I

Small Hamlet of poverty-stricken people situated in (33°19’ 35’ N) (83° 23’16’ W) Putnam, County, Georgia, one of the most black populated states of United States of America, gives birth to a girl child in the family of Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker and Willie Lee Walker. The city quietly boasts its presence as the birthplace of many famous faces like Alice Walker (author of *The Color Purple*), Joel Chandler Harris (Journalist and author of the *Uncle Remus Stories*) and Henry Grady Weaver (author of *Mainspring of Human Progress*).

When the whole world was engulfed in world war, a black woman of seven children was writhing in pain to deliver the youngest of eight children called Alice. She grew up to enlighten the whole world of feminist society with her scathing, piercing sword-like views. She attacks on factors responsible for Black Woman’s life, tortured triply with racism, sexism and classicism in American society particularly, and oppressed women of the world under patriarchal hegemonic culture in general. She became the torch-bearer to her own sisters like mute black women who were physically and psychologically abused and enslaved by black and white society. These women were caught in the mire of confused identity.

The period of 1944 holds great historical importance. The American warships and plane were thundering and were fighting the Japanese onslaught under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt against Hitler led forces. Nazis were on fire in their imperialist motif. It seems the whole world was under great turmoil. At home, my country India at that time under the banner of ‘Bharat Choro Andolan’ was also trying to
liberate from the clutches of British rules of 300 old slavery under the able and committed leadership of man of the century, Mahatma Gandhi, whom, the world, later knows as ‘Bapu’. It was Feb. 9, 1944 which holds much relevance and importance as it marks and gives birth to an era of freedom (birth of the author) from imperialist forces and thoughts. On one side the Americans were fighting for their survival as well as the survival for the humanity and on the other side, the town of Eatonton, which was facing acute hardship and were acutely discriminated against their eastern counterparts on human resources index such as education, health facility, roads, power and many other things, was predictably going to change the fate of Afro American women, for the years to come, through Alice Walker’s revolutionized ideas.

Born in rural Eatonton, Georgia, she learned very early, the value of looking within the hidden spaces of human experience. Her father's great-great-grandmother, Mrs. Mary Poole came as a slave on foot from Virginia, carrying a baby on each hip, a trip that Alice Walker rejoices by keeping her maiden name. "It is in memory of this walk that I choose to keep and embrace my 'maiden' name, Walker" (ISMG, 142). Like most Southern rural Afro-American families in the first half of the century, Walker's family was trapped in the sharecropping system, which strongly resembled its antecedent, slavery.

Alice, the child, slowly grew up in rich abundance of her numerical brothers and sisters but equally devoid of nutrition, education, proper clothing, sanitation, healthy food, medication and other day-do-day facilities. Alice, at the age of four, was very happy and outgoing “something of a whiz” (ISMG364). She loved to be in society especially reciting
speeches at church. She had deep inquisitiveness to know the world and explore the hidden truth. Walker says in an interview to Sharon Wilson “I was quite different. I was quieter and I needed more space. I needed more time on my own” (323). As a tomboy she spent fun time while playing with her older brothers. Nevertheless, the seeds of decidedly female point of view were shown in a household where boys were unfettered and girls tied to domestic duties

Alice Walker was very sensitive since childhood. Her mother Minnie Walker was a homemaker and seamstress and her father Willie Lee Walker was a sharecropper. During childhood Alice assisted her father as responsible daughter who earned 300 dollars a year and was economically exploited and mistreated by white landlord (owner) “evil greedy men”. Education was the only route to escape. But recalling her mother’s “Negroes” or “real state” position, she feels offended. In one of her essays entitled “The civil Rights Movement: What good was it?” She herself recounts her mother, who was a woman of heavy body and swollen feet, raised eight children. She also served the white men to make her both ends meet besides share-cropping. Walker gets deeply hurt for her mother’s slave identity and her deep yearning for a better life: “My mother, a truly great woman who raised eight children of her own and half a dozen of neighbors” (Washington 38)

It is truly said there is heaven in all mother’s lap. There is a timeless and classic quotation about Janani in Sanskrit Janani Janma Bhumisch/ Swarga Dapi Gareeyashi. Walker gets nostalgic and her heart becomes heavy, her eyes gets swollen whenever she remembers her mother’s life of servitude and her heartiest yearning for better life. However, to overcome the
harshness of situation, like poverty, her blackness and ugliness in a form of transcending her personal quality, Walker says “My mother adorned with flowers whatever house we were forced to live in,” and whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden.”(ISMG, 241)

Alice the child has faced a major setback at her age of eight, which has brought drastic and contrasted change in her own personal life. Her right eye gets badly injured causing her to lose the sight when one of her older brothers shoots her, by accident, with a BB gun. In the essay Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self—Walker recollects her first feeling with male aggression:

I am eight years old and a tomboy; I have a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, checkered shirt and pants all red. My playmates are my brothers, two and four years older than I. Their colors are black and green. On Saturday nights we all go to the picture show, even my mother, westerns are her favorite…. Back home. … We pretend that we are.. [Cowboys]; we chase each other for hours, rustling cattle being outlaws, delivering damsels in distress.(ISMG,386)

Alice continues further recounting the incident:

Then my parents decide to buy my brothers guns. These are not ‘real’ guns they shoot BB’s, copper pellets my brothers say will kill birds. Because I am a girl I do not get a gun… instantly, I am relegated to the position of Indian. One day, while standing on the top of our makeshift ‘garage’ pieces of tin nailed across some poles – holding my bow and arrow and looking out towards the fields, I feel an incredible blow in my right eye. I look down just in time to see my brother lower his gun. (ISMG, 386)
Although Walker withdraws herself after the accidents, she becomes more observing and analytical. Years after, in her documentary text *Warrior Marks* Walker recalls this incidence of physical blinding and states that this past experience leads to a social awakening and encourages her to investigate the secrets of women’s (sexual) blinding worldwide. Her self-imposed alienation coupled with her fear of becoming ugly, enables her to discover the inner truths masked by facades of acceptance and equality. Walker uses her blinded eye as a filter through which to look beyond the surface of African American women’s existence, and discovers that she cares about both the pain and spiritual decay lying hidden there. Wounded with discriminatory attitude, Walker searches solace in her writing which helps her to overcome her feelings of inadequacy and loneliness, so she gets herself engrossed in deep reading and writing like her parents who too were great storyteller.

Isolated Alice believes none and keeps herself open only to her thrust for reading. It is remarkably a pity state of all human beings who spend so much of their time and lives as well focusing on negative aspects of their difficult experiences rather than seeing them for what they truly are: their greatest teachers. Walker too is no exception. She explains her bitter experiences in the interview taken by John O’Brien:

I have day dreamed not of fairytales but of falling on swords of putting guns to my heart or head and of slashing my wrists with a razor. For a long time I thought I was very ugly and disfigured. This made me shy and timid, and often reacted to insults that were not intended. I discovered the cruelty of children, and of relatives, and could not recognize it as the
curiosity it was. I believe, though, it was from this period from my solitary, lonely position the position of an outcast that I began to really see people and things, and to really notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out. I no longer felt like the little girl I was, I felt old, and filled with shame, I retreated into solitude, and read stories and began to write poems. (O’Brien327)

Walker’s life is not a bed of roses, so, she learns to fight against odds she does not opt cowardice act of leaving herself on fate. Her optimistic outlook, which is well described in her interview with Kaliopé’s Sharon Wilson, which was conducted as a television program with studio audience participation as follows:

Well, some people don’t like optimism. And for those what can I do? I write. The people who insist on being pessimist just be that way. It’s too bad, because it’s more fun being optimistic. I have discovered. I used to be extremely pessimistic. But unless I have hope, unless we can grow together and really feel that we can endure, survive, and overcome—what is there? …I have a right to present my vision of reality. (322)

We all know that knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance which comes from proper education. Alice received her basic education at her homeland Georgia. For further studies, Alice got awarded a rehabilitation scholarship from the state of Georgia, which enabled her to study in Spelman College, an institution dedicated to the education of Black women. She was a lucky daughter in a sense that she was symbolically
farewelled by her far-sighted mother to start her life journey. Like an educated mother she offered three gifts to her talented Alice, which were symbolically significant for a successful career. First, it was a suitcase with which to travel the world beyond the poor, rural surroundings, second, a typewriter with which to write and express herself and third, a sewing machine to make her self-sufficient and afford her economic freedom. Not only this, Alice’s mother had been all time a source of inspiration in her life and she had a major influence on her writing. So, confining herself to the world of knowledge, Alice became voracious reader of literature since her college days and participated in all co-curricular activities.

In the words of Barbara Kramer about Alice’s studies at Spellman college in Atlanta:

Ironically, the accident that had caused her blindness in one eye also helped open the door to her further. Because of her disability, Alice qualified for a scholarship given by the Georgia Department of rehabilitation to physically challenged students. The award was for free textbooks and half of her college expenses. Because of her high grades, she was offered a scholarship from Spelman College which covered the other half of her expenses. The women in her church also took a collection. They raised 75 to help send Alice to college (28).

It is obvious now that if Alice had not been physically challenged, she would have very bleak chance of higher studies as her parents were not economically-sound to provide her higher education. The year 1962, is memorable for Alice because she got chance to travel to abroad for the first time on account of her excellence in academic , got privilege to attend the
World Youth peace festival in Finland and also got chance to meet the wife of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, who was the staunch lover of peace.

At the age of seventeen, brilliant student Alice, received scholarship in 1961. Side by side she also became politically active and got in touch with Civil Right Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. a leader in the movement, was the first black person she saw on TV. Later as an active member, she participated in the movement and used to go on marches and demonstration. She worked on voter registration in Georgia and for the Head start program in Mississippi, as well as for the department of welfare in New York. Alice had deep influence of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” and she, like true human, extended her all efforts to bring humanity on earth. Her sensitivities, sympathy and attachment for each victim created a soft corner for each and every character in her writings in between 60s to 70s decade.

Under deep spell of Classic Russian Writers, whom she read in her sophomore year were Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Gorki and Gogol. She has praised their penetrating scope and depth for the individual spirit and this configuration of qualities certainly marks Walker’s fiction. In her words “Russia must have something floating about in the air that writers breathe from the time they are born.” (ISMG, 257) Walker went to Russia to propagate the value of world peace. She mentions her feeling in *Anything We Love can be Saved*:

I was determined to impress upon all the Russians I met that I was not their enemy, and that I opposed the idea my government had at that time of possibly killing all of them. I have never regretted offering
smites to the children of Russia instead of agreeing with a paranoid government to throw bombs. (NP)

It’s a well-known fact that knowledge is power. Walker’s excellent performance at Spellman, the country’s oldest college for black women, awarded her with another scholarship. She was well encouraged for her better performance in writing and felt freer, elated and glorified. On account of her hard labor in studies; she got much fellowship which enabled her to study in Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. This college had great prestige and here Walker was one among the mostly white women students, whereas Spelman had only black students. It was a proud moment in her life.

At the age of twenty, Alice got her first chance to travel to Kenya and Uganda on educational grant. She spent summer holidays there and became familiar with African culture and co-operated to build a school too. But Alice is not exception as a girl child, who suffered sexual abuse. She became puppet in the hand of destiny. She says herself “I had been to Africa during the summer, and returned to school healthy and brown and loaded down with sculptures and orange fabric-and pregnant.”(245). She explained this suicidal issue as central in many of her literary works. Firstly, she poured all the emotions of her ordeal—pain, anxiety and depression into her first poem Once. Her mother criticized her abortion as a sin. When Walker reached out her two sisters, one never replied and the other called her a slut.

This shocking and shameful phase of her life changed her perspective. She dedicated her time in social service. She worked with the welfare rights movement in Georgia registering voters in the African American community
in the Deep South. Then she worked with New York City Welfare department to New York. She also received her first writing grant (1966) and tied in nuptial knot with Melvyn Leventhal, a white civil rights attorney, in March 1967. They shifted from New York to Mississippi, who was first inter-racial couple in the state. The couple faced hostility because of prevailing racial prejudices. Walker remained dauntless and kept the words of Dr. Martin Luther King in her mind “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” (Robin Sharma, 73)

Alice Walker became budding writer simultaneous to her studies. She walked on this planet to spread her message of oneness on the canvas of eternity. So, she never left her art of writing in her past time besides studies and social activism. She put all her energy into writing even at the most suicidal and depressing time of her life which obviously made her mentally strong to overcome the barriers. On account of her penetrating and thought provoking writing, she received a three hundred dollar award for her essay entitled “The Civil Rights movement what good was it? In 1967, her essays were sent to the annual American Scholar magazine essay contest and won first prize. Walker served as teacher in between 1968 and 1971. She wrote her first short-story To Hell with Dying highlighting the redemptive power of love which is also Walker’s recurrent fictional ideas.

Children spark radiance of godliness. They are the mouthpiece of Almighty. Their innocence and tenderness heal all types of physical and emotional wounds. So is the case with Walker whose ‘scare’ turned into a source of strength which promised her a lot of possibilities in her future
career. Young Alice Walker, who had learnt to lead a debilitating shameful life due to physical disability, was shown path by her young daughter, Rebecca who commented:

Mommy, theirs is a world in your eye” that she was able to make peace with her wound. She says, “Yes indeed I realized looking into the mirror. There was a world in my eye. And I saw it was possible to love it that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner voice I did love it” (ISMG 244, )

Though in those early days, poverty in Walker’s life was a big hindrance in fulfilling her aim of life, yet she continued her effort. And we know all that labour never goes in vain, so she was rewarded again. While writing essay entitled The Civil Right movement: What Good Was It? Walker proves her merit which dominates over her poor economic situation:

I wrote the essay in the winter of 1966-67 while sharing one room above Washington Square Park in New York with a struggling young Jewish law student who became my husband .It was my published essay and won the three –hundred –dollar first prize in the annual American Scholar essay contest. The money was almost magically reassuring to us in those days of disaffected parents, outraged friends, and one-time meals…. (ISMG, 119)

In personal life, writing for Walker is a “necessity” and it is the act of writing that she is able to think , feel and realize at the highest level .For others ‘writing’ can be passion, but for Walker it’s a step ahead. Alice Walker gives written account for the necessity of her writing in One Child of One’s Own:
Write I did night and day something and it was not even a choice, as having a baby was a choice, but a necessity. When I did not write I thought of making bombs and throwing them. Of shooting racists....Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence---as it saves most writers who live in “interesting” oppressive times and are not afflicted by personal immunity.” (ISMG, 369)

Literature seems to her, more interesting, more significant and more overwhelming than the real world. To her the creative act is a ‘sacred one’. She has beautifully explained in an interview how the novel grows in a writer’s mind as silently as unconstructive as a grain of sand enters a shell. There it grows in such amass that it begins to exert pressure. Life, Walker believes, is the reality we see on the surface – the visible world – while literature plunges into the depth below that lie hidden and need to be explored and described the hidden treasure.

Alice Walker has covered the proverbial ladder of success to become one of America's most gifted and influential writers. She has become a much–talked celebrity for her taboo-breaking and morally challenging depictions of African American passions and oppressions. Although her works cover a wide range in subject matters from sexuality to spirituality and is available in multiform in print and media both. Her literary works include interviews; (print and media) conversation, Broadway and picture-gallery. Walker's writings expose the complexities of the ordinary by presenting it within a context of struggle and change. Walker peels back the hard cast cover of African and African American women's lives to reveal the naked edge of truth and hope.
Her warm response to other writers has been extremely helpful and resourceful in her literary career. She is influenced by Virginia Woolf, Jean Toomer, and Phillis Wheatley and used their insights in illuminating the creativity of black women. Walker has also admired the white women writer particularly Chopin, the Brontës, Simone De Beauvoir and Doris Lessing who are themselves, well aware of their own oppression like Alice and who have also searched the ways of salvation. Their characters always try to envision a solution, an evolution to higher consciousness on the part of society.

The topics of Walker’s substantial body of writings are always connected to her personal life experience as a colored woman living in a white patriarchal society. The subject of her writings involves her heritage, its folklore and traditional art. Walker has narrated about her Southern community which gave blacks a way of coping with and sometimes transcending the hardships of such a racist society. Her deep attachment to the Southern community is ambivalent. Avoiding the “blindness” created by her awareness of the injustices done to blacks in the South; she is able to draw “a great deal of positive material” from her “underprivileged” (ISMG20) background. She highlights her status as a Southern Writer which provides her special advantage:

No one could wish for a more advantageous heritage than that bequeathed to the black writer in the South: a compassion for the earth, a trust in humanity beyond our knowledge of evil, and an abiding sense of justice. We inherit a great responsibility as well, for we must give voice to centuries not only of silent bitterness and hate but also of neighborly kindness and sustaining love. (21)
In order to challenge injustice, Walker adopts a radical vision. More than any other black author at work today, Alice Walker, who calls herself author and medium, is a wholly representative writer of and for the current era. As a writer, she has chosen the existence of black women in 20th century as vital area of her literary focus in the context of contemporarian white female. Her novels search solution of gender discrimination. She is also a taboo-breaker. In an interview given to Krista Brewer in 1981, Walker explains why she writes and sees the world as per her own angle:

Because I’m black and I’m a woman and because I was brought up poor and because I’m a Southerner, [...] the way I see the world is quite different from the way many people see it. I could not help but have a radical vision of society [...] The way I see things can help people see what needs to be changed.[...] I think that growing up in the South, I have a very keen sense of injustice – a very prompt response to it. (12-15)

Walker’s sensibility is deeply grounded in a matrilineal tradition of black writing, paying particular homage to the exuberant imagination of Zora Neale Hurston, who is popularly known as first black Afro-American feminist writer and the ideal and role model of Alice Walker in literary filed. It is Walker who more than anyone except her biographer, Robert Hemenway, revived Hurston’s work and reputation from the burial grounds of obscurity. Walker’s own words to Sharon Wilson opines:
I found her in the cemetery without a marker and very overrun with weeds. It was one of the times I felt badly for us as a human species. I felt—we can do better than that…I have found and to have all of her words, to help them get back into the world. I loved doing *I love myself*. It was a great boost for my own spirit…. (324)

Walker’s authorial target of salvation depends upon conscious raising: - “We must begin to develop the consciousness that everything has equal rights because existence itself is equal” (*LBW*, 148). From the start of her literary career i.e. since 1970’s Walker challenged public criticism with a radical stance:-

The writer like the musician or painter must be free to explore, otherwise she or he will never discover what is needed by everyone to be known. This means, very often, finding oneself considered ‘unacceptable’ by masses of people who think that the writer’s obligation is not to explore or to challenge, but to second the masses’ motions …previously been taken into account. (O’Brien, 340)

Individuality is the basic theme of Walker’s novel, in which she vests all the responsibility of survival. Individual characters, who remain embedded in the lives of generations of black alone, are the harbingers of the writer’s messages. She firmly accepts that one way of framing the 'common thread’ is by means of generations. She salutes the black generations for giving her strength and purpose. Though gradually, she works towards a larger perspective as she says herself:
Connections made or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity, a fearlessness of growth, of search, of looking, that enlarges the private and the public world" (*ISMG*, 5).

One of Walker’s writing style is her matter-of-fact way of writing that goes straight to the core of any issue she is dealing with. Her style is called unique due to its simplicity and accessibility that her work reaches millions of readers. She does not want to impress her readers and critics with complicated structure. She uses simple and direct words. Walker’s initiation of epistolary form is well credited to the renowned abolitionist Sojourner Truth in her speech *A ’nt I a Woman?* Walker recalls her address to God in her own interview:

The letter method seemed best on a number of levels, including the historical. We were talking earlier about Sojourner Truth and about having her children sold from her---- when she cried out a mother’s grief, none but God heard her .That in a way, is the precursor of a letter to God include Sojourner Truth saying, “God, what can I do- they have sold my children.”Celie is able to write, Dear God, this has happened to me and have to tell somebody and so I write to you [O’Brien, 325]

Walker’s personal construct for spiritual wholeness involves androgyny .In the words of Marie H.Buncombe “Walker uses androgyny as a metaphor for the “wholeness”, the totality of the black experience as she sees it.”(Buncombe, 120)In a 1973 interview, Walker declared her deep
interest in analyzing social relationships and challenging the double standards so firmly entrenched in the assumptions made by status quo. As a result, all her later works, most notably the short stories and the novels, reflect this point of view:

I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women, and why women are always condemned for doing what men does an expression of their masculinity. Why are women so easily “tramps” and “traitors” when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? Why do women stand for this? (O’Brien, 197)