CHAPTER-III

BIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER-III

BIOGRAPHY

"We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too. The tom-tomeries and the tom-tom laughs. If coloured people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountains, free within ourselves."  

From the beginning black writers have written a literature of social protest and human enlightenment - and black writing has always been under siege. During 250 years of slavery, it was a legal crime for blacks to read and write. Black writing was not the result of an 'inspirational' 'muse' but was a desire to present the oppressed condition of the race and its struggle. Traditionally, the World of Black Literature in the United States has been a world of black men's literature, until recently black writing has been systematically discriminatory against black women. Black women have been involved in the development of Afro-American writing since its inception. The Black Art Movement in 1960 witnessed a plethora of black female writers. This resulted in many demeaning experiences for the women, that many of them began to protest and eventually broke away. The first anthology of black women writers came in 1970. The Black Women by Toni Cade Bambara, which signaled the decline of the historical inequality of women writers in Afro-American literature. Today, the women of the 1960's are writing in an increasingly pioneer
fashion, among them are Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara etc. who are now griots of song and letters, foremothers of ancient testament and new truths. There was a freshness of style, sensivity and language, a boldness of subject and stance, and a newness of treatment imbued with exciting promise in their works. Their writings constituted the celebration of the black women’s literary Fourth of July for the first time in the United States.

The Black males during that time were very unhappy. They wrote a lot about the ‘castrating’ black female. But when black women told the truth about men and refused to accept the blame for what men had done to them, the men became very angry and hurt. They tried to discredit and invalidate women. They wrote about the comraderie, competition, co-operation and brotherhood of black men in the struggle for manhood. But when the women wrote about the conflicts, joys, problems and sisterhood of black women in their struggle for self-esteem, black men branded them as, "feminist bitches". They had the feeling of envy, jealousy, and resentment. They believed and felt that they were primary and sacred, and women were secondary and profane. They had the notion of supreme self-importance by claiming that they not women, were the prime target of the white men’s oppressive system. Therefore the black women had to struggle and achieve on their own. Hence, no matter how original, beautiful and formidable the works of black women writers was, if it had the slightest criticism of black men or the women received recognition from other women and especially from the white literary establishment - black men became ‘offended’. They felt that something has been taken away from them. Toni Morrison is among the foremost Afro-American writers who has witnessed resentments, accusations of ‘selling out’ of turning back the clock of racial progress, of being a tool of white feminism and many more. There was masculine perspective
concerning the manhood of the black race and this occupied the center stage in the drama of Afro-American literature. It was during this era came up a novelist Gloria Naylor who critically acclaimed,

"I wanted to became a writer, because I felt that my presence as a black women and my perspective as a woman in general had been under represented in American literature."²

Ever since the publication of *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), which won an American Award for the best first novel, Naylor has occupied a key position at the vaneguard of the steadily growing black feminist literary movement - a movement that has helped to establish black female writers in the mind of the public as legitimate creators of American Literature. Like many of her contemporaries, Naylor was unaware of the richness of the black literary traditions until she reached adulthood.

"I was twenty-seven years old before I knew black women even wrote books."³

She discovered this at a very late stage, so there was a delay from the part of Jehovah’s Witness missionary and switchboard operator, 'the authority to enter (the) forbidden terrain' of the American literary establishment, which had long been dominated by white writers scene long.

Gloria Naylor was born on January 25th, 1950 in the New York City brough of Queens. She is the oldest of the three daughters of Roosevelt Naylor and Albera Mc Alpin. Her mother was a transistor worker and her father was a television operator. They both had migrated to New York from rural Mississippi in 1949. Although she grew up in the largest urban centre in the United States, her roots were in the south since her parents then had been sharecroppers in Robinsonville.
Mississippi. Gloria owes her love of books at least partly to her mother, who was an avid reader from her earliest years. Unfortunately, Alberta Naylor as a young woman had been denied borrowing privileges at public libraries in the south, because of her race. So she went to great distances to buy the books she wished to read. It was due to her hardships which she had to face in the South that Alberta Naylor desired to bring up her own children in the North. She thought there it will be easier for her to encourage them to 'read and read and read'. In 1963, Naylor and her family moved to Queens. This was a more middle class borough, that increased Nylors awareness of racism.

Naylor's mother encouraged her early voracious reading habits. She presented her daughter Gloria with the first library card at about the age of four, and later on Gloria Naylor has recalled that she read at least one book a day.

"I used to be thrilled by just the smells and touch of books, the sights of them lined up in rows and rows on the library shelves".

Gloria Naylor's personality resembles her mother. Like her mother, Gloria Naylor is timid, quiet and shy. She also shares her mother's love of reading and libraries. She is a shy and introvert young woman, found in the world of books a refuge from the uneasiness she experienced among her peers. Indeed, Naylor's shyness rendered her something of an enigma not only to her friends but to her family as well. Her father described her in an interview with a reporter as,

"a very quiet child [who] would just as soon read by herself". As "play with the other children".

As a child, "she wouldn't talk", her mother told Allison Glock the reporter of *Ebony* (March 1989).
"So I brought her a diary. Things you can't talk about" 
I told her, "write in your diary."  

Gloria Naylor believes that her mother sparked her writing career by giving her a journal form Woolworth's. Her affinity for the written world deepened during her high school years. In classes for gifted students, she was introduced to the English classics, which she believes, influences her writing to this day. Gloria Naylor has remarked in the autobiographical sketch for *World Authors* that she was very much influenced by the writers like Austin, Dickens Thackeray and the Brontes. They have shown and taught her the difference between a simple voicing of feelings and language. She says,

"Language can be a powerful tool, beautiful in and of itself, beyond the telling of a story."  

Gloria Naylor gives credit and feels indebted to 19th century English literature, she has said that it was not until she became acquainted with the rich African-American literary traditions that her education was complete. She has refered to the English and African-American classics as,

"the two halves [that] made the whole that are now one."  

Gloria Naylor was senior in high school when the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. She was very much disturbed and confused after this incident and her experiences as a result of his death were so great that she decided to postpone college after graduation in 1968. She decided to join a Jehovah's Witness missionary and follow her mother's footstep. She says,

"I wanted a solution to the chaos. For me, preaching about the coming of this theocratic government became my answer for finding a way to solve the problems."
around us. Many of my peers joined the hippie movements or became black nationalists. This way [becoming a missionary] seemed right."

Gloria Naylor spent the next seven years travelling and evangelizing throughout New York, North Carolina, and Florida. The Jehovah's Witnesses brought her out of her shyness and gave her a cause and opportunity to travel. They encouraged her already active imagination and belief that there is power in the written word. This had obvious importance to Naylor in future. Unfortunately the Jehovah's Witness also isolated her from her own culture. There was an incredible explosion of black literature at that time and Naylor did not realize it. She witnessed for seven years, supporting herself as a switchboard operator, but eventually left the Jehovah's Witnesses because "things weren't getting better, but worse".

At the age of twenty-five, Naylor abandoned her missionary work, having "begun to feel ill at ease" as the life at Jehovah's Witnesses was very much restricted. She realized that after graduating from high school she had acquired no marketable skills in the passed years. So she decided to make up for her loss time. She studied nursing for a short time at Medgar Evers College, but this did not interest her much. So she continued to work as a full-time switchboard operator and she pursued writing. During the next few years she supported herself by working at the night shifts as an operator at New York city hotels, and during the day time she joined the Brooklyn College. But she found out that her greatest interest lay in English literature.

While attending college, Naylor underwent a transformation of all sorts. She began to understand what it meant not only to be black but to be a black woman. Her deepening sense of herself was precipitated by her discovery that black Americans had been writing great works of
literature for over a century. In an interview with *Ebony* she recalls,

"growing up in the North in integrated schools, I was not taught anything about black history or literature when I discovered that there was this whole long literary traditions of black folk in this country, I felt I had been cheated out of something."\(^{11}\)

She was equally astonished to find out the fact that black women were among the ranks of great American writers. In 1977 she read her first novel *The Bluest Eye* by an African-American woman, Toni Morrison. Gloria Naylor was very much influenced by the works of Toni Morrison after reading her novel *The Bluest Eye*. And it is then she decided to write. The seeds for writing were already been sowed as she had potential. Earlier as she had read only male or white writers she was very much impressed by them, but now she could not argue that they were not the only masters. She always inquired about a writer who could tell her a story or the story of the Blacks. It was this search for the black writer that forced her to follow the newspaper clipping and go to listen Toni Morrison who was to read from her novel *Song of Solomon*. She was especially moved by the writings of such celebrated African-American female authors as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker who promptly became her literary role models. She told Cynthia B Masquand in an interview for the *Christian Science Monitor* [February 28, 1984].

"To learn that there were women who looked like me who were writing, and writing with a caliber that Morrison did, just astounded me, I loved the lyricism in her work, and I said, I'll never write like that, but if I can just try."\(^{12}\)
Gloria Naylor's early literary efforts were uncommonly successful. One of the first short stories she wrote was published in a 1980 issue of *Essence*, and before that she had written a few more stories and had negotiated a contract with Viking. The stories soon grew into the first draft of a novel. While working at her hotel job, she put the finishing touches on her manuscript, which later became *The Women of Brewster Place* [1981]

Naylor calls herself a wordsmith, a story teller. Her novels contain pieces of her personal life and familiar past in the forms of names, places and even stories. Her novels are all 'linked' together. She refers to characters and places in one text that become significant in the next text. Naylor also draws extensively on the Bible, which is influenced by her involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses. She has an, affinity as do the Jehovah's witnesses, for apocalyptic images and events and uses them in her novels. Her work reflects a moral and spiritual sensibility. She creates corrupt fictional worlds in which characters must find some sort of sanctuary to be safe.

She wrote several short stories in college and converted them into her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, which she completed in 1981. The novel chronicles the lives of seven women of different ages, backgrounds, political persuasions and sexual preferences who are united by their individual and collective efforts to combat the poverty, racism, sexism and domestic strife that are part of their day-to-day existence. In the *World Authors* Gloria Naylor writes that,

"I like to think that the novel was a tribute to my mother and other black women who, in spite of very limited personal circumstance somehow manage to hold a fierce belief in the limitless possibilities of the human spirit."

82
In *The Women of Brewster Place* Gloria Naylor brings out the women's struggle at Brewster Place, a dead end street in a fictional yet recognizable ghetto in a northern city. According to Naylor, the street, which is cut off from the world by an ugly brick wall, symbolizes the racism in American society.

The art of writing the novel turned out to be a catharsis of sorts for Naylor, possibly because what had inspired her to write was an experience that had caused her considerable anguish. She says that,

"I was going through this particular form of pain—the specifics of which are not important and I wanted to write about another woman who was hurting as much as I was, but about different things."\(^{14}\)

In her interview with Jacqueline Trescotts Naylor talked about the overwhelming sense of relief which she experienced on completing the book. She says,

"It pulled me out of severe depression... It symbolized me finally taking hold of myself and attempting to take my destiny in my own hands."\(^{15}\)

*The Women of Brewster Place* had an equally profound effect on thousands of her readers. Within an year of its publication, there was such a great demand for the novel that Naylor's publisher had to go back to press and republish the book. The result was that by summer of 1983 over 40,000 copies of the paperback edition had been sold. This earned the book a place on the *Publisher's Weekly* trade paperback best seller list. Among her most ardent fans was Oprah Winfrey, the television talk-show host. The novel was made into a four hour television movie, with Winfrey in a leading role. This television movie was aired in March 1989.
Brewster Place earned the respect of the critical establishment as well. In a representative assessment by a Publishers Weekly of April 9, 1982 the reviewers referred the work as,

"remarkable first novel from a gifted black writer [that]
marks Gloria Naylor's talent as one to watch"16

The most impressive thing found in the novel was the ability of Naylor to imbue her chronicle of ordinary lives with an aura of epic grandeur. Annie Gettlib wrote in the New York Times Book Review,

"Despite Gloria Naylor's shrewed and lyrical portrayal of many of the realities of black life .. The Women of Brewster Place is not a realistic fiction-it is a myth. Nothing supernatural happens in it, yet it is vivid, earthy characters. seem constantly on the verge of breaking out into magical powers. Miss Naylor bravely risks sentimentality and melodrama to write her compassion and outrage large, and she pulls off triumphantly"17

Along with this there were many glowing reviews and this was followed by Naylor's receipt of the American Book Award for the best first novel of 1982.

The flurry of excitement generated by The Women of Brewster Place eclipsed another important event in her life. She completed her graduation in 1981 from Brooklyn College with a BA degree and won a scholarship of Yale University. But, she soon realised, that the kind of work required of her as a candidate for an advanced degree in Afro-American studies was incompatible with her desire to continue to write fiction. She told Mickey Pearlman in a conversation for Interview, that,
"I found it difficult to always be thinking about how you take part [a novel] and then having to shut all that out to just let the process evolve. I'm one of those type-A personalities who like to do things well, and to do things well I read about 1,500 pages a week for those seminars. So it was the clash between what I wanted to do with my [literary] output and what they required of me to be an academic."

After this she became so frustrated that, after completing her first year, she resolved to abandon her graduate work and return to the switchboard. She agreed to complete the degree only after the department declared that her second novel, which she had begun the year before, would fulfill the theses requirements set by the school.

In 1985, two years after receiving her M.A. degree from Yale, Naylor published her second novel, *Linden Hills*, which is a kind of sequel to *The Women of Brewster Place*. In that Linden Hills is an exclusive suburb populated by well-to-do blacks is a community to which the residents of Brewster Place look with longing. The book also reflects Naylor's penchant, which she has already established in her first effort, for commingling the mundane with her fantastic imaginations. The novel's extraordinary aspects are sustained through its parallels to Dante's *Inferno* and it was after this the book was modeled. The story is guided through the hell-like hill on which the community is situated by the novels narrators, Lester and Willie. They are the two young poets from a neighbouring town who are seeking odd jobs to earn extra Christmas money. She told William Goldstein,

"as they move down the hill, what they encounter are..."
individuals who have 'move up' in American society
among these crescent-shaped drives until eventually
they will hit the center of their community and the
home of my equivalent of Satan'.

The impact of the epic, her religious attitude and the fear of God
and Satan fuses together in her novel and they become naturalistic,
magical and the real ones. To this Michiko Kautani has observed and
said,

"Although the notion of using Dante's Inferno to
illuminate the coopting of black aspirations in
contemporary America may strike the prospective
reader as pretentious. One is quickly beguiled by the
actual novel-so gracefully does Miss Naylor fuses
together the epic, the magical and the real".

In keeping with Naylor's fascination with the other world, the
themes of her third novel, *Mama Day* [1987], is its eponymous heroines
fidelity to the centuries-old African religious traditions indigenous to
Willow Spring. Which is an island located off the Georgia-South Carolina
coast, where a part of the story is set. Another theme is reconciliation,
specifically the reconciliation between Miranda [Mama] Day, the mystical
leader of the community, and Ophelia [Cocoa] her cynical great niece,
both of whom are descendants of the founder of the island, Sappira
Wade, an African slave and sorceress. The theme of reconciliation and
that of the island's setting are two novels which are parallels to
*Shakespeare's Tempest*. This novel too invited many critics who found
that the story was somewhat contrived and the characters not fully
developed. But many agreed and shared the views of Bharati Mukherjee
the Indian born American novelist,
"I'd rather dwell on Mama Day's strengths. Gloria Naylor has written a big, strong, dense, admirable novel, spacious, sometimes a little drafty like all public monuments, designed to last and intended for many levels of use."  

Naylor came up with her next novel, *Bailey's Cafe* in (1992). The story is set up in a roadside cafe managed by Bailey and his wife. At one level the book is concerned with the often strange stories told by the couple's patrons,

"Nobody comes in here with a simple story."  

Bailey says.

But the principal theme according to Naylor is female sexuality. This is relevant when the author examines the lives and 'appetites' - gastronimical and other wise of Eve, the madam of a local brothel, Sister Carric a religious zealot, and the novels other female characters. Naylor says,

"whore' is a word that has been imposed on women as a way of control, as the model of what we do not want to grow up to be. We are raised to want to be good girls."  

Then came the publication of *Bailey's Cafe* which marked the competition of what Gloria Naylor has called the 'novel quartet', which began with *The Women of Brewster Place*. She has explained,

"I wanted each of the novels in the quartet to talk about a different human experience. *The Women of Brewster Place* was the emotive novel, *Linden Hills* was the cerebral novel, *Mama Day* was the spiritual novel and *Bailey's Cafe* a sexual novel. I had a four-book plan that would take me through an apprenticeship with my craft in seeing the end of it."
It is true, that the first ten years of Gloria Naylor in the writing career constituted an "apprenticeship". Many critics regard Naylor as a formidable literary talent whose use of poetic prose is the beauty of her work. Her language is as rich as her poetry, the passages are very effective that at times they as though they take the readers off and sing as though a spiritual. The critics appreciate the beauty of Naylor's planness in her prose. Her descriptive art is such that she does not simply tell a story but brings her readers face to face with human beings living through the complexity, pain and mystery of real life.

Gloria Naylor, has explored the universal themes of poverty and wealth, racism and assimilation, oppression and liberation as well as sexism, female bonding and the effect that an individual's physical environment has on the development of his or her identity. She has explored the conditions of the black, taken them into notice preoccupied with some of the more deplorable aspects of the human conditions especially as experienced by black Americans. She has won great praise for her skill in treating her themes without bitterness or anger. In her novels we find the ordinary places of the physical world are so beautifully rendered that the ghetto street suburban neighbourhood, isolated island community or roadside dinner takes on mythic proportion.

Although, Naylor has been principally concerned with offering her readers an authentic and clear portrayal of life among African-Americans but she has no patience with those who assume in her words, that "a black writer's work should be definitive of Black experiences" She has told William Goldstein.
"Being black is far more complex than a single writer on work can define. My goal as a writer is to articulate experiences that want articulating for these readers who reflect the subject matter, black readers and for those who don't basically white middle-class readers."

Although Naylor has often been compared to Alice Walker and Toni Morrison but her novels have not provoked the heated controversy or accusations of male-bashing that have been generated by the works of these and other contemporary female African-American authors. Though she gives the picturesque of the male domination, physical and mental torture on the women not only of the white but also of the black, the double consciousness persists in all her novels still her men are not objects of radical or instruments of torture. She gives us characters who are at times fools-vain, egocentric, who always make a wrong choice. But such characters are always human, and their numbers can equally be divided between male and female.

In addition to her novels, Gloria Naylor has written essays and screenplays. Besides *The Women of Brewster Place*, recently she has completed a stage adaptation of *Bailey’s Cafe* at the Hartford Stage company. In 1990, she founded the One Way Productions and National Endowment for the Arts. They are independent film companies, through which she established to bring *Mama Day* and other projects to the screen. She also participated in Robert Redfort’s Institute as Sundance Fellow to workshop *Mama Day*. She made a feature-length film from her third novel. In 1996, she edited an anthology, *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to the Present*.

Additionally, she has found time to serve as a member of the Book-of-the-Month Club section committee. She conducts writing work
shops for young people, has a very active involvement in the literacy program in the Bronx sponsored by the National Book Foundation. She has been honoured by many awards. She is the recipient of fellowships form both the N E A (National Endowment for the Arts) and the Guggeheim Foundation fellowship for her novels. Naylor has lectured and served as a visiting professor at many institutions, including George Washington University, Princeton University, New York University, Boston University and Brandeis University. She has also visited Indo - American Center for International Studies, Hyderabad (A.P.) India. She considers these activities vital because they give her an opportuntiy to interact with others which helps her to think, write and present the imaginaiton with the most natural appearance. The danger of a creative life, she has said is,

"you are rewarded for staying inside for becoming a recluse".

While Naylor has come a long way from the shy, introvert youth she once was, she is still not entirely comfortable with her celebrity. She told Allison Glock that all writers are terrible insecure but she has learnt to keep her insecurity inside. She has an imposing figure standing nearly six feet tall, but the dimples that appear when she smiles makes her less untimidating. She was married a few years ago but had a very brief span of married life. Now Naylor refuses to remarry or have children because, she has said, her solitude is important to her. Presently she lives in New York city and continues her teaching and creative writing.

As we go deep into the life of Gloria Naylor we find that she sets her goal and then moves forward to achieve it. While she was on the edge of completing her first novel, The Women of Brewster Place she told that she would have a quarter of novels she set that as a goal for herself. And she was successful in achieving her target in 1992 when she
brought her fourth novel *Bailey's Cafe*. All the four novels of Gloria Naylor are interlinked and the base of the second novel can be traced in the previous one. In *The Women of Brewster Place* she mentions Kiswana Brown from Linden Hills, in *Linden Hills* she mentions the character Mama Day, and in *Mama Day* she mentions Bailey's Cafe. The mention of these characters and places in each book in not just in passing, they are all meant to be loosely connected. This makes each one a quarter of the series. And *Bailey's Cafe* is a very special novel to her, because it was the end of the quarter and all the four assembled together makes, "Gloria a Writer".

Naylor has conceived each of her novel as a quarter from the book one so the books are like her children. Each character of the book is a dear child of hers. But she is very closely attached to her older female characters and children characters. Moreover, she grounds herself in each place where she is writing thus she feels, smells, reacts behaves in the most natural forms. In *Linden Hills* she inundated herself in the environment of 'the downstairs section' so as to be with that woman in that cold cellar room where she was locked and scared. She allows the fear to make her depressing and expresses the feelings of helplessness and insecurity in the most natural manner. She visualises herself in these environment to be a chronicler of what is going on around her. With *Mama Day* she travels to the Sea-Islands. She was an alien to the Sea-Islands, as she was born from southern parents, grew up in New York city hence knew the food, speed patterns behavioural codes of the south as it was encultured within her. She travelled to Sea Islands and did a 'tactile research' She walked the terra-firma, smelt the air, saw the trees, the people so did a kind of research. She say,

"New York is where I was born, so writing about
New york is writing about what I know. All the other
locations in my work have been meta-physical, so
they exist nowhere they are presented as emotional
situation.” 27

Gloria Naylor believes in psychics that man has the ability to take
himself or even others to different planes. In *Mama Day* when Mama
Day was at the ‘other place’ with Bernice, she personally believed that
something happen on the other plane and this belief influenced the
readers at different levels.

Gloria Naylor is a very practicle writer, she does not exist in an
imaginatory world of high fantasies and so do her characters. In *Mama
Day* Bernice is relaxed by the psychological tricks played on her by
Mama Day. It is natural that at times there lies no physical reasons
barring a normal women from conception, there are indeed emotional
reasons on the way. And for this the specialist tells them to relax and
forget all worries. So it is on this level that Mama Day plays psychological
games-with Bernice like that of the "pumpkin seeds, giving her the right
food" etc. She treated Bernice with homeopathy by giving her food rich
in Vitamins to build up her blood, relax her nerves and compose her-
self.

Gloria Naylor puts herself in the shoes of her characters. Her
characters are born first in images and faces, later through which she
attempts to find the story behind the images. For years, she saw a young
girl lying flat in the dust. It seemed as if she was afraid, and there was
some kind of large male figure coming towards her. Naylor searched for
that figure and ultimately brought forward in *Bailey’s Cafe*. There is
much of similarity between her and her characters. They have much in
common in terms of gender lines, racial lines and national lines. So when
she writes about her characters that are not black female characters she
says,

"I start with what I refer to as the least common denominator. That's how I connect to the other characters."

Naylor is very much influenced by the white writers. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tale* is a collection of characters so are the novels of Gloria Naylor. Chaucer's pilgrims start their journey from Tabard Inn and on their journey tell stories while Naylor's pilgrims reach Bailey's Cafe in midst of their journey. Story of each character has interconnected narrative. There is structural and narrative similarity in the works of Chaucer and Naylor. She reinforces the allegorical representations by African Americanizing Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

In the works of Gloria Naylor we find Shakespearean allusions. In her novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* she matches the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mama Day draws minor roles from *The Tempest* and *Taming of the Shrew*. Her characters Miranda, Ariel and Ophelia remind us of Shakespearean plays. The entire network of Shakespearean illusions through the first three novels is compressed into one image. The Shakespeare corpus is represented in the most literal possible way as a set of books, physical objects shipped in a crate. The image illustrates the complex multiple effects of Naylor's comedy. On one level, the educated self-confident black man is moved to defend the Shakespearean heritage against ignorant whites. Yet on another level humour turns in a different direction to make the Caliban like gesture of destroying the books a magnificent act of exorcism. As a fitting conclusion to Gloria Naylor's long engagement with Shakespeare over the course of the quarter, this farewell is a riddance ritual that announces the end of her artistic apprenticeship. The taboo surrounding Shakespeare as sacred icon is broken, we are allowed to experience Naylor's outrageous comic
violation as a release. She was very much influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of the poems and the characters created by Dante. She tries to sketch the neighbourhood of *Linden Hills* along the lines of *The Inferno*.

Toni Morrison is the hand behind Gloria Naylor's writings. *The Bluest Eye* was the novel which served two vital purposes at that moment in her life,

"It said to a young poet, struggling to break into prose, that the barriers were flexible at the core of it all is language, and if you are skilled enough with that, you can create your own genre. And it is said to a young black women struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painstakingly eloquent that it becomes a song."  

Like Toni Morrison we find Gloria Naylor defining the cultural context as a distinct Afro-American one and presenting many facets of the inter-relationship of sexism and racism in the society. She not only demonstrates the fact that sexism exists in black community, but also challenges the prevailing definition of woman in American society, especially in relation to motherhood and sexuality. She explores that sexism must be struggled against in black communities and that sexism is integrally connected to racism.

Though society blames the mother for her daughters, lesbianism Naylor explores that society's attack on lesbianism is an attack on all women, not only because lesbians are women, but because lesbians stereotypes expose society's fear of women's independence of man.
Being both Black and American, Naylor shoulders a double-consciousness. She has been victimised not only by the mountain of sexism, or from the white world but from the men of the black world as well. During her visit to Europe, she was harassed a lot on the streets because she was a black women travelling alone. They assumed she was a prostitute or that she wanted them to approach her, and this was a very difficult task for her. She wanted to be free like Hemingway and Baldwin but unfortunately she got freedom to write but not to roam when she sequestered herself away in the boarding house in Cadiz.

Naylor admires those women who have turned their backs on the world, 'who have been selfish to some degree, who have gone against the grain'. She found marriage to be a "traveled terrain" hence as soon as she got the proposal she accepted it because she grew up with the feeling that it was only marriage which made a women's definiton. Although Marcias, secretary (editor *Essence*) had suggested her to continue writing and make her identity. She feared to face the terror of writing as she called it untraveled terrain so she found marriage safe and conventional. She later finds difference between A.M. (after marriage) and B.M. (before marriage). She acknowledges conventional and self-affirmation in the women. Wila the upper-middle class black woman of *Linden Hills* resembles her mother whom Naylor adores. Naylor says to be a good mother or an ideal women, 'one need not be an executive at IBM'. But she disagrees with Toni Morrison's views on marriage love and power. She feels that men should give equal status to women. Women should not be the only ones to carry the responsibility to give way and men the ones to give permission. She wants to take rebirth as a man so that she may say, "I am the authority and I am asking myself". She speaks about self-deflation, and independent free women. Though she is conventional but does not like women to be chained by do's and don't's of men.
She wants women to come forward make way and establish themselves in the society To break-open the knots of being dominated, harrassed tortured or looked down by the supremecy's of the society.

Gloria Naylor disagrees that art can be didactic. She feels that art involves a certain honesty to the world. The truth is being exposed to the public and this gives a measure of integrity to the artist. The readers or the viewers should extra polate the message by themselves and it is not the duty of the Black women or the blacks to tell the hidden message.

Inspite of fighting for self identity Gloria Naylor does not give a negative message about the men. She creates a women's world, presents the problems caused by the men in womens lives but is very cautious in making any bitter statements. She has a soft corner for the black male but she does not like them to over shadow the females.

Gloria Naylor feels that she is born to write as she had been gifted with this art of handling words and if she did not do so she would self-distruct herself. That is why by the time she comes on the verge of completing her first novel the new novel takes birth in her dreams and the characters are carry forwarded to her next novel. Writing comes to her in a natural manner She has no control over her thoughts, as to when they will come. She is always scared as to when they will leave her for ever. She is fascinated that many writers have entered this terrain and they are doing extraordinary things with novels and short stories about black women. She is delighted that this will continue never-never to stop because one is built on another The budding black women writers will cover the distance and look at the world such that they would find themselves properly spoken of and identified Tom Morrison gives a vivid picture of Gloria Naylor Gloria has scrubbed clean eyes with a
fuller brush, young black women walking around the world who can say,

"I write is what I do. I do this and that too but write
is what I do hear?" "Women who don't have to block
what they know keep secret what they feel, who
welcome their own rage and love because it has voice,
place point and art-and the art is hers not somebody
else's. She wears on her head the "hat" she made—not
one she brought made by somebody else".29

As a black women herself, Gloria Naylor has grown up with
certain strengths. She is thankful to have grown up with relatively healthy
parents who indowed their daughter with a sense of self, sense that their
achievements could be limitless as long as their children did not limit
themselves. She learnt from that if she looked at the outside world for
affirmation she would have nothing and at worst she could be the
receptant of the stereotypes, and thus those things could have held her
down, if not tore her down. She is stronger than some of her white
female counter parts becasue she has attained the nurturing that was
required and she was caged in the steel to exist in always.

Being a black women she knew that she had to work hard and
get less for the effort. -Gloria Naylor, is very much depressed then she
thinks that the pay back which she recieves is too little for the kind of
effort she is expending.

"I have to work past not just some one else is
reticence, but I have to work past all the blocks they
have put up in their minds about my colour and by
gender"30

As a black woman writer she tends not to be concerned with the
white world only. She is a cultural Natonalist, she understands that there
is wealth of material in her community. It is writing which motivates and
interests her to write about the dynamics of human being. Naylor, creates black women character Cocoa in *Mama Day* who is different from her. Cocoa knows the sense of her own history, her antecedents but Naylor does not. Cocoa also has a problem with the lightness of her complexion which Naylor never had. Naylor has a collective ancestry and history of the race. She realizes that the unnamed individuals are stranger, history is an experience and it is the minority that has survived because of the good qualities. At a conference at Lock Haven University on March 30, 2000 in Major Black Writer Series Gloria Naylor said,

"I am a black female writer and I have no qualms whatsoever with people saying that I'm a black female writer. What I take umbrage with is that fact that some might try to use that identity. Now you go off and do the work to somehow broaden yourself so you understand what America is really about because it's about me." 31

Gloria Naylor's latest novel is *The Men of Brewster Place*. This was published in 1998. This is the most recent of Naylor's novels. The other side of the story is told through the eyes of seven male characters that were present in the first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*. Naylor says,

"In *The men of Brewster Place*, the women are still present, but they take a back seat as I look at those men in all their complexity, and in their relationship to their families, their community. But above all, I wrote, *The Men of Brewster Place* as a testament to the hidden majority, men like my father who worked hard all their lives who struggled to keep their homes together against incredible odds and who remained ever after their deaths unsung, unknown." 32
Besides this Gloria Naylor is current working on a screenplay called *Parchman* about a 1930's farm prison.

She has employed the blues and jazz into the novels structure by using lyrical language. The characters tell their story and sing their own song which empowers them to generate the hope for necessary living.

Gloria Naylor thus presents the voice of the black women folk who struggle for their living in this society. She is referred,

"as a novelist with an old fashioned post-modernist world".

The fans of Naylor's work find the realism of her characters the most endearing part of her writing. Naylor herself believes that her work is mostly character driven. She enjoys writing screen plays, but considers herself a novelist first and foremost. Critics have parises for Naylor,

"Gloria Naylor has constructed a palce for herself among leading contemporay writers of fiction" (LOS Angeles Times Book Review).

Gloria Naylor's Chronology


1951 Birth of sister Fanny Barnice

1952 Father discharged from service

1954 Birth of sister Carolyn Family moves to housing project in upper Bronx Father becomes a master framer in a custom frame shop
1957  Death of maternal grandfather, Evans McAlpin

1960  Family moves to apartment building, on West 199th Street in Harlem, owned by maternal grandmother, Lucretia McAlpin

1963-64  Mother joins Jehovah’s Witnesses.

1960  Family moves to Queens

1964  Death of paternal grandfather, Henry Naylor. Paternal grandmother, Callie Canada Naylor, moves to Chicago.

1967  Apartment buildings owned by maternal grandmother destroyed.

1968  Naylor graduates from high school and is baptized as a Jehovah’s Witness, thus becoming a minister. Father leaves framing business to become a transit worker. Death of paternal grandmother.

1968-74  Naylor works as a switchboard operator in various places in New York to support her work as a Jehovah’s Witness minister. Continues to live with parents.

1974  Moves to Dunn, North Carolina, and then a Jacksonville, Florida, preaching as a “pioneer” (a full-time worker) for the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Supports herself through jobs as a switchboard operator and in fast-food restaurants.

1975  Leaves the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Moves back to parents’ home. Has a nervous breakdown. Begins college, first studying nursing at Medgar Evers College, then transferring to Brooklyn College of CUNY to study English.

1976  Moves out of parents’ home

1979 In November, receives encouragement from Marcia Gillespie of Essence Magazine to pursue her writing.

1980 Marries.


1985 Publishes *Linden Hills*, which had been her master's thesis at Yale. Receives National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. Cultural exchange lecturer in India for the United States Information Agency for three weeks.
1986  Recieves Candace Award of the National Coalition of One Hundred Black Women. Scholar-in-residence at the University of Pennsylvania; visiting professor at New York University; and visiting lecturer at Princeton University. Works on *Mama Day*.

1987  Visiting professor at Boston University. Works on *Mama Day*.


1989  Receives Lillian Smith Award. Begins work on *Bailey's Cafe*.

1990  Establishes One Way Production, her own multimedia production company, her nephew Roger moves in with her.

1992  Publishes *Bailey's Cafe*. Visiting writer at University of Kent, Great Britain, under the auspices of the British Arts Council.


1994  Stage production of *Bailey's Cafe* by Hartford Stage Company, 28 March 30 April.
CHAPTER-III
REFERENCES


2. Rebecca Carroll - *I Know What The Red Clay Looks Like* - The voice and vision of Black Women Writers p 159.


6. Ibid.


13. Ibid.

14. Ebony - **Online Internet** [http://voices.c/a.umn.edu/authers/Gloria Naylor](http://voices.c/a.umn.edu/authers/Gloria Naylor).


24. Michiko Katutani - Interview *Publishers Weekly* (9 September 1983) Online Internet

25. Denison DC - Interview *The Boston Globe* Online Internet


30. Rebecca Carroll - *I know what the Red Clay Looks Like - The Voice and vision of Black Women Writers* (163).


34. Ebony - *Online Internet* http://voices.c/a.umn.edu/authers/Gloria Naylor.


**********