



Research Paper

## Women Empowerment in Gloria Naylor's novel "The Women of Brewster Place"

Dr. A. Vijayalakshmi<sup>1</sup>, Dr.T.Mekala<sup>2</sup>

Department of English, SNS College of Engineering, Coimbatore.

Corresponding Author: Dr. A. Vijayalakshmi

**ABSTRACT:** African-American literature explores the issues of freedom and equality, long denied to Blacks in the United States, along with further themes such as African-American culture, racism, religion, slavery, and migration. She emphasizes the strengths of African-American women and realistically portrays the varied lives of African-Americans, particularly examines the dual pressures of being a minority and a woman in a male-oriented society. This paper entitled "Women Empowerment in Gloria Naylor's novel 'The Women of Brewster Place' attempts at studying Gloria Naylor's individualism as a woman. Naylor invites the reader to join her characters in their journeys to move beyond established boundaries and embrace an increasingly varied society. With clear examination she successfully links the trials of her African American characters to the struggles of human beings at variance with seemingly impossible obstacles. Naylor's place within the larger framework of the African American narrative customs is considered as well. She creates corrupt fictional worlds in which characters must find some sort of sanctuary to be safe.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

African-American literature explores the issues of freedom and equality, long denied to Blacks in the United States, along with further themes such as African-American culture, racism, religion, slavery, and migration. Gloria Naylor is a famous novelist, essayist, screenplay writer, columnist, and educator. She emphasizes the strengths of African-American women and realistically portrays the varied lives of African-Americans, particularly examines the dual pressures of being a minority and a woman in a male-oriented society. She has written four novels and she is skillful at using classics of European literature and transforming them to fit the African-American experiences. Since receiving the 1983 American Book Award for *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Gloria Naylor has been hailed as one of the most insightful and significant writers in contemporary African - American literature. Like Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, Naylor is recognized as a brilliant cultural scribe and poetic historian of Black life in America.

This paper entitled "Women Empowerment in Gloria Naylor's novel *The Women of Brewster Place*" attempts at studying Gloria Naylor's individualism as a woman. Naylor invites the reader to join her characters in their journeys to move beyond established boundaries and embrace an increasingly varied society. With clear examination she successfully links the trials of her African American characters to the struggles of human beings at variance with seemingly impossible obstacles. Her place within the larger framework of the African American narrative customs is considered as well. She creates corrupt fictional worlds in which characters must find some sort of sanctuary to be safe.

Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) which is the celebration of the riches and diversities of the black female experience. Naylor centered on seven women who commit a victory by simply managing to survive in an impoverished and threatening neighborhood by bonding with each other and finding refuge. It indicates the women's sense of isolation, their mistreatment by men and their search for identity through shared experiences. The women here are appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood and solidarity and then in the process to reinvent themselves. It chronicles the communal strength of seven colored women living in old rented houses on a walled-off street in an urban neighborhood.

Mattie Michael, the matriarch of the group, is a source of comfort and strength for the other women. Etta Mae Johnson is a free spirit who repeatedly gets involved with men who disappoint her. Kiswana Browne embraces racial pride and eventually accepts her mother's middle-class values. Lorraine and Theresa are lovers; when Lorraine is gang-raped, she is deeply troubled by the attack and murders Ben, who is one of her few

supporters and the janitor of Brewster Place. Cora Lee loves her babies, while Ciel is on a path of self-destruction, having suffered a series of personal disasters.

Novel captures the pain, suffering and futile attempts at happiness for a group of colored women transplanted to a Northern city's dead end street known as Brewster Place. Naylor's presentations of human emotions ring so true that we sing our Amens from the knots in our stomachs or the tears in our eyes. There is verisimilitude in characters who are in their twenties as well as those who are in their fifties and older. In one scene between Kiswana Browne and her mother, who insists upon calling her newly remained daughter Melaine, Naylor astutely presents the clash of generations, and the games parents and children knowingly play. In this instance, neither mother nor daughter win out; instead, both realize that they can learn from, and must allow respect for, each other.

The prismatic features of these women's personalities are exposed by Naylor through various points of view. They are strong, independent minded, and nurture each other. They are proud of their African roots and heritage, ready to face adversity for the betterment of colored people. Some heroines like Cora Lee and Kiswana are eager to enjoy aesthetically satisfying plays. Some like Sophie and Betina are quarrelsome or jealous. Others are helpful as evident in the cases of Mattie and Etta, Kiswana and Cora Lee. They have crucial relationships with one another. These women laugh together, and bear their sorrows as well as uncertainty in each other's nearness. A protagonist like Mattie Michael has a voice of her own. She is full of fiery spirit. Etta Mae Johnson has an independent nature and is a stylish lady. Kiswana and Cora Lee are dreamers. Ciel learns hard lessons in life and overcomes deep frustration gradually due to Mattie's sympathetic companionship. Theresa learns after losing Lorraine that life without each other's support and understanding will be hard to bear. These women collectively share their rich and bitter experiences on Brewster Place. This is reflected in the form and content of the novel, and in the use of language as well as through images, metaphors, mood and tone.

The Women of Brewster Place is a moving portrait of the strengths, struggles, and hopes of colored women. At the end of the novel, the women demolish the wall that separates them from the rest of the city Gloria Naylor weaves together the truths and myths of the womanhood lives, creating characters who are free to determine the course of their lives, embodying the self actualization tradition of the Harlem Renaissance.

The interactions of the characters and the similar struggles they live through connect the stories, through their recurring themes and motifs. Of these unifying elements, the most notable is the dream motif, for though these women are living in a very unpleasant existence, they are united by their common dreams. Naylor delineates only the predicament of colored women and their exploitation by colored men. She does not refer to the attitude of white men towards colored women in her novels.

The seven women, in the novel fighting to stay alive in a world that has never been kind to African - Americans or women is a compliment to the African - American female experience. Their atmosphere further causes complication in their lives. Brewster Place is a poverty stricken and fear provoking locality. Each woman, in her own way, plays a central part in creating Brewster Place. The women are compelled to rely on each other when the world seems to shut them out. Despite their dissimilarities, the women of Brewster Place are bound by an intellect of community and sisterhood that facilitates them to deal with the everyday stress they face in the male dominated society in which they live. This is best demonstrated in the relationship between Cora Lee and Kiswana and between Mattie and Ciel.

The brick wall that closed their street several years earlier now separates them from the rest of the city and symbolizes their psychological and spiritual isolation. In the closing pages of the novel, one woman removes a brick that she thinks is stained with the blood of a resident recently gang-raped and left to die. Spontaneously, the other women join her and collectively they tear down the wall, experiencing as they do so an inner renewal, a sense of community and unity, and a rebirth of hope.

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