Chapter IV

Discourse of Womanism in Possessing the Secret of Joy, By the Light of My Father’s Smile and Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart
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4.0. Introduction

The most popular novel–turned–motion picture–*The Color Purple*, published in 1982, has brought much fame to Alice Walker. It has made her the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for novel and it has also won the 1983 American Book Award. With this novel Alice Walker has presented the issues of dehumanisation, oppression, subjugation of women and the struggle for the self. A single African American girl, Celie, struggles for the survival and wholeness of her community. She remains a complete womanist character as Alice Walker has proposed. *The Color Purple* is followed by *The Temple of My Familiar*, published in 1989. This novel is taken for an attempt to reproduce the history of the world. Alice Walker has reproduced the world of the past with the help of story-telling, letters, recordings and some historical books. Like *The Color Purple*, this novel also puts forth the concern of Alice Walker with her community. These two novels remain good examples of Alice Walker’s concept of womanism. The women characters, presented in the novel, love art, music, the culture of women and their community. They search for the self and try to survive with wholeness. These novels are followed by the publications of *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* (1998) and *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* (2004).

This chapter deals with the discourse of womanism in the novels by Alice Walker published from 1991 till date. In this period she has published her three novels, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* in 1992, *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* in 1998 and *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* in 2004. It studies the social contexts and cultural aspects of the African American community and discourse of womanism in the novels under study. It throws light on the use of the language in the novels, womanist behaviours of the characters as well as racist and sexist issues presented by Alice Walker. It also takes into account the women's struggle for self, survival and wholeness and womanist maternity in the novels. It is obvious that Alice Walker has a great respect for the African American art. This art and the black artists are brought into light with the help of this study. She has proposed in her four-fold definition of
womanist that the black women love the music, men and women and their community as non-separatists. This love of the black women is discussed in this chapter. Alice Walker has also stated that the women love other women or men sexually and/or non-sexually. This lesbian relationship is also discussed in this chapter. There is a discussion of womanist elements, such as sympathy, forgiveness, universalism, non-separatism, motherhood and womanist maternity presented in the novels. Alice Walker is discussed as a womanist writer with the help of this study.

4.1. Discourse Of Womanism in Possessing the Secret of Joy, By the Light of My Father’s Smile and Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart.

Alice Walker has published her Possessing the Secret of Joy in 1992. The minor characters, like Nettie Samuel, Corrine and Celie’s children, Olivia and Adam in The Color Purple, reappear in the novel Possessing the Secret of Joy. They arrive in the African village of Olinka. Tashi, the protagonist of the novel, is portrayed as small Olinkan child crying as her younger sister, Dura dies of circumcision, a process of female genital cutting prevailed in Olinka tribe. The Female Genital Mutilation or FGM is the main theme of the novel. Tashi’s journey from her childhood to her death is the subject of the novel. Due to the death of Tashi’s younger sister, Dura, her mother converts to Christianity and saves Tashi from the procedure. Yet, Tashi is appealed by her tribal leaders to maintain their tradition. To bind herself to her tribe and to maintain the tradition, Tashi undergoes the circumcision ritual. This ritual totally alters Tashi’s existence and she is mentally disturbed. Adam, Celie’s son, goes to Africa and marries to Tashi and brings her to America. She starts her psychological journey to understand why she undergoes circumcision. She goes to Switzerland, where she meets Mzee, an old man and uncovers her repressed childhood memories. Her journey takes her to America where she gives birth to a mentally handicapped child, Benny. The relations between the mother and child remain always strained. She returns to Africa with the intention of murdering M’Lissa, the tsunga, who has performed the process of her circumcision. She decides to murder M’Lissa because she thinks that M’Lissa is responsible for her misfortune. She murders M’Lissa and gets arrested and sent to jail. After the trial she is sentenced to death. By this novel, Alice Walker has stated that the unnatural processes, like circumcision and scarification are against humanity.
By the Light of My Father’s Smile, published in 1998, presents the issue of repression of daughters by their father. The novel revolves around two daughters, Susannah and Magdalena, and their father, Mr. Robinson, an anthropologist by profession. The family moves to rural Mexico, the residence of the Mundo community. In the Mundo Community there is a belief when a black girl enjoys sex for the first time, she is expected to have the blessings of her father. These blessings are expressed in the form of smile. Magdalena or Maggie, Mr. Robinson’s elder daughter, enjoys sex with Manuelito or Mannie, a Mundo boy. Mr. Robinson does not accept her emerging sexuality and he beats her with a belt. This event affects the entire family and it results in their dissolution. Magdalena’s mother, Langley, keeps herself away from her husband. Susannah, Magdalena’s younger sister, also is emotionally blackmailed to choose her sister over her father. She remains with Magdalena till their father’s death. After the death of their father Susannah gets married to Petros, a Greek, but leaves him after some years and gets involved in lesbian relationship with Pauline. Many years later Magdalena meets her former lover, Manuelito and they enjoy their lost love. Unfortunately Manuelito dies of an accident. Manuelito becomes a spirit after his death and confronts Mr. Robinson. He expresses his love for Magdalena and says they are made for each other but the death has separated them. He also informs Mr. Robinson that Magdalena and Susannah want his blessings for their lives. Both the spirits visit a hospital where Magdalena is admitted in a serious condition. Mr. Robinson witnesses that his elder daughter, Magdalena, is on the way to become one of the members of their metaphysical world. He offers his blessings to his dying daughter. At the end all the women characters seek their ultimate liberation and celebrate their liberated sexuality.

Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, published in 2004, is a recent novel by Alice Walker. In this novel Walker has discussed the issues of the search for self and spirituality. Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of the novel, is a well published author. In her writing she has explored the natural world and human soul. She traces some unusual signs of old age, therefore experiences disturbance in her inner peace. She decides to find a new sense of the life. She undertakes a journey down the Colorado and the Amazon rivers. In the first phase of her journey down the Colorado, Kate gets knowledge of the interior parts of her life. She remembers the difficulties she faced after her marriage. She recalls her past attempts to conform to the domestic ideals and
expectations placed on women and mothers by the society. In this journey she suffers from vomiting and becomes violently ill. This illness helps her in expelling all the toxins of the past from her inner self. Whereas, the second phase of her journey of the Amazon river aims at a larger experience of self discovery. She joins a group of people who are on a quest to reinvest their lives. Before this journey, Kate recalls her first marriage as an oppressive experience. Her husband is an abusive man. He tortures Kate much, therefore she leaves him forever with her two children. She comes in contact with Yolo and both of them make a good couple. Yet, in order to find their own identities, they get separated from each other and set for different journeys. In these journeys Kate learns that she can only rely on herself to interpret the spiritual truths of her life. She also learns that the divine source of knowledge is to look within the self. Both of them understand that for the survival and wholeness there is a need of intimate relationship with a partner that also can be a foundation of personal health. Finally, Kate and Yolo enter a self defined marriage.

All these novels, discussed above, deal with the issues of sexism, racism, oppression, lesbian relationship and struggle for the self. Through these novels Alice has presented her views about the American and African American communities. While presenting her views, she has put woman at the centre of each novel. These novels have presented the contemporary society as well as the place of African Americans in the society.

4.1.1. Social Contexts

Alice Walker, as an African American, has a great respect for the African culture. Her works develop through the stories that she hears from her parents, grandparents and through the works of various writers. She comes to know that many of the people of African community are engaged with the farming and have tribal connections. These tribes have their own beliefs, customs and traditions. One of these customs, the scarification is a process of permanent marking on the faces of male and female children. These marks are tribal identifications those help for the acceptance of a person within the society. Along with this scarification process, some initiation ceremonies are also held and practiced by the Africans. The circumcision is one of these initiation ceremonies. Young women’s initiation ceremonies include genital mutilation. The girl child is prepared for the act of mutilation or circumcision right
from the early childhood. This process of female circumcision is considered to be inhuman worldwide. The United Nations have included this issue in its human rights initiatives. Alice Walker has also discussed same issue in her novel Possessing the Secret of Joy.

In the novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy, Alice Walker has discussed the subjects of Africa and America as well as tribal practices, like scarification and female genital mutilation or circumcision. The protagonist of the novel, Tashi, is an African woman who lives in America in her adult life. She goes to Africa and undergoes the process of genital mutilation as a symbol of loyalty and unity to her community. She tells her psychiatrist that she faces the procedure of giving up the sexual pleasure in order “to be accepted as a real woman… to stop the jeering.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 120) She gives birth to a mentally challenged child. She also aborts her second child because she does not want to bear the pains of a caesarean delivery. All these sufferings are the results of her circumcision. Tashi also recalls her sister, Dura’s death due to ancient inhuman practice of sexual blinding. Tashi and Dura are presented by Alice Walker as the victims of Olinkan tribal ritual. This ritual is presented in the novel by Alice Walker as a way of

Resistance to the colonizer’s influence…….Tashi makes the decision to embrace the tribal practice of scarification…. initiation ceremony of female genital circumcision as an additional external identification of tribal unity.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 120)

The Olinkan leaders sanction these tribal rituals as the methods of resistance against colonial laws. The Olinka community tries to preserve their culture by means of physical protests including scarification and sexual blinding of women.

In By the Light of My Father’s Smile, Alice Walker introduces the presence of Africans in Mesoamerica, Mexico. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Africans are enslaved and taken to Mexico to provide the labours for the mines and plantations. This leads to increase in Afro-Mexican population. By the time Mexico is ruled by Spain but in the nineteenth century, Mexican countrymen and African slaves revolt against the rulers and it leads to the abolition of slavery. This freedom supports the marriage between lighter skinned Amerindians and darker skinned Afro-Mexicans. This facilitation creates lighter skinned Mexican population. In this way Mexico is
recognised as a nation of mixture of diverse people of indigenous and European ancestry.

In this novel Alice Walker presents a group of people called Mundo. The Mundo is a cultural group of fusion of African and Amerindian bloodlines in Mexico. In this community African American middle class family, The Robinsons, works as an anthropologist under the disguise of missionaries. The Robinsons are practitioners of agnosticism, a philosophy that denies the existence of God and other spiritual beings. The social moves of the Robinsons, such as education, courtship, family life and social values are presented in the novel with accuracy. The Robinsons come to Mexico to work in African Amerindian Mundo community. The Mundo people share a system of beliefs and practices that help them cope with human existence in life and after life. They strongly believe in telling the truth and the Robinsons have disguised as missionaries to get funding for their research in anthropological study of the Mundo tribe. The novel throws light on “hypocrisy, masquerade, and deception, the quantities needed by the lead characters to accomplish their anthropological goals.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 129) These lead characters are Mr. Senor Robinson, Langley Robinson and their two daughters. The Mexican experience changes the lives of these two daughters, Magdalena and Susannah, dramatically. The novel centres on the friendship, love, lovers and father-daughter relationship.

Alice Walker’s recent and first novel of new millennium is *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*. In this novel Walker deals with a different sort of themes as compared to her previous novels. The post-modern social, cultural and spiritual movements are commonly considered to be the New Age. The followers of the New Age Movement accept natural religion as the result of study of nature. They keep aside the religion of a particular person or a group of people. They value the common principles of all the religions world-wide. In this relation Gerri Bates has rightly stated,

…..followers of New Age thought do not subscribe to any established creed, doctrine, dogma or principles outlined in any authoritative text representative of compilation of sacred writings.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 160)
They do not practice the thought that is combined with the organised religion. Alice Walker shows her interest in natural religion and feminine divinity. She believes in search of new interpretations of the self and strives for the perfections of the self. She also believes in internal peace and balance. The nature is kept at the centre in the quest for knowledge, wisdom and understanding. She also thinks the world as a segment of a universal whole operated in a perfect harmony. This harmony is possible with the help of love. When a person loves himself and herself, he or she can love others. Walker’s novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, emphasises the cleansing and love.

Kate, the protagonist of *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, takes new paths of Buddhism and Christianism. According to Buddhism the Noble Eightfold path is the way to escape sufferings of human life. It helps humans to bring about nirvana or a state of bliss. Along with Buddhist bodhisattva goddess Quan Yin, Kate has the Virgen de Guadalupe, a feminine deity of Latin Catholics, at her altar. The worshippers consult the Virgen de Guadalupe for intervention in their daily lives. Quan Yin educates earth dwellers in some medicinal herbs and holistic health. Alice Walker has presented both these subjects in the novel. Talkingtree, a successful writer, dreams of empty freezers, some snake images and some dry rivers. Therefore, her friends suggest her to undertake a real journey of the rivers and forests. On the suggestions of her friends, she leaves her lover and her home to begin journey down to the Colorado river. In this journey she understands her internal and external life. Her body gets cleansed of her past burdens, like domestic abuse in her first marriage and the death of her mother. Though Kate gets purified her body in this journey, it remains fruitless and she takes another journey of the Amazon river. In this journey she is accompanied by some medicine seekers. She gets the knowledge of Grandmother Yage, a medicinal herb that helps in cleansing the physical body to have a contact with the origins. Finally, she comes to know that one must help, love and respect others and become a healer in one’s own right. She also comes to know that the nature has its own healing power for the help of human beings.

**4.1.2. Cultural Aspects**

In the black community or the African American community women are considered to be the transmitters of their traditions and rituals. Their community
values are supposed to be divinely created and women have to incorporate these values. Women of the black community are totally devoted to the tribal ceremonies, traditions and rituals. Walker has strongly attacked the blind following and devotion of women to their tribal identities through Tashi, the protagonist of the novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. With this novel Walker is committed to fight for the community that is socially oppressed. The characters in the novel present their culture and their acts of aggression against the repressive forces of the society.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Alice Walker has put forth the certain cultural aspects of Olinka community in Africa. In Olinkan culture the daughters are taught and prepared by their mothers as the transmitters of their cultural aspects. In this relation Maria Lauret has stated,

In Olinka culture mothers tell their daughters that they should comply with tradition, that to be ‘bathed’—as the euphemism goes—will make them more valuable to their families, their future husbands and their people.

(Maria Lauret, 2011: 157)

Women in a number of communities have a cultural importance. The traditions are transmitted from generation to generation orally, where women play an important role. The African oral tradition is a medium to pass on the cultural heritage. The process of scarification is one of the cultural practices of Olinka. Tashi gets her face marked with tribal markings. This practice is indicative of Olinka culture. It is supposed that the scarification maintains a social status of woman in the community. When Tashi meets Adam at a young age, they become lovers and have an intercourse in the harvest fields. According to Olinka tribe, if a couple enjoys a sexual intercourse in the harvest field, it is a curse to the land. Therefore, Adam has to perform cunnilingus on Tashi as a taboo in Olinkan tradition. Along with these cultural practices woman circumcision or female genital mutilation is an inhuman taboo of Olinka community. Female genital mutilation, sometimes referred to as female circumcision or Clitoridectomy, is a religious ritual in Africa. It is the process of the excision of the clitoris and other parts of the female genitalia. In some African countries it adheres to higher ethnic culture and supposed to be essential for a girl’s virginity. It is also practiced to maintain the honour of the family. In Olinka community it is related to the process of cleaning of private parts of a girl or a woman as a parameter of chastity and a way of diminishing woman’s sexual urges. Alice
Walker has raised this issue through her *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Tashi undergoes the process of female genital circumcision as this is “the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 63) She becomes aggressive to defend her tribal honour and faces the female genital circumcision. Santosh Kumari writes about the reason of Tashi’s decision as,

> Tashi committed herself to circumcision as tribal frenzy excited her to stand for Olinkan honour like a strong and completely courageous woman.

(Santosh Kumari, 2013: 151)

Tashi reflects cultural bonding and goes to carve the scars as tribal marks on her face. She supposes that this scarification would make her identity as a member of Olinka community and culture. Alice Walker has presented these cultural aspects in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by creating a word picture of the Olinka community.

Alice Walker has presented the black strangeness or queerness through her novel *By the Light of my Father’s Smile*. In this novel she has mainly averted the Christian philosophy. She has presented the psychological and spiritual damage of an African American family. Walker has blamed the Christianity for this damage. While describing the theme of the novel, Marlon Moore writes,

> *By the Light* enacts a queering of the soul by maintaining that African American Christians suffer from a false consciousness, depict black female sexuality as potentially fluid, and insisting upon an exotic connection to the Spiritual world.

(Marlon Moore, 2009: 22)

Walker has discussed the Christian culture and Mundo Culture of Mexico, in the novel. The Cultural aspects of both the cultures have found place in the novel. In this presentation Walker has presented Christianity as a destructive and alienating force in the lives of the characters who do not acknowledge the Christianity or paganism. She has insisted upon the exotic wisdom of paganism in the novel. The enslaved African culture and native American culture are set on two different paths. Walker presents an encounter of an African American culture and a native village culture of the Mundo.

The African American anthropologists undertake the study of the Mundo tribe. Mr. Senor Robinson, the father of Magdalena and Susannah, forgets his love and punishes her daughter for her sexual exploits with a Mexican Mundo boy, Manuelito. This punishment causes the estrangement of the daughters and their
mother from Robinson. They remain apart from each other till the death of Robinson. The Mundo boy, Manuelito also dies of an accident shortly after Vietnam war. His spirit meets the spirit of Robinson and becomes a guide to Robinson. He guides Robinson about the Mundo way of life and death. Manuelito tells him,

The dead are required to finish two tasks before all is over with them: one is to guide back to the path someone you left behind who is lost, because of your folly; the other is to host a ceremony so that you and others you have hurt may face eternity reconciled and complete.

(Alice Walker, 1999: 148)

Robinson comes to know about the Mundo philosophy and culture by this lesson. It is indicative of the relationship between the dead and alive according to Mundo culture and belief. It is the duty of a dead to help living. It helps the dead ones to atone for the wrongdoings they committed during their lifetime. After this lesson, Robinson, finally, accepts that he has crushed his daughter, Magdalena’s spirit. Manuelito explains his own culture to Robinson as,

If you are in love, and going to meet your lover, to make love, you think of the moon as a father, happily looking down on you. For Mundo fathers are happy that their children, the girls as well as the boys, enjoy what your culture calls sex.

(Alice Walker, 1999: 210)

This view is suggestive of the Mundo philosophy of Eros, the Greek God of love. They have also a belief that man has a relation with the moon. It is also practiced in the Mundo community that “………no one among the Mundo would marry when the moon is full, but only when it has waned and then reappears.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 210) The Mundo culture believes in love of their girls and boys, but in Christianity “……the boys and girls were raised with the double standard that meant boys would be allowed to go into town at night chasing girls, whereas girls had to stay home, because father thought all young women perverse.” (Maria Lauret, 2011: 191) In contrast to the Christianity, in the Mundo culture it is believed that the relationships between the parents and their siblings should be sound and they must have an ability to forgive each other on their wrongdoings. In relation to the daughters, father is the first model of masculinity, therefore the relationship between fathers and daughters should be healthy.
In *Now Is the Time to Open your Heart*, Alice Walker has presented different cultures and philosophies. The protagonist of the novel Kate Talkingtree is indicative of Walkers paternal grandmother who is murdered by one of her admirers. Walker has explained the fact in one of her interviews as, “This revelation, that I missed by grandmother terribly and felt lost as I entered the latter part of my life, helped me to understand how human beings are collectively missing the presence of the culture of the Grandmother.” (Author’s interview) When Kate meditates in a Buddhist retreat, she thinks of the culture of the white middle class people, “who had money and leisure time to be at retreat.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 5) People of both the cultures, African American and European are gathered at this Buddhist retreat. Her inner peace is disturbed by the white teacher and white people whose “‘hot’ revolution defeated themselves, because they spawned enemies.’ (Alice Walker, 2005: 5) She is dissatisfied with the white culture’s unwordliness. Therefore, she decides to go on a journey first down to the Colorado river and next to the Amazon river in the search of new sense of life.

Kate Talkingtree has different deities and different cultural icons at her home altar. She has a political icon, Che Guevara, a Latin American politician and soldier who developed Guerrilla Warfare as a tool for revolution in Cuba. She also has an icon of Bessie Smith, an American blues singer of 19th century. She also has placed some candles, herbs, purple cloth and a bottle of the ‘grandmother medicine’ and a clock decorated with anaconda wound around it at her home altar. All these objects are indicative of different cultures and a particular spiritual significance. The ‘grandmother medicine’ or ‘yage’ or Ayahuasca is a potion used by South American Indians to free the soul from bodily confinement. In the South American Indian culture it is believed that the ‘yage’ liberates its owner from the realities of everyday life and introduces him to wondrous realms of what he considers reality and permits him to communicate with his ancestors. (Alice Walker, 2005: 215) This is the medicine that causes violent vomiting and vivid visions. In the indigenous cultures it is supposed to have healing and telepathic powers. With the help of the characters like Kate, Yolo and Armando, Alice Walker has brought together different cultures. Grandmother, another major term in the novel, presents universal culture. Grandmother stands for a medicine which is used traditionally by the Amazonian Indians of Peru. It also stands for
a concept, a principle, a particular kind of spiritual wisdom that has the
ynage as its means of transmission, but is personified in grandmotherly
figures like the transgendered Aunty Pearlua in Hawaii, or the
Grandmother-goddess figure of Amazonian cosmology.

(Maria Lauret, 2011: 197)

It is also an aspect of the self, a part of the collective unconscious. It is a true
revolution, or a cool and non-violent revolution at consciousness and enlightenment
that does not depend upon any political leadership or some guru or teacher. Kate
Talkingtree represents the New Age culture of the modern era. Walker follows a
modern system of presenting relationships between past and present that projects a
peculiar connectivity with heritage. In this relation, in the acknowledgement of the
novel, Alice Walker writes, With this writing, whatever its faults I express my
gratitude to all devas, angels and bodhisattvas Who accompany, watch over and
pretext explores, pioneers and artists. (Alice Walker, 2004: ix) She has used ancestral
imagery in the novel to demean the experiences of racial hatred and slavery. This
novel provides a platform for redefining tradition or culture in the context of present
needs.

4.1.3. Character Analysis and Discourse of Womanism

Alice Walker, as a womanist writer, attacks those contemporary forces which
undermine a woman’s freedom, equality and dignity. She deals with certain social
weaknesses in her literary works. Her women revolt against the self denial and
oppression of them by both black and white men. They prepare themselves with
moral and intellectual strength to fight against oppression and injustice in their life.
She presents women, like Meridian, Celie, Shug, Sofia and Fanny who represent the
qualities and values which are praise worthy. Along with these women, Walker also
presents men, like Grange, Adam, Samuel, Arveyda, Rafe and Hal as good men.
Their attitudes towards women are free from jealousy and possessiveness. They
create space for their women folk and help them to develop and grow. With the help
of all these characters Alice Walker has presented the issues of racism, oppression,
gender, sexism and universalism through her novels. In her later novels she also has
discussed the issues of female genital mutilation, sexuality, spirituality, ancestor
reverence, meditation and cleansing of inner self.
Alice Walker extends her vision from African Americans residing in American North to Africa and its colonisation in her *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. It is a story of Tashi, an Olinkan woman. In this novel Walker has put her womanist ideas with major characters like Tashi, Olivia, Adam and M'Lissa and the minor characters like Lisette, Dura, Mzee and Pierre. Tashi, the protagonist of the novel, is the representative of all the women who undergo female genital mutilation. The novel condemns the practice or ritual of female circumcision prevailing in Olinkan people in Africa. Tashi marries Celie’s son, Adam and comes to America after renaming herself as Evelyn Johnson. Before marriage to Adam, Tashi decides to undergo female genital mutilation. Olivia, Tashi’s best friend and Adam’s sister, suggests Tashi that she should not undergo the process. But Tashi “an indigenous Olinka woman, rationalises that preservation of Olinka culture requires its people to remain receptive to traditional tribal rituals, the practice of which is their only identity as Olinka.” (Geri Bates, 2005: 120) She takes the decision to undergo the initiation ceremony of female genital mutilation. This behaviour of Tashi is indicative of womanist nature, as Walker states womanist “Loves the folk.” (Alice Walker 1983: xii) She takes this decision to make her people feel better and to show her solidarity to Olinka tradition. She also has scars on her face as an African identity. M'Lissa, recognised as *tsunga*, performs both the processes. These are painful and unpleasant experiences. Tashi thinks that they are the only things that the whites cannot erase from the African lives. She justifies her behaviour by saying, “We had been stripped of everything but our black skins. Here and there a defiant cheek bore the marks of our withered tribe. These marks gave me courage. I wanted such a mark for myself.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 24) She has great respect for her people as a womanist character. Her act of being loyal to the Olinka tradition destroys her sexuality and womanhood. She fails to satisfy Adam, her husband, sexually for more than three months, therefore she feels guilty and disgusted, she expresses her grief and helplessness as, “Each time he touched me I bled. Each time he moved against me I winced. There was nothing he could do to me that did not hurt.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 59) Initiation ceremony results in a very difficult pregnancy and severe pain at the time of delivery. She aborts her second child due to the fear of pains of delivery and operation. As she fails at all the levels of life, she suffers of some dreams and psychological problems. She is taken to Raye, an African American female analyst, for the further treatment. Rye helps Tashi to see herself completely. She is taken to a
Jungian analyst, Mzee also. With the help of Mzee, Ray and Olivia, she learns that M’Lissa, an Olinka circumciser, called as tsunga, is responsible for her plight and her sister, Dura’s death. She decides to kill M’Lissa to save a number of girls from circumcision in future. She meets her and listens from her the stories about the traditional or cultural ideas of Olinka community and duties of a tsunga. At the time of discussion, Tashi smothers M’Lissa with a pillow to death and sets her house on fire. Because of this murder she is sentenced to death by Olinka government. This act of Tashi is courageous and audacious that is indicative of her womanist behaviour. There is an aim behind the murder of M’Lissa by Tashi that other innocent girls should not be circumcised any more. This act of Tashi is for survival and wholeness. Yet, she cannot survive and meets her end.

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile* centres on the acquisition of knowledge and an interesting line between life and death. In this novel she has introduced the readers to the characters who are alive as well as deceased. By this novel the author intends to take the readers to a new knowledge of the Universal Cycle. For the purpose Walker has presented Susannah, Magdalena, Pauline, Irene and mother Langley as women characters and Mr. Robinson and Manuelito as male characters in the novel. The major character Magdalena, elder daughter of Mr. Robinson, enjoys sex with Manuelito, a Mundo boy. When Mr. Robinson discovers his daughter’s natural and unsullied sex with Manuelito, he whips her mercilessly. Magdalena cannot understand the reason of beating her. She decides to take revenge upon her father by not loving him anymore. She starts hating her father and blaming him as “He was a brute, a hypocrite, a liar. And Mama was his Moll.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 119) She thinks him a guilty person for taking her best moments of life away from her. She says, “The moment when I knew my life was given to me for me to own. He took that moment and he broke it into a million bits. He made It dirty and evil.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 116) Because of this hatred she takes Susannah, her younger sister, on her side against their father. She prohibits her sister, Susannah, from expressing any affection for their father. In this state of hatred their father dies and all their hopes of reunification vanishes forever. Magdalena draws Susannah into her resentment for their father. She chooses excessive eating, drinking and emotional repression after her beating by her father. Susannah also starts hating her father for his treatment to his daughters. After their father’s death she gets married to Petro. She also keeps lesbian
relationship with Pauline. Susannah and Pauline come together due to their common grief. Barbara Taylor writes about the reason, why these women love each other, as, “Both women were dissatisfied with their childhoods. Pauline disliked her poverty while Susannah disliked the estrangement from her father.” (Barbara Taylor, 2011:162) Walker presents that Pauline suffers from poverty due to her father’s death as well as Susannah suffers of her father’s abusive nature. All these women characters show their womanist view through their behaviour.

Irene, a minor character in the novel, is presented as a caretaker of a small white church. Her mother is raped and beaten, dies while giving birth to her. Therefore, people take her as a God’s punishment for the sin of her mother. She is denied childhood and forced to work at a church. She is a black and dwarf woman who is living in a small room behind the church. Both Irene and Susannah become friends. Irene tells Susannah about her life and treatment she receives from the white people. She tells, “In the old days, when I was young, it was forbidden. I was beaten if I left. Dragged back. There was no place to go, either. My mother Was dead. Nobody wanted me.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 57) Yet, she shows a courage to fight all odds in her life. She represents knowledge, wisdom and understanding and chooses to live life that she wants to have. She shows a womanist consciousness in telling Susannah how women were enslaved by the church. She makes Susannah and Pauline aware of slavery of the blacks in the past.

Alice Walker, in By the Light of My Father’s Smile, projects a fictitious Mundo culture. With the help of her woman characters and Mundo culture she presents a womanist love that embraces people of all types. The Mundo consider women as carriers of life and birthing. They view woman body as a part of beauty of creation. The Mundo view male and female as an expression of mutual love. This view of Mundo people is similar to womanists as womanist love men and women sexually or non sexually. When Magdalena is beaten by her father, her mother Langley and her sister Susannah support Magdalena against him. This behaviour stands for love for woman as womanists do. This shows that in opposition to oppression, womanist love aims at personal and global peace. They reject the concept of patriarchal God and accept the sacredness and humanity of people. Susannah, as a womanist character, respects and understands Irene, who is hated by all the people. She also loves Irene non-sexually, at the same time she establishes her lesbian
relations with Pauline. Thus, through her characters Alice Walker presents her own views regarding womanism.

*Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, by Alice Walker, is a story of Kate Talkingtree and her lover, Yolo, and their spiritual journey towards individual wholeness. It is a quest for self. The protagonist of the novel, Kate is pictured as an often wandering woman. She is well known author, intending to explore the natural world and is married several times. When she confronts certain signs of age and her inner peace gets disturbed by her past memories, she decides to find new sense of life. She rejects Christianity, Buddhism and other religious philosophies and tries to get connected to the real world. She takes her journey down the Colorado and Amazon rivers to know her past and future as well as for the self discovery. She does not care for her material world and one day “….. she burned not only some of her writings but several hundred dollars bills, just to demonstrate to herself that these items were not God/Goddess of her life.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 14) She dreams of a dry river in the middle of an ancient forest every night. Her friends suggest her “You must find a real river somewhere in the world – forest the dry one in your dreams–to travel down.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 14) In this travel Kate neutralises her past memories and repressed emotions. But this journey does not remain much fruitful, therefore after this journey she travels to the Amazon river for her personal evolution. In this journey she is guided by a shaman and accompanied by several other medicine seekers. With this journey all of them get transformed themselves into newer, cleaner and more balanced people than before. At the same time Kate’s partner, Yolo, undertakes a trip to Hawaii. He learns and understands about the history of Hawaii and the nature of people residing on the island. By these journeys both of them conclude that every pain has a solution of connectedness to the ancestors, nature and personal relations. In the end both of them meet each other with a new knowledge more than they have before. They get connected to each other and celebrate their union in the presence of all their friends.

This novel remains a commitment of Alice Walker to her ideology of womanism. Kate discovers the medicinal and aesthetic qualities of nature and the importance of human bonds during her spiritual journeys. Kate rejects the modern institutionalized religions, evils of violence and the modern civilization. She takes all her supporters and well wishers with her on the campaign of self discovery. Before
this she has gone through several unsuccessful marriages. She is much suffered of all failures and pains, therefore she rejects all the modern civilisations. This is a courageous behaviour of Kate indicating her womanist view. Though she is a reputed writer, she stops her writing, she burns her writings and several hundred dollars bills. She starts feeling a deeper connectedness with nature. As a womanist she believes that this connectedness with nature will help her community for spiritual transformation. Basma Majid writes in this relation as,

> Womanist are not only concerned with self growth and individual spiritual development, but they engage themselves in the struggle for the betterment of the black community. Kate, as a womanist, is conscious of the socio-political status of black People in America.

(Basma Majid, 2013: 111)

Kate tries to reconcile black and white communities in the struggle for socio-economic justice in America. She burns her money to show her concern with the poor black people who are worried about “Where their next meal was coming from …. How they would feed, clothe, and educate their children.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 5)

This view of Kate shows her womanist attitude towards her community. Along with this love for her community she loves other women and other women also have love for her. When she sets for a journey down the Colorado and the Amazon river she is accompanied by several women. These women respect and love their own culture and love each other non-sexually. Thus in Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, Alice Walker presents womanist ethics through the characters’ self discovery, spirituality, relation to nature and their ancestors and struggle for socio economic justice. By the means of this novel, Alice Walker remains a voice for women who are looking for their survival and wholeness.

4.1.4. Language and Behaviour

Alice Walker uses the themes of gender, community and language to construct her own identity as an African American writer. Her works of literature, especially novels, are organised around African American, European American, Native American, Asian American and Mexican American identities. Her female protagonists struggle for finding their places in their respective communities. These characters use language that helps them in locating themselves in their hostile environments. This use of language helps them to connect their gendered identities to
their communities. Alice Walker effectively connects gender and language in each of her novels through symbolism, African American vernacular English and through story telling. She experiments this to create her characters and her African American identities. Alice Walker has experienced that all the patriarchal societies deny and oppress the women bodies from the prehistoric periods. These societies teach the women and girls that their bodies are dirty, nasty, imperfect, ugly and disgusting. This treatment is a part of socialisation process and gendered identities in the society. All these issues are presented in a simplified way by Alice Walker in her novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. In this novel she talks about the brutalised African woman. She is simple victim of tradition or an abstract object of discourse. For this discourse Walker has used her own language.

Tashi, the protagonist of the novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is an African woman. After her circumcision she marries Adam and moves to United States of America. She changes her name into Evelyn Johnson. By this she tries to create her American identity. Yet, she remains a half African and half American woman entitled as Tashi Evelyn. Finally, she attains a hybrid identity and is presented as Evelyn. She represents a modern woman found in dilemma whether to accept a new change or respect her native culture. With this state of mind she takes her own decision to be a part of her Olinka community and gets circumcised. Alice Walker has presented the issue of circumcision and its effects on the victims through *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. While presenting this previously unspeakable issue, she has used a language of modern era. This language helps her to discuss the sufferings of woman victimised by the taboos like female genital mutilation. Walker has placed the people as archetypes rather than characters for this discussion. The language put in their mouths is highly poetic. It also tries to bring Carl Jung, a psychologist, into the story. To carry this story up to the end and bring some realistic sense in it, Walker has used some words from an African language. She herself writes, ‘Tsunga, like many of my “African” words, is made up. Perhaps it, and the other words I use, are from an African language I used to know.’ (Alice Walker, 2008: 282-83) She also has used some other words, such as *Ja, barash, mais non, mais oui* and *cauchemar* from an African language and French language.

Tashi argues with her friend Olivia over the colonialisists presence in the Olinka village and introduction of their White God upon them. This argument
indicates Tashi’s hatred for Christianity and love for her Olinka culture. It is also suggestive of womanist behaviour of Tashi to undergo initiation or circumcision as a definitive stamp of Olinka tradition. She says to Olivia, “You are black, but you are not like us. We look at you and your people with pity. You barely have your own black skin, and it is fading.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 23) These harsh words of Tashi show that she tries to detach herself from the Christian religious, political and ideological influence upon her. To get connected to her community, she submits herself to the knife of M’Lissa, a tsunga and rejects Christianity. After she is circumcised, she faces a numerous problems in her married life. She suffers from the unbearable pains at the time of her first delivery and gives birth to a mentally retarded son, Benny. She becomes pregnant for the second time, but because of the fear of pains of delivery she aborts the child. Due to this failure she suffers from strange dreams in her sleep resulting in frustration. She is taken to different psychotherapists for the treatment. She gets totally frustrated because of her circumcision and comes to know about the other girls sufferings who are circumcised. She decides to revenge on the circumcisers in Olinka community. She goes back to Olinka and meets M’Lissa, an old circumciser and kills her. She explains “I placed a pillow over her face and lay across it for an hour. She said stories about her life caused me to lose my taste for slashing her.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 276) This murder of M’Lissa by Tashi is an act for survival, but she is executed by the firing squad of Olinka. Before Tashi is executed she writes “I will face the firing squad for killing someone who, many years ago, killed me.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 274) Tashi murders M’Lissa, not only to take revenge on her but to save thousands of girls from this inhuman practice of circumcision. While presenting this issue, Alice Walker has used the language of common people.

In *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* Alice Walker highlights the repression of the daughters by their father. The story is told by various characters of the novel. For this narration Alice Walker has used the language of common people. The Robinson family, with two daughters, Magdalena and Susannah, comes to study the Mexican Mundo community and their culture as an anthropologist. The language used by Alice Walker in the novel helps the characters express their views properly. Mr. Robinson, a major character, dies and becomes a spirit, narrates his views with the language that gives a true picture of himself. He gets angry when he finds his elder
daughter, Magdalena, has sexual relations with Manuelito, a Mundo boy. He beats her brutally and this is watched by his younger daughter Susannah. After this beating of Magdalena, Mr. Robinson becomes restless and grieves for his mistake and talks to his wife, Langley, as, “We believed in correction, which we thought could be accomplished by reason and consistency; we did not believe in corporal punishment.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 31) Langley accepts the view and recalls that they were beaten in slavery but now there is the freedom. This discussion of husband and wife indicates that they have an unconventional relationship, unlike other husbands and wives, those are portrayed by Alice Walker in her other novels, like *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*. Alice Walker presents her black women characters like Irene, Susannah and Pauline to describe the condition of black people in their own countries in a harsh language. Irene tells Susannah and Pauline,

> It gives me gooseflesh just to imagine it. Better to chop off heads and cut Indian babies in half, or destroy black families in Africa by brutalizing and enslaving them – all of which they did than to realize that much of the “uncivilized” world, unlike Europe, had not been forced to kill off its mother and made to shrink its spirit to half its size.  
> (Alice Walker, 1999: 186)

The language used by Alice Walker differentiated the civilisations in America and African countries. The African American culture and the Mundo culture are presented are different from each other. With the help of this difference, Walker reveals that the sexual healing is important to attain spiritual liberation. She expounds the view of the Mundo that wilful physical sex leads to spiritual union. It is believed that the spiritual liberation is more important for an individual than the corporal freedom.

The novel is an outcome of the behaviour of the characters presented in it. Magdalena, a major character in the novel, is a young child when the Robinsons move to Mexico. As she grows up with the Mundo children, she loves Manuelito, a Mundo boy and gets involved in sexual relations with the boy. Her father, Mr. Robinson, when finds her sexually involved with the boy he is terrified and beats her brutally. His younger daughter, Susannah, and his wife, Langley, observe it through the keyhole. This behaviour of Mr. Robinson turns his both the daughters away from him. Mr. Robinson’s act turns all the members of the family against him. Magdalena, known as Mad Dog, Mac Doc by the Mundo people because of her frank behaviour, is estranged by her father. Susannah is also forced to take side of Magdalena and their
mother, Langley, shuts her up in a room and avoids Mr. Robinson. The behaviour of Magdalena is a wilful and courageous one indicative of womanist nature. She expresses her grief as, “This is not an unusual story, I know that how, fathers attack their children around the world every day….. Susannah sobbed for both of us. On her knees outside our bedroom, her eye to the keyhole; my mother behind her….. (Alice Walker 1999: 26) This behaviour of each female character shows a woman’s love for other woman. Magdalena does not forgive her father for his treatment. She takes him guilty of taking all her best moments of life away from her. She goes on eating and drinking without any care for self. Though she works as a Professor, she takes shelter of excessive food and beer to suppress her grief. She has managed to end her life through her self destructive behaviour.

Susannah, the younger daughter of Mr. Robinson, takes side of her sister after their father beats Magdalena. She rejects her father and remains away from their father. She gets married to a Greek, named as Petros and later she divorces him. She shares a lesbian relationship with Pauline. She learns “the healing force of a sexual relationship and a kind of feminine sexual enjoyment.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 45) She also becomes friend of Irene, a dwarf woman born illegitimate as the product of rape of her mother, who dies after Irene’s birth. Irene knows several languages and is a well educated and knowledgeable character. Susannah decides to explore the options of her life and to be a free spirit and develops friendly relations with Irene. Both of them share views about the woman’s place in the world. Susannah reveals that the women are denied sexual pleasure. She says “Women all over the world have been brainwashed to think sex is not meant to be pleasurable to them, only to the men fucking them.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 130) Her views about the world and patriarchy are indicative of her womanist way of life. Her behaviour, her lesbian relationship with Pauline and her friendship with Irene are womanist as Alice Walker has stated.

In Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, Alice Walker has discussed the protagonist, Kate Talkingtree’s spiritual journey towards self-development. She has discusses certain global issues in this novel. The male and female characters, presented in the novel, are active in their discovery of something real and important for human life. They set off on a spiritual journey to discover the medicinal and aesthetic quality of nature and the importance of human relations for the betterment of the world. For the purpose of presenting these characters, Walker uses the
language of ancestors and the modern also. She says, “I create characters who sometimes speak in the language of immediate ancestors, characters who are not passive but active in the discovery of what is vital and real in this world.” (Alice Walker, 1997: 4) With these characters, Alice Walker presents man’s relation to nature and ancestors as well as an involvement of man in the struggle for social and economic justice. Kate Talkingtree undertakes the journey of the Colorado river and the Amazon river for a change in her heart and soul. Alice Walker has put a language into her mouth that she takes all sort of partners with her and talks to the spirits. She also listens the wilderness of the Amazon valley. She has been under the spiritual influences, like the Shamanic healing, Buddhism, Fengsui, Yoga and Meditation along with herbal and ancient medicines like yage. The practices of nature worship is highlighted in the novel in the language of common modern man. With the help of this simple language Walker wants to transform the racial and national identity into a universal identity and new age spirituality. She makes ancient Grandmother spirit speak to Kate,

You don’t understand about Buddha, ……. He would not mock those who take up arms against their own enslavement. Sometimes there is no way, except through violence, to freedom. Living in violence is not the best use of life, however. And he was interested in teaching that. How precious it is to have a human life to live! How sad to waste it in something so grim and blurry. A thought can be like a gun; it can slay the enemy. Music can be like a sword; It can pierce the heart of the enemy, dance can kill, what needs killing is not the person; what needs killing is his or her ideas that torturing another person will create happiness.

(Alice Walker, 2005: 196-97)

The speech of Grandmother spirit in the new Age language puts forth the importance of universal identity and spirituality for the well being of human society. As Kate travels by the Colorado and the Amazon rivers, she proceeds towards a new life, new knowledge and integration of mind, body and spirit. She understands the need of New Age community is humanism, universal concerns and interrelatedness of human beings. She undergoes spiritual renewal and starts to experience inner peace. All the supporters of Kate tell their stories after they experience the inner peace. They talk to each other intimately and that evokes a spiritual unity among themselves. Kate is accompanied by all sort of people, black and white, on the journey and it is indicative of universality. All of them form their own moral values and get a spiritual
enlightenment. The novel presents Alice Walker’s womanist ideology through the unity of all the women characters, their spirituality, self discovery and their relation to the nature and their ancestors. She structures this narrative with a language that its meaning surfaces with ease. This narration involves an experiment in the form to reflect the roots of the author and her personal experiences. With the use of language of common people, Walker has presented the concerns of the characters with world’s ills and distresses that indicate the universality of the characters.

Kate Talkingtree, a 57 year old successful writer, suffers of dreams of empty freezers, some snake images and a dream of dry rivers. Her behaviour is changed by all these dreams as well as one day she notices some signs of her growing age and experiences some physical pains also. She becomes restless because of her dreams, violent happenings all over the world and uselessness of traditional religions. She has become restless because of marital failures also. She bids good bye to her lover, Yolo, and her house also. She sets for spiritual journey down the Colorado river at the first time and to the Amazon at the second time. She is accompanied by women like Anne, Anunu, Cheryl, Margery, Missy Sally and Sue along with Armando, a shaman and other male companions. This union of maximum number of women indicates the womanism of all the characters as Walker has described womanists appreciate and prefer women’s culture and their flexibility. Kate encounters her inner self expelling the toxins of domestic ideals and expectations. In the second journey to the Amazon, Kate understands that the divine source of knowledge does not exist in the outer world but it is within the self and in the relationships which one has with other people. In this regard Carmen Gillespie writes,

She [Kate] recognizes that there is a reason for the tumultuous relationships in her family, and she also embraces the possibilities of having an intimate relationships with a partner that can serve as a foundation for personal health.

(Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 119)

This realisation brings a change in the behaviour of Kate and she decides to reunite with her lover Yolo. She re-establishes her relations with Yolo which she has broken in the beginning. She also develops her healthier relationships with her sisters those are distant to her. She also reconciles and understands her relationships with her mother completely. She develops her love for other women non-sexually like a womanist one.
4.1.5. Racism and Sexism

In the course of her literary career Alice Walker has presented the issues related to African American women and black community. She presents women who are

……exploited and victimized emotionally, physically, and psychologically, women who endure alienation and confinement, women who struggle to get from margin to centre …… Strong women, who rise above their unfortunate circumstances to achieve wholeness and to contribute to others in their communities, restoring hope, laughter and joy.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 20)

She also portrays individual relationships in the light of physically abusive marriages, the patriarchal racism and sexism in the society. She also discusses the issues of cultural and racial conflicts, ruling class resistance and violence against women. Racial discrimination is there in America only on the basis of darkness of African Americans. But some of the people of black community have inferior feelings about themselves. Alice struggles against this inferiority of her community. She says, “My struggle was always against the inner darkness. I carry within myself the only known keys to my death–to unlock life, or close it shut forever.” (Alice Walker, 1991: 270-71) Along with racism, Alice Walker has attacked the issue of sexism prevailing in America and other countries also. The sexism is understood as discrimination or bias against women by patriarchal society. The women are ill treated and tortured by the patriarchal society as they are considered to be inferior to men. Much of Alice Walker’s works centre on women, circumstances of oppression and evils or racism and sexism.

In Possessing the Secret of Joy, Alice Walker has discussed the white colonialism in the African countries. The white colonialists have created a sort of vision of black people, due to this they “failed to perceive them as human beings……they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 269) The black man is colonised by the white man and the black woman is oppressed by the white as well as the black man. Thus racism is the case of black and white people, but as stated by Alice Walker in Possessing the Secret of Joy, colonised people are oppressed by the colonialists. This racism is related to the discrimination of the indigenous people by the colonialists– the White or the Black.
This racism is a great tool of imperialism and colonisation. In the novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker raises an issue of power relations among the colonisers and colonised. The colonisers modify the traditions of colonised to achieve their goals. The colonialists spread their ideology to keep their subjects more submissive by dominating native lands of Africa. They try to thrust their religion, language and ways of their life and they also attack the native culture and try to thrust their own culture upon the natives. The same when happens with Tashi’s Olinka culture, she goes against the westernisations of her culture. She undergoes Olinkan inhuman process of cutting her genital organ. She shows her way of cultural resistance against the colonialism to keep her culture alive. It shows that only women are supposed to be the protectors of their culture. She gets scars on her face as the symbol of her tribe. This is indicative of sexism practiced in Olinka tribe. The women are made face all the tortures under the name of culture. Tashi is forced to undergo the initiation process by their leaders. This is merely a sexual violence against women in general. The circumcisers, the women performing sexual mutilation procedure on girl children, support the patriarchy and add to the sexism. Walker blames these women for supporting sexism. She also discusses the sexism in American culture that the women in America strive to look thin, blond and with very big breasts. They want to have breast implants and bleach their skin and hair. The girls are sexually blinded or mutilated for cultural reasons in Africa. Though the reasons are different, all these activities are related to sexism. This sexism has affected the life of Tashi and she faces the problems related to body and mind. She suffers from suicidal tendency, acts of violence, depression and nervous breakdown. Yet, finally, from the depth of madness, emotional imbalance and spiritual death, Tashi emerges as a strong resolute woman for the liberation of women.

Alice Walker has presented the racism and sexism in an African country, resulted from Colonialism, in the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The same sort of racism and sexism is also traced in her next novel *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*. In this novel she presents the difference between African American Christianity and a native village culture of the Mundo community and their philosophies. Mr. Robinson and his wife, take funding under the disguise of missionary and carry on their work of anthropology, the study of the Mexican Mundo community but he gets more and more involved in using his power. He starts acting as a dominating enforcer of the
ideas, and beliefs of female hostility. As a missionary, Mr. Robinson holds a real power over the native people’s lives. When he tries to civilise the Mundo in the name of God, he becomes a whitened black man. He abuses his position in the church to obtain authority in family and social life. He behaves with the indigenous people as a representative of the Western Colonisers. While describing his Western religiosity, his daughter, Magdalena states, “I realized years ago, he really did change himself into a priest; it was as if all his Bible reading and acting to fool the Mundo became part of who he was.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 90) Mr. Robinson’s behaviour is of discriminatory western supremacy. He manifests an oppressive western religiosity. He exercises dominance within and outside of his family. He prohibits his elder daughter, Magdalena from playing with Mexican boys. He keeps watch on his daughters every day. All his behaviour, as a priest, indicates his racist and sexist attitudes.

Alice Walker presents her views about racism, though the form is changed, in the novel with the help of Mr. Robinson, a whitened black man. Along with the racism, her idea of sexism also has found place in the novel. The women characters in the novel receive treatments from the male characters as well as the society. That helps the readers to trace the signs of sexism in the novel. The protagonists of the novel, Magdalena and her sister Susannah, fall victim to the sexism of Mr. Robinson Senor, the father of Magdalena and Susannah. Both the girls grow up with Mundo children. Magdalena becomes much intimate with a Mundo boy, Manuelito. She gets sexually involved with the boy and her father comes to know about their sexual relation. He becomes very furious on the issue and beats Magdalena brutally with a belt gifted to her by her boy friend. He locks her in a room and beats her. She tells it as, “Manuelito had given me a silver belt – rather, it was a leather belt that was covered with a silver disk. He’d made it himself. I kept it in bed with me underneath my pillow. It was with this that my father punished me.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 26) He beats her as she is a girl and has experienced sexual pleasure. This act is indicative of the sexism. When her sister, Susannah, watches it through the key-hole, she becomes restless and hates her father till the end. They suffer of the sexist treatment given by the father. Susannah, after the death of her father, Mr. Senor Robinson, meets Irene, a caretaker in the Church. Alice Walker has presented Irene as a victim of sexism. She shares her views with Susannah. Her mother is raped as a young girl and she tells her
family about the incident but they do not believe her. The family members punish Irene’s mother by taking her responsible for the violence that happens against her. All the members of the family as well as her community stop speaking to her. Irene’s mother dies after the birth of Irene. Irene is forced to give her life in the service of the church. She is avoided by everyone that visits the church. None speaks to her by taking her as God’s punishment for her mother’s sin. This treatment given to Irene is an example of sexism in the novel.

In the novels, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, Alice Walker introduces certain events that indicate the racism and sexism in the societies described. In the same way, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* also contains certain events and happenings those are indicative of racism and sexism. While presenting racist issue in the novel, Alice Walker has used a character, Rick, an Italian, settled in America and practicing Christianity there. His family members have many black friends behind their prosperity. They use to sell drugs to blacks and they themselves are not involved in practicing drug consuming. They have hooked their black friends in consuming the drugs in order to make money. Rick says, “….. they could not push drugs to white people, in order to stay medicated.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 147) This segregation is only due to their racial views. The members of Rick’s family “… move up in American society and moving up in American society was what they wanted the most.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 146-47) Therefore they sell drugs only to black and oppressed people. Rick also tells about the attitude of his family members about black people. He says that his father has Anglicised their name to be a part of the American mainstream. Once he takes his black roommate to his home. But he is treated by Rick’s family in a so bad way that he becomes crazy to go back as early as possible. This treatment given to a black person indicates the racism of the contemporary society. After some days, Rick starts dating a black woman. When his parents come to know about his relations with that black woman, “……they freaked. They started to tell me [Rick] stuff about black people I’d [he] never heard before.” (Alice Walker 2005: 151) They try to warn him not to go into their neighbourhoods. This segregation prevents him from maintaining relations with the black friends and partners. These racist incidents are presented in the novel by Alice Walker.

Along with racism, certain examples of sexism are also traced in the novel *Now Is the Time to Open Your Hearts*. Alice Walker has presented a number of
women characters telling their experiences those indicate the sexist discrimination and treatment received by them. Lilika, a member of the group with Kate Talkingtree on the journey of the Amazon river, expresses her experience of sexist treatment received by her. Lilika is raped by a man and he tries to rape her friend Gloria also. Lilika becomes furious and in self defence she kills that rapist. After his murder both of the girls try to escape but unfortunately they are caught by police. They are thrown into small, windowless country jail cells. Walker writes,

They are beaten by the patrolmen who had caught them and once inside the jail were raped repeatedly, over several months, by jailers and inmates alike. There had been a surveillance camera in their cells and they had been watched night and day. The beatings and brutal rapes had been preserved on video and marketed by two of the guards. (Alice Walker, 2005: 105)

Finally, these girls are escaped from the jail with the assistance they received from out of state. The beating and rapes of these black girls are examples of American racism as well as sexism. Both the girls join Kate’s journey of self discovery and spirituality as womanist characters.

Kate Talkingtree is also presented as a victim of sexism. She gets married to an abusive man who mistreats her. He tells her that he will leave her forever and while hiking, he pushes her toward the edge of a high rock. He leaves her alone and runs back to home. She manages to save herself and comes home to talk to him about the misbehaviour, but he brutally rapes her on their couch. Their marriage remains a failure. After this Kate gets married to a woman named as Lolly, as a lesbian. She has very different traits including her sleeping habits. She does not love Kate but takes advantage of Kate’s financial and material prosperity. She tries to claim some of Kate’s wealth as her own and threatens Kate. She exploits Kate as a man treats his wife as a symbol of sexism. Kate is mistreated by her husband and her woman partner also. She decides to come out of all her bitter past memories and undertakes a number of journeys for the self discovery. In this group of her companions Missy is also a character who suffers of sexism and gender issue. Missy tells her story that she lives, with her mother, at her grandfather’s house, when she is a young girl. Her grandfather, named as Timmy Wimmins, sexually abuses Missy. After Missy’s mother learns about the sexual abuse of her daughter by her own father, they move out of the house to a new place. But Missy suffers of a problem that she has become
much attached to her grandfather that she recalls him and his abuse. Her mother never talks about the issue therefore Missy suspects that her mother is also abused by her grandfather. Carmen Gillespie writes in this regard as,

> Missy’s incestuous relationship damaged her as an adult. She has been unable to enjoy sex because she feels guilty about the inappropriate physical pleasure she experienced with her grandfather.  
> (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 114)

Missy falls victim to the drug addiction in the try to escape from the pains she experiences because of this incestuous relationship. To get relieved from the feeling of guilt and to get rid of her drug addiction she joins a journey of self discovery and spirituality.

### 4.1.6. Lesbian Relationship

While describing her womanist ideology, Alice Walker states about a woman who ‘loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually’ is a womanist. Her view of this type of woman is noticed in some of her novels. The woman when loves other woman sexually is called as lesbian. Their sexual relationship with each other is lesbian relationship. In her novel, *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, Walker projects the theme of sexuality and relation of the father and daughters. In this novel she has presented Magdalena and Susannah as the major characters. Both of them suffer from the father’s brutal and oppressive treatment. They get distanced from their father and none forgives each other for their deeds. After the death of their father, Magdalena and Susannah live in isolation. Magdalena abuses herself by excessive eating and drinking and meets her end in this situation. Susannah comes to know from Magdalena’s letter that Magdalena hates her in her whole life. Because of this knowledge Susannah takes her own way of life. She gets married to Petros, a Greek. He considers her as a kind of American dream or a fantasy, therefore, Susannah divorces him and shares a love and sexual relationship with Pauline.

Pauline, living in a tiny village, Wadra, is impregnated by a young man and left alone to give birth to a child. She later on never gets married and rears her child, Richard, on her own. She meets a white woman Gena, a daughter of Eastern European immigrants. She is a married woman, but when she comes to know about the sad story of Pauline, she develops love for her. She make Pauline realize that
women can have sexual enjoyment and both of them establish their lesbian relationship. About their sex Pauline tells, “……. it was the kind of affectionate sex that seemed designed to reconnect me to myself, to keep me alive.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 132) Pauline learns about the orgasm with the help of this relationship. After Pauline is left by Gena for the reason of her son, she starts her own restaurant for her livelihood and survival. When she is visited by Susannah, both of them establish their lesbian relationship. They make a good lesbian couple and Susannah praises Pauline as, “You have been wonderful. You have been the love to take me closest to the door of my own locked closet.” (Alice Walker, 1999:187) Their relations go to an extent that Pauline proposes that she wants to marry Susannah. But Susannah does not want any permanent partnership, therefore she suggests to have a ceremony that will reflect the essence of their relationship. In this way, Gena and Pauline as well as Susannah and Pauline represent Alice Walker’s womanism in a real sense.

Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, is also a womanist character, presented by Alice Walker in the novel. She is married many times and some of these marriages are very short. Walker writes about her marriages as, “Three has lasted about a year. The others, one in which she’d borne children, were longer.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 80) After her last marriage she meets Yolo, with whom she is in love off marriage. Among these marriages there is one marriage of Kate with a woman, Lolly. She is a woman who resembles Kate’s cousin. Kate is fascinated by her look, “twinkling eyes, lovely smile.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 81) This marriage is a short one. This is indicative of their lesbian relationship. They get legally married to each other in a ceremony held at a friend’s house. Both of them love each other, but after some days Kate comes to know about Lolly’s laziness. She starts taking advantage of Kate’s financial and material prosperity. She tries to claim Kate’s wealth as her own and claims for Kate’s house also. Kate feels exploited by her therefore she ends the relationship with Lolly. Though this lesbian relationship does not show any womanist view, it is the relationship between two women loving each other sexually or non sexually.

4.1.7. Struggle for Self

Alice Walker, as a womanist writer, presents black women as the protagonist in almost all her novels. These women characters are portrayed by her as loving their
community, loving men and women sexually and/or non-sexually, loving women’s culture and struggling for their self identities. They struggle for the self respect and self realisation also. All these women characters love their culture, art and strive for survival and wholeness of their community.

Tashi, the protagonist of the novel Possessing the Secret of Joy, strives for her identity, self respect and survival of entire women of the world who are victims of cultural ritual of female genital mutilation or circumcision. She belongs to the Olinka community in an African country. It is a story of an African American woman who struggles to come to the terms with the cultural rituals of her homeland. She is a psychologically wounded individual, who reclaims to find her own voice. In the novel Tashi’s sister, Dura, dies of excessive bleeding at the time of her circumcision, when Tashi is a child. The death of her sister traumatises Tashi. But she tries to forgets all the things as the time passes. As a young girl, Tashi gets circumcised as an initiation process in Olinka community. After her marriage to Adam, she faces many problems in her married life in America. She gives birth to a mentally retarded baby for the first time and for the second time she undergoes an abortion. All these problems bring her past memories back and Tashi becomes restless, affected and fractured by the process of genital mutilation. Finally, with the help of a Jungian psychologist, Tashi gets mentally healed. She starts studying the process of circumcision and its effects upon the girls. The reason of her sister, Dura’s death is never explained to her. when she comes to know that Dura dies of circumcision, she becomes furious. She finds that the process is only for the patriarchal domination of women. She understands the social pressure that exists only for women in the world and they are dominated by patriarchy. Walker presents this pressure in the novel through Pierre, Adam’s son from Lisette. He says, “….. at last, I recognised the connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 137) Tashi prepares herself in order to struggle for self and fight against the exploitation of women.

Tashi returns to Africa and studies the issue of circumcision—history, culture, reasons and effects—from concerned women. She meets M’Lissa, the tsunga and spends time with her to learn her story. She learns from her that women were the leaders of their tribes and heads of the families in the past. This structure of society is changed by men for their superiority and men become the heads of household. Some
of the women became circumcisers and M’Lissa is one of them. She also undergoes the process of circumcision in her childhood and experiences the pains of it. Katie Lavy writes about the work of M’Lissa as, “M’Lissa continues to inflict the same pain on hundreds of young girls because the male leaders of the tribe demanded it.” (Katie Lavy, 2012: 63) Tashi learns that this practice is nothing but only a torture against the girls. She decides to oppose this practice and save all girl victims of the future. M’Lissa also accepts that the circumcision practice is against her will but she has to observe it under the pressure of tradition. She states, “I have been strong ….. strong and brave ……. In service to tradition, to what makes us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. But who are we, but torturers of children?” (Alice Walker, 2008: 219) Tashi feels enraged by the views of M’Lissa. She thinks that these tsunga can be controlled by the elders of the society as they have dominating power. She thinks that they should be killed because they are witches. Tashi revolts against the Olinkan traditions. She attacks M’Lissa and kills her. For this crime Tashi is executed by the Olinkan government. Though she struggles for her own identity as a womanist character, she cannot survive. But her struggle becomes an initiation of the revolt against female genital cutting all over the world. She gives a lesson to all girls and women that “RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!” (Alice Walker, 2008: 279) Tashi’s struggle is successful as she creates awareness about the rights of women among a number of women and girls those have gathered at the moment of execution and she dies with satisfaction.

Alice Walker has discussed a different sort of subject in her each novel. In her previous novels she has touched upon poverty, racism, sexism, the Civil Rights Movement and female genital cutting. But in her By the Light of My Father’s Smile she has dealt with sexuality and spirituality. This novel discusses issues of racism and sexism as well as love. The women characters, portrayed in the novel, struggle for their self and survival. The major characters of the novel Magdalena, Susannah, Mr. Robinson and Manuelito struggle for reconciliation and restore the peace and harmony in the lives of others. Magdalena, Susannah, Irene and Pauline are living characters in the novel who struggle for their self.

Magdalena, elder daughter of Mr. Robinson, struggles for the self and identity as a woman. She is an African American girl residing in Mexican village among the Mundo people. With the help of the character of Magdalena, Alice Walker manifests
that women are desirous of sexual pleasure as erotic beings. Recognition of potential of women’s erotic nature is the basic key for the development of women’s whole self. Magdalena does not understand the reason behind the beating by her father and gets detached from him. She chooses to eat and drink excessively because the incident has become an obstacle in her sexual growth. Susannah also becomes alienated and detached from her father. Unlike her sister, Magdalena, Susannah takes the way of sexual experimentation. She gets married to a Greek man, Petros and finally gets separated from him. She develops a lesbian relationship with Pauline. Though both the girls desire their father’s love, they cannot get it as he finds his daughters’ weakness to fit to the framework of their future that he has fashioned for them. But his treatment to Magdalena distracts the family and the situation remains the same after the death of Mr. Robinson. Magdalena struggles for her self and does not change her behaviour. She decides not to forgive her father for what he has done. Yet, she wants to repair the relations and to make ‘whole’ again. But her father is dead, therefore she “… Eats herself into oblivion, dying eventually from the rage she has savoured and the mounds of food she has consumed trying to satisfy herself.” (Attar P.A. & Thorat R.R., 2012: 31) Her search for her self-identity and the way to reconcile to her father remains unachieved.

Susannah, younger sister of Magdalena, spends her whole life with her sister distancing herself from her father. She is presented in the novel as a real womanist character. After her father dies, she gets married to Petros and both of them make a good couple. While talking about her marriage to Irene, Susannah says, “I am already married to a life of experimentation, change. I feel I must try to all of life—at least, all of life that interests me—before I can truly understand that all life suits me. If I marry I’m afraid I’ll turn to stone.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 179) Susannah decides not to be married for whole life, therefore she leaves Petros. This thought helps Susannah and Irene to be close friends and discuss various issues related to racism and sexism. Irene encourages Susannah to fight against all odds in her life. She says,

There is a man inside you, your own inner man, so to speak, and he is dedicated to helping you. He is lifting you into the carriage of your own body in which you can begin to take charge of your body.

(Alice Walker, 1999: 63)
This encouragement helps Susannah to search for her self. She leaves her husband Petros and develops lesbian relationship with Pauline. She shares her views with Pauline and both of them enjoy each other’s company. Pauline is portrayed as a woman, like men, rides horses, drives fast and speaks her mind without any fear. She leaves her son with her family and joins college as Meridian in *Meridian*. She also encourages Susannah for her struggle. Susannah, like a womanist woman, lives a free and independent life.

The female characters, presented by Alice Walker in all her novels, have to struggle for their identity and also for the survival and wholeness of their communities. In *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* Alice Walker presents a black woman struggling for a universal goal along with her self-identity. The protagonist of the novel changes her name from Kate Nelson-Fir to Kate Talkingtree. This change is the result of her Buddhist meditation that she likes and enjoys, and the love for nature. At a certain point when the preacher at meditation talks about ‘….. the misguided notion of “hot” revolution, with guns and violence, attempted in Africa, Cuba and the Caribbean,’ (Alice Walker, 2005: 4) she becomes restless. She finds herself unable to meditate. She looks at her own life and recalls her past. She is a widely published writer and has gone through several unsuccessful marriages. The discomforts and pains she faces in her life make her upset. She also notices the aging of her body as one day her knees “creaked like unoiled door hinges” (Alice Walker, 2005: 11) and she find a “….wrenching pain in her hips, as her body sought to realign itself in patterns it had always known” (Alice Walker, 2005: 12) She thinks to initiate for reformation and struggle for her self.

Kate Talkingtree pays no heed towards her house. She does not care about the leak in the bathroom, the peeling paint over the fireplace or the kitchen door that does not close properly. She loses the inspiration to write and puts her books on fire and also burns several hundred dollars bills. She has experienced the burdens of her husband’s oppression and several marital failures. These experiences put her in action. She mentally prepares herself for her search and struggle for self and spirituality. As she dreams of a dry river, her friends suggest her to undertake a journey to the Colorado River as a spiritual pilgrimage. In the course of this journey she suffers of vomiting and other physical problems. With these illness and problems her body gets purified that allows an investigation of her inner self. Walker considers
Kate’s illness “As her body gave up the last of its bitter memories of her first marriage, she experienced a lightness that actually made it easier to remain seated the long hours necessary, in the boat.” (Alice Walker, 2005: 36) She gets much connected to the nature with the help of this journey in relation to her search for the spirituality. Yet, she takes this journey incomplete, therefore she takes a number of her friends on another sojourn down the Amazon river. This journey is aimed at the search for certain medicinal herbs in the nature called as *yage* or ‘Grandmother.’ This herb is believed to engender spiritual transformation and healing. As the time passes, she notices that her body does not respond to the medicinal herb. This unresponsive state of her body indicates that she has undergone spiritual renewal. She finds herself an inner peace that attracts others towards her. All of the participants start confessing their life stories to Kate and this intimate conversation establishes a spiritual unity among them. Kate understands that the human bonding is the basic medicine for the burdens of her painful past. It becomes obvious through the self discovery of all the characters that a person can find the release from his pains with the help of spirituality, relation to nature and involvement in the struggle for social and economic justice. All of them come to know that for the release from all the pains no other medicine is useful rather than the connectedness to society and ancestors. They also come to know that the nature has its power to heal all the diseases therefore the human beings should preserve the nature.

4.1.8. Black Artist

Alice Walker, as an African American, has a great love for her culture and art of her community. In all her novels she has presented black women characters as the protagonists. These women characters are presented with at least one art. She has described the arts, like quilt making, blues singing, collecting seashells, drawing, painting and dancing, in almost all her novels. With the help of these arts, Alice Walker has projected at least a black artist in her novels. The art occupies a prominent place in the life of black women as far as her leisure time is concerned or as a part of career. For example, Shug in *The Color Purple* is a blues singer, Zede and Carlotta in *The Temple of My Familiar*, are cape makers, Arveyda in the same novel is a rock start and Carlotta from the same novel becomes a musician. Alice Walker has presented at least a black artist in her each novel.
Tashi, the protagonist of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, though not in a worldly sense, is a painter. She is presented as a victim of female genital mutilation in Olinka tribe in Africa. She undergoes the initiation process for the reason of being a part of her Olinkan culture. Because of this process she suffers from various problems. She also suffers from some mental illness. She is taken to different psychiatrists for the treatment. When is taken to Switzerland for psychological treatment, Tashi is told by the Old Man to draw some paintings. She draws painting of a fighting cock. She also draws a painting of ‘a design called “crazy road,” a pattern of criss-crosses and dots that the women made with mud on the cotton cloth they wove in the village…’ (Alice Walker, 2008: 72) In one of the paintings, Tashi draws a foot, whether of man or woman she cannot tell. Though Tashi is not presented as a painter in the worldly sense, but painting, as an art, gets a place in the novel. These paintings, Tashi draws, are indicative of her psychological state and its reasons.

In the novel *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, Alice Walker has presented a Mundo art of pot making. The pots that Mundo women craft with a round perfection have the central place in Mundo community as a traditional art. The Mundo women make pots with different colours, such as red, black and white, which are used in decoration and after baking they turn gray. These pots are of different shapes also, some are small and some are so big that one can put one’s head in it. Mr. Senor Robinson’s wife Langley and younger daughter, Susannah learns pottery making with the Mundo women. Walker writes about Langley as, “she learned to dig the clay, clean it, wedge it, roll the long coils that formed the sides of each pot….” (Alice Walker, 1999: 17) Both Langley and Susannah get mastery of their craft and those pots prepared by them are used by the Mundo people to store their food and drinks. Along with the art of pottery the Mundo people have a tradition of folk songs. They gather on the occasion of some festivals and sing their folk songs. Magdalena, the elder daughter of Mr. Robinson, develops her interest in the Mundo songs and she enjoys it. She learns and enjoys a song of the Mundo people in their language, that is,

Por la lue, por la luz … by the
Light by the light …. (Alice Walker, 1999: 21)

This song is sung by Magdalena that is not allowed in the church. Yet she sings it very often. She learns it from her lover, Manuelito, a Mundo boy. When Magdalena
is visited by her sister, Susannah, Magdalena grieves on her lover’s death and tells Susannah that Manuelito dies singing his initiation song which he has taught her in the mountains. Magdalena hums it softly:

Anyone can see that the sky is naked
And if the sky is naked
Then the earth must be naked also.

(Alice Walker, 1999: 90)

She also tells Susannah that she used to sing this song all the time. In the novel Manuelito is portrayed as an artist who sings his tribal songs. About his singing habit, he says, “I will continue to sing, to live, on the other side. At least until my tasks are done.” (Alice Walker, 1998:95) After his death his soul meets the soul of Mr. Robinson, where he tells Mr. Robinson about their culture and folk songs and he teaches the Mundo song to Mr. Robinson in their afterlife. When Mr. Robinson tries to sing the song, he cannot sing properly. Manuelito tells him, “there is no right or wrong way to sing, Senor. To be really human is to fully understand this.” (Alice Walker, 1999:160) Thus Susannah, Langley, Magdalena and Mr. Robinson learn and practice at least an art. They also understand that the art has a great role to play in the life of human being.

In Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, Alice Walker has portrayed a number of black artists. Alice Walker has narrated a group of people named as Mahus. These people are difficult to identify as they are men who live their lives as women. Aunty Pearula is an older woman who teaches hula to other people in which she is accompanied by Aunty Alma. The hula is a kind of artistic performance performed at the parties. Aunty Pearula describes the Mahus people to Yolo, lover of Kate. He is interested in it as he is also an artist. He is a major character in the novel, and is a painter. He is presented as an independent and self sufficient artist. But his art does not get a proper expression in the novel. Other black artists are shaman Armando and his assistant shaman Cosmi. Armando has a beautiful singing voice and Cosmi accompanies Armando with his music when he sings. Armando’s singing spiritually empowers the participants of the journey. With these black artists in the novel, Alice Walker emphasizes the multidimensional quality of life. They love dance, music and struggle as the womanist characters.
4.1.9. **Survival and Wholeness**

American social structure is a fragmented one therefore there is a fragmentation in the self of Americans and African Americans. Alice Walker proposes this fragmented self of African Americans with the help of her novels. In these novels she has presented black women characters those strive and struggle in the search of their self, survival and wholeness of their community. In the novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the protagonist, Tashi represents a colonised community in Africa. She belongs to the Olinka community in which men are aggressive and women are passive as well as oppressed by the social norms. The black women, mothers and grandmothers, are “creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy even of hope…they become more than ‘sexual objects,’ more even than mere women.” (Alice Walker, 1983: 232) In such oppressive forces the survival becomes a problem for women. In order to survive, the women have to keep on fighting against their own negative images. By proposing such women characters, like Tashi, Walker tries to restore the wholeness of fragmented, mutilated and victimized society. Tashi, a tribal girl, undergoes the ritual of female mutilation to oppose the missionary that forces the natives to change their traditional ways. She protests against the colonisation of her native land by the whites by scarring her body according to Olinkan practice. The ritual of female genital mutilation is a way of man to control the female body and sexuality under the name of culture. In order to resist the colonial powers, Tashi, is “wanting the oppression because she recognized it as the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinkan tradition.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 63) She aims at safeguarding her culture and tradition from being destroyed by the white colonialists. First of all, the missionaries try to make the villagers aware of the harmful effects of genital mutilation, the villagers resist this cultural imperialism by reinforcing the traditional practice of genital mutilation. Tashi and other many victims of genital mutilation do not understand their leaders’ way of using tradition as a political tool to force the people to act against the colonisers. This shows that the women are oppressed by the name of tradition. This traditional practice is a form of oppression and exploitation that women suffer from at the hands of men. All the types of oppressions and exploitations result in silencing the victims. Tashi is annoyed at the passive
submission of women to death and wonders whether it is the assigned role of the African women to suffer, to die and don’t know the reason.

Tashi understands on her own that the survival and wholeness is a part of rebellion against the oppressive forces. She, first of all, returns to Africa and meets M’Lissa, the tsunga or circumciser. She takes revenge upon M’Lissa for circumcising thousands of girls. She kills her at M’bele camp by putting pillow over her. For Tashi the resistance is the secret of joy. She thinks that all the oppressed women may resist every sort of humiliation and oppression for their survival. Before she is executed for M’Lissa’s murder, Tashi says, “I have the uncanny feeling that, just at the end of my life, I am beginning to reinhibit completely the body I long ago left.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 108-09) Though Tashi cannot survive, she is happy and joyful at the time of her execution. Her death represents her reunion with her own self. Her struggle and resistance is for the whole society in which the ritual practices, like female genital mutilation, are prevalent. This resistance will be helpful to the Africans, African Americans, all other people worldwide and their descendants for their survival. Tashi becomes a martyr and a source of strength for other women against inhuman practice of genital mutilation.

Alice Walker has presented Tashi, in Possessing the Secret of Joy, who cannot survive but paves a way for the survival of another women in future. Walker’s memorable survivors are Ruth in The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Celie in The Color Purple and Susannah in By the Light of My Father’s Smile. Alice Walker presents the issues of woman’s sexuality and father-daughter relationships in By the Light of My Father’s Smile. Susannah’s struggle and survival are presented in the novel by the author. Mr. Senor Robinson, the father of Susannah and Magdalena, while working as an anthropologist becomes a priest. He finds his daughter, Magdalena’s, curiosity about a Mundo boy disgusting. He beats her mercilessly and destroys all the familiar bonds. Magdalena restores herself to self abuse by excessive eating and drinking till her death. Susannah rejects her father’s love and keeps herself away from him because of his brutal treatment to both his girls. She revolts against the attitude of her father and starts developing different relationships with certain people. First of all, she gets married to a Greek man, Patros. She also comes in contact with Pauline and establishes lesbian relationship with her. All these acts of Susannah are indicative of her efforts for survival. After the death of Magdalena,
Susannah finds a space for her expression and her search for self. Walker writes, “Susannah felt herself complete the process of becoming an adult. She was grown up. She could handle her own life.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 171) This change in Susannah takes place because she learns about the real nature and love of Magdalena from her letter. She forgives her sister and father and forgets her agony filled past for the survival. She, after being married to Petros, establishes her relations with Pauline. She finds her own ways of life to enjoy and survives after all the upheavals. Pauline and Irene are also oppressed women like Susannah and Magdalena presented in the novel. These women have to fight in the society against the sexism and gender issue. Pauline, Susannah’s lover, is a woman whose childhood is ruined by violent father, like Magdalena or Maggie. At the age of sixteen she is impregnated by Winston, but later on he never returns to her. She meets Gena, a white woman, and develops a lesbian relationship with her. But she does not get connected to her for a long time. She comes in contact with Susannah and enjoys her lesbian relationship with her for long time.

Irene, who is a product of the rape of her mother, is a dwarf girl given to the church after her mother’s death. She is denied by the society as she is supposed to be God’s punishment for the sin of her mother. No one from the society speaks to her. She feels herself different from the rest of the world. She pays no heed towards the people treating her in an indifferent way. She fights for the survival by embroidering tablecloths that can be sold to the tourists who visit the place. She shows a rare type of courage to fight against all odds in her life. She believes that there is a cure to each sickness. Susannah praises her for her love for fight. She expresses her views about Irene as, “It is her intelligence, her will, it is also her courage. She has managed to live by herself with herself, for two thirds of a century without losing her mind.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 175) She faces all odds silently for the survival, and finally gets all her father’s fortune to enjoy and visits different territories of the world.

Alice Walker has portrayed different women from different communities and societies in her novels. They like to struggle for their own identities as well as to strive to survive in oppressive patriarchies. Alice Walker believes that “….the search for wholeness is analysed as a source of creativity and agency and is linked to the search for freedom.” (Basma Majid, 2013: 92) In the novels of Alice Walker the search for wholeness and survival is dependent of the healing with the help of
reconciliation of the past and the present as well as spirituality. Such type of reconciliation of the past and present is noticed in *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*. It is a personal spiritual journey of Kate Talkingtree that results in individual wholeness.

Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, marries several times in her life. She is also a well published writer, who tries her hand on different subjects like human soul and the natural world. She, like Alice Walker’s other women, suffers from sexism, oppression and exploitation in her life. Therefore, she wants to search for the new meaning of the life. It is the case that African American self functions as a colonised other in the Western nations. This self is trapped between the material and spiritual world. In this situation it becomes important to seek a balance of the self to become a whole. Kate decides to bridge the gap between the spirituality and contemporary African American Culture. She gets tired of her past and materialistic world. She also notices the effects of her age upon her physique. Gerri Bates writes about Kate’s desire for search as,

> This unforgettable woman of deep truth, honesty, and sensitivity chronicles from a woman’s perspective the fears and weaknesses and even strengths involved in confronting advancing age and a midlife crisis.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 157)

Walker’s masterful depiction of Kate’s character is a realistic portrayal of a woman in search of the deepest truth of the self and meaning of the life. For this search she sets for a journey down the Colorado and Amazon rivers after she burns several thousand dollars bills, destroying her books and leaving her lover, Yolo. With the help of these journeys she tries to re-explore her past and future and her relation to the real world.

Kate is accompanied by different women, men and Shamans with same objectives, on her travels,. Kate follows the old traditions as well as New Age philosophy in her life. She practices meditation, ancestor worships, medicinal herbs and plants and ecological responsibilities to understand her duty towards the universe. She undergoes the purification of her hidden memories, repressed emotions and her marital unevenness in her first journey. In her second journey she and her companions transform themselves into a new, clean and balanced persons, different from the past. This is a spiritual journey towards the self development of all the participants.
presented in the novel. Kate discovers the medicinal and aesthetic quality of nature and significance of human bonds. She also comes to know the power of the new world, institutionalised religion and the evils of violence. All her companions express their past experiences of racism, sexism and classism in their respective societies. All of them feel relieved and the complete persons after these expressions. Kate, finally, becomes a whole person who understands the significance of human bonds and love for all as a womanist. She finally returns home and meets her lover, Yolo. Though She has been married several times in life, now she decides to unite with her lover forever. She experiences her inner peace and becomes an advocate of reconciliation between black and white communities. By means of Kate, Walker presents her womanist character that strives for female wholeness and survival with the help of love, spirituality and human bonds.

4.1.10. Motherhood: Womanist Maternity

Alice Walker has presented black women as protagonists of almost all her novels. Maximum protagonists are taught and guided by their mothers in their oppressed routines. Maximum protagonists have to play the roles of mothers in the course of the novel or they are guided by their mothers. These mothers have womanist matters in their thoughts and behaviours. They teach their daughters and sons. In the novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy, Tashi’s mother, Catherine whose African name is Nafa, an Olinkan woman, is converted to Christianity. She makes her younger daughter, Dura, face the cultural initiation process by getting circumcised. In this process Dura dies of excessive bleeding and Catherine is affected much, but she does not show any sign of grief. She is presented as a strong and working woman for her daughters. She works in the field Tashi speaks about her mother’s hard work as, “I have never seen anyone work as hard as my mother, or pull her share of the work with a more resigned dignity.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 16) Tashi shows a great concern for her mother. Her mother loses her younger daughter but she never shows it on her face. She remains much busy with her work for her daughter Tashi. When Tashi asks her mother why she works very hard, her mother says, “Tashi, ….. it is only hard work that fills the emptiness.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 16) Catherine’s view is indicative of her womanism as she loves to struggle for the self and others. This can be taken to be her womanist maternity.
Tashi is mother of Benny and womanist mother of all the girls who have undergone the process of circumcision. She gives birth to a son, Benny, who is mentally retarded right from his birth. He faces some problems in remembering and is not successful in schooling. Though he is mentally retarded, she succeeds in creating love for her in his mind. Therefore, Carmen Gillespie writes about Benny as, “Even as a middle aged man, Benny likes to cuddle with his mother, …” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 132) Tashi, in the beginning, hates her stepson Pierre, son of Tashi’s husband Adam and his French lover, Lisette. But after Pierre has a good relationship with Benny, Tashi accepts him as her own son and respects him. After the death of Pierre’s mother, Lisette, he requests Tashi to let him live with them and Tashi accepts it. Though Tashi never meets Lisette, they have a good communication with each other with the help of their letters. Lisette is also presented as a mother with a son, Pierre. She has a great love for her son. She makes him study and sends him to Harvard to get the best education. It is the effort of Lisette that Pierre is a highly educated person. As she suffers from stomach cancer, she knows that she has to die one day. She wants that before her death Pierre must be accepted by Tashi as her son. She writes a letters to Tashi expressing her hope that Tashi may accept and allow Pierre to live with her. This will of Lisette indicates that she is a mother with womanist views towards her son. Both Tashi and Lisette express their womanist maternity.

In By the Light of My Father’s Smile, Walker has presented a single black woman, Langley Robinson, as mother of Susannah and Magdalena. She has her own womanist views towards her daughters. When her husband, Mr. Robinson, complaints against their daughter’s behaviour, Langley takes it with an ease. Mr. Robinson expresses Langley’s reaction as, “My wife did not see this as a problem. Leave the child alone, children are curious!... She (Magdalena) is curious, my sweet daughter….” (Alice Walker, 1999: 15) Langley believes in the freedom of her children. She loves her daughters more than Mr. Robinson loves them. When Mr. Robinson beats Magdalena for being involved in sexual relationship with Manuelito, Langley and Susannah watch the scene from the keyhole of the door. Langley becomes furious and tries to be away from him for long time. She becomes warm to Magdalena and cool to her husband. She forces her husband to sleep separately from her. While talking about his behaviour she recalls their past and says, “We were beaten in slavery!” (Alice Walker, 1998: 31) This treatment given to her husband
shows womanist maternity of Langley. Though Langley has great love for her daughters, she also has a passionate and deep love and sexual bond with her husband throughout her life. She has motherly love for her daughters like ‘a woman loves other woman’ as a womanist. She has a sexual love for her husband, Mr. Robinson, like a womanist loves man sexually or non sexually.

The mothers discussed in Possessing the Secret of Joy and By the Light of My Father’s smile are not that complete womanist mothers as are discussed in The Third Life of Grange Copeland and The Color Purple. Alice Walker has presented Tashi, Lisette and Langley as major characters with motherly duties. In the novel, Now Is The Time to Open Your Heart, Walker does not present such type of mother. Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of the novel, has two sons, Henry and Charles. Henry works in United States Space Programme and Charles is a musician. She pays no attention towards her children as much as needed. Therefore she cannot be discussed as a womanist mother as Langley and Lisette.

4.2. Summary

African American men and women experience a harsh reality of racial segregation or racism, oppression and sexism. All these realities are exposed by Alice Walker in her novels. As a womanist thinker, she has projected black women as her protagonist. Along with the issues of racism, sexism, oppression and violence she has discussed the subjects of female genital cutting or circumcision and woman sexuality in her recent novels. In Possessing the Secret of Joy, she attacks an in-human practice of clitoridectomy or female circumcision in different African countries. In her another novel, By the Light of My Father’s Smile, she has expressed her views regarding woman sexuality, father-daughter relationship and love. The woman characters projected in the novel have their womanist views those get expression in the novel. In her recent novel, Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, Walker has presented some unusual issues such as cleansing and meditation, inner peace of human beings and human relationships. All these novels have helped Alice Walker to put forth her views with the help of black women as her protagonists.

Possessing the Secret of Joy is a story of a African girl, Tashi, from Olinka community who undergoes the female genital circumcision. In the beginning Adam and Olivia come to Olinka as the missionaries. Tashi’s mother, Nafa or Catherine,
gets converted to Christianity and Tashi is saved from the process of genital cutting. But prior to it her sister, Dura, dies of the excessive bleeding at the time of process. Tashi gets married to Adam and comes to America. As she adheres to her Olinka culture, goes back to Africa and gets circumcised. This process creates a numerous problems in her marital life. When she comes to United States with a new identity as Evelyn Johnson, suffers from mental illness. She starts learning about the oppression of women in different regions of country and even in her own Olinka community. The initiation or circumcision process has destroyed Tashi physically and emotionally. She comes to know that millions of women are physically and sexually tortured in African and Eastern countries. The patriarchy controls the women’s sexuality with the help of cultural practices like scaring and circumcision. Tashi gives birth to a mentally retarded baby, Benny, because of her initiation process. She also knows that the reason behind her sister, Dura’s death is the initiation process. This process is performed by a woman from the same community. She uses the crude instruments under unsanitary conditions for the process. They cause infections, excessive bleeding, chronic pains and eventually the death of the girl. Tashi also faces different problems such as frightening dreams and restlessness. The process of circumcision results in Tashi’s madness and she is taken to different psychiatrists for the treatment.

Tashi understands that there issues of sexism even in small territories of African countries. She becomes furious towards M’Lissa, the tsunga, who is responsible for sufferings of millions of girls. She decides to take revenge upon M’Lissa and comes to meet her. She knows from Martha Mbati, a young black girl who looks after M’Lissa, that the visitors of M’Lissa are “Women with certain age. Women with daughters, frightened women, often, she reassures them.” (Alice Walker, 2008: 151) The practice of circumcision and M’Lissa have a great connection that has destroyed the lives of millions of women. Tashi thinks that M’Lissa is to be killed so that it may stop the practice and will save the future victims of the process. Tashi kills M’Lissa as a part of her struggle for her community and survival of her people, girls and women. Because of this offence Olinka government executes Tashi. Before her death Tashi, as a womanist woman, gives a message to the world that the resistance to such types of traditions is the secret of joy. Tashi shows her universalist attitude with her act. Alice Walker uses Tashi as her mouth piece in
her fight against inhuman cultural practices, AIDS and in the preservation of the beauty of universe. In the novel Walker has stressed the necessity of taking the world and its people as a whole. In relation to Tashi’s struggle C. V. Venkatsubramanian rightly states as, “By her death, she has awakened the dead feelings in the minds of so many people who were indifferent to the sufferings of the female children.” (Venkatasubramanian, 1994: 273) Though Tashi cannot survive, she has prepared a way for the survival of future generations with wholeness.

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile* deals with the theme of father-daughter relationship and the women sexuality. Alice Walker does not discuss her usual issues of racism, oppression and sexism, but a universal issue of women sexuality. The Robinsons come to a Mundo village for the anthropological study of the Mundo community in Mexico. For the reason of financial support they disguise as missionary and finally the head of the family, Mr. Senor Robinson becomes a priest and follows a strict Christianity. Both of his daughters, Magdalena and Susanna, get mixed with the Mundo boys. Mr. Robinson worries about his daughter’s behaviour and their relations with the Mundo people. These views of Mr. Robinson ruins his whole family and the members get separated from each other. He exercises his dominance in the church, society and in his house also. His religion related oppression affects his elder daughter, Magdalena, very heavily. When she is beaten by her father brutally and mercilessly for enjoying sexual relationship with Manuelito, she distances from him forever. Her younger sister, Susannah, and mother, Langley, get disturbed by this treatment. Mr. Robinson has an objection on calling her Mad Dog by the Mundo people. He expresses his authority and superiority, “…. She cannot be called Mad Dog, .......She is the daughter of a minister.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 19) His daughters as well as his wife keep them away from him. They become aware of the self deceitful hypocrisy of the Western world. Magdalena and Susannah do not forgive their father and in turn he also does not decide to do so. He dies without any emotional correction. Therefore, the broken relations remain broken for a long time.

Langley, Magdalena and Susannah mixes up with the Mundo people and appreciate their culture, language, songs, philosophy and way of life. Langley and Susannah learn the Mundo art of pottery and prepare a number of pots those are used by the people to store their food and drinks. They also recognise the purity or sacredness of women according to the Mundo philosophy. The Mundo reject
oppressive Western patriarchy. Walker writes as, “They had never understood how woman could be considered evil... they considered her the mother of corn.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 81) They regard women as carriers of life and birthing. They respect female body and women culture. This philosophy is suggestive of womanist view of the Mundo people. Magdalena finds interest in the Mundo culture, their folk songs and their way of life. She hums certain songs sung by the Mundo boy, Manuelito, who teaches her these songs. He also teaches these songs to her father, Mr. Robinson, in his afterlife. This shows that the art has a prominent place in the Mundo community. This art is their cultural heritage. In the same way they consider love an inseparable aspect of their life. They consider love as an assertion of the life force of women, of their creative energy and knowledge. These cultural aspects are not understood by Mr. Robinson in his lifetime, therefore the family is distracted. He does not take her daughters love in a humanist way. Therefore, Magdalena, his elder daughter takes this humiliation seriously and behaves in a self-distractive way to meet her doom. His younger daughter, Susannah also hates her father but can do nothing in her lifetime. After her father’s death she gets engaged in sexual relations with various people. She marries a Greek man, Petros and enjoys a married life for a short period. After that she establishes lesbian relations with Pauline. This behaviour of Susannah is womanist, as Alice Walker explains a woman loves other woman sexually or non-sexually. Both the daughters struggle for reconciliation with their father. They forgive their father and their father also forgives them but in his afterlife. This forgiveness is also suggestive of womanism.

In this novel Walker depicts a story of love and sexual healing of the soul. She explores the ways in which a denied sexuality of a woman leads to the loss of self. The daughters struggle for their self and reconciliation with the help of their womanist ways of life. Walker offers the womanist love as an alternative to oppressive patriarchy. This patriarchy distorts interpersonal and intra-familiar relationships. But the womanist love calls for concern with personal and global peace. The Mundo with their womanist ways of life, recognise the chastity of all people, gender, race and religion. On the basis of this recognition they survive with wholeness.

In *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, Alice Walker presents her own philosophy and spirituality. She projects a character of Kate Talkingtree to illuminate
her philosophical and spiritual stances. The protagonist of the novel gets burdened with her past and the recent religiosity. She understands a spiritual journey for her individual wholeness. She gives up all the worldly things, such as money, her book as well as her lover, Yolo, and decides to re-explore her past and future. The behaviour of Kate is courageous and wilful, indicative of her womanism. She encounters lovers, meets Shamans and other natural aspects in her different journeys. She is accompanied by nine women in the journey down the Colorado. All these women discuss the “topics that only women find interesting …. to fear or not to fear old age, to dye or not to dye hair, to straighten or not to straighten hair, plastic surgery, liposuction, bisexuality and men’s anatomy.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 170) All the women help Kate to search for the medicinal plants, in her another journey to the Amazon rain forest. Kate takes two men and five women medicine seekers with her. They tell their own past stories in the journey. Those stories are related to racism, oppression, lesbian love, gender and sexism of which each one is the victim. All of them search for the self and the meaning of life. While travelling down the Colorado, Kate and her group face the rivers elevated rapids and challenges of the river. These challenges represent the uneasiness of the lives of all the participants. Kate suffers from illness at the time and this illness makes her better than before. She understands the internal and external aspects of life. Kate’s body get cleansed, emptying her inner self from the past burdens of domestic abuse and unwanted past events. Though she returns home from the journey, she feels it fruitless and incomplete. Therefore she sets for another search in the Amazon rain forest. She aims at the searching for a medicinal herb, called as Grandmother yage, which is used to cleanse the physical body to contact with the spirit of origins. In this journey Kate develops proper understanding of human kind and the needs of universe for survival. These journeys teach Kate that the betterment of human kind and the survival whole need only human connectedness, love for nature and relations with ancestors. She also understands that no medicine other than the connectedness is useful for the survival.

Alice Walker has discussed the essence of New Age Spirituality in this novel. It is “referred to as mind-body-spirit phenomenon, self spirituality, or new spirituality.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 172) Kate uses meditation as a means to understand her inner world. Her last meditative way is her journey with a group of women and some men. All of the participants, from different regions, with different races and
different experiences, are gathered with same objectives. The women, gathered for Kate, indicate that they love the women’s culture like womanists. Some of the participants are artists, as the art is an inseparable aspect of black community. For example, Armando Juarez, a spirit leader and shaman, sings healing songs called as *icaros*. He is helped by his apprentice shaman, Cosmi, with his music when Armando sings. The presentation of this singing and music makes it clear that the characters are womanist. Walker also has presented the characters like Aunty Alma and Aunty Pearula who are *Mahus*. They teach *hula*, a tribal art, to the people. All the participants of these journeys, finally, understand that they need not a medicine but ancestral relations, personal relations and love for nature for the survival and wholeness. Through the novel, Alice Walker has presented her affinity for nature. She has used the setup of nature everywhere in the novel. The novel remains a womanist document that would carry Alice Walker’s views forward, generation to generation.

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