Chapter V

Conclusion
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5.0. Introduction
5.1. Objectives and Methodology of the Research
5.2. Concept of Womanism
5.3. Present Status of Womanism
5.4. Communication of Womanism by Alice Walker
5.5. Social Significance of Womanism
5.6. Pedagogical and Social Significance of the Study
5.7. Significance of the Study regarding further Research
5.8. Summary

Works Cited
Chapter V
Conclusion

5.0. Introduction

The chapter deals with the observations made in the previous chapters. It is an account of discussion of feminism, womanism and discourse of womanism. It discusses the different shades of womanism and its status in the novels of Alice Walker. It also presents a general estimate of Alice Walker as a womanist writer and the discourse of womanism in her novels. It explains how Alice Walker has communicated her own views of womanism in her novels. The pedagogical and social significance of the research is also discussed in the chapter. It also explains whether this research and its observations are helpful to change the views of society regarding women. It also states the significance of this research work in relation to further study of the novels of Alice Walker.

5.1. Objectives and Methodology of the Research

Alice Walker an African American activist, writer, essayist, poet and novelist is a great contributor to the African American literature. She has a number of essays, stories, poems and novels to her credit. She is the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for the novel. She has coined and proposed the concept of womanism as a variant for feminism to take into account the issues of black women. She has presented her views about black women in all her novels. The present study is about Alice Walker’s ideology of womanism presented in her novels. While dealing with the concept of womanism, the world of women that is presented in her novels, is discussed. The present discussion helps to differentiate womanism from feminism. As feminism aims at the rights of white women, womanism considers universality, survival and wholeness, not only of black women, but of entire black community. Alice Walker has presented women as the protagonists of almost all the novels. All these protagonists are presented with the womanist views that make Alice Walker a womanist writer. The present study is a discussion of the presentation of African American women in the novels of Alice Walker. This presentation makes it clear that the women portrayed in the novels are suffering from racial and gender oppression in American society. Though these women are oppressed by racism and
sexism, they have played a great role in the American culture and history. While discussing these women in her novels, Alice Walker has presented her universalist attitude and ideology of womanism.

The novels of Alice Walker are studied with the help of methods of description and analysis. The present study is a descriptive and analytical research based on the creative writing – novels – of Alice Walker. These novels and other secondary writings, such as critical books, articles, papers and research dissertations are used for analytical study. Thus the textual method of study has been adopted for the analysis of the novels of Alice Walker in relation to discourse of womanism.

5.2. Concept of Womanism

The history of African American people is the history of slavery. In this community black women are merely workers who have to take care of their homes and families, work in cotton fields, clean the homes of white people and look after the children of white people. They have been the victims of sexism, racism and classism well into the twentieth century. White women start their freedom movement by the name of feminist movement. It is the movement by the White women only for their cause. As white women are not the victims of racism and classism, they do not include black women in the feminist movement. Therefore black women need their own movement that would describe their issues and cause. Gladys Willis has stated about the scope of the concept as,

Alice Walker, the Black American Pulitzer Prize winner, coined the term ‘womanist’ in her book entitled *In Search of our mothers’ Gardens*. Many Black women, including Black women in Christian ministry, have adopted the term to describe themselves.

(Gladys Willis, 2006:16)

In this book Alice Walker gives a fourfold definition of the term womanist to explain the concept of womanism.

Black women are both black by community and women by gender, therefore they are doubly marginalised. They have to face the tortures for being women as well as being black. They are victims of sexism, racism and classism in America. Many of the black female writers have pointed that the black women are oppressed, “not only from outside but also from within that same community.” (Elisabeth Torfs, 2008:18)
They are the victims of domestic violence also. In this situation different organisations fight for white women but black women are neglected. Therefore, Alice Walker has proposed her ideology of womanism. For her, womanism is the feminism of colour. The term womanist is derived from the black colloquial word ‘womanish,’ means like a grown up woman. It also suggests that womanists, sometimes, behave with a strong determination and motivation. They are outrageous, audacious, courageous and wilful as they can do certain things which are not easy for a woman. They also desire to know more than is considered good and acceptable for them. They have a mature and grown attitude and are responsible, in charge and serious regarding the issues of the black women. In the next expression Alice Walker defines the term that womanists love other women and men sexually or/and nonsexually. They also love the culture of women, their emotional life and their strength. By this expression she has referred to lesbian relationship, this is the most striking difference between white feminism and womanism. In the definition the most important view regarding womanist is they are committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. It indicates that the womanists are universalist as the women and men of different race and colour coexist like different types of flowers in a garden and maintain their culture. This is Walker’s philosophy that is useful not only for black women but for the whole of mankind. Along with this, she gives a list of things those womanists love. In this list she includes music and dance, love, food, roundness, the moon and spirit, womanists also love struggle, the folk and themselves. Finally, Alice Walker says that the womanist is comparatively equal to feminist as the purple colour is to lavender colour. The feminists strive for the issues of white women and womanists strive for entire people. This means that both of them, womanist and feminist, have things in common but there is an undesirable difference between them. Alice Walker calls womanist ‘a black feminist or feminist of colour.’ This statement indicates the difference between feminist and womanist. The definition of the concept draws attention of the readers to the importance of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual wholeness of women. Alice Walker proposes the ideology of womanism to stress the need to create a universal community where everyone is encouraged to survive and survive whole. Womanist commits to “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” (Alice Walker, 1983: xi) Among these explanations the universalist thought gives a more strength to the ideology of womanism.
5.3. Present Status of Womanism

Womanism has been presented as an alternative for feminism. It supports inclusiveness of entire people, male and female, dealing with race, class and gender. It has given a particular framework for black women in relation to their struggle against social, political and economic injustice. The white women liberation movement excludes the coloured women, therefore they need a tool of their own to present their issues and to struggle for their rights. Alice Walker writes, “…the reason for it was the desire of the white feminist to avoid assuming responsibility for the lives of coloured women and their children so they denied them the rights they had.” (Alice Walker, 1983:374) The white feminist critics ignore the work of coloured women. Therefore, Alice Walker proposes the ideology of womanism that provides a framework for the empowerment of coloured women all over the world. The focus of womanism is on political activities and coloured women’s struggle against racism, sexism and classism.

Black women have been placed at the centre by womanism. It excludes white women from its span, therefore it has been criticised by multicultural feminists. Walker gets influenced by this view of white women, therefore she changes the original standpoint of it and allows all women in it. Regarding this change Izgarjan and Markov write,

One of the reasons this change of opinion was the fact that under the constant criticism of colored women, some of the white feminists changed their stance and recognized the need to incorporate different voices and discourse into feminism and to avoid divisions along the lines of race and class.

(Izgarjan and Morkov, 2013: 312)

It mean that the presentation of issues of all women has become the core of womanism at present. It also deals with the struggles of women against post colonialism, ethnic and tribal divisions and religious patriarchy worldwide. For example, Alice Walker has presented the issue of female genital mutilation in Possessing the Secret of Joy. Various forms of oppression of black male and female are expressed in Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart. It also has focused on the explanation of the spiritual and religious aspects of related community. This spiritual side of womanism is developed in The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar and By the Light of My Father’s Smile by Alice Walker. Recently, womanism has
integrated the aspects of eco-feminism that has wholeness, ecology and nature preservation at its core. This type of eco-feminism is traced in *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*. Spirituality has also gained a significance into womanist theology in the first decade of 21st century. Because of its spiritual and religious aspects, the impact of womanism has crossed the boundaries of the United States. Izgarjan and Markov have stated as,

A number of black womanist theologians and scholars of religions, such as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Katie Genevá Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Emile Maureen Townes and Marcia Y. Raggs–bring womanist perspectives to bear on their Church, cannon formation, social equality, race, gender, class and social justice.

(Izgarjan and Markov, 2013: 314)

Many women scholars and critics use womanism as an analytical tool for the communication of female experiences in a better way in the modern times.

5.4. Communication of Womanism by Alice Walker

Alice Walker’s definition of womanism, given in her *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, has a fine correlation with her characterisation in her novels. Her novels are most illustrative of her ideology of womanism. The women characters, presented in her novels, have their abusive relations with men. The women characters struggle for their self-love, their community, they love their own culture, love men and women sexually or non-sexually, they behave in a audacious, outrageous, courageous and irresponsible or wilful way. They are universalist by nature. They also love food, art and human relations or human interrelationship. They are committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Walker has also expressed that the lesbianism or bisexuality is a characteristic of the womanist. She has communicated all these aspects of womanism in her novels. Yet, all these aspects are not noticed at a time in any single novel. It is the case that each novel exhibits some of the aspects of womanism proposed by Alice Walker.

The Copelands suffer from the effects of racism, poverty and classism in the novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. In the novel, the women characters - Margaret, Mem and Ruth - are women abused by their men. Margaret is victimised wife as her husband, Grange, abuses her and treats her as he wishes. She gets tired of
the treatment and one day beds down with a land owner, Shipley and begets a baby from him. This behaviour of Margaret is indicative of a womanist behaviour. She dares to do whatever she wants as a wilful woman. In this relation Gladys Wills writes, “Margaret realizes that she is a victim of her husband’s mistreatment which is why she sleeps with Shipley. …This is the closest that Margaret comes to being an independent thinker.” (Gladys Willis, 2006: 23) Yet, she cannot be called an ideal womanist because in the end she cannot live with her choice and commits suicide. Though she tries to struggle for self, she cannot survive. In the same way Mem, Brownfield’s wife, is also presented as a victimised character. She is abused by her husband, Brownfield, and treated as a “nigger and whore…” (Alice Walker, 1988: 79) She declares her womanhood courageously by announcing that she has to move to another house with her daughters without her husband, Brownfield’s permission. Brownfield opposes the idea, therefore she becomes furious and pulls a gun on Brownfield and threatens to blow off his balls. She takes the charge of her household and makes her own rules to be followed by Brownfield, if he wants to live with her. Though she takes hold of her household, she falls short for the womanist ideals. Due to her pregnancy reasons she follows Brownfield’s rules. He uses his patriarchal powers against her and shots her dead. Though her behaviour is womanist, like Margaret, she also cannot survive.

In *Meridian* Alice Walker presents the journey of a physically and psychologically abused black girl, Meridian Hill. She is presented as a womanist character in the novel. She is also presented as a female with conflicts with external impediments as well as with herself. She suffers from an early marriage and divorce. As a womanist woman she gives up her child and husband for the reason of education. She attends college and also participates in the Civil Rights movements. This can be considered as the first stage of her journey towards wholeness. She struggles for herself and her community. She dedicates her life to the Civil Rights movement and gets involved with the voter education campaign. In these activities she struggles for the sense of the self. She is presented as a strong woman to overcome the loss of her husband, child and her lover, Truman Held. This strength of Meridian is indicative of her courageous nature. She survives as an individual aiming at her freedom and ability to make her own choices. She participates in the Civil Rights movement and makes her mind to die for it. She chooses to live among her
people in the South like a servant and a saint. She is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people of her community. She takes interest in community matters. Dennis Tembo rightly states about Meridian’s struggle and sacrifice for her community as,

Meridian is selfless in her services to her community. She works very hard but her bravery and determination are especially prominent…. at the start of the novel Meridian is mostly a broken and damaged individual, mourning about the various losses that she experiences, in the end she emerges as a whole individual. Her commitment to community service has helped her overcome the love that her mother has deprived her. The struggle has given her the much needed wisdom that she needs to survive and regain her lost identity.

(Dennis Tembo, 2009: 115)

She becomes a fully grown human being with a proper sense of self. She becomes responsible, leader, in charge and serious as a womanist. This only results because of her forgiveness. She forgives her mother, her husband and her lover for their treatment. In the end, she understands her outer world better than the past. She, finally, achieves a spiritual release and transformation.

_The Color Purple_ is a story of the emergence of an uneducated and abused black girl, Celie, as an independent creative and self-sufficient business woman. She is an ideal example of the womanist, defined by Alice Walker in _In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens_ (1983). She is really an outrageous, audacious and courageous woman who freely gets engaged in wilful behaviour. The story of Celie is presented by Alice Walker with the help of a triangular relationship between Celie, Albert and Shug. In the beginning, Celie is a victim of incest, as her stepfather keeps sexual relationship with her against her will. From this forced union babies are born. After this sexual use she is forced to marry to Albert or Mr.—, a married man with a number of children. She gets a bad treatment in the house of Albert. After Shug enters the house of Celie and Albert, the condition of Celie starts changing. Shug, a blues singer and a keep of Albert, supports Celie and both of them develop lesbian relationship. This relationship is indicative of the womanist idea as Alice Walker explains the womanist loves woman sexually or nonsexually. She is also supported by Sophia, her step-son’s wife. Both of the women, Shug and Sophia, make Celie a fighter. This behaviour of Shug and Sophia is indicative of their womanist nature. Alice Walker has presented her womanist idea with the help of these women.
characters. Because of this mental and moral support of Shug and Sophia, Celie becomes courageous. Gladys Willis writes in this relation, “Now, one has to admit that this behaviour of Celie is rather ‘audacious, outrageous and courageous’ – because her behaviour goes against the norm.” (Gladys Wills, 2006: 29) She does not care for the social norms and keeps sexual relations with Shug.

Alice Walker’s second definition of womanist comes into focus when Celie expresses her feelings for Shug without any shame. She says that she enjoys sex with Shug and this is the first sign of her boldness and willingness to go against the social rules or norms. Celie’s feelings for Shug become bolder and she wants Shug’s company. The triangular relationship between Albert, Celie and Shug, day by day develops into more of a relationship between Celie and Shug. She takes Shug for the love that she never gets from a man. This lesbian relationship makes Celie bold and courageous. She changes herself from a self-effacing child like woman in the beginning into a self-sufficient, fighting and a serious woman. Alice Walker presents Celie as a womanist character who takes charge of her life that cannot be controlled by the norms of society. She leaves her husband and accompanies Shug to Memphis for her own business against her husband’s will. She grows into an autonomous womanist lady and relies on her self-will. Her frame of thought is changed and she becomes much bold to renounce her husband and the God also. While talking about this development of Celie, Gladys Willis writes,

This frame of thought provides the platform for Celie to be brought around to a new frame of thought which will lead her to becoming the autonomous Black woman that Alice Walker promotes in her original definition of the womanist and in her works of fiction.

(Gladys Willis, 2006: 37)

Celie becomes a woman who gets freed from the ties that bind her to a certain social and religious limitations. Finally, she becomes an independent woman who takes the charge of her own life and struggle for her children, husband, family and community. Thus, Celie becomes a complete version of womanist that Alice Walker promotes. She is a better example of womanist than Margaret, Mem and Meridian in The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian. Margaret, Mem and Meridian have paved the way for Celie towards the wholeness. These novels present Alice Walker’s
conceptualisation of a character with some traits of womanist. This conceptualisation reaches its maturation with Celie, the protagonist of *The Color Purple*.

*The Temple of My Familiar* is discussed with reference to Alice Walker’s concept of womanism. The novel is also discussed as a theoretical writing on womanism. Though this novel does not retrieve all the aspects of Alice Walker’s fourfold definition of womanism, it confirms the most eye-catching and most important features of Walker’s womanism. She presents in her definition of the concept that a womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people. She also pleads for the universalist attitude between all the races. The same message is communicated in this novel by Alice Walker. She has portrayed the universalist or non-separatist characters in the novel. There is a certain sort of connectedness between the people of difference races, sexes and even between people and nature. The novel presents the issues of oppression, racism and sexism only to come to the conclusion that the only way to become a whole person is universalism. This novel is little different from her previous novels. *The Color purple* focuses on the issue of sexism but in *The Temple of My Familiar* Alice Walker touches on the issue of racism. In this novel she presents different instances of racism during different periods with the help of six main characters. These six characters are used by her to make her idea of universalism clear. There are three women and three men characters in the novel. They form three couples, Fanny and Suwelo, Carlotta and Arveyda and Miss Lissie and Mr. Hall. All these people have good relations with other people of different races, for example, Fanny has friendship with Tanya, a white girl. This shows the universalist attitude of the characters. All the characters are interconnected and have been deeply rooted in their cultures. The overall message of the novel is the non-separatism.

Along with universalism and non-separatism, survival and wholeness of entire people is also an important aspect of womanism. In *The Temple of My Familiar* one character that has reached the status of wholeness from the beginning of the novel and serves as a guide, is Miss Lissie. She guides other characters in search of their ‘self.’ The women presented in the novel are one step ahead in the development towards wholeness. The novel clears that the women have a special relations with animals and their children better than men. Having the sense of familiar and a close connection to animals and nature is the symbol of wholeness. This suggests that women are more
whole that men from the beginning of history of mankind. The novel is a romance of the development of the human psyche. In it the human ego strives for wholeness. The world of men and women as well as animals is knit into one whole, the universe. Venkatasubramanian writes in this relation,

> Like *The Color Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar* celebrates the possibility of happiness restored with the reconfiguration of the family as open, extended, and loving, and with the characterization of individuals who are not afraid of abandon social prescription for honest relationship.

(C. V. Venkatsubramarin, 1994: 257)

The human beings are joined together as a whole without any social restrictions. It indicates a circle of reunion and integration that is needed for the survival of entire people.

Alice Walker states that womanist loves music, dance, the folk and herself. It indicates that the art has a prominent place in the life of human being. In *The Temple of My Familiar* there is also a lot of reference to the art and artists. In the novel almost every character is an artist, either from the beginning or becomes in the course of the novel. This art, finally, becomes the part of their spiritual development. In this novel Zede, the elder, is a bell chimist and a tailor, Zede is a tailor, Arveyda and Hal are painters, Miss. Lissie is a painter and storyteller. Fanny becomes a masseuse and a playwright, Carlotta becomes a bell Chimist and Suwelo takes up carpentry. It is noticed that being an artist is related to the development of almost all the characters. It helps to become an integrated person. The art has certain functions in the life of a person. It helps the characters to listen their inner selves and they remain connected to the society. They have their general social function of informing the people. Arveyda, a major character in the novel, puts it as, “…the information delivered [by an artist] - would lead not to destruction, but to transformation.” (Alice Walker 2010: 125) This shows that the artists are needed for social transformations. The artist characters, presented in the novel, strive for the transformation of the society and for the survival of entire people.

*Pressing the Secret of Joy* is the story of a womanist character, Tashi, who undergoes the painful in-human process of female circumcision. She undergoes the process of circumcision because she loves her culture, her folk and her tribe. This
love makes her a womanist. Tashi behaves in a courageous, outrageous and in an audacious way in the course of the novel. Tashi and her mother, Nafa, are converted Christians but she follows the religious ways of her original Olinka tribe. She wants to be a part of her Olinka tribe, therefore she gets Olinkan tribal mark carved on her face. Olivia, childhood friend of Tashi, tries to dissuade her from following certain traditional practices but as an audacious girl, Tashi, undergoes the female circumcision process at the hands of M’Lissa, a tsunga or circumciser. This behaviour of Tashi is a womanist behaviour as Alice Walker states that a womanist has an audacious, outrageous and courageous or wilful behaviour. She loves her culture, her folk and follows the traditions of her tribe. But after she gets circumcised, she has to face a number of physical and psychological problems. From her own grief she understands the grief of a number of girls who have undergone the circumcision process. She decides to struggle for the girls who would be circumcised in future. As a womanist, she fights to resist the traditional practice of circumcision. She meets M’Lissa, a tsunga, and gets more information about the process. She becomes restless after talking to M’Lissa and take her responsible for the sufferings of women who are circumcised. Finally, she behaves in an audacious way and smotheres M’Lissa with a pillow to death and puts her house on fire. This cruel behaviour is one of the aspects of womanism as stated by Alice Walker. By this act she gives a message that the resistance is real secret of joy and other women must resist such type of practices. She is sentenced to death by Olinkan government for the murder of M’Lissa. She does not survive but her death gives a message to future generation for their survival. Venkatasubramanian writes about Tashi’s death 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.” (C.V. Venkatasubramanian, 1994: 273) Though Tashi cannot survive, she struggles for the survival of her community, especially women of her community.

Tashi, in Possessing the Secret of Joy, has a universalist attitude as a womanist. Alice Walker uses her as her mouth piece in her fight against circumcision, AIDS and preservation of the beauty of the universe. Tashi stresses the fact that the individual identity is essential for the self fulfilment. She tries to come out as an emergent women with the help of her various acts. She stresses the need of female education for the self-realisation. She is surrounded by loving community at the time
of her punishment, where there are African-Americans, a European and the people from her tribe. This gathering is indicative of universalist attitude presented in the novel. Thus the struggle of Tashi is for wholeness and survival of entire people. She desires for women the opportunities of education and annihilation of certain inhuman social practices those victimise the women. She desires wellbeing of all people, male and female.

Alice Walker proposes womanism with the stance that black women take against the oppression, race issue, gender issue and class issue. The womanists love the humanity of all people and concern with the survival and wholeness of entire people. They have a sort of universality that connects them with others. They love their culture, art, the folk and love to struggle for their self-identity. The womanists further seek the empowerment of others as they believe in equality of all people.

Alice Walker presents the patriarchal abuse of religion in *By the Light of My Father’s Simile*. The patriarchal oppression has made women deprived of opportunity to express their individuality. It is also noticed that Alice Walker refers to the Christianity as a clear expression of religious oppressive patriarchy. This patriarchy has oppressed the female culture and spirituality. Susannah and Magdalena’s father, Senor Robinson works as a missionary in Mexico. He exercises dominance within and outside of the family. His religious practice affects his family and most heavily it affects his younger daughter, Magdalena. He disapproves her relations and connectedness with the native Mundo people. He beats her brutally after he finds her enjoying premature sex with a Mundo boy, Manuelito. Robinson tries to obtain authority in his familial life. This act of Robinson is an act of gender oppression. Magdalena revolts against her father, Senor Robinson, in response to this oppression. She keeps no relations with him as a result of his brutal treatment. She also forces her sister, Susannah, to keep herself away from her father. This behaviour of Magdalena is a womanist behaviour. She becomes courageous and audacious and goes against her father till her death. She blames her father as a self-deceitful and a hypocritical person, by her father’s treatment and acts, she become aware of the hypocrisy of progressive Western world that misuses the science and church. The act of fighting against the opportunist and hypocritical Western Christianity and struggle for self-identity make Magdalena a womanist character.
The discourse of womanism in the novel is noticed with love presented by Alice Walker. She projects different characters with the struggle for womanist love, a love that embraces all the people. For this purpose Alice Walker presents the fictitious Mundo culture. The Mundo culture rejects the oppressive Western patriarchy. It considers women the carriers of life and birthing. The Mundo people believe that a woman is a beauty of creation. The Mundo boy, Manuelito, respects Magdalena and her sensuousness, whereas her father punishes her. The Mundo philosophy takes sexuality, both male and female, as an expression of mutual love and spiritual empowerment. In the Western culture “you can watch men and women sucking on each other all day long on television.” (Alice Walker, 1999: 165) But the Mundo people believes in love and this belief has a relation with womanism. The Mundo boy, Manuelito, is concerned with the wellbeing and survival of all people. This concern has a correspondence with womanism. He grieves for the oppression inflicted upon his tribe as well as for victimised people worldwide. He also opposes certain practices found within the African tribal communities. He is against the practices like woman circumcision, women wearing the heavy iron collars around their necks and scarification of women in certain tribes in Africa. This is a womanist view of Manuelito is presented in the novel. He believes in intercultural communication, therefore he loves Magdalena in his life time and even in his afterlife.

Susannah and Magdalena, the protagonists of the novel, *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, behave in an audacious way after Magdalena is punished by her father for her sexual relations with Manuelito. They keep no relations with their father, Senor Robinson. This is womanist behaviour of both of the daughters of the Robinsons. They keep themselves away from their father till his death. After the death of Mr. Robinson, both of them grieve for their antagonist attitude towards their father. This grief takes them to self destruction. Magdalena tries to find out relief from the sadness with the help of excessive eating and drinking. This way of life takes her to self-destruction. On the other hand Susannah breaks her relations with her Greek husband, Petros. She loves other woman sexually and non sexually as a womanist. She develops lesbian relationship with Pauline, a minor character in the novel. Both, Susannah and Pauline, create the proper emotional state and share their feelings with the help of lesbian relationship between them. Alice Walker has
strongly stated that women are naturally strong erotic beings, having sexual desire or excitement. In this relation, Gerri Bates has rightly stated as, “Walker’s novel indicates that women need to claim their freedom, and the experience of the erotic is the underlying principle of the road to freedom.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 143) The women should have a freedom for the development of whole self. For this freedom they struggle as womanists. As a part of this struggle Susannah and Pauline share a long-term relationship and also achieve economic independence and financial success. In their struggle they realise their liberation and survival.

With the help of artistic imagination death is used as a way of reconciliation. It searches for the meaning of true love. Senor Robinson, the oppressive father of Susannah and Magdalena, reconciles with his daughters and Manuelito in the afterlife. At this stage they reach up to the universality. They understand that the true love is complete and fulfilled. It is noticed that every one desires that no one has to suffer if he believes in true love. Mr. Robinson communicates his love for his ceased wife and daughters in his afterlife. In this way, Alice Walker offers womanist love against oppressive patriarchy. In opposition to this patriarchal oppression, womanist love leads to the personal and global peace. It is considered to be a whole base for the wholeness and survival of entire people. Thus womanism rejects the concept of patriarchal God that oppresses a group of people and rejects their sexuality. The womanists recognise the sacredness of humanity of all people without taking into account their gender, race, religion and nation. This view is considered to be essential for the universality, wholeness and survival of entire people, male and female.

As a womanist writer, Alice Walker focuses mainly on oppression of women, their spiritual journey towards self development and their lives in the black community. She also presents certain global issues like female genital mutilation, poverty and other antisocial aspects in almost all her novels. She presents the women’s issues that show her commitment to womanism. Her latest novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, is also an evidence of her commitment to womanism. Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of the novel, gets off a spiritual journey in which she discovers the medicinal and aesthetic aspects of nature. As a womanist character, she rejects all the religiosity of the modern world, materialism and the evils of violence. She believes that the self development empowers the women spiritually. They resist the injustice and other social hostile forces. The sense of the novel is the
self knowledge and love empower their struggles against all the hostile force. This struggle is the base of the womanism as womanists love struggle.

Alice Walker has communicated her views of womanism with a large number of women characters along with some male characters. Kate Talkingtree undertakes a campaign of self discovery due to the loss of her faith in different institutionalised religions. She needs a change in her life, therefore, as a womanist, she gives up her house, the profession of a widely published author and her lover, Yolo. She burns a number of hundred-dollar bills, some of her work and keeps aside her materialistic worries for the spiritual renewal. All these elements are taken to be hindrances in the way of self development. Kate gets rid of all these worldly hindrances and seeks to find and define the source and the essence of her life. She forms her own moral views and focuses on spiritual achievement. As a womanist, she takes the nature as a beautiful, inspiring and reassuring element. She sets for a journey with her friends to the Colorado river and for the second time to the rain forests of the Amazon river. These journeys help them to investigate the inner self of everyone. According to Alice Walker as Agnieszka Lobodziec puts,

> Womanists 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. The womanist character in Alice Walker’s novel is conscious of the socio-political status of black people in America.”  

(Agnieszka Lobodziec, 2009: 41)

She struggles for her black community. She thinks that the blacks are considered as second and third class citizens in America. She desires that the black people may have their fair share from the government. She also advocates reconciliation between black and white community in the struggle for socio-economic justice in America. Along with this, as a womanist, Kate focuses on other people’s pains, sufferings and troubles. She assists other broken-hearted women and also receives assistance from them in their journey for self discovery. This unity among all the characters is observed in Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart. They participate in the spiritual campaign on the Amazon. In her journey to the Amazon river, Kate undergoes spiritual renewal, she experiences the inner peace and connectedness with others as well as with the nature.
Alice Walker’s ideology of womanism also focuses on the classism or class stratification in the society, particularly American society. The African Americans have to observe the conventional middle class American ideals. These ideals cause the social stratification and inequality in the society. Kate is aware of the things and concerns with the fate of oppressed and poor people. She suffers of the thought and wonders “How they would feed, clothe and educate their children” (Alice Walker 2005:5) For the purpose of a peaceful solution for all these issues, one needs to have knowledge and self-development. Along with the classism, according to Alice Walker, a womanist “appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility … and women’s strength.” (Alice Walker 1983:xi) In the same way, Kate, in *Now Is the Time To Open Your Heart*, sets for the journey to the Colorado river and the rainforests of the Amazon river with a number of women. She gets help of these women in her hour of need on the Colorado river. Kate gets released from her painful past only with help of the company of these women. Initially, they fight against all the odds in their journey and support each other like womanist individuals. These characters show love for beauty of nature, express appreciation for the art and love the folk. They have interest in songs, sermons and folk tales. Armando, a Shaman, sings his songs and his singing empowers all the participants. His sermons also play a central role in the spiritual development of all the characters. All these characters show their connectedness with the traditions and their ancestors. Kate encounters her mother in her dream. Her mother who is killed in an accident, is a source for Kate’s writing of a story about her family life. In a dream she meets Remus, her ancestor who is killed by some knight riders. Kate thinks that it is very important to remember the painful experience of the ancestors because they guide everyone in their struggles. In this way, Alice Walker has communicated her views of womanism through the self discovery characters, relations to nature and their ancestors and through the involvement of all the characters in the struggle for socio-economic justice. She has communicated her views towards wellbeing of entire people through her writings.

5.5. Social Significance of Womanism

Alice Walker, an African American renowned writer, reflects diverse experiences of the people of African American community, especially coloured women. She has portrayed her female characters and their struggle for survival and
wholeness. She starts her literary career in 1968 with the publication of her poetry, 
*Once: Poems*. As Alice Walker’s literary scope expands, she becomes aware of the 
need for a movement which would be helpful to offer coloured women a space for 
the expression. She coins the term womanism, a concern for women and their roles in 
their community. She define a womanist as,

‘A black feminist or feminist of color,’ who loves other men and 
women ‘sexually and/or non sexually,’ appreciates and prefers 
‘women’s culture women’s emotional flexibility and women’s 
strength,’ is ‘committed to survival and wholeness or entire people, 
male and female,’ a womanist is usually referring to ‘outrageous, 
audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour,’ ‘wanting to know more 
and in greater depth than is considered good for one,’ ‘Traditionally 
universalist,’ ‘Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the 
spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the 
folk. Loves herself.’ A ‘Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.’ 
(Alice Walker 1983: xi – xii)

This indicates that Alice Walker has emphasised the behaviour of black woman 
which is responsible, playful, fearless and compassionate. womanism has been 
compared with feminism as purple colour to lavender colour. The purple colour is 
always described as a royal colour and the lavender is considered to be weaker colour 
than the purple. This comparison makes it clear that feminism is considered to be 
weaker than womanism. In this relation Aleksandra Izgarjan and Slobodanka Markov 
write as, “Lavender, as paler color, is also clearly associated with the notion that 
feminism is related more to white women than colored.” (Izgarjan and Morkov, 2013: 
305) This difference of colour in Alice Walker’s definition is the crucial difference 
between the terms, womanist and feminist. Feminism has its goal to win equality for 
women, but it refuses to support the struggle of black women. In this situation black 
women have to seek support from the black men who demand their own right to vote. 
The black women are considered to be different in terms of origin, race, ethnicity and 
class, therefore they are rejected the civil and political rights. The feminism excludes 
the works of black women and the difference between woman and woman emerges. 
Therefore eminent African American writers and scholars like Barbara Christian, 
Mary Washington, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker start pointing out that racism is a 
part of feminism. Alice Walker blames feminists for rejecting coloured women as 
women. Alice Walker’s colleagues, Patricia Meyer Spacks (1929) and Phyllis Chesler 
(1940), reject the inclusion of African American women writers in the survey of
women writers’ history and psychology. Phyllis Chesler provides the reason for exclusion of coloured women in her book *Women and Madness* (1972) as, “I have no theory to offer to Third World Female psychology in America … As a white woman I’m reluctant and unable to construct theories about experiences I haven’t had (quot. in Alice Walker, 1983: 382) This type of discrimination prompts Alice Walker to create the womanist movement.

Womanism grows from an attempt to answer to the feminist views towards coloured women. It rests upon the inclusion and support among all women. It relies on the self-sufficiency and self-confidence of women as they have to deal with racism and sexism. It emphasises the need for a strong community of women, worldwide, to support and help each other in their struggle against oppression and patriarchal dominance. It gives them a platform and more possibilities to express their experiences with the help of womanism. Alice Walker has provided coloured women with the positive values which sustain them to build a network among women. While talking about womanism Izgarjan and Markov have stated as, “It became a tool for coloured women with which they could not only challenge policies which marginalized them but more importantly provide the framework for the empowerment of colored women and women from ethnic minorities all over the world.” (Izgarjan and Markov, 2013: 309) It supports women to have a proper co-operation with oppressed men. It also challenges all the power structures and contributes to the expression of coloured women. It also enables coloured women to struggle for the survival and wholeness of entire mankind.

Womanism provides a broader framework for the expression of oppressed women. A number of female scholars and writers, such as Buchi Ememcheta (1944), Mariana Ba (1929-1981) and Miriam Tlali (1933) identify themselves as womanist. They use womanism as a model in their analysis of works of women. The womanist concept of universality also deals with the wellbeing of the whole community. Several African feminists, like Filomena Steady (1944) and Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1939) are self identified womanists. They state that the philosophy and practice of womanism have supported them to propose a new model of femininity. Womanism is all inclusive as it does not only concentrate on gender issue but it considers issues of race and class. The theory of womanism has serious implications, not only for coloured women, but for all women worldwide.
Womanism has its focus on political activities and struggle against racism, sexism and classism during 1970s and 1980s. But recently, it has changed its focus due to the influence of multiculturalism, Alice Walker changes her original standpoint of womanism because of the influence of Multicultural feminism. Izgarjan and Markov have noted it as,

Multicultural feminists criticized womanism for its exclusionist stance in relation to white feminists which influenced Walker to change her original standpoint and to allow for the possibility of including all women, colored or white, within the span of womanism, including men who respect women and their rights.

(Izgarjan and Markov 2013: 312)

This change in opinion is the result of constant criticism of coloured women by feminism. Some of the feminists accept to incorporate different voices into feminism to erase the line of division between race and class. Alice Walker also realises, if all the women are not included in womanism, it will also become similar to feminism. Due to this, womanism is diversified and resulted in significant changes in 1990s. These changes in the stance of womanism can be traced in the recent novels by Alice Walker. The focus of womanism shifts to spiritual and religious aspects of the life. She develops religious and spiritual side of womanism in *The Temple of My Familiar, Possessing the Secret of Joy, By the Light of My Father’s Smile* and *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*. In these novels woman characters weave their maternal identities and histories together. Womanism has also integrated the aspects of eco-feminism and aims at wholeness, ecology, preservation of natural sources and preservation of the Earth.

Recently, Womanism has expanded its stance from racism, sexism and classism to religion and spirituality. Womanism, concerning to the spirituality, develops into womanist theology and gains significance in the first decade of 21st century. Gladys Wills has stated as, “… womanist theology originates in writings on Alice Walker’s texts.” (Gladys Willis, 2006: 35) Alice Walker’s womanism has a profound influence on the formulation of theories in gender studies, religious studies, African American studies and literary studies. The study of Alice Walker’s work is helpful to understand the influence of her womanism on the womanist theologians. For example, Celie, in *The Color Purple*, writes her letters to God in the beginning but later on she stops addressing her letters to God. She changes her concept of God
and says, “....the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown.” (Alice Walker 2004: 173) The woman, created in *The Color Purple*, gets freed from all the limitations and provides the womanist thoughts, is the foundation of womanist theology. A number of womanist theologians, such as Katie Cannon (1954), Cheryl Gilkes (1947), Emilie Townes (1955), Delores Williams (1963) and Marcia Riggs (1960) have followed womanist perspectives for canon formation, social equality, race, gender, class and social justice. In this way, Alice Walker, by proposing an ideology of womanism, has contributed a great deal to the universality, survival and wholeness of all the people worldwide. This concept helps all the women to communicate their experiences with others.

**5.6. Pedagogical and Social Significance of the Study**

Alice Walker has worked as a writer in–residence at different places in America. She also has worked as a Lecturer in Literature at Wellesley College, Massachusetts University and Brandies University. She has worked as an editor for *Ms.* Magazine in 1974. After the experience of different works, she established Wild Trees Press in Navarro, California in 1984. She had a mission of publishing the creative works of unknown writers. Later on she became a full time writer and contributed poetry, stories, nonfiction, essay collections, essays and articles, autobiographical works and novels to the African American literary field. She won the Southern Regional Council’s Lillian Smith Award for poetry and the nomination for the National Book Award for Revolutionary Petunias and other poems in 1973. She received the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award for *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* in 1974. She also received O’Henrey Award in 1986 for *Kindred Spirits*. She was honoured with the Pulitzer Prize for her controversial novel *The Color Purple* in 1983. The same novel is made into a cinematic production directed by Steven Spielberg, in 1986. It is also adapted into a musical production in 2004. With the help of her literary work, she communicates a variety of issues, such as racism, sexism, oppression and she proposes her concept of womanism.

The literary works of Alice Walker are admirable for her artistic ability. A number of books are prescribed as the parts of syllabi in different universities worldwide. In India *The Color Purple* is a part of syllabus in different universities,
such as Delhi University, Gujarat University, Calcutta University, Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj University, Madras University and Dr. B.R Ambedkar University, Srikakulam. Her novel *Meridian* is a part of syllabus in Presidency University, Kolkata and Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi. *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* is a part of syllabus of Mumbai University. Thus the works of Alice Walker, such as *The Color Purple*, *Meridian*, *Everyday Use*, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, *Strong Horse Tea* and *In Secret of Our Mothers’ Gardens* are assigned for the study in different universities in India. The present study of all the novels of Alice Walker deals with the discourse of womanism. This study also deals with different aspects of the novels, like social contexts in the novels, cultural aspects, language and behaviour of characters, racism and sexism, struggle of the protagonist for self, survival and wholeness, place of art in the lives of people and womanist maternity. This may be helpful to the students to understand Alice Walker as an author, socio-cultural aspects of African American people as well as economic and political status of African American community in America. They also may come to know about some inhuman social practices, like scarification and female genital mutilation. The learners may understand that Alice Walker’s

\[\ldots\] appeal stems from her ability to develop the stories of African American women who are noticeably absent from American literature… who find themselves weakened by their position with women who are strong and rise above their unfortunate circumstances.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 52)

Thus, the study brings the issues of African American women to the notice of students from different universities worldwide.

The novels of Alice Walker incorporate racial, sexual, cultural, national, economic and political issues. The present study discusses all these issues along with womanism in a way that the readers may become aware of them and may change their attitudes towards women. The present study may have its social significance in relation to acceptance and understanding of women as an important aspect of the society. The black women have a complex existence in African American community and are valued by those around them less than their real values. The community itself is a major threat to the survival and empowerment of black women. The community, that black women belongs to, may understand that the women can take an active part in movements of creating a community of support. It also may learn the need for
integration of the female body and the women should be treated as subjects rather than objects. The present study tries to contribute to the proper understanding between black women and white women. It also makes it clear that Alice Walker not only writes about womanist issues, but about the womanist process also. This process deals with the resistance to established social orders and struggle for freedom and wholeness. The exploited and oppressed women may understand the ways to rebel against this exploitation and oppression. In this study it is also observed that the black women try to achieve wholeness of men and women, the earth of living and nonliving organisms and the universe. These women, initially, try to achieve personal wholeness, secondly, societal wholeness and finally, spiritual wholeness and become universalist. In this way, this study is a presentation of the journey of the black women towards wholeness. By this, one gets a whole picture of the black experiences. The black women, portrayed in the novels by Alice Walker, use their heritage to change the society. They are a synthesis of many aspects of heritage of the Southern black community. The black women, such as Mem, Margaret, Meridian, Celie, Shug, Miss. Lissie, Carlotta, Fanny, Tashi, Magdalena, Susannah and Kate, represent their communities with different social and economical status in America. They try to make their people know that the division and fragmentation distort the beauty of black culture and social unity and affect their lives. They suggest the ways for creating a world of harmony and balance. Alice Walker tells the stories of her culture to the future generations. It imparts traditional customs and cultural as well as social values of the past to the children of new generation. The present study carries all these customs and values to the readers in a simplified way. It also contributes to the change of views of the modern world towards women.

5.7. Importance of the Study Regarding Further Research

The present study of the novels of Alice Walker opens up a variety of subjects for further research. She presents certain characters who appear in more than one novel. In this relation there is a possibility of analysis of such type of characters under growth novels. For example, Celie, the protagonist of The Color Purple, reappears in Possessing the Secret of Joy, Nettie, Celie’s sister in The Color Purple, reappears in Possessing the Secret of Joy as well as Olivia and Adam, Celie’s daughter and son in
The Color Purple, reappear in Possessing the Secret of Joy and The temple of My Familiar. Fanny plays her roles in both, The Color Purple and The Temple of My Familiar. This shows that, taking all the novels of Alice Walker as a whole, there is a possible subject of studying these characters under bildungsroman or growth novel.

A child has much significance in a black family. This concern has been reflected in the novels of Alice Walker. From her novels it is noticed that there is at least a child presented in it with its significance in the black family. In this family the mother is a provider and protector of the child. Alice Walker has also presented such type of child-mother relationship in her novels. For example, Mem, in the Third Life of Grange Copeland, shows a great concern for her children in the Copeland family. She struggles for the wellbeing of her children and takes hold of her family as a womanist person. Unlike Mem, Meridian, in Meridian, places her child up for adoption to get further education. This child mother relationship is different from the conventional child-mother relationship. Tashi, in Possessing the Secret of Joy, suffers a lot for her child because of her illness. This child mother-relationship can be an area for research.

The story-telling, songs, myths and other arts are the cultural aspects of any community Alice Walker has presented the African American community through all her novels. This community has its own myths, songs, art of storytelling and other arts. All these things have found a place in the novels of Alice Walker. For example, Shug Avery is a blues singer and Celie masters an art of sewing in The Color Purple, Miss Lissie, Carlotta, Fanny and Mr. Hal, in The Temple of My Familiar, are presented as story tellers. Arveyda, in the same novel, is presented as a musician. Zede, the elder, is presented as a cape maker and Fanny becomes a masseuse. Thus the art has a great place in the novels of Alice Walker. Therefore, a study of Alice Walker’s use of myths, Folklore, art of storytelling and singing can be taken as a subject for research. The African American community has a history of sharecropping, racism, sexism and oppression. These are the main concerns of Alice Walker, as far as her novels are concerned. All the women protagonists of the novels of Alice Walker are presented as the victims of racism, sexism and oppression. Therefore, a study of sharecropping system, racism, sexism and oppression of coloured women in the novels of Alice Walker can be the subjects for further research.
5.8. Summary

The present study deals with the discourse of womanism in the novels of Alice Walker. Alice Walker, as an African American writer, has a great place in the African American literary field. She has contributed poetry, stories, essay collections, non-fictional work and novels to African American literature. She is also honoured with the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple*. Her novels, in relation to discourse of womanism, are studied in this thesis. The methods of descriptions and analysis are used for the study. In this study different aspects of the novels of Alice Walker, such as social contexts in the novels, cultural aspects in the novels, language, racism, sexism, struggle for self, survival and wholeness, the black art and womanist maternity are studied. With the help of descriptive and analytical methods, the present work studies the discourse of womanism in all the novels of Alice Walker. All the aspects of womanism, such as behaviour of the characters, language of them, struggle, love, universalism and the relationships of the protagonists of all novels are discussed in this research. The importance of womanist movement, in relation to survival and wholeness of entire people, is also discussed. As womanism focuses on political activities and struggle against racism, sexism, classism and oppression, all the female protagonists of the novels of Alice Walker are described in the light of womanism,

The present study has its own pedagogical and social significance as Alice Walker has a great place in the field of African American literature. She is the first African American woman writer to win the Pulitzer prize for literature. A number of books by Alice Walker are the parts of Bachelor and Master degree syllabi in different universities worldwide. In this relation the present research work is helpful for the students who undertake the study of Alice Walker’s work. They may understand Alice Walker as a writer, her concept of womanism, the place of African American community in America, socio-political and economic status of African American males and females in America and the culture of this community. They may come to know about certain inhuman practices, such as scarification and female genital mutilation, are prevailing in some tribes. The learners may also know about the African American women who are noticeably absent from American literature. Alice Walker has portrayed the women protagonists, who are the representatives of different layers of the African American community, through her novels. She also has
discussed a variety of issues like racism, sexism, oppression and socio-economic injustice with the help of her novels. These issues may work as areas of research in relation to new research students. Along with the pedagogical significance this study also has a social significance. There is a discussion of various social, political and economic aspects of African American community. This discussion is helpful for the modern society in relation to acceptance and understanding of black women as a significant part of the society. The readers may understand the need of treating women as subjects rather than objects. The women of modern era will come to know the ways to fight against the exploitation and oppression. The present study tries to make the new generations know the aspects of heritage of the Southern black community in America. The traditional customs as well as social and cultural values of the African Americans are carried to new generations. This knowledge is helpful to change the views of concerned people about women and it is also supportive for universalism, survival and wholeness.

Works Cited


**Interviews**
