

# Declaration of feminine individuality in Gloria Naylor's Novels

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**Abstract – Gloria Naylor, a novelist with a difference is a brilliant writer and true humanist who wants to change the male- centric culture through her novels. She awakens and motivates women to feel confident and self-reliant. All the characters of her novels face hardships in their life but come out as warriors of their life because they do not lose confidence and hope to change their situation.**

**Key Words - Struggle, Strength, Survive, Ugly, Intellectual Battle, Gloomy Atmosphere etc.**

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Gloria Naylor is a strapping Black tone of voice of the modern period who made an emergence on the literary scene with the publication of her debut book *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). Then she wrote five more novels- *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), *The Men of Brewster Place* (1995), and *1996* (2005). Naylor's fiction shows the struggle of survival of dark women and men. Her works are the intellectual battle to survive and flourish in the oppressive world of racism. Her imaginary world is, to some extent, the reflection of her own life. She is the part of her writings and writes "that outline did not say that black was beautiful, it did not say that black was ugly. It said simply: You are. You exist. It reverberated enough to give me courage to pick up the pen. And it's what finally validated me" (Naylor 171). Her novels are the fine fusion of the facts and fantasy and this fusion makes her a great confident writer who can write about accepted authority and can write about the familiar accepted places and individuals. Her world of fantasy is the reflection of dark environment of black community. Through her characters she shows all layers of the reality of metropolitan North to rural South. She is the brilliant character shaper who shapes various characters that all are types and individual characters who are capable of controlling to a persuaded amount.

*The Women of Brewster Place*, is a well known work of Naylor where she shows the cultural heritage, different backgrounds, past experiences, memories and familial artistic skills to provide the women characters with an inner strength to survive even in an impoverished and threatening environment. In this gloomy atmosphere they suffer a lot but even then they do not lose courage and do not resort to inhuman tricks to attain their ends. They are packed with the sense of self-respect and strength of independence. Her characters such as Mattie Michael,

Etta Mae, Kiswana Brown, Ciel, Cora Lee or Theresa and Lorraine are the characters that are filled with self respect and spirit of self esteem. Through these characters Naylor represents the assertion of female identity for a significant endurance against weighty odds. She shapes her women characters in such a way that they do well in getting liberated from the negative images that frustrate the expression of their genuine identities as human beings.

In her novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, she portrays Afro-American women who struggle against the tyrannical system and stay alive significantly even in the face of antagonistic and troublesome forces. In this novel there are seven women who are having individual differences but help each other in the unpleasant and intimidating state of affairs. The novel also confirms how black mothers provide poignant and moral support to their daughters. When Mattie, a loving daughter, feels embarrassed and ashamed of her pregnancy, her mother exhibits much valor to protect her daughter from the physical as well as mental torment. The mother urges her, "Ain't nothing to be ashamed of, Havin' a baby is the most natural thing there is ... What's going on in your belly now ain't nothing' to hang your head about -- you remember that" (*The Women of Brewster Place* 20). After having support and protection by her mother, she gets a new spirit in life and works very hard day and night for the shiver of her unborn child. The novelist brings her women characters with sense of cohesion so that they can guard the weaker ones in the time of catastrophe. When Lorraine is endangered by Baker, she is protected by Kiswana and Theresa. The novel also shows a self-confident mother and wife through the character of Ciel who makes various attempts to stop her husband running away from the house. She does so because she knows the value of father for her children. It is true that she fails to stop him

but she does not lose strength and does not cry even when she loses both the children- one through an abortion and the other through electrocution. At that miserable condition this lonely mother is helped by Mattie who is the mother figure for her. This motherly help provided her a meaningful life and also a new job. Another major woman character is Cora Lee at the initial stage she is not as careful about her children as Mattie and Ciel are. But with the time and experiences she realizes her responsibility and becomes a self-assured and accountable mother. The novelist also highlights the problems of lesbians in society. Naylor discloses man's fear of woman's independence through Lorraine's gang rape as C.C. Baker proclaims his intention to "slap that bitch in her face and teach her a lesson" (*The Women of Brewster Place* 162). The novelist is of the view that the collective leadership of women can break down the wall of racism and gender discrimination. This novel is the chain of seven stories where Naylor underlines the difficult expedition of her female characters from reversal to declaration. All the characters have limited choices in the beginning but they steadily understand their potentialities as women and demonstrate an extraordinary ability to brawl against all the forms of oppression and try to subvert the norms of the male-dominated society.

*Linden Hills* is another well-known work by her. In this novel she displays how Afro- American women obtain selfhood and self-sufficiency as women within family to reserve themselves from the prescribed customary role as wives. This novel depicts the women characters on the pathway of physical as well as emotional expedition to self-discovery. In the novel, Luther Nedeed, the male character, locks his wife Willa in the basement of house by doing this he wants to teach her a lesson for a so-called faithfulness. This basement becomes a pathway to discover her real self. Here she finds time to explore her. All this provides her a valuable strength to transform her into an assertive woman who claims to be a mistress of the house. She now comes to realize the injustice done to her: "She sat down there calmly and irrevocably immersed in the simple fact that had become part of her being: Luther was a dead man if she left that basement alive" (*Linden Hills* 71). The novel tells the story of a middle-class wife who attains independence and selfhood through meticulous experiences and now she has a space for herself within the domestic sphere. She is no longer deprived of but a strong lady.

*Mama Day* is the story of intelligent and independent black girl who marries George, the New Yorker, and George is influenced by hegemonic culture. During her courtship with George, she always forces him to prove his adore and faithfulness to her. In the early phase of her marital life, she shares ancestral and fiscal responsibilities with her husband; she keeps her individuality as a strong and self-confident woman. She triumphs over him in almost all

the fields of domestic life as well as social life but, at last knows the real master of the society. Through her novel novelist tries to deconstruct the image of African woman as performer of bold deeds. By doing this, Naylor rejects the social structure that places African American woman at the lowest position in the social ladder and consider her non-persona or sub-human.

*Bailey's Café* is the story of a whore named Saddle who has a derogatory label. Here Naylor tries to deconstruct this derogatory label and tries to change these man-made negative connotations about woman. Saddle has a dull environment in her childhood where she is unable to find love, compassion and care that is why she always wants to win love and approval from her mother and to have "a trim white bungalow with a green picket fence" (*Bailey's Cafe* 44). She can do everything to please her mother. She is obsessed by these thoughts of pleasing her mother but she fails to please her. Her world of dream shatters when her mother forces her into the mud of prostitution at the tender age. In this filthy world of prostitution, her life is miserable - no laughter no hope, but she does not lose courage to change her fortune. With the help of this character, the novelist defies the type cast image of the hypersexual Afro-American woman.

Thus the strong, sovereign and free-willed women characters in her novels, give Naylor's fictional world a new dimension. Having a great flexibility, they disburse a war against the oppressive and cruel system and come out triumphant. In their expedition of life, they, undoubtedly, suffer discrimination, hardships and exploitation; but with the help of their unconquerable courage and inner strength they understand their potentials and make their lives significant by defeating all the insurmountable obstructions. They struggle hard and stand against all forms of domination. They have unfathomable faith in the healing powers of nature and the folk traditions inherited from Africa. To rise in life they do not lose their essential virtues of love, friendship and patience. They are ready to face life. They are always hoping against hope to get what they really deserve. Her female characters have the virtue of solidarity that helps them to fight against all the cruel forces. Being a humanistic writer, Naylor raises the voice of all human beings. She is the spoke person of all males, females and homo sexuals who creates human values and rejects prejudices regarding race, gender, caste and creed.

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