CHAPTER-V

SILENCE BROKEN:

THE COLOR PURPLE
The Color Purple is a work to stand beside literature for any time and any place. It needs no category other than the fact that it is superb.

-Rita Mae Brown

Alice Walker’s novel The Color Purple is written in 1982 but Celie’s story takes place in the early twentieth century. Although there is no specific dates given, the novel approximately is between 1910 and 1940. After the civil war in 1865 and the abolition of slavery, African Americans still faced economic difficulties. By the early twentieth century, there were many more opportunities to succeed. Many of them received education, many moved out of the rural south to the more sophisticated Industrial North. Those who moved took their culture, songs, stories, language with them. 1920’s is the Jazz Age when the African-American music, poetry and many more pursuits related to them came together and it resulted in Harlem Renaissance. The setting in the TCP presents all most all the changes which took place during this time.

TCP is a spiritual journey for Walker and her character Celie. They both share the common path in their journey. It is a story of women’s victory. It is a phenomenon of African American women’ struggle against racism, sexism and social determinism. Mary Helen Washington describes Walker’s writings as:

from whatever vantage point one investigates the work of Alice Walker-poet, novelist, short story writer, critic, essayist, and apologist for black women-it is clear that special indentifying mark of her writing is her concern for the lives of black women.”(133)
TCP is an example of a “woman’s novel”. For, Walker, womanist writing is that which focuses on African-American women in the twentieth century America. This style of writing deals with the oppression of African-American women, not only by white people but also by black males. The women in the novels fight against all odds for their own survival and for the survival of their families. Other novelists who wrote in this tradition are Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. All their women characters are found to come out of their imprisonments/cages and make their voice heard by everyone.

The goal of this book is to inspire and motivate black women. Patricia Harris Abrams describes “The book treats the reader to a journey where the characters discover beauty, truth, love, and the answer to the meaning of life.” (28) Celie, the main character, undergoes an inner transformation from a submissive, abused wife to a confident and independent black women and business woman. It is not only her journey of discovering the beauty, love, truth and the meaning of life but also it is a journey of Shug Avery, Nettie, Sofia and Mary Agnes (Squeak). The rejection of the traditional Christian “White-man’s” God forms the secondary theme the women create a new age kind of God who gives them more comfort in their lives. Celie, the vulnerable, abused fourteen year old black girl addresses the letters to “Dear God” in the beginning of the novel. But thirty years later, at the end of the novel, she fights her way through life and questions everything she has been taught. She challenges to remake her idea of God as an old, white bearded male- into a God who encompasses everything and lives within her. Celie’s last letter is written to this vague kind of God: “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples.
Dear Everything. Dear God.” (259), revealing that she no longer sees God as a distant figure with which she feels she has little or no connection.

The novel TCP is considered to be concerned with the life of black women and their patriarchal suppression as Bernard Bell describes the concept of the novel TCP as “more concerned with the politics of the class and race. Its unrelenting, severe attacks on male hegemony, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men, is offered as a revolutionary leap forward into a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism.” (263) The description of the universal oppression of black women, crosses all the limitations of race, class, gender and the theme reaches out to women in general. The novel widens the scope of literary discourse, and also reflects consciousness of women’s world. It is a novel which can be read crossing all the cultural boundaries, as bell hooks praises “it is truly popular work-a book of people-a work that has many different meanings for many different readers.” (454) The color ‘purple’ is the color of royalty that exemplifies the endless possibilities available not only to the black women but to all women who stand up and fight for their rights.

Walker in her preface to the tenth anniversary edition of TCP: “This book is the book in which I was able to express a new spiritual awareness, a rebirth into strong feelings of oneness I realized I had experienced and taken for granted as a child; a chance for me as well as the main character, Celie, to encounter That Which Is Beyond Understanding But Not Beyond Loving and to say: I see and hear you clearly, Great mystery, now that I expect to see and hear you everywhere I am, which is the right place.”
Walker’s women especially Celie in the novel TCP develops and matures both vertically as well as horizontally. The protagonist reaches her own sense of ‘self’ and ‘independence’. It is occurred in the female bonding circle she is connected with and it further becomes more effective only within the realm of bonding with other women. This is what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson calls it as the:

Intra subjective engagement with the inter subjective aspects of self, a dialectic neither repressing difference nor privileging identity, but rather expressing engagement with the social aspects of self. It is the subjective plurality (rather than the notion of the cohesive or fractured subject) that, finally, allows the black woman to become an expressive sit for a dialectics/dialogics of identity and difference. (264)

Celie is allowed to experience the world in a journey through which she reaches maturation. Walker brings maturation primarily not for Celie alone, but for a group of women like Shug, Nettie, Sofia and Squeak who find their power, not in separation, but in active operation inside the domain of positive interaction and interconnectedness with each other. As Sunitha Diwakar says “In The Color Purple Walker’s characters discover it through the strength and wisdom available in the community of women.” (136) Celie, is not without her sense of inherent selfhood. She reaches maturation, not on her own, but through a vigorous net of black female interdependence and support. Her full consciousness and independence are initiated and nurtured through the female bonding she procures. It can be said that the
maturation through consciousness is not the protagonist’s exclusive privilege as it is equally awarded to every member in the female bonding circle.

The novel is the story of Celie, a fourteen year old black girl who lives with her dying mother and her sister, Nettie. Her stepfather, Fonso is portrayed as the villain of the narrative, living like an animal, demanding sex from both mother and daughter. Celie suffers silently and writes her story in the form of letters addressed to God as she can never trust anyone else with her secrets. Her step-father too warns Celie not to speak to anyone except God: “you better not tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy.” (3) Rashmi Gaur explains Celie’s sexual abuse in the novel as:

The horrifying account of Celie’s sexual abuse on the very first page of the novel is a sad commentary on the androcentric culture which condemns women to a subordinate state. Defenseless and threatened Celie cannot share her trauma with other members of her family. (168)

Celie expresses all her feelings, her worries, her impressions of others and her desires only in letters. The style of language in the letters reflects her distressed, depressed, rational and touching state of mind. “The actual language of the letters, which are written in Celie’s folk speech without any attempt at editorializing on walker’s part, is similarly reaffirming; something essential to her personality.” (Trudier Harris 16) The chronological positions of the letters and the interrelations between them make the novel rich. The dialect Celie uses stands as her attempts to intellectual self-definition. Celie considers the God as her guardian and so she expresses all her feelings to him.
As the novel unfolds, Celie appears as an abused, brutally victimized young girl with no intention of rebelling. The only communication she has is with God thinking that at least God can listen to her and understand her sorrows and feelings. Writing to God gives her a sense of hope. She wants to be considered important at least by God. Celie’s writing is described as:

Celie constantly struggle against the dominant language of patriarchy and racism and renovates her expressivity in terms of her mimetic expressions. So for a black women like Celie, mimetic voice of self-awareness symbolizes her dialogic expression and in this process Walker re-structures a specific feminist expressivity in terms of black women’s resurrected consciousness. (Mukul Sen Gupta 194)

Walker describes Celie’s position as, “She has not accepted an alien description of who she is; neither has she accepted completely an alien tongue to tell us about it. Her being is affirmed by the language in which she is revealed, and like everything about her it is characteristic, hard-won and authentic.” (Alice Walker 64) Moreover, Celie’s series of letters show her growth from a victimized girl to a strong willed woman as described by Nandita Sinha in the introduction of the book Alice Walker’s The Color Purple: a reader’s companion:

Letter’s express Celie’s view of herself and her view of the world even as they show her development from a victimized girl to a woman who becomes strong enough to change her condition and love herself. Letters are both a source of subjective information,
Celia’s feelings about herself, and objective information the world in which she moves. Letters proclaim the woman-centered focus of this novel. (60)

Alice Walker’s TCP provides a personal outlook and flexible method of narration that adds richness to the story telling. To Celia, the main character, God is her first spectator. Celia’s younger sister Nettie is her second spectator. Through all of Celia’s endeavours for communion with God, she is able to find out what her position is. Mari Evans highlights Celia’s need: “What she needs is to share her burdens, be taken off the cross, and find a way to save herself. Celia does find a way and it works because, as she discovers, God is herself.” (490) The concept of God changes when it comes to the end of the novel.

Celia has no one else to speak to. She suffers from an overwhelming sense of inferiority and insecurity. She feels ashamed to share with her mother what has happened to her “She ast me bout the first one whose it is? I say God’s. I don’t know no other man or what else to say.” (4) Celia hates herself and has no desire to take care of her body which is constantly exploited. Adrienne Rich expresses her sorrow, “But fear and hatred of our bodies often crippled our brains. Some of the most brilliant women of our time are still trying to think from somewhere outside their female bodies—hence they are still merely reproducing old forms of intellect.” (284) Ultimately Celia ignores her body. Danies Ross describes this as:

To confront the body is to confront not only an individual’s abuse but also the abuse of women’s bodies through-out history; as the external symbol of women’s enslavement, this abuse represents for
women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status. (70)

Celie is repeatedly beaten and raped by Fonso. So it is found that she does not even have control over her body. After having two children by Fonso, Celie soon loses them. She doesn’t either know where they are or what happened to them. When her mother asks about them she says “God took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods.” (4) But actually Fonso, like a slaveholder, moves them away to a childless family. Celie is then cast away as Fonso forces her to marry Albert, an old and oppressive widower. It is interesting to know the details of the marriage bargain as well as Fonso’s fear that Celie might speak out of his sexual violation to her.

The details of the marriage bargain expressively reflect how Celie is extremely objectified, more like an object and a slave. Fonso wants to sell her because, as she simply thinks, “he can’t stand me no more. . . I got breasts full of milk running down myself” (5). Actually, Fonso has his own plans: he wants to get rid of Celie so as to start the same round with her younger and, obviously, more beautiful sister, Nettie. In the bargaining process Fonso offers Albert a cow. He further presses Albert into acceptance, by reminding him of his need as a father of four who all need a lot of care, especially by a hard working and yet submissive woman to whom Albert can do everything he wants.

So, like a manipulative capitalist, Albert accepts the deal, first, because Celie is an obedient hard worker who “can work like a man, no stranger to hard work;” second, Celie is, after all, a free labor as she will make no demands, “ain’t
gonna make you feed it or clothe it.” (10) Third, because Albert, like Fonso, has his eye on Nettie, he thus intends to use Celie as his bridge to get Nettie, with whom he wants to adorn on bed. Celie, of course, is never asked of her opinion because she is merely considered as a thing but not as human by both Fonso and Albert. Celie is asked to turn round, and Albert gazes at her as if she is an animal, before accepting the deal. Krishna Mohan Mishra explains Celie’s exchange as:

A patriarchal society tends to deny subjectivity to females, whether it is sexual or economic activity. In both realms, they are commodified and exchanged between men, as, in the novel Celie exchanged between her step father and her husband. Such an exchange and compulsory heterosexuality operate to bind men together as well as helping uphold the system of patriarchy. (183)

Fonso is always afraid that Celie might speak out of his immoral rape, so he even prevents Celie from going to school, thus silencing her not to speak. To force Celie into further silencing before handing her to Albert, Fonso makes a story about Celie. He warns Albert that she always “tell lies.” Further he says Albert that he has to be careful and watchful with her or else “she’ll give away everything you owns.” (10) It is noted that Fonso’s lies about Celie to portray himself as an honest man while dealing with another man. Thus, in addition to getting rid of Celie like a disposable item, Fonso also tries to promote his own image as a truthful person in Albert’s mind.

Fonso and Albert present the oppressive male system in the novel. characters. Fonso rapes and brutalizes Celie and deprives her of her kids. He also
hands over her to another cruel male Albert. Albert uses her not only as a free labourer in his house, but also as a bridge for getting her sister sexually. In such ways, the patriarchy manages to flourish, through imposing suppressive dictations on the females’ bodies, voices and minds. It is identified that patriarchal desire is fully satisfied only when the woman is fully dehumanized. By ordering Celie to remain silent, Fonso wants to satisfy his abnormal sexual desires, at the same time wants to be admired as a respectable man in the eyes of his community. Despite his sexual violation of Celie, Fonso beats her for “winking at a boy in church,” (7) something that Celie, in fact, has not done. Albert, in the same manner wants to have it both ways: to use Celie for the house chores and field work and to use Nettie for the bed. Under Albert, Celie’s situation is no better than under that of Fonso. Both of them are soulless and immoral and deadly night mares to Celie. George Stade describes these men:

As for the men, with a few telling expectations, they are brutal in the flesh because they are impoverished of spirit. They are pitiless when they are not self pitying. They are misogynist and they are pedophbic. They are petty, spiteful, lustful and treacherous. They are also arrogant, complacent, lazy, insensitive, incompetent, vain, inartistic, contemptuous of women, but quick to take credit for their work. Above all they are lechers, mechanical monsters of sexual appetite. (266)

This is true in the character of Albert. To Celie, Albert is another Fonso, another rapist, as Celie later says to Shug, “I don’t like it at all. He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain’t
there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep.” (74) Besides this Albert treats Celie as a child, and beats her the way he beats “the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie git the belt.” (23) She totally ignores herself, and her body which is repeatedly experienced sexual and physical assaults. Daniel Ross rightly comments:

To confront the body is to confront not only an individual’s abuse but also the abuse of women’s bodies throughout history; as the external symbol women’s enslavement, this abuse represents for woman a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status. (70)

Celie’s grief is increased by her sister’s departure who leaves in order to escape Albert’s sexual advances. He even stops Celie’s communication with her sister by hiding the letters of Nettie from Africa. Of course, Albert’s hiding of Nettie’s letters is an act of silencing. It is not less violent than Fonso’s command on Celie not to tell anybody of his unethical rape. In this suffocated conditions, Celie doesn’t ignore her profound sense of resistance. The resistance is shown by writing her own story, in the form of letters to God. Apart from this, it is also seen when Fonso asks her to keep silent about the rape and “git used to it,” Celie, in her mind, “never git used to it.” (3) Celie, in fact, is not there in either of the two kinds of rape she is subjected to. Similarly, in order to ignore of Albert’s physical violence, Celie chooses to turn herself into wood: “I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man.” (23) Thus she gains self-invented resistance in her imagination of being a wood. Thus Celie gains her personal relief either by imagination or by writing letters. She gains her voice that she needs to
make up for the silencing imposed on her by the two men respectively. Walker uses metaphors to provide the effective description: “As Celie creates her own writing form, she also becomes more artistically expressive. She no longer merely states situational facts, she invents metaphors for her feelings.” (Valerie Babb 111)

Though there is no reader for her letters, the act of writing provides strength and inward readiness for resistance. It also signifies her personal awareness of a need both for a voice to tell her story and a medium for expressing herself. As Deborah E. McDowell argues, while Celie’s letters to God represent “an attempt to communicate with someone outside herself,” they also “reveal a process of self-examination and self-discovery.” (289) Valerie Babb points out that “words are the means that afford her deep self-examination. As she writes, she becomes more aware of herself and knows who she is and values herself.” (90) In fact, Celie is stubborn and willful despite her miseries; she continues writing regardless of what is happening to her. In order to protect her fragmented sense “she uses writing to fix the events of her life, thereby lending them coherence and making their review and understanding possible.” (Valerie Babb 109) Celie’s writing prevents her from becoming mad. It heals her heart. She seeks relief by putting all the abuse that has been done against her on paper. It makes her to get relief from pain. For Celie it is important to be alive as she is much worried of Nettie than herself.

Nettie’s absence damages the only availing chance of female bonding that Celie could have retained, especially after her mother’s death. So in the absence of true female bonding, Celie doesn’t accept Albert’s sister’s advice to fight back. It is because she knows that Albert’s sister is just a visitor who lives away from her
place and may not be of a great support when in need. In addition to this she is sure that Albert’s cruelty is undefeatable.

Celie’s refusal to fight back also originates from a sense of shame and defeat that Fonso’s incest is ingrained inside her. This, as a whole, shows that Celie has been violently conditioned and restricted by the dominant male abuses against her. Thus Walker provides the prevailing patriarchal abuses of the society in the novel

Man corrupt everything…He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to get lost, say Shug.” (177)

When Harpo, Albert’s son, asks Celie, how to subjugate his wife, Sofia. Celie advises him to “beat her” (36), as this is the only way Celie knows and is suffered in life so far. It is not until Sofia comes to blame Celie for her bad advice that the first incident of an effective female bonding begins to start.

Celie in need of female bonding and a female community unconsciously knows the empowering value of female bonding and craves for it. For example, despite Fonso’s repeated and humiliating rape of her, Celie offers herself to him in order to save her sister: “I ast him to take me instead of Nettie while our new mammy sick.” (9) She wants to protect Nettie not only from her step father but also from her husband Albert. So, Celie advises Nettie to meet Reverend Samuel’s wife
who can really be of some help “But I only got one thing to give her, the name of
Reverend Mr_____. I tell her to ask for his wife. That may be she would help. She
the only woman I even seen with money.” (19) She asks Nettie to write to her,
which is a call for bonding between two sisters. Nettie assures “Nothing but death
can keep me from it.” (19) As Nettie is away Celie is in need of a new bonding in
order to attain her autonomy and self-esteem. Celie strongly believes in the solace
that comes with the female bonding. She has the potential for liberation, but still
needs solace and support. The seeds of resistance she has inside, cannot solely
provide her the complete freedom and the change she waits for. The change comes
after her shift to Albert’s house and her bonding with Harpo’s wife Sofia.

Harpo, the seventeen year old son of Albert meets a girl in church but the
girl’s father disagrees his proposal as he has nothing to offer him. But the two
young lovers decide to continue their relationship and to have a baby together.
Albert becomes angry when Harpo brings Sophia to house, but eventually he gets
over it and the baby is born. Soon Harpo and Sofia marry. Eventually Harpo
realizes that Sofia is not submissive like Celie. To ‘tame’ her is not easy for Harpo
as she is much bigger than he is. Whenever he tries to hit her, she retaliates him the
lesson of obedience. Though Celie also advices Harpo to beat his wife, she admires
Sofia for being such a strong woman. Celie realizes that she can never be this
strong. But she feels guilty for telling Harpo to beat her and constantly gets
nightmares about her sin. When Sofia confronts Celie about it, Celie concedes that
she didn’t mean what she said and soon the two women become friends as Celie
feels safe and secure in their new bonding as she says: “I don’t even look at men.
That’s the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them.” (7) This sense
of security actually sets the basis on which she quietly and openly deals with the angry and mad Sofia. Celie has never before speaks but now she feels safe in Sofia’s company. Moreover all her inward aspirations are previously expressed in secret and to an Almighty that never responds. But now she has Sofia who can listen and respond to her secrets of heart.

Celie admits her mistake and by speaking openly with Sofia succeeds not only in abolishing Sofia’s anger, but also in turning Sofia into a well-wisher. The cooperating atmosphere between Celie and Sofia, provides the base for an amazing series of continued alliance between the two women. It soon starts by Sofia’s telling her story before her marriage with Harpo. Sofia’s mother is very submissive to her father and her father “hate children and hate where they come from.” She also tells of her strong sisters and about the strong relationship between them. She further expresses her grief to Celie by telling: “All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men. But I never thought I’d have to fight in my own house.” (39)

In return for Sofia’s divulgence of her past life, Celie explains the way she is brutalized under Albert. Sofia then equals Celie to her own submissive mother. She even advises her “to bash Mr_____head open…think bout heaven later.” (40) The meeting ends with Sofia’s suggestion “Let’s make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains,” After this encounter with Sofia Celie says “I sleeps like a baby now.” (41) This statement is a confirmation of how relaxed she feels after finding a supportive female around.
Along with the act of writing letters Celie’s “quilting” with Sofia helps her to gain some more strength to get her identity as a human being. Sewing establishes a harmonious relationship between the two women. Cutter describes Celie’s quilting skill “functions as an alternative methodology of language that moves her away from violence and victimization and into self-empowerment and subjectivity.” (Cutter 163) Quilting with Sofia also paves the way for Celie’s easy acceptance of Shug’s existence in the house despite Shug’s initial insult to her as ugly. It is quite important to mention that quilting between Celie and Sofia never ends at the limit of producing one quilt. Their quilting turns into a process, as it is enriched a while later by Shug’s sharing in the making of another quilt named after the pattern “Sister’s Choice.” Shug also grants an “old yellow dress” (56) to be pieced together with some other fabrics brought by Celie and Sofia.

Shug is a blues singer, economically independent, and is loved by Albert who brings her home because of her severe illness. Albert intends she be nursed by Celie, who is not even informed of Shug’s arrival. It is ironical to notice that Celie’s connection with Sofia is initiated by one of Celie’s errors where as her intimacy and full interaction with Shug is initiated by one of her good deeds. Celie nurses Shug regardless of being insulted. Besides being taken care of while sick, Shug is also intended by Albert to resume making love, as a result, Albert is to maintain further patriarchal power in his domain. But Shug, turns out to be the instigator of all sorts of power mechanisms for Celie against Albert.

Shug gives psychological strength to Celie by saying “I am here to help you get on your feet.” (191) So, Celie considers Shug as an archetype of female power
and spiritual strength. What Celie longs for is exactly embodied in what Shug does and knows. This, in turn, develops the process of Celie’s consciousness in the hands of Shug. Mae Henderson speaks of Shug, “Unlike Celie, who derives her sense of self from the dominant white and male theology, Shug is a self-invented character whose sense of self is not male inscribed. Her theology allows a divine, self-authorized sense of self.” (16) Shug character is described by Johnson:

As a blues woman, Shug is role model and catalyst for change in her community. Through her portrait, Walker shows us the vitality, resiliency, creativity and spirituality of African American women illuminating the core aesthetic concepts which have been crucial to their survival in a society that has largely used and abused them for its purposes. (221-222)

The two women, in fact, help each other, and can actually be described as two protectors of each other, two life-givers. Celie’s nursing of Shug, while sick, returns her back to health and life. Similarly the teachings of Shug to Celie enhance her consciousness. Celie gives her physical healing where as Shug gives her spiritual healing. But the knowledge and support Shug offers Celie is much larger and varied than any knowledge or support Celie has ever received. Shug teaches Celie about her sexuality and makes her conscious of her life that provides happy ending for Celie. Alice Walker’s use of female bonding in TCP is explained by Chandra Chatterjee as: “Female bonding approaches the themes of development and quest from an internalized perspective. It is also used to string plot together,
and integrate Celie’s knowledge about herself with the ‘happenings’ in the world around her.” (205)

It is because of Shug Celie, who used to hate her body begins to love and claim it as a private property of her own. As Emma J. Dawson writes, Shug’s teachings serve as a “redemptive force, a means of re-creation for the self. It helps Celie to develop the capacity to nurture her own creativity, Shug becomes for Celie a means of salvation.” (88)

Besides helping Celie to rediscover her own body, Shug, also helps Celie to rediscover God. Celie’s through her experience of writing to God she concludes that the God is passive. It becomes difficult for Shug and Nettie to change her view of God. With Shug’s, Nettie’s and Sofia’s support, Celie is able to unearth the hidden riches inside her and to start attaining real self-esteem.

Shug also helps Celie in discovering Nettie’s letters hidden by Albert. The reaction of Celie comes typical to Sofia’s attitude against Harpo. The seeds of defiance that Sofia has planted long ago into Celie’s mind to bash the head of Albert, are not wasted. Celie decides to take revenge soon. She says “I watch him so close, I begin to feel a lightening in the head. Fore I She intends to kill him. Shug removes the razor away from her hand, but Celie remains furious: “All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble about the house crazy for Mr____ blood. In my mind, he falling dead every which a way.” (110) Celie’s adoption of Sofia’s method surely explains the degree of identification taking place between the two women. This kind of identification will later be reciprocated by Sofia. When she is jailed for knocking down the town’s mayor, she adopts one of
Celie’s mechanisms of resistance to protect herself against the pains of torture in jail.

It is interesting to know that the advice of “fighting back” has also been offered to Celie by two other females, Nettie and Albert’s sister, even before Sofia did. But Celie is much influenced by Sofia rather than Nettie and Albert’s sister. The difference here is that Sofia, by “fighting” with her husband in front of Celie’s eyes, provides a live model. Her action of fighting back is more influential than mere oral advice offered by Nettie and Albert’s sister.

Shug’s support extends to include saving Celie against Albert’s physical violence. “I won’t leave,” as Shug says to Celie, “until I know Albert won’t even think about beating you.” (72) She also advises her to control anger and desire of revenge against Albert, reminding her that “you somebody to Nettie,” (129) Shug helps Celie financially so as to limit her dependence on Albert.

Besides being an act of silencing, Albert’s hiding of Nettie’s letters is also an act of revenge. As he earlier failed to subjugate Nettie to his sexual desire, he denies chance to let either of the two sisters hear from the other again. As Cutter explains, “Albert’s physical attempt to rape Nettie fails, but he finds a discursive way of ‘raping’ both women when he refuses to deliver any of Nettie’s letters to Celie.” (Cutter 168) However, Shug’s discovery of where the letters are strongly defies Albert’s discursive rape and, in return, makes a material recovery of the two sisters’ lost communication and bonding. It is true that Nettie never receives any of Celie’s letters, but her imagination serves to compensate for what she misses: “I imagine that you really do get my letters and that you are writing me back: Dear
Nettie, this is what life is like for me.” (140) In this way, Nettie’s imagination manages to piece together the various threads of hers and her sister’s texts into one interconnected whole.

Shug’s discovery of letters brings to light the vicious nature of Albert. Thus, against Albert’s intentions, Shug’s presence helps Celie a far wider space of recognition of herself. Besides, as Babb explains: “Through written expression, both Celie and Nettie are able to lend coherence” to each other, to “gain a deeper understanding of themselves” and “a great awareness of their personal worth.” (85) “Writing” is a voice for Celie and Nettie’s is another voice that Celie badly needs. Celie stops writing to God and starts writing to Nettie. Gabriel Sen Scholl provides Celie’s action of switching from writing to God to writing to Nettie.

Celia’s letters to God give way to her communication with her lost sister, a trade with which she seems quite happy, and her increasing self-reliance leaves her little need or inclination to continue her relationship with the Christian God of her earlier and more vulnerable days. (255)

The discovery of Nettie’s letters also recovers part of the authentic, but historically-erased, knowledge about Africa and the Africans. As it is learnt from one of Nettie’s letters, “there are colored people in the world who want us to know! Want us to grow and see the light! They are not all mean like Pa and Albert, or beaten down like ma was.” (119) Africans are mature enough and not a child-like race in need of Western paternalism. They are rather enlightened and willing to share their enlightenment with others. On the whole, by combining Shug’s help, the
discovery of letters, and the recovery process they entail, signifies how women can aptly communicate across in opposition to the patriarchal barriers imposed on them.

The very first letter of Nettie opens with a message “You’ve got to fight and get away from Albert. He ain’t no good.” (114) However, the most precious pieces of knowledge contained in Nettie’s letters are that Celie’s children are under Nettie’s care and that “Pa is not our pa!” (159) Fonso, the incestuous rapist, is not Celie’s father, a discovery that Nettie’s letters bring forth a full fledged relaxation which Celie never feels before. Celie’s knowledge of who her father really is releases her from the incest guilt she bears like a burden on her heart. Her knowledge that “All my little half brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother Pa not Pa.” (160) It acts as a great mobilizing force in her journey of development. This knowledge sets her fully inside the human arena, and frees her from the animal stigma that an incest might inflict on human beings.

Celie has actually seen in Shug a true mother figure; she also found in her support a recovery of the motherly and sisterly bonds that Fonso and Albert have severed respectively: “Laying there in Shug’s arms,” (102) Celie, like a child, cries and tells her story. She tells her story not to a remote and unresponsive God, but to a sympathetic, real flesh mother. Long before Celie knows that Fonso is not her father, she discloses to Shug the man’s sexual violation of her. So Shug become the first reader of her secrets and secretly-written text. The male God of the whole universe is thus substituted with a female / mother / sister. Ross Daniel W. examines Shug and Celie’s relationship from a psychological point of view: “psychoanalysis demonstrates the crucial role that Shug Avery plays in her
development, especially in reconciling Celie with her own body.” (73) Ross further says that “for Celie the mirror opens the door of her imagination, helping her envision a world of new possibility for herself.” (71) Celie’s consciousness is awakened to take strides towards self-discovery.

In opposition to Albert’s will, Shug suggests that Celie wear pants instead of an embarrassing dress that she wears while working in the field. Interestingly, it further undermines the limits imposed on women. Celie uses a man’s army pair of pants as a model to make a pair for herself. As Trudier Harris writes, “since men have been her cruel oppressors, it is ironically appropriate that she take something traditionally assigned to them in shaking off the power they have over her.” (14) While Albert denies Celie the liberating pleasure of reading her sister’s letters, Shug in return soothes Celie’s anger and awards her the double pleasure of reading and sewing.

Shug makes an upheaval in Albert’s household. She suggests taking Celie and Squeak, Harpo’s submissive woman, with her to Memphis. This suggestion is very much welcomed by Celie and Squeak. Empowered by Shug’s support and motivated by her own anger at Albert’s hiding of letters, Celie explodes when Albert opposes her decision of departure. Again, the way Celie expresses anger is in the Sofia’s fashion: “You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong . . . It’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome at I need... all us together gon whup your ass.” (180) “Lowdown” is the very epithet Celie uses in describing the old deity she deserts, the absent deity who cares nothing about her.
The deity is replaced by Nettie in terms of to whom Celie’s letters are to be addressed. Albert is replaced by Shug and all other females of the bonding circle in terms of whom Celie is to live with. Besides, the “us” Celie uses above is evidently an expression of the collective power of bonding Celie retains now with Shug and Sofia, a power that is indeed increased with the amazing knowledge revealed to her through Nettie’s letters. In the face of such bonding, Albert fails to invalidate Celie’s decision of departure and so does Harpo to Squeak’s.

Albert is not happy of Celie’s departure because labour threat will cause in his house. He tries to threaten Celie by funnily repeating the word “But” for fine ‘fin’, “Sound like some kind of motor. (180) He looks like an old-fashioned ‘motor’ that needs to be discarded in the new-born female world of Celie, Shug, Sofia and Nettie.

In Memphis, Celie makes her own changes over the army model of pants revealing her exceptional creativity. “This a far cry from that stiff army shit us started with,” (192) is what Shug delightfully says on seeing Celie’s new model. In expression of her creativity, as well as in gratitude for everyone of her bonding circle, Celie makes pants in the colors that suit each woman’s personality. Adrienne Rich describes the art of sewing as weaving emphasizes woman’s ‘transformative power.’ By making pants for both men and women Celie is successful in narrowing the gap between the sexes. Walker shows Celie’s art of Sewing as woman’s primordial power so it makes patriarchy as an outdated term.

Celite’s creativity in “sewing” makes Shug to suggest Celie initiate her own business of making pants. It also encourages her to finance Celie’s business at its
early stages. As orders for Celie’s product start to come in big numbers from everywhere, Shug then makes further suggestions, all to boost Celie’s business:

“put a few advertisements in the paper, she say. And let’s us raise your prices a hefty notch. And let’s us just go ahead and give you this dining room for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew, while you sit back and design.” (193)

Celie, as such, starts to feel “whole” and in command over her own life. Celie is able to make a living, to own a female-made and female-run business, named “Folks pants, Unlimited.” (191) So Celie turns into a fully-realized being. As she puts it in writing to Nettie, “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children.” (194) Celie’s ownership is even furthered by Fonso’s death. Consequently she inherits the house and other things including a store - the property of her biological father who was lynched, out of business jealousy, by his white competitors.

It is interesting to note that the title of Celie’s business, “Folks pants, Unlimited,” is as “unlimited” as the expansive Feminine Consciousness exemplified by the circle of female bonding. In its generous inclusiveness, it opposes the lynching of her father as well as the black patriarchal brutalities that separated her from her sister and children, and that victimized her for a long time by sexual violation and bodily abuse. She goes back to her hometown to claim her property and re-establish her business in the store she inherited. She owns the very place in and of which she was dispossessed. She stands dignified and erect in the very place patriarchal power violated her. She voices, in triumph, her regained humanity in the
very place in which this humanity was violently taken away. Her world is now "patriarchy-free." Albert is welcome only as a friend, as a sort of company, somebody to talk to. Sofia is hired to work in the pants store so as to get more independence from Harpo. Shug is always welcomed to visit and stay as she pleases. Walker’s novel is not devoted solely to consciousness of Celie’s maturation. Though the story revolves around Celie, the consciousness of other women in Celie’s circle, is equally significant. If it is over looked Walker’s quilt will be complete when all the women are included as each one have significant part of it.

Despite her success as a blues singer, Shug significantly lacks a “sense of consciousness” all along prior to coming in contact with Celie. In other words, it is only after knowing Celie that Shug begins to develop maturity in terms of experiencing and enjoying a true sense of consciousness. Early in the narrative, it is informed that:

Shug Avery sick and nobody in this town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. Her mammy say She told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp. A woman at church say she dying - maybe two berkulosys or some kind of nasty woman disease, (42)

Shug is the image of an outcast, a woman who is deserted by everybody like a diseased animal that has to be discarded and left to die alone with no body to care for. The underlying meaning of the above lines is a societal death sentence. It is executed slowly against a woman who dares to break the law of the father and break the traditions of her society’s moral system. Even Shug’s parents - who, of
course, are in full compliance with the law of the father - do not accept to take her in. To them, Shug has to die in order to put an end to her disreputable sins and shameful actions. Not only that, but Shug’s case is publicly used in the church sermon as an example of deviance to warn other women against moral deviations:

Even the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery, now she down. He take her condition for his text. He don’t call no name, but he don’t have to. Everybody know who he mean. He talk bout a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking other women mens. Talk bout slut, hussy, heifer and street cleaner. (42)

Shug is even denied care from her children, who “didn’t want to see me because I lives a evil life” (242) With new alternatives, another consciousness is offered to Shug through Celie. What Shug really needs is “love plus understanding.” (243) The big irony here is that Shug, the great breaker of the patriarchal rule, is accepted by Celie, the then biggest victim of all patriarchal rules. In terms of the patriarchal law, both women have fallen from grace, one by her choice and another by force. Celie, therefore, never blames Shug for whatever conduct she makes or has made - “Whatever happen, whatever you do, I love you.” (226) This kind of treatment, on Celie’s part, proves great success on Shug. It soon compels the arrogant Shug into making an apology for her initial insult towards Celie, and into another apology even for a dead woman, the late wife of Albert.

It is Shug’s feeling of being “Othered” by the community, the church, and even her parents, force her into adopting an attitude of detachment and arrogance.
Celie’s nursing and love changes her attitude. The community Celie creates for Shug is a motherly and sisterly community, one in which a female identity is more likely to develop and flourish. When Celie meets Shug for the first time she is practically dead, and it is Celie’s assistance that brought her back to life. Celie has given Shug what Shug’s mother and the community have denied her. Celie has even turned into a fountain of inspiration for Shug’s singing and the creation of new songs. “Shug’s love for Celie is deep-rooted and results in on-going physical relationships as well as powerful emotional affiliation.” (Kashinath Ranveer 91)

In the maturation process of Shug, Celie brings Shug to an awareness of the dark side of Albert’s personality. Before coming in contact with Celie, Shug believes that Albert is a wholly pleasant man and a source of happiness and fun. But in Celie’s company, Shug unexpectedly discovers that Albert is grievously vicious, brutal, oppressive, and a double-standard manipulator. Having learnt and experienced the sense of community with Celie, Shug is turned from an arrogant, insulting, and selfish person into a completely compassionate one. She afterwards turns into a pleasant woman who gives guidance and support to other destitute women. After regaining health, as an expression of gratitude, and to show her new joy in the community feeling, Shug decides to sing for the community. Her singing, in turn, helps Harpo financially as he owns a music place that is rarely frequented by customers. It is surprising to notice the large number of customers gather to hear songs are more than the church goers.

Shug’s process of maturation concludes with an amazing act of self-denial that reflects her deep concern for the black community. This happens when she
chooses to separate from a young man whom she married close to the end of the narrative. As she says, I “can’t let all that talent go to waste. Us through, though . . .
He feel just like family now. Like a son.” (258) The woman who used to take other women’s men now chooses to leave her own talented, young partner in order to allow him wider space to study in college. To open the road for him, Shug prefers to be in the role of a caring mother rather than a manipulative wife. Speaking of talent and feeling like family, it is important to mention that Shug also cares for the singing talent of Squeak, the girl with whom Harpo lives after Sofia’s desertion of the house following one of their ferocious fights.

Like Shug, Sofia is an assertive female. She is another powerful woman who refuses to subject herself to male dictations whether physically or emotionally. But, unlike Shug, Sofia is a little impulsive and, most importantly, without a career draws some limitations as she is economically dependent either on Harpo or on her sisters. Sofia comes from a family where the mother is under the control of father’s patriarchal dictates. She has six sisters and a ‘bunch’ of brothers. Sofia learnt that a “girl child ain’t safe in a family of men.” (39) But she is out spoken and has her own strong opinion. Though brought up in a strictly patriarchal atmosphere, she could not get along with Harpo even though they have a baby even before marriage.

Sofia is experienced to work hard like a man. On seeing her physical strength, Harpo once wonders by saying that the community is used to seeing only “men doing this sort of thing” because women are weaker. Women, as Harpo believes, are supposed to “be home frying chicke and spose to take it easy. Cyr if you want to. Not try to take over.” (196) But Sofia never takes it easy, as she
disagrees of submissive women, like her mother, who choose to victimize themselves by living according to what the society prescribes to them.

Sofia loves Harpo but like Shug, she needs her love to be met with Harpo’s appreciation and understanding. While she likes to do things in her own way, Harpo, by contrast, wants to imitate his father and wants Sofia “to do what I say, like you Celie do for Pa.” (60) Because Harpo, by then, is under much of Albert’s criticism for not subjugating Sofia, he thus finds refuge in the blind mimicking of his father’s patriarchal practices. Though Celie informs Harpo that Sofia is not the kind of woman to be beaten, yet he prefers to escape severe criticism.

As tension mounts up Sofia leaves the house accompanied by her children, knowing that Harpo wants a “dog” not a “wife.” So Sofia decides to leave him. Sofia’s departure marks the beginning of some chaos in her life, first, because she is economically vulnerable; second, because it gives Harpo the chance of getting involved in a relationship with another woman, Squeak.

In her assertiveness, Sofia, however, is quite convinced that “Life don’t just stop cause you leave home.” (77) But her life truly stops on getting into a violent encounter with the mayor of town. Asked condescendingly by the mayor’s wife to work as a maid for her, Sofia rejects the offer, “Hell no,” to which the mayor gets furious and then slaps her. As Sofia, in return, knocks him down and she is taken to jail and sentenced for twelve years. In jail, Sofia adopts Celie’s resistance mechanism of turning herself into “wood” or a “tree” in order to remain alive under jail brutality.
The jail experience proves very costly to Sofia. As Celie writes on visiting the brutalized Sofia, “They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye . . . She can’t talk.” (82) During one of her visits, Celie works on Sofia in a healing process similar to the one she formerly did for Shug when sick. And, despite an early fight with Sofia, Squeak takes care of Sofia’s kids along with one of Sofia’s sisters. Through a designed attempt to free Sofia from jail, Squeak tries to use her distant kinship to the jail warden, but the warden, quite unexpectedly, rapes her and aborts the attempt.

Sofia’s impulsiveness and its consequent result of knocking the mayor has ironically ensnared her and put her into silence. If at all Sofia would have controlled her anger in the first instance itself while speaking to the mayor’s wife, much of the violence must have been avoided. Sofia is granted freedom after three years of sentence on the condition that she completes her sentence in domestic service at the mayor’s house. More ironical is that Sofia and the mayor’s daughter get into sisterly bonding later in the narrative. The bonding between Sofia and the mayor’s daughter (Eleanor Jane) happens through dialogue and understanding, which indicates the rise of “tuning down” as a new feature in Sofia’s personality. Violence mostly leads to more silencing, so Sofia eventually learns to keep her energy and power intact, exactly as Shug does by guiding Celie not to commit violence against Albert.

Sofia, however, is still in need of economic independence in order to reach maturation to be fully shaped. If finding a job is what Sofia prescribes to the mayor’s daughter who is bored with much of her husband’s absence, it is likewise what she herself needs to be economically independent to make use of her energy in
the right way. Celie offers Sofia a job later when she re-establishes her business in town after returning from Memphis. Self-assertive as she is, but more mindful than before, Sofia interestingly demonstrates great skills in selling and gentle dealing with customers in Celie’s store.

Celie sets an example to all the women and teaches them how to use the faculties of “insight,” and “elusiveness” as effective means to reconcile differences. Celie uses a white employee Fonso in her store. She does this to attract white customers to her store. This brings a positive result and even Sofia whose anxiety is caused due to their presence, is also gone.

Things, as such, begin to take another direction in terms of the Sofia-Harpo relationship. Having seen the failure of his father’s authoritative and violent practices, Harpo starts to act in a more understanding manner. He again gets back his true nature. With no interference in any of his wife’s own choices, Harpo accepts Sofia’s going to work and shows reinforcement of whatever she decides for herself, “I loves every judgment you ever made” (189) as he says to Sofia. Finally, in acknowledgment of her own maturation and of what she has learned in life, it is Sofia who says “Everybody learn something in life.” (189) And, with her bonding spirit ever intact, Sofia commits herself to caring for Squeak’s daughter as a sign of support for Squeak’s endeavour to start a career of singing in public.

Unlike Shug’s or Sofia’s, Squeak’s process of maturation comes full circle, mostly like Celie’s. Squeak first appears in the narrative as Sofia’s replacement for Harpo, and is earlier seen as a submissive female model, that is, the model that Harpo wishes to have in order to avoid much of his father’s criticism. As Celie says
of Squeak, “She like me. She do anything Harpo say.” (78) The original name of Squeak is Mary Agnes, but Harpo nicknames her “Squeak” as an indication of his disrespect and humiliation. To use the words of Thomas F. Marvin, the name Squeak “brings to mind the unpleasant sound of rusty hinges and the inarticulate noises made by a small, frightened animal.” (419) And, to further solidify his power over his new female, Harpo adopts his father’s fashion of making lots of orders to enslave Squeak in much the same way his father does to enslave Celie.

The only advantage Squeak has is her yellowish body which, ironically, furthers her objectification as a submissive, sexual object under Harpo’s thumb. As Celie puts it, “little Squeak run long all up under him trying to git his tension.” But “Harpo look through her head, blow smoke.” (80) To help support Squeak, Celie tells her that Harpo should stop calling her Squeak; he, instead, should call her by her the name, Mary Agnes. Of course, Celie hopes that this might make Harpo see Squeak as an even partner and a true individual. Ironically, Squeak does not understand Celie’s suggestion and looks puzzled.

As Sofia’s jail sentence is painful and troubling to almost everybody in the household, a plan is made to free her. So, Squeak decides to take the mission of freeing Sofia on her shoulder. The mission proves very fatal as she is raped by the warden, even without freeing Sofia. So, if Celie’s process of initiation in the world starts with rape, so does Squeak’s. Rape makes them find their voice. However, if Celie is silenced by fear, shame, as well as Fonso’s imposition to keep it secret, Squeak paradoxically speaks out and refuses to be silenced. When Harpo tries to steal Squeak’s voice by telling her story of being raped, she immediately silences
him: “Shut up, Harpo . . . I’m telling it.” (89) As bell hooks writes, “moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and straggle side by side is a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible.” (9) Squeak, as such, no longer accepts to remain a passive object; she has to tell her own experience and define her reality for herself. By “telling” her experience in her own voice, and in rejection of Harpo’s attempt to speak for her, she thus declares a personal transformation, through feminine consciousness, as an active subject in the world.

In the middle of “telling,” Squeak somewhat mumbles and seems unable to fulfill what the individual voice she has just claimed is supposed to communicate. But she is soon rescued from mumbling by a sharply ironic question made by Shug, “if you can’t tell us, who you gon tell, God?” (90) Squeak is thus instigated to continue telling the story of her rape, and even refers to the warden as “He” as if subconsciously linking him to the line of Celie’s oppressors like God, Fonso, and Albert. By far, Squeak’s process of maturation has gone through two important stages: first, she is silent and voiceless before the rape and, second, outspoken and voiced after the rape. To further identify her own position and enhance the power of her newly-claimed voice, Squeak develops her voice by shifting from telling to questioning.

Gazing boldly at Harpo, she asks, “do you really love me, or just my color?” When Harpo tries to express his love - “I love you, Squeak” - while kneeling down to put his arm around her waist, she stands up and say, “My name Mary Agnes.” (90) She thus reconstructs her new identity, wants to erase the name
“Squeak,” and defines herself that she is not a mere sex object with an attractive body color.

After six months, Mary Agnes begins to sing. At first, she sings Shug’s songs while spending evenings together. But Harpo mocks her voice as it seems “funny” to him (91). Mary Agnes and Harpo are now like two racers: while he mimics his father’s ways of domination, she paradoxically mimics Shug’s ways of liberation. “You ought to sing in public,” (105) is the liberating advice Shug takes to the hesitant Mary Agnes - at least, to sing for one night at Harpo’s music place. Shug also assures her about the good “quality” and the “volume” of her voice, compared to many of the voices that Shug hears in singing clubs. Shug’s advice for Mary Agnes is opposed by Harpo, but Shug persuades him with the possibility of good money. This, in turn, helps to accelerate Mary Agnes’ movement from singing Shug’s songs into singing her own songs.

Mary Agnes’ decision to move to Memphis with Shug gives her a true shift in her life. She announces her decision emphatically “She sit up straight, suck in her breath, try to press her face together” (181) and she says that she is leaving for Memphis Harpo’s reaction is the same like her father’s when Celie makes a decision of departure. He can’t prevent her leaving. Sofia commits to take care of Mary Agnes’s little girl.

In Memphis, Mary Agnes works hard towards fulfilling her public career, and eventually manages to find a steady position at more than one club. She thus gains recognition and power, having become well known and loved by the folks there. In terms of economic independence, Mary Agnes now enjoys good dresses,
perfumes, hats, shoes - all of her own, and without being painfully reviled by Harpo’s providing for her. Even unlike Shug, who is disliked and deserted by her children, Mary Agnes gains the love and respect of her daughter, who is proud of her.

In her steady success, Mary Agnes, accompanied by a boy friend, also sings in Panama. But on finding out that her boy friend is “not a good influence,” she deserts him and comes back to Memphis where she “got a lot of new songs . . . and not too knocked out to sing’ em.” (261) With this journey of maturation and success, Mary Agnes is never away from her bonding circle: she keeps either visiting while in Memphis or sending letters while in Panama. In the final moment of the narrative, Mary Agnes is seen making “potato salad” (294) with Sofia, while surrounded by Shug, Celie, Nettie, Samuel Albert, Harpo, and many others in their celebration of each other as well as the Fourth of July. Unlike before when she (was Squeak) was “seen” but not “heard” by Harpo, Mary Agnes is now seen, heard, and admired by everybody as a successful female. Confident, and with an independent voice, she is heard recounting some of her own experiences as well as “visualizing” her future singing plans in Memphis.

It is time now for Nettie’s complex process of consciousness and maturation. Nettie’s maturation looks different because it takes place on the other side of the Atlantic; it also looks different because it happens without Nettie’s suffering the pains of male sexual violation or male physical abuse. Nettie’s only violent experience is her separation from her sister, Celie. Her maturation process is yet related and similar to the processes of the four women. It is related because
Nettie, despite her presence in Africa, has contributed through writing to Celie’s maturation, and in turn, influenced the rest of Celie’s female group through her letter writing.

Nettie fortunately becomes a mother to Celie’s two children, Olivia and Adam. They were initially under the care of Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine. Nettie develops a bonding both with Reverend Samuel’s wife and also with the Olinka women in Africa. The specialty of Nettie’s process of maturation is her disillusionment of about the reality of the missionary work and becoming a witness to the violent colonial practices against African people. Nettie living in the house of Reverend Samuel, a missionary man who feels she belongs to them makes Nettie never feel left out or alone. She writes “they always try to include me in everything they do.” (115) She is ready to learn everything she needs to before going to Africa on missionary work. Nettie comes to realize that “there’s no beginning or end to teaching and learning and working - it all runs together.” (120) Nettie cares and teaches Celie’s kids, learning from Samuel and Corrine, and also works for the benefit of Africans. She learns of the Europeans and their hypocrite claims of civilizing Africa, and, above all, links the two sides of the Atlantic through her letters to Celie.

Nettie comes to know that African female children are denied schooling because the Olinka men do not believe girls should be educated. While this is not much different from Fonso’s denial of Celie’s schooling, it however marks one of the basic challenges Nettie has to confront and overcome. Through a series of bonding actions with the Olinka women, Nettie, regardless of a few verbal assaults
made by some African men, manages to change the rules of the game. In the end, “more mothers are sending their daughters to school” though “the men do not like it: who wants a wife who knows everything her husband knows? they fume.” (154) Interestingly, the collective will of the Olinka women and the unavailing opposition made by their men is actually reminiscent of the collective will of Shug, Celie and Squeak to leave for Memphis in the face of Albert and Harpo’s unavailing opposition - the two male reactions, sputtering and fuming, are not much different anyway.

Contrary to those men who oppose their daughters’ education, Nettie finds out that many other African men make what only females are supposed to be making - “beautiful quilts ... full of animals and birds and people.” (168) If Celie did use a man’s army pair of pants as a model to make her first pair, Corrine, as Nettie informs us, uses an African, man-made quilt model to create hers. In making her own quilt, Corrine adds some touches of her own; her quilt, to quote the words of Tavormina, becomes:

an icon dense with history - personal, familial, artistic, national, racial, human - and with union and reunion. It brings together differences without denying them or subjugating one to another. Like the full set of both Celie’s and Nettie’s letters, it preserves, juxtaposes, and connects; it creates a meaningful, functional beauty out of a variety that admits both pain and happiness. (227)

Unfortunately, the beautifully harmonious African-African American interaction depicted here is soon undermined by the interference of a greedy,
European rubber manufacturer whose capitalist project is to take the land in order to plant rubber trees and, in the process, to displace the Olinka tribe because the village site is designated to be the headquarters for the rubber plantation.

To Nettie’s dismay, destruction starts with the school, the church, the hut they live in, and ends with the erasure of the Olinka hunting territory. If the Olinkas are to live close to this rubber location, they must pay for “rent” “water” and “sheets of corrugated tin.” (154) The dismantling of the Olinka’s established life actually puts Nettie into a state of severe ambivalence, first, regarding the value of their missionary work and its inability to protect the Africans, and, second, regarding the whites’ claims of civilizing and uplifting Africans. Her ambivalence is intertwined with fear and worry about herself and the children, especially after Corrine’s death by African fever.

Having returned empty handed from a quick trip to England to make fundraising for the Olinka tribe, Nettie’s ambivalence soon turns into a state of disillusionment, both about the value of missionary work as a whole, along with that is called whites’ civilizing mission of Africans. On the way to England, Nettie, for instance, encounters then a well-known, white, female missionary named Doris Baines. Out of the encounter, Nettie, among many other things, knows that Doris uses the missionary work for personal purposes including breaking her tedious style of life and writing books about natives without caring a bit for their souls.

In England, instead of considering the appeal made for helping the Olinka tribe, the bishop of the English branch of Nettie and Samuel’s church investigates Corrine’s death and why Nettie remains with Samuel after his wife’s death. To the
bishop, the Olinka plight seems insignificant compared to Nettie’s personal life. What he cares for is “appearance, Miss, appearance,” (209) as he says in reprimanding sarcasm of Nettie’s living with Samuel without being married. Marriage, of course, happens a little later, not because of the bishop’s sarcasm but because Nettie and Samuel already began to feel a family. Fully disillusioned about the significance of their existence in Africa as missionaries, Nettie and Samuel feel pressed to return back home. Their mission has turned soulless, rocky, and valueless in terms of uplifting Africans, as well as in terms of ameliorating the imperialistic damages made against the Olinka tribe.

The departure of Nettie, Samuel, and the children does not, in any way, imply separation between Africans and African Americans. In two different ways, Walker contrarily establishes an eternal link between her people in America and her people in Africa: first, through burying Corrine in an African land and according to the Olinka rituals. Second, through a marriage bond that takes place in Africa between Adam, Celie’s son and an African female Tashi. Tashi is the first female child to have ventured going to school against the males’ opposition in the Olinka tribe. She, as such, is the first to make a true embodiment of Nettie’s sense of success. Nettie’s success, in this respect, is achieved not through her missionary position, but through her sisterly engagement and bonding activities with the Olinka women who, in turn, pushed hard side by side with Nettie for the education of their female children. Walker ends her novel in a positive co-incidental winding up by unifying all the characters and ending their conflict gaps.
The women in the novel after undergoing a series of changes become independent and liberated women. The novel is portrayal of not only Celie but also the whole community of black women living under the same oppressive conditions. Walker, through all the characters in the novel, celebrates communal harmony by bringing all of them together towards the end of the novel. July 4 is explained in the words of Harpo as “White people busy celebrating they independence from England July 4th….So most black folks don’t have to work. Us can spend the day celebrating each other.” (261) Walker feels that being a black southern writer, she has the inheritance of her community as a natural right. Celie’s children, Adam and Olivia, returning to America, to the south, is a reflection of the generations’ continuity. Though the beginning of the novel is pessimistic it’s ending is optimistic. “Beginning in the most abject misery, degradation and isolation, the work ends with joyous fulfillment and integration. (Frank W. Shelton. 392)

The two different representations, Celie’s private world of growing consciousness and Nettie’s feminist critique of the public world, that of Africa against imperialistic social structure constitute the feminist structure of the novel and vivid description of the global oppression of women. The imperialism of Africa and racism in the America, both are here marginalized in order to insist on the subterranean history of sexual oppression of black women throughout the world. The womanist ideology in the novel is here focused through Celie, Nettie, Squeak and Sofia. The specific epistolary form of the novel reconstructs images and representations associated with women’s oppression and thus establishes a mode of feminine consciousness within the dominant discourse of racism and imperialism in the novel.
Not only the protagonist Celie but also all the women characters in the novel become independent psychologically, spiritually as well as economically. It is found that this liberation is brought due to the consciousness, co-operation among these women during the crisis. Thus Walker’s novel TCP is an exact embodiment of Feminine consciousness.

The next novel ICM continues the central theme of feminine consciousness in Lenny and Ayah. It is again the liberation of Ayah from depressed state of freedom.