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Women Fights for their Rights

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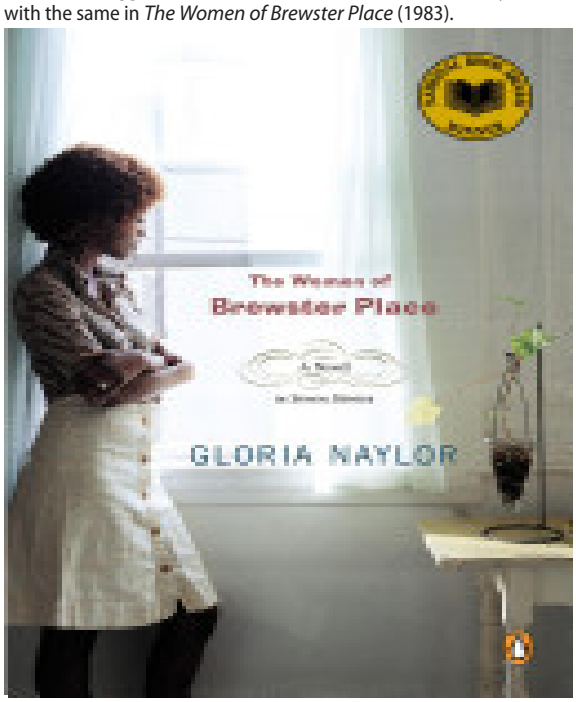
ABSTRACT

Naylor's portrayals Ciel, Kiswana, Etta Mae Johnson, Lorraine and Theresa are the representatives of black women who still face numerous problems because of their race and class. The portrayal of Lorraine, a lesbian who fights consistently to find a place is a remarkable attempt of Naylor to recommend a place for her. Ciel's efforts to keep her husband with her, he longing to lead a peaceful life are a dream of many black women. Kiswana is a symbol of black activists who fight for their rights in a white America. Etta Mae Johnson moves from place to place and the result she finds the same status for women throughout America; restricted freedom and neglected identity. Etta Mae Johnson's effort to maintain her dignity and search of a decent man to get a peaceful married life are common dreams of black women. The women fight for their rights is discussed by Gloria Naylor in this paper to bring out the common identities of African American women.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

African American women writers have taken a special effort to portray their women in their novels. Heightened interest in the women's issues makes these writers famous throughout the world. The themes discussed by these writers are racial oppression, sexual abuse, impact of western culture, complex relationship between women themselves, and Black heritage. Jesse Fauset, Nella Larson, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Gorlia Naylor are some of them who prefer to talk about the inner struggle of Black women in their works. Gloria Naylor deals with the same in *The Women of Brewster Place* (1983).



She talks abut seven women whose lives are completely shattered and the result they get sheltered at Brewster Place.

A young Revolutionist

Kiswana Browne is introduced to the readers as a young revolutionist, who works to bring a change in the lives of her people. She is born in bourgeois family of Linden Hills, a place where Blacks lead a comfortable life with a fine job, house and all the facilities at the cost of their race and culture. Kiswana does not want to lose her identity as a Black, so she leaves Linden Hills and stays at Brewster Place where she is able to lead a life with her people.

She is proud to be a Black and she has never forgiven her brother Wilson, who even refuses to be referred as an 'Afro'. She even adopts an African name, hairstyle, and décor in order to put her Black Nationalist belief into practice. She fights with her mother for remarking the black as 'them'. "What do... Linden Hills". (The *Women of Brewster Place* 83)

Kiswana's mother, Mrs. Browne a middle class bourgeois woman, tries to convince Kiswana to get education and a job to help her people in a better way. But Kiswana, clear minded girl refuses to get arrested for four to five years by white brainwashing institutions. She leaves her home to live in Brewster Place. Her mother visits her house, at that time Kiswana tries her best to prove her mother that she is a grown up, matured woman who can deal the problems of society.

Mother- daughter relationship is skillfully sketched by Naylor in the chapter of Kiswana. Mrs. Browne when she realizes the firmness of her daughter in her decision, not to spoil her dignity and not to discourage her, without her knowledge places an envelop on the cushions and goes. "Kiswana.... five dollars in it". (*The Women of Brewster Place* 88)

Naylor gives a graphic picture of Kiswana's efforts to bring the women of Brewster Place together to find solutions for their boarding problems. Kiswana Browne is the representation of young population of black women in America. She wishes to find her roots and likes to be a supportive agent for them and tries to help them in their immense pains.

A Woman Sacrifice

Lucielia Louise Turner (Ciel), the grand daughter of Eva Turner, is partly brought up by Mattie Michael. Ciel leads a humiliated life with Eugune with a false hope that he will become an affectionate husband as well as a loving father to her daughter Serena. Eugune wants to desert her whenever a responsibility is added on him. It continues when Ciel announces her second pregnancy. Ciel even undergoes an abortion in order to please him and keep him with her, but there is no use of it. Thereafter Ciel's only solace lies on Serena, her only daughter. The hands of curl fate takes her away is an electric shock. Ciel has come a long way and crossed the limits of her endurance.

Ciel's problems cause her immense pain and it is a common framework of black women in America: dreams shattered by the men in their lives. However, it is only Mattie who supports and helps Ciel, when she losts her hope and life in the hands of Eugene. The healing touch of Mattie gains confidence in Ciel's life. Naylor vividly portrays Mattie's efforts to bring back the dying Ciel to normal. Mattie's determination to bring Ciel to normal state is an example of the relationship of Black women. Like a mother who helps a sick child to get back a strong physique and mind, Mattie nurses Ciel. "Mattie....she rocked on. (*The Women of Brewster Place* 103).

Mattie is sure that Ciel's tears will end and she wants Ciel to have a happy life. Ciel flies over to Sanfranscisco, to be away from her child's reminiscences and works there in an insurance company. Ciel's devotion to

Eugene, the great

pain she undergoes as the result of it, loss of her child, after loosing everything, raising up from the ashes are the scenes where Naylor's lyrical language mesmerizes the one who reads it.

A Respectable Image

Etta Mae Johnson, Mattie Michael's friend is, a young Southern girl. Their friendship tolerated no secrets. They share all the gains and pains. Etta's teenage years are spent at Rock Vale, where a woman is expected to abide all the scales of obedience unquestioningly. "Etta spent ....dry goods store. (*The Women of Brewster Place* 59).

Etta's sprit challenges this. She reserves her 'sirs' and 'madams' for the people who deserve. So she is forced to leave the place. Later she realizes that rules are the same at Memphis, Detroit, Chicago and New York. Etta's long lasting struggle, in search of a dignified life and a decent life partner, is one of the common problems of most number of black women. Naylor has taken pains to shape the character Etta Mae Johnson.

The Lesbians

Lorraine and Theresa are daring portrayals of Gloria Naylor in the novel The Women of Brewster Place (1983). Both are middle class lesbians. Among them Lorraine is thrown out of her family when she refuses to lie about being a lesbian. They are not accepted anywhere in their society and at last ends at Brewster Place, but in vain. Theresa and Lorraine are still not able to avoid the pointed fingers and dirty looks of their community.

Lorraine is a frail and quite light skinned woman who seems to want nothing more than to fit in with the rest of the women at Brewster Place. Lorraine even tries to integrate herself with the rest of them by going to a tenants meeting where she is insulted by Sophie, an inquisitive neighbour of her. Theresa is the bolder of the two. She never cares what the neighbours think of them. She doesn't understand why Lorraine cares.. Lorraine feels the rejection from both by her neighbour and by Theresa. She finds comfort in talking to Ben, an old alcoholic handyman of Brewster Place. She plays the role of his little girl whom he had lost. Ben tells Lorraine, "you reminded me lots of my little girl" (*The Women of Brewster Place* 147). who also suffered repeated rape of white Boss. This sexual exploitation of Ben's daughter by white-boss emphasizes the inaccessibility of white patriarchal power. A black man is not able to break it. This exploitation takes place in the south, where Ben cannot earn enough money to support the family; but north is also not an exception of this.

Conclusion

Black women are not only prey for white men; but also for their own men. The gang rape of Lorraine brings it to the center. The gang rape of Lorraine at the dead end wall shows a helpless state of women in African American Community. She is attacked by a gang of teenagers. After the boy leaves her batter and bloody, the other one mercilessly sponges her. A black woman is smashed by her own men. At the end, early morning, she drags a loose brick towards the figure and bashes the person in the face, without knowing it is Ben and not the gang men who destroyed her completely.

Thus Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place traces Black women's migration from slavery to freedom and submissivenss to self assertion. The characters Kiswana, Ciel, Etta Mae Johnson and Lorraine are samples of many African American women who still struggle to find a place of their own.

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