upon a belief system that is derived from an oral or a written source. But where the system is legitimised by patriarchy have failed to offer the women of Gloria Naylor’s novels for life, they turn in ward, look at each other and find strength in the timeless practices coming out from the folk past. By doing so they defy the fate which is responsible for the creation of the failing community. The conclusion of the novels marks the beginning of them because in each the omniscient woman narrator tells the reader “to wake up” (TWBP 192) they move elsewhere and continue the rituals and practices that have long been a sustaining influence in black America.

In the fictionalization of the lives of women, Gloria Naylor pays close attention to the impact of Afro-American women on matters of race and sex in the latter half of the twentieth century. The texts chronicles the gradual awakening of the dispossessed women to their full potential as political entities, and it does so largely through the account of Mattie’s dream nightmare involving the dismantling of the brick wall and many other apocalyptic events are framed within the context of the failed promises of democracy. Underlying Kiswana Browne’s organizational efforts on behalf of the formation of a tenants association’s or the characters is the awareness, deeply rooted in a distinctly block consciousness, that America’s promises are false. They are at best pipe dreams and at worst nightmares. Living conditions on Brewster Place or Willow Spring or at Baily’s Cafe or at Linden Hills are abysmally poor, with crumbling plaster, arthritic cold and vermin infested garbage dumps. There are criminals like
C.C. Baker and his gang, Uncle Eli who contribute to the criminal element present in the community.

The novels of Gloria Naylor have a political origin and therefore they challenge the validity of the Utopian postwar new world. The community emerges after the Word War II in order to understand her concern with the various movement in the modern and the contemporary era’s influence woman’s lives. For it is the World War II that had a profound impact in shaping the evolving mindset of the black Americans.

"The war so raised the level of consciousness of blacks and women that it needed the national soil for the Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and the sixties and the Black Power Movement of the seventies, as well as the Women’s Liberation Movement of the sixties and seventies."4

Gloria Naylor devotes considerable attention to the specific bond that can exist between women characters, including women of different generations, in The Women of Brewster Place, Linden Hills and Bailey’s Cafe. The bond derives the power from the women’s previous sense of isolation, from their mistreatment by men, and from their regenerative discovery, through suffering, of the saving grace of a shared experience. In Mama Day the power comes from folk tradition, from ‘foremothering’ and nature, as Naylor moves into the realm of matriarchal myth making. At it is best these bound among women confers identity, purpose and strength for survival. And the possibility of its achievement grows in the course of her novels. But although it is dramatized in the novels as clearly desirable, the success of female friendship of the black womanhood, remains
limited potential.

In all her novels Gloria Naylor uses a unified physical setting, a spirit of place - just as Gwendolyn Brook does in, *In the Mecca* and Toni Morrison in *Sula*— to provide a communal framework for the varied descriptions of the women who come to live in it. Brewster Place offers a close physical contact that makes the women’s confrontation with each other inescapable and their compelling mutual support. In Linden Hills, the women are physically isolated in houses and separated by status distinction. The possibilities of sisterhood here are less spatial and contemporary than temporal and historical. In *Mama Day* the rural South, alternating with New York scenes between George and Ophelia, offers a setting for a healing community with roots in female folk tradition. In *Bailey’s Cafe* it is the cafe of Bailey and the rooms at Eve’s boarding house which makes the dwelling place for women like Jesse, Mariam and Mary.

Gloria Naylor has moved steadily from the naturalistic to the symbolic and mythical modes. As she adds historical depth to the presentation of the female bond, she moves away from an exclusive focus on females to an exploration of the relationship between sisterhood and the resolution of male-female conflicts. She has moved from view of the power of sisterhood as a refuge from oppression to a celebration of sisterhood as empowered by folk tradition, by nature and by abiding spiritual forces. She has moved from the severely limited and tentative possibility of sisterhood to a recherchier and more positive glimpse of its reality, even if it not yet fully dramatized in action, for example, as it is in a community of women like those in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Marita Golden’s *A Woman’s Place*. But still she has tried to give a reality to her imagination.
The bond of sisterhood between the ladies appears to be natural and real. The image of well is presented in all the novels of Gloria Naylor. In *Mama Day* there is a literal image of well in which Miranda Day overcomes her fears and opens the well where her sister Peace kills herself. For Miranda, and Violet the well symbolizes the tragic past and the grief that cannot he born or even admitted. She accepts the past tragedy to prevent the future family tragedy. The well itself becomes an imaging of death and decay. In Brewster Place and Linden Hills the communities where the novel is situated becomes the well; the former is an urban block closed from the bustling city by a high brick wall; the latter is a V—Shaped hill whose circular drive goes downwards to the Nedeed’s house. Life in these wells is hellish, at Brewster Place it is because of the impositions of white power, and in Linden Hills it is because of greed, envy, and social ambitions of the residents. In *The Women of Brewster Place* there are no outside perspectives, but *Linden Hills* include human attitudes of Willie and Andersons who, do not live in Linden Hills, but just outside. For them generously, empathy, and love outweigh status and economic success; their perspectives, symbolically on the rim of the well allow them to nurture their own and other’s soul rather than to loose their souls like the residents of Linden Hills.

In the novels of Gloria Naylor there are image reinforcing negativity of the women characters. In *The Women of Brewster Place* the alley is a dead end of Brewster Place. The domain of C.C. Baker’s macho gang, stands in opposition to the female-dominated street. As there is no fusing of two genders, there is no accommodations, only dead ends so when Lorraine seeks accommodation between her lesbian lifestyle and the community of heterosexual women,
mistakenly enters the alley, it literally becomes her tomb. In Linden Hills each house becomes a tomb for the Afro-American inmates, each of whom has given up his or her soul in order to gain supposed status. Laurel Dumont’s empty swimming pool is literally her death trap when she dives into it. But the house as tomb is most graphic for the generations of Nedeed women. Each is trapped in the house and obsessions of her husband. And the last woman who failed to produce a proper replica of her husband is locked in the basement with the corpse of her son, too dark-skinned to satisfy her husband. She is “entombed” in “otherness” like all black women and like all Afro-Americans. Here she finds in fragments how the women were reduced. *Mama Day* is filled with example of characters harmful fixation on narrow objectives, obsession that limit them to the closed unity. The Day family history is marked by former suicides; Frances and Ruby exhaust themselves in their pursuit of Junior Lee. In *Baileys Cafe* there is social and gender discrimination. Each visitor tells his brutal encounter.

Gloria Naylor mixes the surreal with the real vision with sound, and past with present in her synthetic approach to the characters. Like Ellisonian tradition, Gloria Naylor represents her literary processors to give her novels, both voice and vision, merging the western and Afro-American literary traditions to signify the creation of a new language that can portray the black urban experience.

The novels of Gloria Naylor are all inter-related and have common characters, place and related episodes. Thus we can say that no novel of hers is completed as each novel has its birth in the previous one. Her women characters play a variety of roles: partner, wife, lover, friend or even child in the male-female relationship. These roles
in themselves do not cause problems within the relationship unless there is a conflict between the way women act and the way they perceive reality. Besides the restrictive roles Gloria Naylor also gives new roles to her characters like a single mother, a whore running a boarding house etc. Under such circumstances the women characters gather strength and power to determine herself as a woman. They pass on survived knowledge from one generation to the other through a mother, sister, aunt, cousin or another woman in the community, country or world. This survived knowledge from the successes and failures of the previous generation, from these experience enables the next generation of women to learn. She tackles issues of class, racial prejudice and sexual harassment but adds a twist and makes her female characters happy by some aspirations or hope, that comes close to give them a happy-ending. There is myth, magic, imaginative biblical, religious and spiritual references.

Gloria Naylor’s work gives a peculiar American version of magical realism, as though black life in America can only be adequately rendered in terms of the grotesque. There is Sadie who is bullied into prostitution by her mad abusive mother. Eve, is expelled naked from her fathers house because of the onset of adolescent sexuality. Ether, is sold into perversion by her brother, Mariam is driven from home and community because she mysteriously gives birth to a child, even though her mother had sewed up her genitals to make a more exciting sexual experience for her prospective husband. Peaches, who has fled her own sexuality all her life, Jesse Bell who married too high, turns to a woman lover out of need and desperation was expelled like Eve and Mariam. Like them there are many women characters who have to struggle in the male dominated society for
their survival. The repression and lurid sexuality on which most of the narratives turn are Gloria Naylor’s metonymic symbols for the desecration of relationships they are the sick and heartless depredations against love and represent the brutality that the American psyche has on them.

Gloria Naylor ends her novels with a birth and all the births in her fiction are rare and associated with extreme hardships. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Lucielia’s first child is electrocuted and her second one is aborted. In *Linden Hills*, Willa Nedeed must watch the corpse of her son as he struggles towards her own psychic rebirth and physical death. In *Mama Day* Berenice Duvall first develops a cyst instead of a baby and then her baby dies, and pregnancy for Cocoa Day occurs simultaneously with the nearly fatal spell under which she is placed. In *Bailey’s Cafe* George is born to a woman whose vagina has been ritually sewn shut. This marks the literary independence of Naylor and also her literary rebirth. Her hope that black men and women will not suffer the male torture and the oppression. But will face them boldly till it will die and a new society will come into existence and the women will be free, independent and with a single consciousness.

After reading and analysing all the novels of Gloria Naylor we find that although the novels are about women and concentrate on exploring the experiences of women it does not enlist a dogmatic feminist ideology. There is little of celebration and rejoicing in the discovery of self, sexuality and creativity in the face of male abuse and repression. Her novels are far more tentative about celebrating the efficacy of female friendship, lesbian relationships and self-affirmation
through sisterhood. There are important moments of friendship and supportive connections but there are no radical transformation. Naylor does not draw on feminist ideology as an agent of transcendence. She calls attention to the particular problems of black woman without suggesting that such problems are gender issues alone. She hopes that the novels do not make a bitter statement about the men. She wants to clarify that the problem she addresses will be over simplified if they are seen only in terms of male-female relationship. David Nicholson Comments, says,

"Naylor gives us characters who are fools - vain, egocentric, given to making wrong choices or simply whitt too high an opinion of themselves and their abilities these characters are always human and their numbers equally divided between male and female."

Black men in her novels mostly stand as counterparts to black women, which makes them vital. She makes her male characters strong and hard for the patriarchal society and feels that they expect the more of themselves that women do to survive in this society. They are given different ways to define themselves as men entail that they that they succeed in a way that woman is not expected to. Black man resonates differently to failures. She considers herself a feminist still she feels that at some levels woman accepts that she is a woman but why should man go to the wall for some issue. She feels that now a time has come to claim that we are human beings. She wants to be a different feminist to discover a new light with a new edge and colour. This new light of hope is evident in all her novels. She claims,

"Feminism is for me the simple belief that all human beings, regardless of gender, are equal."
CHAPTER-IX

REFERENCES


**********