Chapter VI

Conclusion

The analysis of four major coping strategies adopted by Walker's characters to respond to a wide range and variety of pressures and challenges in their lives reveals that her fiction has a greater richness and complexity than that has so far been recognized by most of her critics. It emerges clearly from this study that no interpretation of her works based exclusively on either biographical or sociological or feminist approach can provide a fair and balanced assessment of Walker's mind and art. The focus on this aspect of her novels and short stories, thus, serves to rectify some of the imbalances and to fill up the gaps which seem to characterise the scholarship available on her works. It underlines the necessity of a more eclectic reading of Walker's writings in order to gain a complete and consistent perspective on her themes, attitudes and vision of life.

One of the important features of her fiction that emerges from this study is the wide range and variety of her concerns. She has placed her characters in testing situations representing different kinds of pressures and challenges. Racism in different forms appears in her fiction as a force her characters have to battle with in one way or the other. Violence, discrimination, economic exploitation and denial
of rights to freedom, equality and justice to the black are only some of the forms in which racism manifests itself in the pages of her fiction.

But she goes beyond the race issues and takes her reader into the territory of sexist oppression as well. She shows how in patriarchal societies women are treated as mere objects and subjected to brutal and degrading experiences at almost every stage of their life. Black woman, in particular, is exploited and oppressed not only by the white man, but also by the black male who takes out the venom of his own frustrations on her body, mind and soul. Her fiction shows how social institutions and cultural traditions and practices such as female initiation created by man to establish and preserve his male supremacy, serve as instruments of sexist dispossession of woman. In fact, there is a special focus in her fiction on the oppression of women by black and white males alike, which makes her art truly representative of the life of her people.

A detailed and incisive depiction of the black in their own families and community is one of her important themes and concerns. Crisis of identity, hopes and fears, ambitions and frustrations, oppression and resistance, love and hatred, violence and healing all form an integral part of the life of her black men and women. Political struggle of her people in Africa for freedom from white colonialists and
their sufferings caused by the exploitation and oppression by the greedy class of their own black rulers after freedom constitute an important part of the picture of life on her fictional canvas. Her fiction provides historical, social, cultural and psychic perspectives on the panoramic view of life which her fiction thus presents.

Main interest of Walker, however, seems to lie not merely in depicting situations of crisis but in exploring and presenting critically the different ways and manners in which people with varying attitudes and levels of sensitivity, intelligence, strength and capacities respond to them. She goes further and reveals causes and consequences—personal, cultural, social and historical—of different strategies her characters employ to conduct themselves in the face of pressures. Her treatment of the four major patterns of response, which most of her characters seem to adopt, reveals her remarkable understanding not only of the ways historical and environmental factors influence human perceptions and attitudes, but also her insights into the subtleties and complexities of human psyche. This accounts for her ability to present life realistically to draw her characters sympathetically and to dramatize varying perspectives on different issues incisively and critically.

This study also reveals that Walker's fiction is primarily a celebration of life even in the midst of dehumanizing
and depressing realities of modern-day world. She has exposed unflinchingly all kinds of oppression and has shown how they have beaten servility into the psyche of a large number of men and women reducing them to mere nullities or shadows of life. Her treatment of the hopeless and helpless victims of oppression who just stumble through pains and sufferings by submitting themselves passively to forces of oppression underlines her protest against all those institutions, traditions, ideas and individuals who are responsible for human misery and degradation. Her fiction suggests that individuals and societies can be changed and improved through resistance to forces which seek to deny rights to equality, freedom and human dignity to all irrespective of race, class and sex. The critical presentation of those who tend to indulge in fantasies, alcohol or sex as an easy escape from the world of realities and responsibilities further underlines the importance she attaches to the necessity of resistance to evil. The disruptive and destructive effects of aggression, resulting from one's fears and frustrations, ego-centricity and the lack of self confidence and moral and psychological strength, have been dramatized so comprehensively and critically that her fiction clearly underscores the necessity of human love, harmony and mutual respect for each other's identity.

The way Walker lays bare the slave-like conformity of some of her characters to certain institutions, traditions and
ideas speaks clearly of the great importance she attaches to the values of human equality, dignity and freedom of thought and action. In fact, the humanistic code of values her fiction seems to endorse becomes crystallized mainly in the delineation of her protagonists who emerge as men and women equipped with acute awareness, sensitivity, great inner strength and moral courage, guided by the feelings of love and sympathy in almost every area of their life. This shows that Walker's fiction is truly a criticism of life and not a means of mere self-projection.

Another important feature of Walker's fiction that emerges from this analysis is the great artistic integrity and critical objectivity with which the African and American societies have been treated by the artist. She appears to be unsparing of both of them for the anti-human tendencies in their social, political and cultural institutions and practices. If she is critical of the hypocrisy, chauvinism, social, political and economic injustice of the American white, she is equally strong in her denunciation of all those American blacks who are devoid of human sensitivity and the sense of responsibility for themselves and their race. Her courageous invasion into the taboo territory of genital mutilation of women is only one of the several examples of her firm artistic commitment to truth even when she writes about her African community. Though she nowhere seems to ro-
manticize about Africa, she highlights through her fiction all those values of her people which have sustained them over centuries and have been a source of their strength, happiness and fulfilment. The African sense of community, a harmonious relationship between the individual and society and a sense of oneness with the larger world of birds, trees and animals and etc. have a very important place in the system of values which Walker's fiction seems to recommend as essential for the very survival of life on this planet.

The presentation of a very wide range and variety of ideas, attitudes, concepts, institutions, cultures and races make her fiction a very interesting battle ground between forces of affirmation and negation. This has been dramatized through a very wide range of characters, representing almost every facet of life. There are rulers, bureaucrats, artists and the commoners. Men and women, the young and the old, masters and slaves, the wise and the ignorant, the strong and the weak, believers and non-believers, fighters and escapists are all present in Walker's world of fiction. If there are passive sufferers, there are those also who resist for freedom and justice. There are people who are negative in their attitudes and action but there are those also who are positive in their approach and pursuits. She has drawn people who are very simple and are incapable of change and growth. But there are several others who appear as very
complex human beings capable of development and further enrichment. What impresses Walker's readers about her characters is the way she draws them as sharply individualised figures even when they tend to represent certain social and cultural forces and ideas.

Thus, the study serves to highlight some of the important features of Walker's fiction which have so far not received the attention they deserve. An attempt has been made to arrive at a fair assessment of her mind and art rectifying some of the imbalances noticeable in the criticism available so far on her novels and short stories.