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Chapter I

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

The present study deals with the concept of womanism, introduced by Alice Walker. It is an attempt to study Alice Walker as a novelist, her biography and her novels. It may be a close study of novels of Alice Walker in relation to her ideology of womanism and its discourse in her novels. As Alice Walker is an Afro-American novelist, this study takes into account the African cultural and social elements occurred in her novels. It also studies the issues, such as racism, gender, sexism and social injustice, presented in her novels. It is noticed that all the novels written by Alice Walker are woman centred. Therefore the ‘woman’ is the centre of focus of this study.

1.1. Discourse

The speech is related to the determination of the way and the content of the presentation. This way of speaking, that determines what one says, how one says as well as what one does not say, is called as ‘discourse.’ The term ‘discourse’ is derived from the Latin word ‘discursus,’ means ‘running to and fro.’ The word Discourse has been explained in Oxford Dictionary as ‘written or spoken communication or debate,’ further it has been stated as ‘to speak or write authoritatively about a topic.’ It is a generalization of the concept of conversation within all the contexts. It relates to the body of a text that communicates a specific information and knowledge about a subject. Discourse provides a unified set of words, symbols and metaphors that construct and communicate the interpretation of reality. It uses the written and spoken language, a signed language and multimedia forms of communication. In relation to humanities, the term discourse describes a formal way of thinking which can be expressed through a language. In a language the speech patterns and dialects are used by a community is called as discourse. Iara Lessa has summarised the definition of discourse by Michael Foucault, a French Social Theorist. He has described discourse in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) as,
Systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the words of which they speak.

(Iara Lessa, 2006: 13)

In the views of Foucault the discourse is a medium of speaking subject. It has a wider role to play in the social process of power and constructing the truth. He further argues that power and knowledge are inter-related. This relationship produces the truth. According to Foucault, discourse “is related to power as it operates by rules of exclusion. Discourse, therefore, is controlled by objects, what can be spoken of; ritual, where and how one may speak.” (Michel Foucault, 1977: 15) Thus, the discourse is a creation of power. This power is related to knowledge. The term discourse has several definitions and different applications. In language it is referral of speech patterns and regional dialect in a specific community. In relation to philosophy, the reference of conversations and their underlying meanings to a community with common ideas is called as discourse. It also examines the speech in written form. Sociologists and Philosophers use discourse to present conversations of a group of people. These functions of discourse can be discussed with the help of different types of it.

1.2. Types of Discourse

Based upon the intentions and aims of the speaker or writer, discourse has different types. A writer or speaker perceives certain things from the society. When he or she puts it in front of the reader or listener, he or she wants to make the reader or listener vividly aware of it through his or her imagination. There is an intention, in the mind of the writer or speaker in presenting it, to give reader or listener the feel of things described. This presentation of discourse is called as descriptive discourse.

The discourse aiming at getting the reader or listener to agree with the ideas and views of the writer or speaker is known as argumentative discourse. This is done with the help of some evidences and reasons. The writer uses certain examples and proofs to put his argument in front of the readers. This agreement is elicited by the writer or speaker with the use of logic, examples, facts, figures and some experts’ views and opinions. This argument can be persuasive when the writer wants to get reader to act. The writer puts the reader in some action by persuading him with his presentation and argument. The writer or speaker sometimes wants to inform the
readers or listeners, this is called as expository discourse. It is used for comparison and contrasting, defining, analysing, classifying and to bring out the cause and effect of a problem with its solutions. This type of discourse is used in any social situation, event or problem.

Narrative discourse involves the narrating of a series of happenings, events and situations. This discourse is a story telling and often used to relate events and happenings that are fictional or non-fictional. It is concerned with the acts and events of a time and life in the motion. It intends to tell the readers what happened and how it happened on the cause and effect basis. It totally aims at presenting the movements in a time therefore it is widely used in the forms of fiction.

All these types of discourse are totally related to the text and context. The text contains the actions, events, situations and happenings selected from the society, that become the context of the discourse. Ian Ifversen has rightly stated of the text, supra text and context:

…… the text ‘makes a choice’ of discourse (supra-text) and of context. If we were not to recognize this choice, we would end in a pure contextualism; that is, a claim of casual link going from the context to the text.

(Ian Ifversen, 2003: 64)

The text or discourse is an important aspect of any literary genre. It helps the writer in the formation of some basic themes or theories. These themes need some contexts. In a certain contexts themes are developed and presented with the help of a text. The context of text is primarily social in nature. Various social contexts or social environments affect the language and the use of language. This shows that the discourse is a body of text that aims at communicating specific data, information and knowledge. To analyse this data, information or knowledge one needs to know the context. From this discussion it can be said that the discourse of womanism is a narrative type of discourse. The narrative discourse is applicable in the study of novels of Alice Walker. It involves the narrating of a series of happenings, events and situations. It is a story telling and often used to relate events and happenings that are fictional. It is concerned with the acts, and events of a time and life of African American women in the motion. It intends to tell the readers what happened and how
it happened on the cause and effect basis. It totally aims at presenting the movements of African American women and their issues, therefore it is a womanist discourse.

1.3. Feminism and a need for a Variant of it

In the social sciences and the humanities the term discourse describes a formal way of thinking expressed through language. This expression needs vocabulary and the style of communicating. In this relation post modern theorists, like Michel Foucault, have contributed a great deal to the discourse analysis. They have given rise to the literal discourse of rights, equality, freedom and justice. Along with the postmodernists, feminists also have written about gender in action or performance. They have explored the relationship among power, ideology, language and discourse. The basic need for women’s right was the base for this presentation of gender. It originated the concept of feminism. It is explained as “an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women’s experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature.” (J. A. Cuddon, 1991: 338) This makes it clear that the discourse of womanism describes the women’s experiences. These experiences are closely related to the gender issue or sexuality, women’s oppression and biological differences of men and women. In this relation Sotunsa Ebunoluwa has noted that feminist discourse is a presentation of women’s experiences of various forms of oppressions in a society. She says,

> Whether as a theory, a social movement or a political movement, feminism especially focuses on a woman’s experiences and highlights various forms of oppression which the female gender is subject to in the society.

(Sotunsa Ebunoluwa, 2009: 228)

The feminist discourse includes the presentation of female gender as a social category, the issue of oppression, sexuality and differences between men and women. These differences are considered to be the causes of social inequality and injustice that affect the lives of women. The basic aim of feminist discourse is to remove all the barriers to social equality. Feminists have the view that the male domination is the main cause of social inequality and injustice. This domination determines the worth of women, mainly by their gender and takes them inherently inferior and less intelligent than men. Thus, the feminist discourse aims at deconstructing the established male dominance and constructing a female perspective. Though the
feminism aims at constructing a female perspective for the expression of female experiences, it does not take into consideration the issues of black female and female of colour. It only concentrates on the needs of the middle class white women. Blacks are excluded from participating in the feminist movement. Therefore they need another variant of feminism. Clenora Weems has written in this regard, “Women, who are calling themselves black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns are.” (Clenora Weems, 1998: 812) Because of the deficiency of feminism of taking blacks into account, it was a need to evolve an ideology that would cater of the needs of black women. To fulfil this need another variant called womanism is developed. The term is coined by Alice Walker in 1983. Womanism has its focus on the black female experiences with writing about the issues, such as racial, classist and sexist, this is taken to be womanist discourse.

An ideology, developed through the need or desire for equal rights, freedom and an assumption of the basic sameness of men and women, is considered to be feminism. A universal term ‘feminism’ is a mixture of Radical feminism, Socialist feminism, Modern feminism, Black feminism, Poststructuralist feminism and French feminism. It has an idea of equality at the base in relation to women and men. Feminist theory, when talks about women in action and the desire for equal rights and place in the society, is termed as feminist discourse. Yet, in the course of time it is noted by several thinkers that feminism has considered issues of middle class white women only. The black women or women of colour could not participate in the movement of feminism. This avoidance resulted in a need of some variant for feminism to cater of the needs of black women or women of colour. There emerged a need of a system of thoughts to construct the subjects and world of black women. In 1983 Alice Walker coined the term ‘Womanism’ in her book In the Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983). It has been discussed that womanism deals with the presentation of racial and gender issues as well as issues of oppression in relation to women. It also presents the issue of sexism that gives ill-treatment to women. Though feminism and womanism are dealing with the issues of women, they differ from each other. Walker states that purple differs from lavender, in the same way womanist differs from feminist. The feminism and womanism aim at the discourse of issues of women at different levels, therefore they are different from each other.
1.4. Womanism

The term womanism is coined by an African American woman writer, Alice Walker. In her collection of essays titled as *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983, Alice has given her definition of term ‘Womanist.’ While defining the term, Alice Walker has stated, ‘Womanist,’

1. From Womanish.(Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown”. Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength, sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non- sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans: “Well, you know the colored race is just a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”


4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.

(Alice Walker, 1983: xi-xii)

These four definitions or explanations are said about being womanist. This denotes that the thought of womanist is womanism. Alice has given definition of womanist in these four entries. If it is tried to analyse these four definitions, it can explain womanism as clearly as possible.

At first, Walker defines ‘Womanist’ in relation to the origin of the term and its original use and meaning in the folklore. ‘Womanist’ is a phrase in which Walker has indicated that it is a synonym for a black feminist or a feminist of colour. By using the generalisation of ‘color’ Walker has not committed a mistake of differentiation
that white feminists have done. But the first part of definition deals with the root of the concept of womanism. The word ‘womanist’ has been derived from the adjective ‘womanish’ that is used by the black folk in expression “You act womanish.” It resembles another folk expression ‘You trying to be grown’ that mothers say to their daughters. Alice Walker takes the term from black folk expression of mothers to female children. By using this, she suggests that the history of black women promotes the development of womanist view. This view, primarily, is accessible to black women. The ‘womanish act’ refers to ‘outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behavior.’ These adjectives refer to do or say something that is difficult and yet to do or say it with strong determination and a lot of motivation. Alice has emphasised ‘willful’ because for a long time the black women have been suppressed. They haven’t been considered to be in possession of their free wills. The expressions, ‘You acting womanish’ and ‘You trying to be grown’ refer to an attitude of ‘wanting to know more’ and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one. These expressions indicate mature and grown attitude. She says in the beginning ‘womanish’ is the opposite of ‘girlish’ that means ‘frivolous, irresponsible and not serious.’ In opposition of girlish, ‘womanish’ means not only acting, but also being grown up. It means to be responsible, in charge and serious. This shows that the emphasis on the mature side of womanist throws light on a feeling of responsibility of being in charge of the fate of black women.

In further explanation, Walker defines ‘Womanist’ in relation to the different types of relationships that occur between women. According to her, womanists love other women in respect to their female culture, their emotional life and their strength. Besides this love for female characteristics, Walker adds that the Womanists also love men and their culture. If it is searched to the deeper sense of the definition, it becomes clear that Walker has referred to lesbian relationship in the first sentence. Though she has referred to lesbian relationship, she has not despised to heterosexual relationship. This is a most probable feature that has differentiated womanism from feminism—white feminism. She suggests women to love themselves because they are oppressed for long, yet she does not show any hostility towards men. In fact, ‘love(ing) individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually’ is also a characteristic of womanist in her list. According to Collins, “Womanism seemingly supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men.” (Patricia Hill
Collins, 1996: 11) Unlike the feminists, womanists have a non-separatist attitude. Walker has expressed this attitude three times while explaining the term ‘Womanist.’ First of all, according to her, a womanist is ‘committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.’ By this statement Walker has made it much clear that black feminism or Womanism is not against the race liberation, but bringing it closer. Secondly, she has stated that womanists are not separatist but ‘traditionally universalist.’ While illustrating this attitude Walker has given a metaphor of the garden about which Collins says “the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden yet retaining their cultural distinctiveness and integrity.” (Patricia Collins, 1996: 11) This metaphor has been used by Walker herself. By using this metaphor she wants to suggest that the tolerant attitude is needed among the sexes as well as among the races. This philosophy of womanism by Walker is useful for the whole mankind. Thus the definition of womanist is universal one. According to Walker individuals are not separate from the survival of the earth, but instead act as extension of the universe itself. This shows that the womanists are not separatists. In one of the explanations of the term womanism Walker has referred to a certain relationship between a mother and her child-daughter. She presumes that the motherhood is most essential for a daughter for being a woman.

Walker, further, defines ‘womanist’ in relation to the black women’s love for dance, music, the moon, the spirit, love and food, struggle, all the people and love for self. She has included the things, such as love, dance, music and food as the indicators of bodily pleasures in life. Along with these worldly symbols, she has also talked about the moon, which is considered to be the symbol of femininity and the spirit as the essence of our being. It has been also stated that womanists love struggle, as the struggle is an unavoidable aspect of human life. The womanists, as Walker has suggested, do not give up their striving for the desired goals. They love their people, folk and also love themselves. Among all the definitions this definition contains almost all the aspects of womanism. Finally, she has compared the term womanism with the feminism with slight difference between purple and lavender. This shows that the feminists and womanists have many things common, but have some difference between them. Therefore she has called womanism a black feminism. Not only Alice Walker, but many African American women find difference between feminism and womanism. Womanism is totally rooted in the black women’s history
of racial and gender oppression. It has provided black women with a way to deal with gender oppression without attacking black men. In this regard the womanism can be considered as a pluralist way of black empowerment. It is a thought dealing with the integration of all the social groups. Collins has aptly compared womanism with pluralism.

Pluralism views society as being composed of various ethnic and interest groups all of whom compete for goods and services. Equity lies in providing equal opportunities, rights and respect to all groups. (Patricia Hill Collins, 1996: 11)

In the same way, womanists reject all forms of oppression and strive to establish social justice. They desire the black women’s moral superiority against the gender and racial oppression. In nutshell, it can be said that the term womanist is derived from the American Southern Black Folk expression of mothers to their girls ‘You acting womanish’ means like a woman. It has been explained by Alice Walker, ‘as being grown up.’ It is indicated that womanist means a woman who loves other women and men. Womanists believe in ‘survival and wholeness of entire people’, male and female. They love all the worldly and bodily pleasures as well as their struggle. While discussing womanism Alice Walker has discussed the race issue, gender, the black female artist and motherhood.

1.4.1. Africana Womanism

Feminism is found insufficient to take into account the issues of black women and women of colour. Therefore Alice Walker coined the term womanism. In the same way an African writer Clenora Hudson Weems (1945) originated the term Africana Womanism in her book Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves (1993). It is one of the most discussed terms in the last two decades in African literary sphere. Eurocentric critical traditions were considered to be insufficient. Therefore, to fulfil the need of new ideology, to achieve the goals of African women Africana Womanism is introduced. While advocating the term, Clenora Weems writes,

African men and women do not accept the idea of African women as feminist. There is a general sense in the African community that the feminist movement, by and large, is the White women’s movement for two reasons. First, the African woman does not see the man as her primary enemy as does the White feminist, who is carrying out an age
old battle with her White male counterpart for subjugating her as his property.

(Clenora Weems, 1993: 23)

Clenora’s theory paves a new way to look at the literature of African writers. This literature is based on the basic problems of African society, especially African women. The women in African society are facing the problems of oppression, race, class and gender. In this situation it becomes necessary to focus on the circumstances of African women. To fulfil this need Africana Womanism is introduced by Clenora Hudson Weems.

Africana Womanism includes different characteristics. While writing about these characteristics of Africana Womanism, Betty Thompson has given a list as “Self namer, self definer, family centred, in concert with males in struggle, flexible roles, genuine sisterhood, strong, male compatible, respected and recognized, whole and authentic, spirituality, respectful to elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering and nurturing.” (Betty Thompson, 2001: 179) The protagonists of African Women’s literature demonstrate these characteristics. For example, Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (1989) can be taken into account for the support of discussion. Ramatoulaye, the protagonist of the novel, is presented as a wife, mother, dutiful daughter and politically aware female. She expresses her inert conflict caused of her husband’s second marriage. This causes the desertion of her and her ten children. Yet, she loves her husband and does not leave him. She is an educated woman therefore she fights her own battle and becomes financially strong to look after her children. She also receives a sisterly support from her friend Aissatou. After the death of her husband Ramatoulaye, her mother-in-law and her children become destitute. Yet, she tries to achieve a sense of inner well being and respects her culture. With this novel one can come across almost all the characters of Africana Womanism.

Thus, Africana Womanism deals with the significance of women in the African community. It is reflected in the African and African American women writers’ literature. These Womanists speak their heritage and culture to their new generation, the community and the readers worldwide. Through their creations, writers like-

Toni Morrison, Mariamma Ba, Nwapa, Maylor and Dangarembga provide support to one another as audience, fellow artists and critics.
These authors demonstrate not only the tenets of African womanism but more significant these texts speak The Soul of African women in their stories.

(Betty Thompson, 2001: 184)

Through their writings, the African and African American writers speak to their community, sisters and other world about their strength, flexibility and wholeness.

1.4.2. Indian Womanism

The Africana Womanism is different from Alice Walker’s womanism as presented in her essay collection, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983). It deals with the African culture, therefore focuses on the struggles, experiences, desires and needs of African women. In the same way an ideology of presenting the struggles of Indian women or American women of Indian origin, role of American men of Indian origin and their connectedness can be called as Indian American Womanism. This type of womanism can be traced in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri’s fiction presents the struggle of male and female, those personally and collectively create their own Indian American identities. In this connection the American men of Indian origin are positively presented. With the help of such type of presentation Lahiri has tried to raise awareness of the strength of womanist maternity in the lives and actions of Indian male and female.

There is a difference between white feminism and womanism. Clenora Hudson has discussed this in a simple way as,

White feminists want independence and freedom from family responsibility ……..African (womanist) women have wanted to be ‘liberated’ to the community, family and its responsibilities.

(Clenora Weems, 1993: 34)

This metaphor of family includes maternity and male-female co-operation. In this relation Indian womanist includes womanism of Maternity, sisterhood, and love for culture and nationalism as well as cross-cultural sisterhood. Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian American who lives, writes and publishes her works in United States. She presents Bengali/Indian American womanism through her novels. She presents through her novels the Bengali Indian characters. With the help of these characters Lahiri manifests womanist maternity and sisterhood. Her novels exhibit womanism, which is totally independent of current Afrocentric womanism. These novels include
“local-global, male-female, maternal, cross-cultural and intergenerational womanist fictions, well articulate examples for a new Bengali/Indian-American exploration of womanism.” (Genna Kasun, 2009: 48) These womanist features of the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri are fictional and can be brought to reality with a brief discussion of her novel *The Namesake* (2003).

Clenora Weems writes in her womanist theoretical work, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, that the Africana womanism is family centred. The Africana womanists are more concerned with their characters in relation to their entire family and maternity. In the same way Lahiri is concerned with her characters’ families and other ongoing. In her novel, *The Namesake*, the protagonist, Ashima is pregnant when she comes to Cambridge, Massachusetts from Calcutta, India. She begets a baby, Gogol and starts rearing the baby with her husband, Ashok. Ashima plays a role of wife and mother in the house and a role of friend to a large number of people. Though they live in America, away from their native place, Ashima observes her own religious traditions with American life style. Because of this she can develop an intercultural identity of her son, Gogol. She becomes much friendly with other people of different communities. This attitude shows Ashima’s communal maternity. Though Ashima is tied to Indian religion and Bengali rituals, she attends Christmas parties displaying her own liberation. While describing ‘liberation’ as an aspect of womanism in relation to Ashima, Genna writes,

> No longer the isolated, frightened Bengali who arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, unsure of how to retain her cultural heritage, she is now, thanks to herself initiated familial and communal development, liberated from powerless to powerful and even empowering.  
> (Genna Kasun, 2009: 13)

Along with this self-liberation Ashima’s cultural maternity is tied to her physical maternity of raising a son, Gogol and a daughter, Sonia. She takes Gogol and Sonia to the gathering like Christmas party to provide them a communal maternity and cross-cultural brotherhood or sisterhood. Not only Ashima but her husband Ashoke also bears a cultural maternity. He tries to bestow a special cultural identity on his son. As Hudson Weems writes, “The African woman has never been restricted to the home and household chores, as her male counterpart had more often than not shared the role as home maker.” (Clenora Hudson, 1993: 64) This is applicable to Lahiri’s male character Ashoke in *The Namesake*. He washes dishes, prepares meals, and
works in the garden too. This can be considered as a unique maternal role played by a male in the household. Gogol, as a child and a grown up, envisions his mother's feelings and emotions. By the end Ashoke dies of heart attack and Ashima plans to sell her house and comes to India. Gogol’s marriage becomes a failure and he lives with his mother alone. Ashima supports her son and preserves her culture up to the last. Though the novel ends in sadness it exhibits the struggle of a woman exhibiting a womanist maternity.

1.4.3. Difference between Feminism and Womanism

The struggle for Women’s rights generated the discourse of feminism in Europe and America in the late eighteenth century. Now-a-days Feminism has become historically and culturally an international movement. Basically it aimed at equality for women. Yet, it failed to take into account the issues of Black women, black men as well as women of colour. Patricia Collins has noted this inadequacy of feminism as,

Even though Black women intellectually have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender historically we have not been full participants in White Feminist Organizations.

(Patricia Hill Collins, 1991: 7)

This insufficiency birthed womanism as a new concept or variant for feminism. This need is the origin of womanist discourse. This is an idea created and designed for all African American women. It focuses on the needs, desires, experiences and struggles of African American women. Womanism is a variant or alternative theory that focuses on the black women experiences. It concentrates on the writings of men and women giving description of racial issues, classist issues and sexist issues. For feminist thinkers sexist oppression is a key concept to deal with. The racial issues and classist issues are different from it. Whereas according to womanists, racial and classist issues are interlinked with sexist oppression. Many times they portray racial and classist issues with more precedence than the sexist issue. They think that the liberation of black women folk is only possible with the liberation of the whole race. They give more importance to the partnership with their men than the sexist oppression. This feature of womanism separates it from feminism. It differs from feminism because the womanists fight against the triple oppression of black women under racial, classist and sexist difference. They desire male participation in the
movement of women liberation from all kinds of oppressions. The Womanist thought is totally dependent of black culture accounting centrality of family, community and motherhood in its discourse. Because of this all inclusiveness womanism is extended beyond African American community and reached up to Africa, India and other parts of the world. Womanist discourse differentiates the black writers from the white feminists in relation to the discussion of issues. Chickweneye Ogunyemi points out the difference,

...... a white woman writer may be a feminist, a black woman writer is likely to be a womanist. That is, she will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy.

(Chickweneye Ogunyemi, 1985: 64)

The women and the men of black community have experienced the past and present control over them by the Western Culture. This control has given them the subject of conflict between white and black. This conflict is because of different priorities and strategies in sexual politics. Womanist novels posit almost all the elements of womanist ideology. In these novels a reader may find the theme of critical perception of patriarchy and reaction to it. These perceptions and reactions to patriarchy are presented through the struggle of the oppressed against the patriarchy.

1.5. Discourse of Womanism

Womanism is a philosophy celebrating the black life ideals and black roots with the presentation of black womanhood. It aims at the liberation of black women, men and children against the contemporary oppressive social structure. Black American female writers present their experiences aiming at the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Many of the black female writers have presented their protagonists in their novels as women without men. Zora Neale Hurston’s novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), presents Janie Crawford, the protagonist of the novel, without any support of man. Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966) portrays Vyry, the protagonist, as a womanist character. Toni Morrison, Marshall, Aidoo and Heads are African American and African women writers, who present their protagonists as women without men. The black woman, as presented in different novels, is not a powerless character. But she is less protected than she should be. She has to grow independent. This is a sort of spirit in the womanist novels that deal with female achievement. In this discourse the womanist explore the connection between
black Americans and Africans. They strive jointly for the good of their folk. This womanist approach to religion and society is considered to be a means of presenting black women’s issues from their own intellectual perspective. While talking about the function of womanist discourse Aaron McEmrys has noted,

Womanist thought is one of the most vital contributors to theological and ethical discourse today, giving voice to the experience, memory and wisdom of African American women.

(Aaron McEmrys, 2006: 1)

In the views of African American writers womanism is a universal ideology that describes the experiences of blacks. The term ‘black’ is applied to all people, who are not white. The womanist discourse is the representation of the black female and non-white women’s experiences. This discourse is basically dependent of racial issues and social discourse incorporates the ideology of lesbianism. According to womanist thought lesbianism is an acceptable tool for facing the social oppression. Therefore, the leading African American writers include lesbianism in their works. Alice Walker has used the concept of lesbianism in her leading novels like *The Color Purple* (1982) and *By the Light of My Father’s Smile* (1998). Though the purple colour has more appreciation than the lavender, the lesbians have a love for lavender colour. Therefore, while defining the concept of womanist, Walker has said, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” (Alice Walker, 1984: xii) This shows that the lesbianism is also a part of womanist discourse. For the exploration of this discourse it becomes necessary to discuss certain elements of the black women’s writings. These elements are, as discussed before, the sexual and racial politics and black female identity. The black women writers manifest a specific political, social and economic experiences of men and women. For example, Zora Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker manifest their traditional black female activities of midwifery, root working, gardening, herbal medicine and conjure in their stories. These women characters use their native folk language in their discourse. They communicate their views with the help of native speech. The womanist discourse is related to the expression of women experiences in the light of racism, sexism and social oppression. This is carried out with the help of black female language. Alice Walker rightly writes about the language of womanist discourse as,
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)

Womanist writers focus on the pains and sufferings of their people. They aim at self discovery and awareness of social injustice among the people. They also focus on class stratification in American society. They express their love for men, women and their culture. This culture is preserved with the help of transmission by oral mode from one generation to other. In this relation the womanist discourse includes songs, sermons and folk tales. In Alice Walker’s novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* (2004), Armando, a shaman sings the songs to cheer up the participants. These songs are transmitted with the help of oral mode from old generation to the next. Along with this closeness to the culture and the past a womanist sees nature as beautiful, inspiring and reassuring. There is a spiritual closeness of people with nature.

Thus the womanist discourse is related to the character’s self discovery, love for all people and relation to nature. The womanists present their ethics through spirituality, ancestral relations and the characters involvement in the struggle for social and economic justice. The womanist discourse refers to the way of being woman, appreciates women’s culture and women’s emotional flexibility.

'Womanist' is preferred by many black feminists because it is rooted in black culture, whereas the word feminist is perceived as coming out of the white woman's culture. Alice walker has stated that Womanist encompasses feminist as it is defined in Webster's Dictionary, but it also means instinctively pro-woman. It has a strong root in black women's culture. An advantage of using 'womanist' is that it is from her own culture. She dose not preface it with the word ‘Black,’ because blackness is implicit in the term. It is like white women as there is no need to preface feminist with the word ‘white’ because the word feminist is accepted as coming out of white women's culture.

Womanism celebrates blackness, black roots, the aspirations of black people, and presents a balanced picture of black womanhood. Alice Walker presents the specific racial reference in the explanation of the term. Walker's primary emphasis is
consciousness of herself as a black woman empowered to narrate the stories of black women. These black women are past or present creators of a black female Culture. Her role is one of enabling black women, especially those most marginalised by race, caste, and class, to have their voices heard and their histories read. Walker employs the term ‘womanism’ to denote the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself as a woman. The young girl inherits womanism after a traumatic event that she faces. This is a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family and sudden responsibility. Through this experience she moves creatively beyond the self to adult womanism. Alice Walker, as a womanist writer, along with sexual issues, incorporates racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her works. She protests against sexism and the patriarchal power structure in the society. Her writings demand that the readers may come across the ideological issues to change their attitudes about patriarchy. Her works just don't deal with women and women's issues but present some aspects of a womanist ideology. Walker has also experimented with the old forms used by her predecessors, male and female. She uses the African myths, folklore, story-telling, voodoo, songs, dance, their own language and the epistolary form. It contains cultural values, ideal states of being found in Afro-American history and experience. Walker's return to the epistolary form of the novel enables her to exploit qualities of simplicity and relative intimacy. It is supposed to be authentic and, like oral tradition, gives the impression that the story teller is not lying. Walker also uses in her novels the songs, verse and phrases often used in the community. This technique has a communal function of the call-and-response usually employed during African story telling sessions. Walker uses them to emphasise climatic points in the narration. Her women range from the slave women to the revolutionary women of the 90s. Within each of these roles, she has examined the external realities faced by these women as well as the internal world of each woman. She explores the imaginations, dreams and rituals of the black women which contain their collective reality. To make her point about womanism effective, Walker uses the women, who are hardworking and suffering from terrible fate. They suffer from poverty or racism or sexism, and sometimes from all three together. It has its ideal for black unity that every black person has a small quantity of power and so can be a brother or a sister or a father or a mother to the other. Its aim is the dynamism of the wholeness and self-healing. Walker discusses in her writings the theme of the black woman as suppressed artist. Walker regrets that black
women have been hidden artists for two centuries. Their creative impulses have been denied in a society. They have been valued only as a source of cheap labour. She asks,

What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for the most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist.

(Alice Walker, 1983: 233-34)

The collective and historical violation of black women is another theme of the works of Alice Walker. This can be used to point the way to historical study of the black woman writer and the black woman herself. Alice Walker uses her definitions of womanism as a base for personal and historical view of black women. She takes the experiences of black women totally victimized by society and by men. Walker is a part of an international community of writers from whom she learns and to whom she continually responds. Their actions have established bonds between generations affecting all members of a family, community, race, or society. Her portraits of human weaknesses convey her message that art should make us better. Her message, presented in her novels, is that the oppressions and violations must be mended for health and continuity, for 'survival whole' or 'wholeness.'

1.6. Alice Walker: Life

In the early years of the 19th century, first relative of the Walker family came in Eatonton, Georgia from Virginia in a coffle of slaves with two children. They were members of black family. They lived in a black community called Wards Chapel, on the outskirts of Eatonton. They remained the residents of Wards Chapel Community for a long time. They were share croppers by profession. William or Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Walker were the members of this community.

1.6.1. Early Life and Education

Alice Malsenior Walker, American by nationality and African Cherokee by race, is a southern writer. She was born on February 9, 1944, a Wednesday, as the eighth child and third daughter to Minnie (Lou) Tallulah Grant-Walker and Willie Lee Walker. It was a sharecropper family in Eatonton, Georgia. Willie Lee Walker
was a farmer making his living as a share cropper. Walker’s mother, Minnie Lou worked in domestic service and weeding, planting and picking the cotton and corn. She had also a skill of creating a garden. Walker’s brothers, Willie Fred, William Henry, James Thomas, Robert Louis, Curtis Ulysses and sisters, Mamie Lee and Ruth, assisted their parents in the fields. Walker was the last of her mother and father’s eight children. She was much loved by her family. The southern atmosphere of Eatonton, a dominant black vernacular, the life of slavery and oppression shaped her personality to be a renowned literary figure. Though Walker’s parents were not well educated they had a great attitude towards education. They insisted that each of their children attend school even though there was a pressure to have their children leave school and work as labourers. Her father, Willie Lee Walker established Putnam County’s first School for African American children, but racist white men burnt it down. At the age of four she has been enrolled in school by her parents. As a school child, Alice was a precocious and outgoing child. In this relation Carmen Gillespie has noted, “Walker was particularly precocious, and at the age of four, earlier than most of her peers, she began a distinctive career as student. She particularly loved to read and write.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 12) But her enjoying childhood and sense of well-being were changed forever by an accident at the age of eight.

In 1952, when Alice was eight she was playing with her brothers, Curtis and Robert, a game of cowboys and Indians. Her brother Curtis, playing with BB gun, shot her in her right eye. The injury resulted in permanent blindness. This deformity of eye greatly impacted the life of Alice Walker. Because of this she developed a sad countenance and it turned her into a timid and reclusive child. This reclusive attitude helped her “really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and learn to be patient enough to care about they turned out....” (Alice Walker, 1983: 244-245) She also became interested in literature and started to read stories and began to write poems. She started sitting reading for hours undisturbed. This mishap with the gun turned Alice into a creative writer, “more than 30 years later Walker writes about the life changing injury in ‘Beauty.’” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 4) Though she had been feeling alienated and isolated, her mother encouraged her for getting interest in cooking, gardening and storytelling. Her brothers also helped her much. At the age of 14, her brother, Bill, arranged a cataract surgery in Boston for her. Though the operation
could not improve her eye-sight, the removal of the cataract changed her appearance. This change increased the self-esteem of Alice and she became a popular student of the school. From Butler-Baker High School she completed her schooling. Her eye injury was considered to be a disability by the school and in 1961 Walker received a scholarship to attend Spelman College in Atlanta.

Spelman College, in Atlanta, was an institute mainly made for black women. When Alice left home for Spelman College, her mother gave her a sewing machine, a suitcase and a typewriter. While at Spelman College, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. The movement was for the change in repressive social, political and economic systems in the country. Alice actively participated in the movement. She received an invitation to come home of Coretta King and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Atlanta, Georgia. She was selected for the trip to the World Youth Peace Festival, to be held in Helsinki, Finland for the period from July 28 to August 6, 1962. Alice found this College too Victorian or puritanical that she did not graduate from it. She was transferred to Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, in December 1963. She received a scholarship offered to African American girl students, in this college. While talking about Walker’s experience of this college, Carmen writes, “Sarah Lawrence greatly expanded her creative and intellectual universe.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 6) While studying in Sarah Lawrence College, Alice visited Uganda and Kenya. Here in this college, Alice unintentionally became pregnant and wanted to commit suicide. But fortunately she could manage to terminate the pregnancy. In 1966, Alice graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in B.A.

1.6.2. Social Contribution

After her graduation she worked for the New York City Welfare Department. She received a grant to be in the Civil Rights Movement and to work for the Legal Defence Fund (LDF). It was a branch of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Mississippi. In 1961, in Mississippi, she met Melvyn Roseman Leventhal, a Jewish lawyer, working against racism and discrimination through legal channels. They got married on March 17, 1967 in New York and moved to Jacksons, Mississippi. The marriage was an inter-racial one. It was against the State laws of Mississippi. Melvyn undertook the mission of desegregating the public schools of Mississippi, this was a case that occurred first time in one hundred years.
Alice started working as a writer-in-residence at Jackson College in 1968 and Tougaloo College in 1970. Though they did not pay any attention towards the social norms, it was very difficult to live in the community with racism and discrimination. Gillespie has noted their sufferings and its consequences in proper words. He writes,

"Walker and Leventhal struggled with the emotional and psychological difficulties of living in Mississippi as an activist and inter-racial couple. The risk that they took by living together at that time was potentially fatal."

(Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 7)

Leventhal worked passionately and devotedly against segregation. Walker was also much busy with writing and teaching. In the same year Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. It was a great loss for the Black Americans and for Walker also. Walker experienced another loss of miscarriage of their first child in 1968. Next year she became pregnant again and on 17th November 1969, she gave birth to a daughter, named Rebecca. Three days after the birth of Rebecca, Alice completed her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

The early years of the married life of Alice and Melvyn were exciting and of infused companionship, in Mississippi. But later on the couple faced the violence of white racists. They were also criticised by blacks because they felt it was an act of betrayal to marry a white man. They also started feeling alienated from their friends and families. Melvyn’s mother Miriam mourned the death of her son when the couple made the announcement of their marriage. Along with the disapproval of family members, their close relatives also could not welcome Alice and Melvyn after they got married. In Mississippi, couple faced the constant threats of people. They decided to leave the place and to settle in New York in 1974. They rented one bedroom apartment in New York. Leventhal joined a law school and Alice started working as an editor of *Ms.* magazine. They could not resolve the tension of dangerous work of Civil Rights Movement and threats of the Whites as well as the Blacks. These issues contributed to their break up and in 1976 they got divorced from each other. Alice made her way, with broken heart, in an opposite side of the country.

By the second half of the 19th century, blacks and slaves were prohibited from the basic rights, such as public school attendance, public assembly, jury services and testifying and ownership of firearms. African Americans fought against this injustice.
This fight went on for about hundred years. When Alice Walker joined Spelman College, she participated in the Civil Rights Movement. This movement had a great impact on her life. She involved in the rallies and protests to change the segregated social frame work. As an activist, Walker came in contact with some prominent leaders and activists, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Julian Bond and John Lewis. She participated in demonstrations and marches with these people. With the help of experiences of the Civil Rights Movement, Walker wrote an essay entitled ‘The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?’ This essay won the first place in the annual essay contest of American Scholar Magazine in 1967.

Alice Walker completed her graduation in 1966 and started working as Writer-in-Residence in black studies at Jackson State College, Mississippi, in 1968. She also worked in the same position in Tugaloo College for 1970-71. She was a lecturer in Literature at Wellesley College, Wellesley and also at University of Massachusetts, Boston for 1972-1973. In 1974 she worked as an Editor for Ms. Magazine, New York. Later she entered into academic career as Distinguished Writer in African American Studies at the University of California. She also has worked as Professor in Literature at Brandies University in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1982. Alice, in 1984, founded Wild Trees Press in Navarro, California. The purpose behind this foundation was to publish the creative writings of unknown writers. The first publication of Wild Trees Press was ‘A Piece of Mine’ written by J. California Cooper that was nominated for the Book of the Year Award by the American Library Association in 1984. She also has contributed a great deal to Sara Lawrence College, as a member of the Board of Trustees.

While working as an activist of Civil Rights Movement in her studentship and as a writer and professor she received different fellowships. She became Merrill Writing Fellow in 1966-67 and McDowell Colony Fellow in 1967. She received a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship in 1971. Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, bestowed her with ‘an honorary Ph. D. in 1972. She has been awarded with the Southern Regional Council’s Lillian Smith Book Award for Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems, in 1973. She also got the National Book Award nomination for her Revolution Petunias and Other Poems in the same year. The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded her with the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award for her In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women in 1974. Her novel, The Color Purple, was
nominated for the National Book Critics Award. She received the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* in 1983. She has been awarded with Doctor of Honorary Laws by the Massachusetts University. She also received O’Henry Award for *Kindred Spirit* in 1986. She received Nora Astorga Leadership Award and the Langston Hughes Award from New York City College in 1989. In 1990 she received the Fred Cody Award for lifetime achievement from the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association and the PEN West Freedom to Write Award. In 1994 she received California Governor’s Arts Award. She also has been honoured with Literary Ambassador Award given by the University of Oklahoma Centre for Poets and Writers in 1998. She received Lifetime Literary Achievement Award in October 2004 from the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland. The Cinematic Production of *The Color Purple*, directed by Steven Spielberg in 1986, is a noteworthy event in the life of Alice Walker. *The Color Purple* is also adapted into a musical production in 2004.

### 1.6.3. Position in African American field of Literature

Alice Walker is an African American activist, story writer, essayist, poet and novelist. She has contributed a great deal to the African American literature. African American literature is literature written by, written about and sometimes only for African Americans. This literature began with “Lucy Terry (1730-1812), who wrote the first poem ‘Bars Fight’ (1746), although it was not published until 1855.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 24) Yet, the honour of founding African American literature goes to Phillis Wheatley, who published her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, in 1773. This is supposed to be the beginning of the African American literature. The contemporary world discussed Wheatley’s poetic ability. There was an ideology of Whites that the Africans or slaves were non-productive. To reject this notion, Alice, in her *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, has tried to present Wheatley’s greatness as, “We know now that you were not an idiot or traitor; only a sickly little girl, snatched from your home and country and made slave; a woman who struggled to sing the song that was your gift.” (Alice Walker, 1983: 237) Wheatley greatly influenced African American literature and women’s literary tradition. Wheatley is followed by Jupiter Harrison (1711-1806). As a black writer, he published his poem ‘An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries’ in 1761. He also wrote an ode to Phillis Wheatley in 1786. He remained a
slave till his death. The successor of Harrison was William Wells Brown, who was a lecturer, novelist, playwright and historian. He wrote *Clotel; or the President’s Daughter*, in 1853. This novel is published in England, therefore the honour of being the first African American novel goes to *Our Nig* written by Harriet Wilson (1828-1863), published in 1859. This literary tradition is carried forward by Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) and Fredrick Douglass (1818-1895) who wrote slave narratives. They described the horrors of slavery through their writings. In addition to male writers, the women writers also have contributed to the slave narrative. Among the women writers Mary Prince (1788-?) and Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) have narrated the brutality of slavery system. Another slave narrative, by Harriet Ann Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1867) is a noteworthy slave narrative. She is followed by Harriet Wilson, who contributed to African American literature. “Harriet E. Adams Wilson’s *Our Nig; Or Sketches of a Free Black, In a Two-storey White House, North Showing That Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There* (1859) is the first novel by an African American woman in an autobiographical tradition.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 31) These slave narratives have played a great role in paving the further paths to new comers in the literary sphere.

In the post-slavery era, African American authors have written about the African American life. Booke T. Washington (1856-1915) and William E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) have changed the course of African American literature. Du Bois published his collection of essays entitled as *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that depicts the way how African Americans live in the American Society. Book T Washington had his own views regarding the racial conflict. He said that the black must uplift themselves up to the level of the Whites and ask for the end of racism. He published his works *Up from Slavery* (1901), *The Future of The American Negro* (1899) and *My Larger Education* (1911), that contain the viewpoints of Washington regarding the black people and the racial movement.

In America, the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Renaissance started from 1920 with new attention to African American literature. This was started in the black community in Harlem, New York, therefore it is called as Harlem Renaissance. It is best known for literature, art and music of the period. The famous writers of the Renaissance are Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Houston, Jean Tommer, Dorothy West, Countee Cullen and Wallace Truman. All these famous writers, with their
literature, created a great impact upon the American society because of this the African American writings began to be absorbed into the main stream movement and Black Power Movement flourished in America. This period is called as modern era of Afro-American literature. The realism, naturalism and protest against racism were the contemporary issues of African American literature of this period. Gerri Bates has described the writers of this period as, “The writers of this period used their form to protest the inequities and deprivations of an insensitive American System.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 45) Richard Wright (1908-60) and Ralph Ellison (1914-94) also were the significant writers of the period. They dealt with the issues of racism, self-identity and liberation. The literary world of African American race had been occupied by the women writers, such as Toni Morrison, Terri MacMillan, Toni Cade Bambara, and Alice Walker. Toni Morrison, Terri MacMillan and Alice Walker appeared on the best seller list of New York Times. Some of them also received some literary awards. Bambara is honoured with American Book Award for *Salt Eaters* (1980), Walker is honoured with American Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* (1982), and Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. Along with these women writers many other women writers emerged on the horizon of African American literature. These black women authors are Gloria Naylor, Audre Lorde and Gayle Jones. They introduced new themes such as motherhood, mother-daughter relationships, women friendships and the relationships between sexuality and spirituality, in African American literature. New genres of science fiction and children literature are introduced by Octavia Butler, Lucille Clifton, Virginia Hamilton, Rosa Guy and June Jordan. Along with these women writers, Rita Dove and Maya Angelou also made their own positions in the sphere of African American literature. Rita Dove was Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to Library of Congress of the United States from 1993 to 1995.

Alice Walker, one of the African American women writers, has contributed a great deal to African American literature. Walker is greatly influenced by different literary figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and Gabriel Marquez. Gerri Bates has rightly noted,

The intellectual African American writer of the twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois, inspired Walker with his delight in the beauty and spirit of African genius Langston Hughes touched her so deeply that
she wrote a biography of him, *Langston Hughes, American Poet* (1974), so that generations to come would never forget him. (Gerri Bates, 2005: 49)

These writers have greatly influenced Alice in relation to her presentation of life-like characters through her works. By her work of literature she presents her African American community.

### 1.7. Alice Walker: Literary Career

Alice Walker developed her knowledge of African American literature with the help of oral tradition of her family, as well as through readings of works of eminent writers, she heard folk tales from her parents and grandparents that became Walker’s legacy to create literature. She is an essayist, a story writer, a poet, and a Pulitzer Prize winner novelist.

#### 1.7.1. Short Stories and Essay Collections

Alice Walker published her first stories collection, entitled as *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, in 1973. These stories are related to African American southern women and their disturbed relationships. They also deal with the women’s resistance against injustice in the community. These stories are about those women who are driven by their positions, natural forces and their expectations. This collection contains a story ‘The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff’ that has been included in 1974’s best stories. The central character of the story Hannah takes revenge on white women who denied Hannah her basic needs during the time of depression. This revenge caused the death of the White Woman’s children and her insanity. Because of the insanity the white woman also died.

*You Can’t Keep A Good Woman Down*, a second collection of short stories of Alice Walker, published in 1981, closely discusses the issues like abortion, fame, lust, pornography, love, thievery, new lovers and old friends. In this collection of stories Walker presents the relationship between black and white popular music and musicians, the memories of slavery and cultural thievery. One of the stories in the collection ‘Nineteen Fifty Five’ is a best known story about a white popular cultural singer and an African American poet. The singer sings the songs given by the poet and people enjoy it, but he cannot understand what he sings. This is the symbolic representation of white exploitation of African American music. This is considered to
be a cultural thievery. While critically commenting this story, Carmen Gillespie has written about the white exploitation as,

Alice Walker is able to suggest that the birth of Post-World War II American culture has its roots in the same kinds of exploitation and invisibility as was true during earlier period of American History.

(Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 247)

These short stories contain the womanist elements as well. The issues of women, race and gender have been discussed in these short stories. In addition to the short story Alice Walker has tried her hand on the essay also. There are three essay collections to her credit to date. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing..... and 'Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* is Alice Walker’s first essay collection edited in 1979. Behind this edition Alice had an aim to restore Zora to her place as a major African American Writer. She has tried to bring the beauty of African American expression to the people. She has explained Hurston as a person and as an eminent literary figure.

*In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* is her second essay collection published in 1983. It is an important collection of essays, letters, speeches, reviews and some pieces unpublished before. In this essay collection Walker has given definitions of her term ‘Womanist.’ She has defined the term as,

.... a black feminist or feminist of color; a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually; a lover of music, dance, the moon and self, among other open-ended possibilities, and concluding with the statement that ‘Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.’

(Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 272)

This collection is totally built on the concept of Womanism. Alice has discussed the issues like race, class, gender, sexuality and socio-political constructions, in this collection. While discussing the domestic oppressions, Alice has invoked the struggle against racial supremacy and imperialism. Along with these issues she has evaluated the history of Black female artistic production. She has explored her literary models and other female artists, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O’Conner, Bessie Head and Virginia Woolf along with Langston Hughes and Leo Tolstoy. She also has discussed some contemporary issues like domestic abuse, female genital mutilation or sexual binding of women and sexism in certain black communities. In addition to these issues, Alice has discussed her creative process of
the novel *The Color Purple*, her childhood and adolescent life, and her experiences of her married life.

*Living By the Word: Selected Writings, 1973-1987* is the final essay collection of Alice Walker, published in 1988. This collection explores the issues of race, gender and class. It begins with a dream that she has about a two-headed woman. Alice asks her whether the world will survive, the woman answers that the solution is to ‘live by the word’ therefore it is titled so, these essays include the themes of the need of familiar compassion for who suffer helplessly. Alice has advocated the inter-raciality as a fundamental element of American life. Carmen Gillespie notes about Alice’s suggestion, “there is a dynamic and interactive relationship between the universe and humanity that all humans have access to and that we can use to find the answers to survival and peaceful, non-hierarchical co-existence.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 276) With the help of these essays Alice has tried to project the womanist philosophy of wholeness. It is a try to value those who are unable to use their own words to influence and inform others about their understandings and knowledge.

1.7.2. Poetry

In addition to short stories and essays, poetry is also an area of interest for Alice Walker. She has eight poetry collections to her credit. She published her first book of poetry *Once: Poems* in 1968, when she was at Sarah Lawrence College, New York. These poems are about the life and her travels to Africa. Some of the poems deal with the African images and some are about the Civil Rights Movement in the South. Some poems focus on her abortion and love. When Alice was a student at Sarah Lawrence College, she was encouraged by Helen Lynd and Muriel Rukeyser to write poems. When she was a student, became pregnant from her friend, she decided to have abortion, but after it, she suffered from depression. This depression led her to consider of committing suicide. Rather than committing suicide she started writing poems. This collection of poems resulted in her first poem collection publication, entitled as *Once: Poems*. It throws light on the Civil Rights Movement and relationship between American racism and the African antiracism as well as the racial struggles.

*Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* is the second book of poetry by Alice Walker, published in 1973. In these poems Alice has interpreted the women’s
stories. The women are considered to be heroines of the Civil Rights Movement. The Southern African American women like Sammy Lou and Mrs. Johnson are praised for their roles in the movement. The poems are about the resistance against injustice prevailing in the American Society. This collection of poems received The Southern Regional Council’s Lillian Award and the nomination for the National Book Award in 1973.

Alice Walker published her third poetry collection, *Good Night, Willie Lee, I’ll See You in the Morning: Poems*, in 1979. This is a tribute to women’s love for themselves. Alice heard her mother whisper into her father's coffin “Good Night, Willie Lee, I’ll see you in the morning.” From this line she constructed this collection of poems. It centres on the inevitability of life and death, change and transformation in human experiences. This collection, like other collections, contains the Womanist philosophy of Alice Walker. She presents women’s abuse and exploitation in African American society. She also examines some literary figures and characters that are significant to her. The poems in this collection suggest a need of acceptance of what happens in one’s day to day life. Along with these issues, love is also a noteworthy subject of the poems.

*Horses Make The Landscape Look More Beautiful*, the fourth collection of poems by Alice Walker, is published in 1984. It focuses on the relationship between nature and human beings. It also deals with the racial and gender oppression in African American community. It presents the ‘results of inhumanity and destruction of the natural world.’ Alice tries to make readers know the ways to bring together the divisions for wholeness. Wholeness is one of the views of Womanist ideology of Alice Walker. With this collection she uses her knowledge gained from experiences, to express her response to division of wholeness.

Alice published her fifth anthology of poems, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems 1965-1990 Complete*, in 1991. It contains the poems that Alice wrote in the years between 1965 and 1990. This collection includes some previously published poems and 16 new poems. Throughout this work Alice has put Zora Neale Hurston’s novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), at the centre. This also is a Womanist collection dealing with the spirit, struggle, and self-love of woman. One of the poems from this collection, ‘Janie Crawford’ is based on
Hurston’s protagonist of her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie is admired for her independent spirit. She leaves her husband who did not allow her to fulfil her potential. It suggests that a black woman is not a beast of burden.

*Absolute Trust In The Goodness of The Earth: New Poems*, another volume of poems by Alice Walker, is published in 2003. Through these poems Walker attempts to give some lessons to the world regarding the attacks and disasters those took place on 9/11 in America. One of the poems ‘Why War Is Never a Good Idea’ personifies war as a monstrous being that violets the peace of human society and the nature. Walker had described war as a cruel and monstrous. With this volume Alice also shares with the readers poetry’s healing role in her life. Along with this volume Alice published another volume of poetry in the same year, titled as *Poem Travelled Down My Arm: Poems and Drawings*. Through these poems Walker has expressed her brief observations of human relationships. There is an expression of her belief in the power of connectivity to produce positivity. She has added some drawings in it with her autograph. According to critic Gerri Bates the volume is “a development centering on her signature. To avoid the monotony of signature repetitiveness at book signature giving readers something unique within the book.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 52)

*Hard Times Require Furious Dancing* is a recent book of poems by Alice Walker, published in October 2010. This is a collection of poems depicting struggle of her life. These are the poems written for the time we are living through. The New World Library Release has explained this volume as “….. these poems written during struggles and sadness and deal with the loss of siblings, the loss of a beloved dog, the estrangement in family.” (Press Release on [www.alicewalkersgarden.com](http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com)). This collection also presents the violence and struggles, simple joy of life, love and freedom.

### 1.7.3. Autobiographical and Non-Fictional Works

Alice Walker has a great contribution to African American literary sphere as she is an essayist, a poetess, story writer as well as she has a number of autobiographical works to her credit. She has written four works having autobiographical elements in them. The first book, *Alice Walker: Banned*, is published in 1996. It discusses the issue that the works of Alice Walker are banned in the United States most frequently. This book contains two short stories of Walker and
The Color Purple. All this material presented in the book is related to the observations and experiences of Alice Walker. In addition to this book, The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult is another autobiographical publication of Alice Walker that appeared in 1996. In this book Walker has discussed her experience of the process of film version of The Color Purple. She speaks of her time with the artists of the movie. She also talks about her daughter, Rebecca for her involvement in the film production. Alice includes the discussion of the end of her relationship with her partner, Robert Allen. In 1997 Alice published Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer’s Activism, a book with autobiographical elements. Carmen Gillespie, while writing about the book, states that “Walker writes about nearly every aspect of her life and experiences. She frames these desperate pieces within her constructing a life of activism.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 267) In this book Alice has written about her mother and the influence of her mother’s life on her sense. She also writes about her brother and daughter in the book. In addition, she has written about her discovery of Zora Hurston, Winnie Mandela, Carl Jung, Fred Kohlo and Sulman Rushdie in her fourth autobiographical writing, Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine Israel, in 2010. It contains seven stories about the insight and reflections of Alice Walker about the situations in Rwanda, Congo and Gaza. These reflections are based on Walker’s two trips to Africa and Middle East in 2006 and 2009. She experiences the violent slaughter of the Tutsi Congo, where she comes to know the loss of about 4 million Congolese lives because of the war. She discusses these observations in her book. Walker also talks about her married life in comparison to Israeli situation. By this discussion Walker wants to make the readers know the ways of reconciliation and understanding.

community has a green stone working as a barometer of the thoughts of a person. This stone shines when a person thinks and acts in a gracious manner, but it grows dull if the person thinks in a negative manner.

The next children book by Alice Walker is *There is a Flower at the Top of My Nose Smelling Me*, published in 2006. This book is about the beauty of nature. Alice reverses all the daily references and turns the readers into the objects that they view. The narrator does not see the sky and the stars at night, but the sky and the stars watch the narrator. The narrator says, “There is a song deep in my body singing me” and “There is a dance that lives in my bones dancing me.” This book is a different kind of work by Alice Walker, meant for children.

1.7.4. **Novels**

Alice Walker has tried her hand on almost all the genres of literature. But her real fame, as a literary figure, comes from the novel. Gerri Bates has rightly discussed the relationship between Walker and the genre of novel. He writes about Walker as,

> Walker’s fame comes from her novels, and Walker views the genre of novel as the medium that permits her the greatest amount of freedom in her creation of a literary work that is uniquely hers in her own words.  
> (Gerri Bates, 2005: 52)

Walker has a skill of novel writing that helps her weave the story into proper dialogues that exhibit the thoughts of the characters. She has a special ability to develop the stories of black women, those have not been the parts of American literature. There are seven novels to her credit till date. All the novels have different themes, different narrative techniques with a single current of wholeness of humankind.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970)*

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is a first novel by Alice Walker. It is set in rural Georgia, America. It tells the story of Grange, his wife, the son Brownfield and a granddaughter, Ruth. Alice has treated family cruelty caused by racism, sexism and poverty as the central theme of the novel. The novel is divided into 11 parts with 48 chapters. The first half of the novel deals with the family destruction caused of Southern American racism. The second half of the novel presents the regeneration of
the Grange family come from the realisation of the waste of youth and adulthood of Grange. The themes of novel have been developed with the help of an omniscient narrator. The narrator is all knowing, unrestricted and free to comment on every aspect of the life of the Copeland family. The narrator does not narrate the events in a chronological order but in a quilt or patchwork style. While describing the narrative and writing style, Gerri Bates has noted that Walker develops the themes of the novel through the eyes of an omniscient author narrator who is privy to every tightly held secret of the Copeland family life. Walker bases the story line of this novel loosely on the murder of Mrs. Walker, killed by her husband. This shows that the novel deals with the theme of death. There are events like Margaret’s suicide, the murder of Mem, Brownfield and Uncle Silas. These events take place against the background of sexism, economic deprivation and racism. It is a story of the uselessness of violence and importance of personal responses.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* contains two male characters, Grange and his son Brownfield and two women, Margaret and Mem. Grange works as sharecropper at a land owner’s farm and lives life under debts from his white boss. He neglects his son, Brownfield and abuses his wife, Margaret. He is unable to deal with the situations and develops a drinking habit and sexual relation with a local prostitute. His son, Brownfield, is totally deserted by his father. He also follows the footsteps of his father, Grange. He also keeps sexual relations with a prostitute. He marries Mem, a school teacher’s niece, yet could not develop good relations with her and one day murders her. Grange leaves his family and sets for North to improve his life. But hunger and hopelessness make him a criminal. Margaret commits suicide of her husband’s behaviour. Finally Grange turns to his home and takes the responsibility of his grand- daughter, Ruth, after her mother’s death. Brownfield does not let his father have the responsibility of raring Ruth. Therefore Grange murders his son, “Underneath his flared tail coat Grange had carried his blue steel Colt 45. With it he had shot down his son.” (Alice Walker, 1970: 309) After the murder of his son, Brownfield, Grange Copeland also dies of police firing.

*Meridian* (1976)

*Meridian* is the second novel by Alice Walker with a woman, Meridian Hill, as a central character. Alice presents the role of a woman in the Civil Rights
Movement in America. The protagonist, Meridian Hill, an African American woman, becomes an activist of the Civil Rights Movement. She gets romantically connected to Truman, a black male activist of the Civil Rights Movement. He expresses his love for her and praises her beauty. He also impregnates her and she aborts the child to spare much time for the Civil Rights Movement. After this, Truman gets married to a white girl, Lynne. Meridian does not bother much about these happenings and remains attached to the movement. She rejects her motherhood and works for the upliftment of her people. For this purpose she practices nonviolence ideology, but at the end she changed her ideology and accepts ‘killing’ in the name of revolution. Finally, she comes to know that the Civil Rights Movement is completely a failure to bring change in the social orders. Yet, Meridian stays firm to fight her own battle alone. Truman expresses his grief “I hate to think of you always alone. But that is my value, said Meridian. Besides, all the people who are as alone as I am will one day gather at the river. We will watch the evening sun go down. And in the darkness may be we will know the truth.” (Alice Walker, 1976: 242) She leaves everything for her further battle. It is a prose narrative presented in different episodes. These episodes are loosely connected to one another to complete the cycle of the novel. The narrative of the novel is anecdotal and humorous. It gives every detail of the characters and the events. The culture of African American people is presented with a kind of music. Bates rightly says,

Music frames the novel, the kind of music that represents the culture of a people. The music is everywhere – protest songs, church songs, work songs, love songs and party songs. The music is there because it was part of the survival of the South.  

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 81)

In this presentation there is a sense of history and autobiography. It deals with a historical movement of which Walker was a part once. She gives her personal account of the movement that she experienced before. This movement was a life changing factor to Alice Walker, therefore she wants to involve her readers in this experience. Walker wants to examine the personal loss of every activist of the Civil Rights Movement. Carmen Gillespie mentions this as, “the novel provides insight into some of the responses and costs of activism of those who were involved in the struggle.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 94) Thus the novel responds to the personal costs of the movement to the activists and the stress of work.
The Color Purple (1982)

*The Color Purple* is the third novel by Alice Walker, appeared in 1982. This is an epistolary novel that won her the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. It was also nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1982. The novel is adapted for a film with the same title directed by Stephen Spielberg in 1985. This film was nominated for 11 Academic Awards and 5 Golden Globe Awards. A musical adaptation of the novel, ‘The Color Purple: The musical,’ produced by Scott Sanders, was premiered in 2004.

The novel deals with the story of Celie, the protagonist of the novel. Celie writes letters to God after she is raped and tortured by her stepfather, Alphanso. He impregnates her and she delivers a girl for the first time. It is stolen by Alphanso and killed in the woods. For the second time she begets a boy, he is also stolen by Alphanso. Alphanso makes Celie marry a person Mr.—, who has sexual relations with Shug Avery. Celie is tortured and abused by Mr.— very often. At the same time Nettie, Celie’s sister, runs away from their stepfather’s house to live with Celie. Mr.— wants to abuse Nettie also, therefore she runs away from Celie’s house also. When Mr.— brings Shug at his home, Celie gets attracted sexually to Shug. They develop lesbian relationship between them. This friendship of Celie with Shug results in fruitfulness to Celie. One day Shug searched Mr.—’s trunk and they find a number of letters sent by Nettie. From these letters it becomes clear that Nettie is living with Samuel and Corrine, a missionary couple in Africa. It also becomes clear that the children, stolen from Celie by her stepfather are alive and adopted by Samuel and Corrine, a missionary couple. Celie becomes bold enough and accompanies Shug to Tennessee. Celie becomes financially, spiritually and emotionally independent. Finally, Nettie returns to America with Celie’s children, Olivia and Adam. The novel ends with Celie and Mr.—’s reconciliation and re-union of the family.

*The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel as the narrative is presented in the form of written letters between the characters. This style of writing, used by Alice Walker, does not let writer intervene in the presentation of emotions of characters. While advocating this technique Gerri Bates has pointed out, “this genre allows the writer some flexibility because the same occurrences are presented through multiple points of view via the correspondent’s epistolary records.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 92)
This technique is related to the woman culture. Walker has used folk language or folk dialect as female narrative voice. Walker has used the aspects of African American culture, folklore, folk expressions and the folk dialect in this novel. She has presented the conditions and situations of women in African American community. She wants to make all the readers know the behaviour of pre-civil war slave owners. They sexually abuse the women to give them inhuman treatment. The women are not able to express their feelings and emotions openly, therefore Alice has used a suitable way of expression. While evaluating this technique, Meena Kumari has written, “She (Celie) is able to express her true desires only in her letters. These letters allow her to display any emotion and they are very personal to her as well.” (Meena Kumari, 2011: 90) Thus with the help of epistolary form, Alice Walker has presented the social status of women, love for self and others, their struggle and the wholeness of people.

The Temple of My Familiar (1989)

The Temple of My Familiar is a multi-narrative novel having inter-related stories of Hal, Lissie, Arveyda, Carlotta, Suwelo and Fanny. This is the story of personal and communal heritage of all the characters. The major issues discussed in the novel are racism, oppression and sexism. It is a story of three couples, among them two couples want to reconcile or establish friendly relations with one another. African American Professor, Suwelo and Fanny make a married couple, but Fanny wants a divorce because she does not want to be married. She desires freedom from all the limitations of marriage. Suwelo takes a train from California to Baltimore for his uncle’s funeral and to sale his property. He meets Mr. Hal and Miss Lissie, his uncle’s friends. They go on talking regarding different issues. Miss Lissie is portrayed as having much spiritual power to recall the human history and the past lives. It has been shown that Miss Lissie has lived in different incarnations since the beginning of time. The third couple, Arveyda and his wife Carlotta, desires to have self-knowledge and affirmation. Arveyda has a sexual affair with his mother in law, Zedê. Carlotta is not ready to accept her husband because of this affair. At the end Fanny, Suwelo, Carlotta and Arveyda come to know about their ancestral past and they become aware of the importance of forgiveness and wholeness.
It is a complex type of narrative used to rewrite the world history. All the characters are portrayed in a way that their lives intersect and overlap each other. The novel explores the issues of racism, sexism and economic exploitation. While talking about the central theme and narration, Carmen has pointed, “Its title reveals its central metaphor: an exploration of the relationship between the inner and outer self, the spirit and the body, the FAMILIAR and the temple.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 157) The novel is divided into six parts with animal imageries. The first and second parts of the narrative have peacock imagery. The third part has serpent and the fourth has owl imagery. In the fifth part there is a turtle and in the final part, lion imagery is used. These imageries are used in the novel to show the shared existence of humans and animals. Alice uses her knowledge of ancestral spiritual practices to construct her novel. She makes her readers know about the past and present constructs of race, class and gender oppression. She has also used the African story telling tradition to put her views. Gerri Bates calls this novel a romance, he writes, “Alice Walker’s term for her novel is a romance. At the base level a romance emphasises the occurrences of the plot rather than reflecting ordinary life experiences.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 107) It is true that a romance has very close relations, with myths, adventure and detective stories. Walker has used all these components in her novel to deal with the history, primary characters and relations with familiars.

**Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992)**

*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, a novel by Alice Walker, appeared in 1992. It deals with the issue of female genital mutilation. The protagonist, Tashi, is an African Olinka girl. There are other characters that appeared in *The Color Purple*. Celie’s sister, Nettie, Celie’s daughter, Olivia and Celie’s son, Adam, leave Africa after living many years there. They serve as missionaries to the Olinka people in Africa. Adam and Tashi are married before they arrive in the United States to reunite with Celie. Tashi has undergone the procedure of sexual blinding or circumcision. She also has got the traditional marks of her tribe scarred on her face. Adam and Tashi cannot make a good couple because their love making becomes painful due to circumcision process. Adam has an affair with a French woman, Lisette and they have a son, Pierre. Tashi gives birth to a son, but because of circumcision and a surgical problem the child becomes mentally impaired. These two events make Tashi emotionally and psychologically upset. Tashi becomes haunted by a nightmare of a
dark tower. She also suffers of Dura’s memory. Dura is Tashi’s sister who dies in the childhood of excessive bleeding at the time of circumcision. Tashi also becomes much restless as she comes to know about Adam’s affair with Lisette. Tashi suffers of being American on one hand and her African tribal traditions on the other. Meena Kumari has put this inner reality of Tashi in proper words. She writes,

Evelyn-Tashi-Mrs. Johnson’s mental disturbance has been caused by being in America for many years and has that American life, for the black person itself is a torture.

(Meena Kumari, 2011: 125)

Tashi learns that her sister, Dura dies of circumcision performed by M’Lissa, the tsunga of her tribe. She also thinks that her son’s disability is the result of M’Lissa’s process of circumcision which she herself undergoes. She decides to kill M’Lissa and smothers her with a pillow and burns her house. The Olinka people convict her of murder and sentence her to death.

The novel is about the life and experiences of Tashi. It is a narrative of many of the current issues of the world. It begins with the epigraph selected from a book ‘African Saga’ by Mirella Ricciardi, published in 1981. In it the writer writes that black people are natural and they possess the secret of joy. The same current is present in Possessing the Secret of Joy. The novel has a multi-voice narration with 21 titled parts. It focuses on an antisocial practice of female genital mutilation or circumcision. Though the ritual has religious significance according to Olinka tribe, Gerri Bates calls it a political issue. He writes,

This novel is an extended political discourse on African customs of tribalism and sexism and the complicity of African Leaders, male and female, in upholding the rituals of female mutilation as passage into adult life.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 119)

The story progresses with the help of narration of important issues in life of Tashi. The narratives haven’t any chronology but arranged as flashbacks to involve the readers in memories of the characters. This technique helps to connect the emotion of love, anger, joy, hate and courage. This novel handles the issue of women circumcision to make the readers aware of such a social taboo that is practiced in different regions of the world. Walker takes it as an inhuman and unnatural practice that should be banned worldwide.
By the Light of My Father’s Smile is sixth novel of Alice Walker, published in 1998. It deals with the issue of female sexuality, hypocrisy and deception. The dominant themes of the novel are father-daughter relationships, love, sexuality, spirituality and reconciliation. Senor Robinson and his wife Langley live in the mixed African Amerindian Mundo community in Mexico. The couple is in conflict with each other very often over the upbringing of their girls. Senor Robinson is a stern disciplinarian and desires to rule the household strictly. In this situation Magdalena or Mad Dog, a free spirited and fearless elder girl of Robinson, likes the Mundo culture and she also falls in love with a Mundo boy, Manuelito. At the age of 15 she becomes sexually intimate with Manuelito. Samantha or Susannah, the younger girl of Robinson, is the protagonist of the novel. She prohibits Magdalena from outward expression of love and affection. Because of this she becomes alienated from her sister. When Robinson comes to know about the sexual relations of Magdalena with Manuelito, he whips her with a belt. This punishment takes the father and the daughter psychologically away from each other. Susannah takes the side of Magdalena and keep herself away from her father. Manuelito, in reaction to loss of Magdalena, marries a woman as a commitment but not love. Because of Robinson’s attitude the father-daughter relationship is damaged. He dies but cannot amend these relationships. Manuelito also dies in the middle of the novel. Yet there is reconciliation between all the characters posthumously. Robinson performs the act of penance and finds absolution in his daughter’s forgiveness. The novel ends with the death of the protagonist, Susannah.

The narrative of the novel is of three sections. The first section introduces the characters, some are alive and some are dead. The second section deals with the conversation among the characters. They talk about their lives that can be called the other side of life. The last section, titled as ‘Fathers’, has a focus on eternity. This creative work has some elements of romance and manners. This novel can be called a love story as well as a novel of manners. The story is of love of Magdalena and Manuelito that is interrupted by the father, Robinson. It also deals with the customs and habits of a social class from which Robinsons come. Therefore this can be called a novel of manners. Along with this, the novel is also a genre of myth as a central point. The story telling tradition of primitive people is used in the narration. Walker
also uses genre of poetry to justify the existence of nature. This can be considered to be the metaphysical aspect of the novel. With the help of multiple narrative techniques, Walker has made men and women alive and deceased tell the story. In this relation Gerri Bates has explained, “Walker exercises her freedom of choice in the selection of point of view and does not limit herself to one perspective in this novel.” (Gerri Bates, 2005: 135) This supports the view that Walker has a love for making experiments with the forms.

**Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart (2004)**

*Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* appeared in 2004, is the first novel of the new millennium by Alice Walker. It explains an interpersonal conflict centred on Kate Nelson Talkingtree, a 57 years old successful writer. She suffers from the dreams of empty freezers, snake images and dry rivers. She joins a trip to the Colorado River with some other women seekers. This journey is much hazardous and opens Kate up to interior of her life. She becomes ill and suffers of vomiting. This journey on the river is taken to be the beginning of Kate’s understanding of her life. She starts realising that the romantic relationship, she has with Yolo, is to be ended. Carmen, while depicting the effect of journey, writes, “She becomes violently ill, and her vomiting becomes metaphor for riding herself of the oppressive weight of her attempt to conform and to withhold her words and feelings.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 118) Because of Kate’s illness this journey results in a failure and Kate takes another journey to the Amazon River. She joins a group of medicine seekers with the assistance of a shaman, Armando. In this journey the group is seeking the medicinal herbs. Kate becomes much aware of the importance of personal relationships. By this journey Kate comes to an opinion that she needs no medicine, but understanding of the human relationships completely.

This novel, with third person narration, accounts the action of searching or quest for the significance and meaning of the life. It is an episodic story depicting the adventures of the protagonist, Kate, for the meaning of the life. From this narration the readers know Kate’s character, her marriage, children, lovers and associates. The novel is a quest narrative with the sense of wellbeing of the world. This quest becomes effective as Kate acquires enlightenment that the aging is a fundamental and inherent part of life. Yolo, with the help of another voyage, “becomes sensitized to
the motherland – to the land and sea, to the extra ordinary healing qualities of the variety of Flora.” (Carmen Gillespie, 2011: 167) Finally, Walker brings these major characters together to unite with new understanding and knowledge. When they reunite, they find their relationships stronger than before. They decide to continue their lives together. They invite all their kindred in their lives to join the celebration of their union. This narrative makes the readers know the real healing medicine in the life is their relationships. They should have a certain relationships with their maternal figures and the Kindred ones. Walker has structured this novel on the traditional literary framework of journey. This journey is aimed at the re-assessment of self-definition, interpersonal relationships and beliefs.

1.8. Aims and Objectives of Research

The aims and objectives of the present research are as follows:

a) To study Alice Walker’s ideology of Womanism.

b) To study ‘the world of Women’ in the novels of Alice Walker.

c) To analyse the concept of Womanism as well as similarities and difference between womanism and feminism.

d) To study Alice Walker as a womanist writer.

e) To focus on the presentation of African-American women in the novels of Alice Walker.

f) To study the sufferings of black women under racial and gender oppression in American society discussed in the novels of Alice Walker.

g) To study the role of women of colour in the American culture and history.

1.9. Justification for Research

Western Society has been questioned by many oppressed, colonised and suffering groups of people. They suffer of their social “status of second class–citizens.” (Elizabeth Torfs, 2008: 1) One of these groups, black American or African Americans or people of colour have expressed their grief through a number of ways.
Among these African Americans, women are most marginalised of the society. They are oppressed as ‘black’ on one hand and ‘female’ on the other. These women question and challenge the main stream of American society with their own approaches. One of the widely accepted approaches is Alice Walker’s Womanism.

Alice Walker is recognised as one of the leading African American women writers. Her writings examine the struggle of black or African American people, especially women, in a sexist and racist American society. Most significant feature of her writings is the ‘Black American Woman’ at the centre. She has presented the lives of black women through almost all her writings. To deal with the women issues, Walker has coined the term ‘womanism.’ She used it for the first time in her book In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose, in 1983. There is a term ‘feminism’ in practice, established in late 19th and early 20th century, to refer to the women struggle for equality and their rights. Feminism was inadequate to take into account the plight of black women, racial oppression and sexism. Therefore, there was a need of a new approach to deal with the issues of sexism, racism and black women. To resist the marginalisation of black women, the theories of black feminism and womanism are developed. This discourse of womanism in the novels of Alice Walker is examined in the present research. It may be helpful to analyse the works of African American male and female writers.

1.10. Research Methodology

This research is descriptive and analytical in nature. The present study is a close study of the novels of Alice Walker. As it is based on the creative writing of a novelist, essayist, poet and story writer, an interdisciplinary and analytical study of the novels of Alice Walker is undertaken. In the course of study certain secondary sources are taken into account. The proposed study is to be completed by applying following methods.

a. Collection and thorough analysis of primary and secondary data.

b. Collection and thorough analysis of research articles, related journals and papers based on Alice Walker’s novels.

c. Research visits to various libraries for the collection of data.
The use of webliography or internet sources in relation to Alice Walker’s works.

Thus textual method and analytical method of study are used as methodology for this research.

1.11. **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This research includes all the novels, i.e., seven novels of Alice Walker for the study. These novels are studied in relation to Alice Walker’s ideology of Womanism, portraying, presentation and the role of African American women in the American society. The research undertakes a minute study of the novels of Alice Walker in relation to discourse of womanism in it. It has to be examined that Alice Walker is a womanist writer. This study is a way out to the sufferings of African American women presented in Alice Walker’s novels. This study may be helpful to the students and researchers worldwide, therefore it has a universal scope.

Though Alice Walker is a novelist, a poet, an essayist and a story writer, this research aims at the thorough study of her novels only. Other genres are referred to wherever are helpful but a critical and analytical study of novels only is undertaken. It takes a brief survey of other works of Alice Walker as well as some secondary sources also. This is the limitation of this research. This shows that the novels of Alice Walker are studied in the light of the concept of womanism and its discourse. This makes it clear that the proposed study is limited to ‘black women’ presented in the novels of Alice Walker.

1.12. **Social Significance of the Study**

This research studies the African American society in relation to ‘women.’ This brings out the world of women and its significance in the American society. This also highlights the issues of gender, race, social oppression, sexuality and their effects on the contemporary society. The readers may come to know the effects of racial struggles on the socio-economic aspects of the American society. This research and its findings facilitates the future researchers to have certain guidelines. The proposed study examines the socio-historical contexts of Alice Walker’s novels. It helps the readers to know the contemporary Western canon. In this study a minority group of Afro-Americans, a group of formerly colonised people, is examined in
relation to socio-political aspects of the American society. This also helps the readers to know the reasons and effects of certain social issues like racism, gender, segregation, sexism and social oppression. Alice Walker has discussed a certain social malpractices prevailing in certain communities in different regions of the world. The readers come to know these social taboos and get some clues to prevent them if they take place in their societies. For example, Walker has discussed an issue of ‘female circumcision’ prevailing in a number of African communities. This is an inhuman practice as it can cause the death of the circumcised. Walker herself has written regarding this, “Human beings do terrible things to each other, yet we are healers, too.” (Walker Alice, 1992: xi) This study contributes to the social awareness about such type of issues. Alice Walker discusses the life of African American people, their deprived state and her hope for upliftment of these people in her novels. There is a concern for all the oppressed people of the world. She discusses the issues of African American men and women. In the same way different men and women writers deal with the Dalit issues in India. In this relation the present study has a social significance in Indian context

1.13. Pedagogical Significance of the Study

Alice Walker is a prestigious Pulitzer Prize winner African American writer. She has taught as a teacher in various universities, such as Cambridge University, University of Massachusetts, Boston; Yale University, New Haven; University of California and Brandies University, Waltham. This shows that she has been in the profession of teaching for a certain period in America. Some of her novels and poems are the parts of the syllabi of different universities. In India her Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Color Purple and Meridian are the parts of the prescribed syllabi in a number of Universities. Walker’s novel The color Purple is a part of the syllabus of Master degree in some of the renowned Indian Universities, such as Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj University, Nagpur; Shivaji University, Kolhapur; Calcutta University, Calcutta; Madras University, Madras; etc. In this situation it becomes necessary to make an authentic critical resource available for the present students. With the help of this research the students will understand her way of looking at the life and her philosophy of life. They will also understand the Ideology of womanism of Alice Walker and its discourse in her novels.
A number of research studies have been done in relation to writings of Alice Walker and in future those may be undertaken by different researchers. This research study may play a great role in their investigations of various themes and ideas in her writings. This research tries to be a reliable and authentic resource pedagogically.

1.14. Summary

In this chapter the research topic is discussed in relation to its various terms. It has discussed the definition of the term ‘Womanist’ introduced by Alice Walker. In nutshell it can be stated that ‘the womanist’ is ‘a folk expression’ of mothers used for girls, ‘You acting womanish,’ trying to be grown up, responsible and serious. It is further explained that ‘womanist’ is a ‘woman who loves other women,’ ‘preferring women’s culture,’ ‘loves men’ and ‘committed to survival and wholeness of people,’ and ‘Traditionally Universalist.’ Alice has further explained the ‘womanist’ loves music, dance, the moon, the spirit, loves love, food, folk, herself and struggle. Finally, she has defined ‘womanist’ is to feminist as purple to lavender.’ This is followed by the discussion of Alice Walker’s life and her contribution to the literary sphere of America. Alice Walker’s poetry, collections of short stories, autobiographical and non-fictional writings and the novels are examined in brief.

The aims and objectives of the research are noted in relation to research problem selected. In the further section the methodologies of data collection, textual analysis and use of modern technical devices for collection of data are discussed. It is followed by the justification for the research in the novels of Alice Walker. It has been tried to justify the research with suitable and supportive information. While stating the scope and limitation of the study it is made clear that ‘the issues of women’ has a universal scope, but it is related to only ‘black women’ in the novels of Alice Walker, therefore it is limited to black women only. This research must have some social and pedagogical importance. Alice has discussed current issues of gender, race, sexuality and social oppression. This makes the study socially important as it deals with the problems which are universal today. This study is pedagogically important because the writings of Alice Walker have been prescribed for different educational courses in various universities worldwide. A numerous researches, in relation to the writings of Alice Walker, are done and will be undertaken by
researchers in future. This study will help those research students as an authentic source.

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