CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION: BLACK FEMINIST VISION.

The present study is undertaken to highlight the ramifications of the classic and multiple jeopardy of race, gender, class and sexual preferences and multiple consciousness in the lives of black women. The aim of this study is to assess the quest of black women as triply oppressed in the fiction of Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Ntozake Shange and to evaluate their places in the canon of African American women’s fiction.

The feminist episteme, as a liberating theory critiques the patriarchal hegemony that subjugates, enslaves, subordinates and enchains women in various shackles. As feminism not only emancipates women but asserts their identity and dignity as true human beings. The black women’s liberation process become more entangled because of the above mentioned oppressions.

This study brings to light the fact that African American women fiction is deeply embedded in history since the Negroes were brought as slaves from their native African countries and were dehumanized as beasts and women moreover as slave breeders. The Negro men were slaves but the Negro women were slaves of slaves. This depersonalization of the black was on the three fronts-economical, political and ideological. Because of capitalist white economy they were
exploited, they had no political rights and had no dignity and identity as true human beings. Numerous and various atrocities were inflicted and perpetrated on them as branding, raping, lynching, and auctioning as beasts. This commodification, and objectification transformed them into zombies. This is a collective saga of inhuman black slavery.

As mentioned above black women were caught in the geometric oppression and they were the ‘Other of the Other’. The stereotypes and images created of black women were negative along with passing and assimilation. Black women writers created the black feminist aesthetics by questioning the patriarchal order. This creation of black feminist aesthetics became possible because of black feminist consciousness. An awakening that one is oppressed because one is black and female is black feminist consciousness. Black women writers create such consciousness and make black women aware to end such an oppression.

While exploring the quest for black womanhood in the fiction of Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara; and Ntozake Shange an effort is made to delineate their thematic and stylistic innovative contributions to the canon of African American women’s fiction. The trajectory of this canon is mapped and these three writer are assessed, evaluated and criticized in their right perspectives.

This critical approach brought certain comparative, distinctive aspects and features that were highlighted. The white American novelists and black men novelists have depicted the black women as
certain stereotypes such as Mammy, mulatto, sapphire and jezebel. Their portrayal of the black women jaundiced, biased and not factual. The Black women novelist project themselves from an insiders point of view. They have valiantly attempted to place the predicament of their race and gender in its historical experiences.

However some of the earlier women novelists also have depicted the black women as mulattoes who pass for white. Hence they lack the very sense of genuine and authentic black female identity. Merely being black and writing for black women does not make their protagonist black feminists. It must expose sexism and the patriarchal power structure and celebrate the black women’s intellectual capabilities and the revolutionary black feminist vision. The black feminist work should explore the struggle of black women victims or rebels who have faced a patriarchal institutions and inequalities by sexism and racism.

Most of the fiction of the African American women of the second phase during the Harlem Renaissance continue the mulatto heroines as protagonists and strive to pass as white. The protagonists of Three Is Confusion, The Chinaberry Tree, Comedy: American Style by Jessie Fauset; and Quicksand, and Passing by Nella Larsen focus this theme of passing for personal attainment scaling the high social and economic ladder so that they are not identified with the black race. So the result is tragic. Hence the heroines such as Joanne Marshall in There Is Confusion, Lawrentine Strange in The Chinaberry Tree, Angela Murray in Plum Bun Olivia Carry The
*Comedy: American Style* Helga Crane from *Quicksand*, and Claire Kendry and Urne Redfield from *Passing* are young, dynamic and want to improve their socio-economic and cultural lot.

Lutie Johnson, the protagonist of Ann Petry’s *The Street* and Henritta Coffin are young mothers but provides of the family. Though the protagonists from *Our Nig* to *Passing* are depicted as helpless black victims, it is Janie the protagonist of Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who satisfies and fulfills her integrated self and totality.

This study focuses on the triumvirate of black women novelist namely Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Ntozake Shange. With their innovative thematic concerns and techniques these have achieved unique places in the fictional canon of African American women and thereby enriched it. Gayl Jones with her special interest in the ‘abnormal psychology’ of black women exposes the racism and sexism in her two novels. *Corregidora* and *Eva’s Man*. Both her novels are debatable, controversial for the negative stereotypes of the black men and women and she is severely criticized for it. She is interested in the psychology of her characters. That is her landscape where she depicts the abuse inflicted on black women by black and white men.

*Corregidora*, very painful and traumatic saga of the four generations of Corregidora women, is narrated by Ursa Corregidora, a blues singer and the representative of fourth generation. Located against
the horrible atrocities that the Portuguese whoremonger Corregidora inflicted upon his slaves, the mission of these women is to make generations when all the slavery record is destroyed at the time of abolition of slavery. Ursa’s agony is that she doesn’t and can’t make ‘generations’ as she has been kicked in her pregnancy by her husband Mutt. A hysterectomy follows and the womb is removed. Ursa’s agony is poured in her blues singing on the note of which Ursa and Mutt reunite in the end after twenty two years. Gayl Jones second novel *Eva’s Man* is equally thrilling like her first novel it is also a blues novel. And moreover a black female *Bildungsroman*. Brought up in the black society and having experienced molestation and sexual abuse since childhood Eva Medina Canada, poisons, kills, and castrates her lover Davis Carter who represents for her all the women abusers who maltreated her, as he confined, imprisoned and raped her. This leads her to the psychiatric prison but she doesn’t open her mouth. Jones was severely criticized for her portrayal of negative stereotypes of black men and black women as whores and rapists, but she defended that it is a fiction and not the representation of the black society. Jones sprinkles lesbianism. Jones’s heroines are not defeated but find their way, struggle, go ahead. This is one of the indication of black women as “sturdy black bridges”.

Toni Cade Bambara’s only novel *The Salt Eaters* belong to the phase of black feminists fiction writing where the protagonists are activists. The protagonist in this novel, Velma Henry, a civil rights
activist attempted double suicide by slitting open her veins of wrists and thrusting her head in the oven due to the personal and other problems related to the Civil Rights Movement. Her lost will to live is restored by the ‘fabled healer’ Minnie Ransom who is successful at the end when Velma “Resurrects”. For Bambara ‘Salvation is the issue’ she writes to save our lives, people’s lives. Hence the protagonist in her novel is also a civil right activist, and the entire novel is set against this movement. This delineation of Velma through lost fifth in life is healed by Minnie is intricate. Minnie represents the African heritage-root worker, a spiritual healer, representing sturdy metaphor who brings Velma back to life from the throes of death and makes strong like her to face life bravely for the society.

The novel is a postmodern one. Constructed of highly complex plot structure of flashback and flashforwards it defies the linear structure and has a caravan of characters, each of whom sets off on his/her memory lane. It encompasses a vast array of subjects so it makes the novel a labyrinth and abstract to understand because of the use of postmodernism in it. Even schizophrenia the element of postmodernism is revealed in the novel.

The third African American women novelist studied is Ntozake Shange. Her vision is quite radical. A poet, dramatist and novelist she has three novels to her credit namely: Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo, Betsey Brown, and Liliance: Resurrection of the Daughter. With
Shange there is a revival of the portrayal of black bourgeois after a long gap up time since Harlem Renaissance. All he novels are set against the black middle class society. And the major theme, of all her novels are Buildingsroman and Kunstlerroman. Her novels are the exploration of adolescent protagonists.

Her first novel Sassafrassa Cypress & Indigo is a black radical feminist Kunstlerroman as it maps the spiritual and artistic and physical growth of the three adolescent black artist sisters after whom the novel is named, Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo. Sassfrass, a weaver like her mother and a poet, Cypress a classical ballet dancer, and Indigo a spiritual healer and midwife. The novel delineates the quest of these protagonists towards their goals, and Hilda acts with the love and functions as a chorus in the novel.

They achieve their goals in the end come black-and unite with their mother where Sassafrass delivers her baby and Indigo serves as midwife.

What is poetic and postmodern about the novel is the use of-a pastiche or a collage of letters recipes, dreams, spells, journal entries, rituals etc. What is considered unimportant and ‘trivial’ is thought important in feminism by Shange. These things are feminist. The theme of mobility and explicit portrayal of lesbianism are also the demarking themes of the novel. The novels of the early eighties portray a character’s mobility, moving from one place to another as they are not
confirmed to one place as in the past. All three protagonist move to different places to achieve their goals. Similarly there is overt exploration of lesbianism between cypress and Idrina. The novel also makes a passing reference to the civil rights movement against which it is set. The novel depicts adventurous black women.

Shange's second novel *Betsey Brown* is a black feminist *Bildungsroman* in which we see the white racist world through the eyes of a thirteen years old black adolescent girl Betsey. Coming from a upper middle class family, Besey portrays her teenage life against the backdrop of integration. The playful novel reveals the darker aspect of white racism that plagues the black. Her adventure, playful frolic tricks sometimes make her thinks seriously.

Shange's next novel *Liliane* is against a black feminist *Künstlerroman* constructed in the postmodernist mode. The novel depicts Liliane Lincoln a visual artist coming from a upper middle class family whose world is shattered by racism. The fury of person when Liliane was a small child, her world with her lovers friends make the novel readable due to her dialogues with her psychiatrist. Hence Shange's women are caught in the turmoil but find their ways and face life.

To sum up, like most of the African American women novelists, Jones, Bambara and Shange have placed black women in the background of the historical experience. They have tried to highlight
the issues pertaining their colour, or race and gender.

Taken as a whole Jones, Bambara and Shange trace the diverse experience of black women in hostile environment of racism, sexism and class oppression. These three novelists try to unfold unique identity and dignity of the black women and to subvert the age old patriarchy. So these three novelists explore black feminine sensibilities and sturdy images of black women and possess a unique black feminist vision.