Chapter V

Humanistic Strategy

Walker's fiction is a powerful expression of the heroic struggle of her people for spiritual wholeness and sexual, political, and racial equality. For her, the black woman is a universal symbol representing hope and resurrection. She explores issues of the spiritual survival of the black people. In an interview with O'Brien, Alice Walker said:

"I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women.... For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world.

Next to them, I place the old people--male and female--who persist in their beauty inspite of everything. How do they do this, knowing what they do? Having lived what they have lived? It is a mystery, and so it lures me into their lives."

Throughout her writing Walker insists on a "fundamental human responsibility: to improve the quality of one's relationships with other people and ultimately with all life on the planet."² In her fiction Walker repeatedly relates art to what she considers the all important process of self-improvement. Most critics categorize her writings as feminist. Walker rebuffs the label, describing her
works and herself as "womanist," depicting "a woman who loves other women.... Appreciates and prefers woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility....and woman's strength....Loves the spirit....Loves herself."³

These are the qualities which Walker considers essential for a person to attain "full humanity which is a state of oneness with all things."⁴ This clearly underlines that Walker's vision of life is basically characterized by values and principles which can be subsumed broadly under the term of humanism which in its primary connotation means devotion to human interests and human values. It is the philosophy in which man occupies a central place. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines it as an "attitude of the mind which attaches primary importance to man and to his faculties, affairs, temporal aspirations and well being."⁵ It is a philosophy that "desires happiness for all and relies on integrity, courage and sensitivity to get it."⁶ The strategy of humanism is structured on one's intellectual abilities to comprehend the intricacies of one's situation as well as a sensitive response to it. In this approach to life one's inner strength occupies an important place. It signifies man's relationship to man and acknowledges compassion, reverence, care and a sense of solidarity for fellow human beings. It seeks to establish peaceful and fruitful relationships. It also enriches one's goals, values and ideals to achieve one's full humaneness through bringing one in ever deeper and more intimate kinship and harmony with the
surrounding life, society and cosmos.

Walker's men and women using these humanistic principles as a coping strategy tend to be different from those who go through the ordeals of life by submitting to them rather passively. They are equipped with intellectual ability, emotional sensitivity and courage to withstand the pressures of their condition — qualities conspicuous by their absence in those who try to live by benumbing themselves to the pains of their existence. Though the characters who reveal tendencies of escape and aggression have a greater sensitivity and understanding than those who suffer the onslaughts of life silently and without resistance, the men and women imbued with humanistic values display a far greater measure of intellectual ability as well as emotional sensitivity. Moreover, her protagonists have a greater moral strength, a broader vision of life and commitment to the causes larger than themselves. These are the qualities which are found utterly wanting in the patterns of thought and action of those who either seek an escape from challenges in life or use brutal force and violence as a response to the pressures they have to confront. The attitude of conformists is also strikingly different from that of the humanists. The conformists tend to perceive and define their lives with reference to the prescription of some external authority — religion, customs and traditions of their community or society. The humanists on the other hand, are characterized by the qualities of self-reliance in their judgement and action. They are, therefore, capable of growth and living a more meaningful
life of fulfilment and wholeness than the conformists.

Walker's faith in the viability of these values and principles as a means to cope with all kinds of pressures emerges when we see her protagonists trying to protest and develop their sense of wholeness as human beings. In this struggle the characters who use these humanistic ideals as a means to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life of wholeness evince their intellectual ability to comprehend and analyze the complexities of their environment and a clear knowledge of the issues they are confronted with. They are also the ones who are gifted with emotional sensitivity and are capable of growth and dynamism in their attitude and outlook. They combine in themselves both the emotional and the rational. They have a tendency to observe and evaluate and then to act and take independent decisions, so necessary in the course of life. But in their case, freedom is not allowed to degenerate into a self-serving drive and is disciplined by larger, social and human concerns. They reveal the quality of courage which is not only physical but moral and spiritual as well. Her fiction seems to be a vindication of the validity and viability of humanistic ideals in the face of dehumanizing conditions that threaten modern man at every corner and stage of life.

Walker's fiction is a vast battle ground for an intense and absorbing conflict between the self struggling for the fulfilment of its wholeness through commitment to humanistic values and the forces which seek to thwart and distort this journey towards the realization of
these ideals. This struggle is evident even in her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* which covers the years ranging from 1920 to 1960. Spanning these crucial decades, the novel chronicles change in the life of its major characters, particularly Grange Copeland. The novel also underlines Walker's belief "in change; change personal, and change in society." The novel tells the story of Grange Copeland, the protagonist, who grows from a man of little understanding of himself, his environment and the real nature of challenges before him to a man of mature understanding of the complexities of issues and pressures confronting him and his race in American society. Grange, a man of thirty five, has no confidence and courage even to look into the eyes of his boss in the first phase of his life as a sharecropper in Virginia. We find him to be an embodiment of the spirit of self-reliance, resolution and courage when we meet him as an old man after his experiences in the novel. In this process, he also develops qualities of compassion, love and a sense of responsibility, concern for others, and thus emerges as a wiser and stronger man with an enriched humanity. This metamorphosis of Grange Copeland, the protagonist of the novel, is a sure testimony to the great value Walker attaches to the humanistic qualities of awareness, sensitivity, compassion, moral strength and courage as well as the qualities of self-reliance motivated by concerns which go even beyond the self. Walker takes the reader through a step-by-step analysis of Grange Copeland's change and development from a degraded character to one who appears to be a repository
of strength and wisdom.

In the first stage of life Grange appears to be a highly self-centred, drunkard, domineering and an adulterous individual. His relationship with his family is a total disaster and he always creates a very tense environment and it keeps the whole family lurking in fear: "Their life followed a kind of cycle that depended almost totally on Grange's moods" (TLGC: 14). In order to show his aggressively masculine behaviour he ill-treats his wife and son and reveals himself as a self-centred person seeking his own gratification while trampling on others. In this first phase of his life he also appears as an abusive drunkard who gets drunk every Saturday night and comes home only to beat his wife. He would come "home lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling and shooting off his shot gun" (TLGC: 15). Grange's abject poverty and miseries lead him to drink and beat his wife. We also come to know that initially he is a great womanizer, an adulterer. He spends his nights with fat Josie, his mistress. His son Brownfield is also aware of this fact. He "knew his father was seeing another woman, and had been seeing one, or several, for a long time" (TLGC: 22). This infidelity and faithlessness of Grange has a tremendous affect on Margaret, his wife, who often fights with him. Once she tells her son: "Oh we had us a rip-rowing, knock-down, drag out fight. With that fat yellow bitch of his calling the punches" (TLGC: 21). This totally negative behaviour is the result of Grange's depression which "always gave way to fighting, as if fighting preserved
some part of the feeling of being alive" (*TLGC*: 27). Finally Grange abandons his family and it makes him responsible for his wife and little baby's death.

In the second stage of his life, Walker begins to take the character of Grange through a very convincing change. Walker's meticulous account depicts portions of change and growth that Grange goes through. Grange's trip to Harlem provides him with an awakening experience. There he sees a white pregnant woman who is deserted by a soldier who is already married. The soldier gives her seven hundred dollars and leaves her for ever. Grange is appalled by the incident, for it is a reflection of the way that he has treated his wife in the past. Grange sympathizes with the woman. He tries to help the woman by giving her some of the money which she has thrown away. This is an indication that Grange has begun to change, for it is the first time that Grange has ever tried to help anyone. However, the white woman refuses Grange's help and repeatedly calls him a nigger. It is obvious that the woman is racist and hates blacks. She throws the money into the pond, and when Grange goes into the icy water to collect it, she kicks him. This is the first time that he has been insulted and mistreated by a white woman. He becomes angry and says: "If she puts her hands on me I'm going to knock that white brat right out of her stomach!" (*TLGC*: 215). This incident makes Grange realize the evil he has done in the past. Being mistreated by a white woman, Grange is better able to understand the oppression that black women suffer at the hands
of black men. When the white woman accidentally falls into the pond, Grange extends his hand to help her: "Now he realized that to save and preserve life was an instinct, no matter whose life you were trying to save. He stretched out his arm and nearly touched her. She reached up and out with a small white hand that grabbed his hand but let go when she felt it was his hand...Finally she sank. She called him 'nigger' with her last disgusted breath"(TLGC: 217).

This is the most shocking and devastating incident for Grange, for it is very difficult to believe that a white woman would rather lose her life than let a black man save her. It is at this point he learns that he should not be fighting his own race; instead, he realizes that blacks are faced with a very tough fight. Now he knows that it is the white man who has taught the black man to behave in a negative manner.

Grange is a totally transformed man when he returns from North. He reveals that he does feel guilty, and regrets the way he had treated his family in the past. He says to Brownfield: "Nobody give a damn for me but your ma, and I messed her up trying to be a big man! After two years of never getting nothing on the plantation I turned my back on what I did have"(TLGC: 290).

Grange's confession rings true through self-introspection and he develops a mature perspective on life. This realization of his own faults does not send him into self-pity; rather it prepares him for a life of responsibility and positive action. His new knowledge
and new way of understanding have begun to lead him in the right direction. This change is noticeable not only in his behaviour but also in his ability to understand and think things out. Unlike the old Grange, the new Grange is loving, affectionate, kind and is able to express his feelings of concern for others in the form of action. He does try to recapture family ties through his relationship with Ruth and Mem. However, his main objective is not only to protect Ruth, his granddaughter from the outside world, but also to develop her into a strong and self-reliant individual capable of meeting the challenges in life with courage and confidence. This he tries to do by inexplicably instructing her in the lessons of history and African heritage, and by relating to her all that he learned during his years in the North: "There were days devoted to talk about big bombs, the forced slavery of her ancestors, the rapid demise of the red man; and the natural predatory tendencies of the whites, the people who had caused many horrors" (TLGC:196).

With his knowledge of history, Grange is better able to cope with life and look ahead. In his teaching, Grange takes Ruth back to the Motherland, Africa, and tells how "they stole you from Africa" (TLGC:197). Grange trains Ruth in the customs of the black tradition instead of the way the white man wants her to be trained. The most important thing that Grange talks about is that of change, a major theme that makes his own change convincing: "What I know, and I reckon the most I know is that people change. This is the main reason not to give up on them" (TLGC:274). This speaks
of Grange's positive outlook and of his faith in the basic goodness of human beings and their potential to change and develop.

The fact that Grange repents for the evil things he had done signifies his honesty about self as well as his potentials to learn from his experiences. He, thus, becomes a new and a better man, kind and strong: "The older Grange got the more serene and flatly sure of his mission he became. His one duty in the world was to prepare Ruth for some great and herculean task, some magnificent and deadly struggle, some harsh and foreboding reality" (TLGC: 279). Grange is so committed to his mission of educating Ruth that nothing can swerve or deter him from his objectives. Even Josie fails to weaken his resolution, and he displays a superb sense of firmness of purpose in sacrificing his relations with Josie.

The way he stakes his own life in order to protect Ruth from abusive Brownfield further illustrates his courage of conviction and action. This once again shows that he values the survival of Ruth and of his race through her more than his own life. He tries to achieve this purpose by cultivating in his people the values of self-respect, integrity, human dignity and, above all, a love for freedom and solidarity with each other. These are the qualities which Walker seems to present in her fiction as something essential for the survival of not only the black as a race but also of the humanity as a whole.

It is not only through the changes in the personality and outlook of Grange that Walker underlines the validity of these values as
a response to the pressures in life, but her delineation of the heroic struggle of Mem also, one of her most memorable female protagonists, clearly underscores her faith in the qualities of determination, courage, intelligence as well as a strong will power and decisiveness.

Mem is equipped with sufficient intelligence who can understand not only herself but her environment and society as well. It is this quality of sympathetic understanding of the people around her that liberates her from narrow concerns and gives her strength to cope with the hostilities pervading the world around her. This enlarged and sympathetic consciousness also equips her with the patience and love necessary in her efforts to transform the men and women who come in contact with her. This inner strength, coupled with enlightened awareness, is visible at almost every stage of her life and experiences. But the way she tries to put up with Brownfield with the hope of curing his soul of the sickness of frustration is a classic example of a humanistic response to the pressures of circumstances in her life.

Mem is an educated lady and runs a school. She falls in love with Brownfield and teaches him to read and write. It is this thing which Brownfield admired in her for he is fascinated not simply by her physical charm but by her vision and ideals. He wants to share her vision and feels that she can help him rise above his ignorance. It is her influence upon him which gives him new hopes
and dreams about a happy and a bright future. Infused with a new vigour and desire to fulfil his dreams, he begins his life with Mem and promises that soon they would give up sharecropping and move to the north. But the failure of his dreams hurl him down into the ditch of despair and dejection. He goes deeper and deeper into frustration which he takes out on Mem and hurts her in every possible way he can think of. Mem tolerates all the miseries and brutalities inflicted upon her. She faces them with a tremendous reservoir of inner strength accompanied by a mature understanding of life and human psyche. Her response to "turn ashen with shame" and "keep her mouth closed" (TLGC:81) is not because she is afraid of him but because she understands the working of the mind of a man like Brownfield, broken and battered by his failures. She accepts his beatings only with the hope that this will purge him of his frustrations and it may restore him to a psychic health and balance. This shows her tendency to look at things with a sympathetic and human perspective. This quality seems to be native to Mem and she does not derive this outlook and strength of mind from any external source. She has her own independent understanding which is reflected further in her ability to take clear, firm and mature decisions at a number of points in the course of her life. Moreover, she is guided not by just emotions and instincts but also by commitment to the well being of her family, particularly her children. Her decisions by nature reveal that they are not aimed at furthering her individualistic concerns and interests but
they show that she is basically motivated by her sense of responsibility for others and for a better life of self-respect and dignity. When she finds that Brownfield can't come out of his abysmal state and that the future of her daughters is in jeopardy, she decides to take full control of the situation in her own hands. Once she realizes that her dreams with Brownfield cannot materialise, she rises to the occasion. She moves out of the house and succeeds in finding a job in the town at twelve dollars a week. This infuses a new spirit of confidence and hope in her life. She decides to move the family to a house in the town. But when she sees that Brownfield is still destructive, she threatens him with a gun in her hand. This clearly indicates that she is bold and courageous and decides to steer the ship of life herself. She lays down certain rules for Brownfield: "If you intend to come along I done made out me some rules for you, for make no mistake it's going to be my house" (TLGC: 138).

This quality of courage and strong will power shines once again in Mem when Brownfield forces her to leave the house and turn to J.L.'s house, a place she never wanted to go. We admire her invincible inner strength when we find her defying Brownfield even in her depressed state: "I ain't going to die and leave my children. Even in this weather you brought me out in I ain't going to catch pneumonia. I'm going to git well again, and git work again, and when I do I'm going to leave you" (TLGC: 152).

She may be destroyed in body but can't be broken in spirit.
Her husband is inimical; her body itself is a challenge; the crisis before her is of grave manner; even then she is resolute and hopeful and copes up with the pressure with confidence in herself. The bedrock of her strength is her concern for others and her attitude of self-reliance resulting from hope and invincible power of will. She does not seek an escape from the crisis and is not a meek and passive sufferer. This generosity of mind, solidarity, love for others, ability to respond in the face of crisis without turning to God or to some outside authority are all native to Mem. Even when she dies, her death is a tragic death of a heroic figure. The way Walker raises Mem to the stature of a tragic heroine, intensely compelling the love and sympathy of the reader for her, testifies Walker's unequivocal faith in the humanistic attitude of Mem in the face of crises in her life.

The tragedy of Mem is a powerful protest against all forms of abuse and oppression which dehumanize both the victim and the victimizer. The novel is also a plea for the removal of all those factors and forces which generate and perpetuate inequalities, exploitation, violence and injustice. Walker expresses her optimism for change in human society through the transformation in the personality of Grange and the education he imparts to Ruth. This optimism, the novel shows, does not have its roots in any form of religion, doctrine or theory, but springs mainly from the writer's faith in the innate goodness and strength of individuals like Mem whose impulse to survive whole and give life to others
Her next novel, *Meridian*, further expresses her hope for a just and humane society free from all forms of inequalities, discriminations and coercions. Such a social order can be made a reality, Walker suggests, only by individuals who confront hatred with love, selfishness with self-sacrifice, irrationality with reason and circumscriptive conventionalism with the liberalism of a constantly growing mind. This becomes explicit through the responses of Meridian Hill through whom Walker celebrates the awakening life of the spirit and reaches for a new definition of freedom. Walker is of the view that a new world can be built only by replacing the inhuman old order with life-affirming values. The eponymous protagonist of *Meridian* enacts this quest in her journey from adolescent unawareness to mature self-knowledge, from egocentricity to sociality and from a revolutionary ardour to a more sober and comprehensive vision. The writer shows this development by placing the protagonist in the thick of conflicts, both external and internal. The protagonist's conflicts are not only with external obstacles, but also with herself.

Meridian Hill is the embodiment of an extended consciousness and she upholds the ideals of a human liberation movement through her unswerving dedication to non-violence, her patience and great concern and respect for others. Walker endows her with
the "austerity and strength of purpose needed for true revolution: the struggle with the recalcitrant self."\textsuperscript{10} But against her stand the forces of death and repression both, conventional society and Civil Rights activists, try to mould her according to their own ideas.

Against all these pressures Meridian is firmly resolved to discard and reject all those precepts which impede her growth as well as her access to autonomy and self-empowerment. Her first step towards the attainment of this freedom of the spirit is to reject her mother's religion which demands that a woman should act only as "obedient daughter", "devoted wife" and "adoring mother"\textsuperscript{11}. At various stages in the novel, Meridian is a daughter, though not obedient, a wife, though not devoted, and a mother, though not adoring; for, the demands of these roles are circumscrip
tive and stifling. It is in her role as a daughter, particularly in her relationship with her mother, that Meridian's growing self-awareness and independence first surface. Although her mother's influence is powerful, Meridian is intent upon freeing herself from its strangling hold. She regards her mother as "a woman of ignorance"\textit{(M:30)} who strictly adheres to the tradition. Her mother, who has relinquished all responsibility for her own welfare to God, wants Meridian to do the same. But Meridian questions the rationality of her mother's Christian beliefs and refuses to submit to them. She not only challenges her mother's blind devotion to religion, but also her equally passive acceptance of the overlapping constraints of motherhood and marriage. Meridian believes that the accept-
ance of the demands of these roles will only add to her suffocation. Meridian's flourishing sense of purpose and independence markedly contrasts with her mother's blind adherence to the traditional roles of a woman: "It seemed to Meridian that her legacy from her mother's endurance, her unerring knowledge of rightness and her pursuit of it through all distractions, was one she would never be able to match. It never occurred to her that her mother's and her grandmother's extreme purity of life was compelled by necessity. They had not lived in an age of choice" (M: 124). As Meridian lives in an age of choice, she wilfully abdicates her role as an obedient daughter and she does not even accept for herself the role of a traditionally devoted wife and adoring mother. She looks at her relation with her husband in a very critical manner, and finds that he wants her only for his sexual gratification. She also discovers that in patriarchy, which views women as objects, sexuality, like parenthood, may also lead to the death of self. Her passionate encounters all end in loss. Through her love-making, Meridian gains little pleasure and experiences no feeling of participation in it. Her actions are simply expected rituals. She becomes pregnant while still in high school largely through the ignorance of the implications of sex. Following a pattern typical of pregnant young women, she drops out of school and marries the child's father, Eddie, a fellow student, with whom she finds no pleasure. This, she feels, places another demand on her. Her husband accuses her of losing interest in it: "I have to fight to get your legs open... They're
like somebody starched them shut."(M.64). Her lover's kisses do not awaken her, they merely deepen her adolescent trance. Her marriage inevitably dissolves. And when she gets a scholarship to attend college, she goes for a tubal ligation and gives up her child for adoption, despite her mother's protest. The impulse to the "martyrdom of unsought motherhood is one of the pressures towards self-abnegation against which she must struggle."12

This act of Meridian to give up her child and to prevent further possibilities of motherhood lays her open to the charge of narrow and selfish individualism. It may be taken to mean that she is trying to escape responsibilities involved in bearing and raising a child. She may be accused of being devoid of the ennobling feeling of love and motherhood, but a study of the pattern of her life and growth reveals that her rejection of the role as a mother is an act of revolt against all those forces which seek to stifle her self and try to force her into a mould of roles prescribed by others in the patriarchal society. This, in fact, enables her to live her life at her own terms and to develop and enrich her self through a wider life of responsibility and concerns for all around her. The love that pulsates in her heart and soul elevates her to the pedestal of a universal mother. Though almost every act of her life speaks of this quality of Meridian as a woman, the way she tries to look after the wild child provides a striking example of this aspect of Meridian's personality. When Meridian hears of the wild child she takes it upon herself to bring her into her fold: "With bits of cake and colored beads
and unblemished cigarettes she tempted Wile Chile...She brought her onto the campus...Into a tub went Wile Chile, whose body was caked with mud and rust, whose hair was matted with dust, and whose obscenities mocked Meridian's soothing voice" (M: 36). After bathing her, Meridian takes the wild child to the honors house dining room where the house mother admonishes her: "She must not stay here...Think of the influence. This is a school for young ladies" (M: 37). Even in the face of a world of apathy, she tries desperately to find a special school or home for unwed mothers to take in the wild child. But the wild child escapes and bolts into the street where she is "hit by a speeder and killed" (M: 37). The wild child incident proves that Meridian is a woman imbued with compassion, sympathy and love — no less than a mother. Meridian's love is not a self-seeking love but a heightened form of impulse and experience which leads her to embrace life all around her with a feeling of tender care and concern.

Another thing which emerges very clearly from the analysis of this incident is that Meridian's response to life is complex and inclusive. She neither rejects the past only because it is a tradition nor is she romantic about the future. She is the one who draws strength from history, learns from experience and looks into the future with the eye of an ardent humanist. Her balanced and comprehensive response is free from prejudices and naive idealism. She tries to respond to the condition in the most suitable and appropriate manner. She rejects all those factors and forces which
seek to restrict or constrict her humanity. All that allows her a life of freedom and wholeness, dignity and integrity is accepted by her as a guiding principle. Her sense of kinship, her respect for the experiences of her oppressed race and her keenness to derive strength from the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of her people is a testimony to the openness of her mind to all the healthy and nourishing influences that enable her to confront the challenges faced by her and her people in American society. The episode of the Sojourner reveals this aspect of her mind and personality. The Sojourner is a magnolia tree in the centre of the Saxon campus. As Meridian absorbs its history, she learns what her own is to be from two poignant stories contained within the Sojourner's history. One story tells how the Sojourner came into being. The tree was fertilized by a slave named Louvinie. Before her enslavement, she had been raised in West Africa "in a family whose sole responsibility was the weaving of intricate tales with which to entrap people who hoped to get away with murder" (M: 42). Her legacy of story-telling brought about her tragedy. She was punished by the white oppressors for maintaining her cultural heritage.

The tragedy of Louvinie puts the experience or the history of whole race into a proper perspective. It underlines not only the story telling tradition of the Africans, but also the resilience of their culture that has survived, like the magnolia tree, even the worst of the odds. This association of the magnolia tree with Louvinie's tale suggests that the secret of the strength of the black lies in
their sense of rootedness in the soil of their culture. This serves as a source of strength and confidence for Meridian. Connected by its history with the sufferings of black women, the tree symbolizes continuity, shelter, nourishment, and the warmth of shared ecstasy. It also provides a sense of female ancestry and of black motherhood. The image of the Sojourner emphasizes that Meridian's strongest bond is still with black womanhood. The strength she requires must come from this source which, Walker implies, can provide a spiritual renewal that Meridian has sought and will go on seeking.

Anne-Marion's act of sending a photograph of the reviving tree at the end of the novel is a sign of her own changed heart and vision. Meridian's returning health suggests that, like the Sojourner, she can grow towards a new life. Meridian is confident that her people will flourish like this tree. She is of the view that her race is strong enough to get the place of importance in the landscape of American society.

Her close bond with the tree clearly reveals that Meridian absorbs all that is nourishing and enriching even if it is available in the form of customs and traditions. Like a true humanist she refuses to submit herself to anything which is irrational and antithetical to the demands of her humanistic concerns. This is only an evidence of her open, balanced and a dynamic mind.

This strategy of coping with the pressures of life helps her
not only in answering some of the problems besetting her life as an individual but also enables her to understand and confront the conflicts ravaging her society. This marks the development of her concerns from self to society, from quest for personal fulfilment to the struggle for liberation from the scourge of racism. This maturing and broadening of response to the challenges around her becomes evident when she is shocked out of her trance-like stagnation by an act of violence against Civil Right workers. She feels outraged like millions of men and women of her kind but she turns her feelings of anger into a determined act against the factors and forces that perpetrate such acts of death and destruction. This fervour of a humanist to fight evil actively with the commitment for serving the larger cause of humanity leads her to join the Civil Rights Movement. This growth in the personality and outlook of Meridian illustrates the definition of a humanist by Reuben Osborne who sees "the development of humanistic morality in man as a development from egocentricity to sociality." The growth of moral consciousness is correlated with the growth of co-operative tendencies. According to him, this development provides a basis for "complex interpersonal and social relationships". The heightening of awareness and sense of responsibility towards others stir Meridian to action not for the narrow concerns of self-preservation, but for the larger sentiment of helping others. It is her love and sympathy as well as the understanding of the perdicament of the oppressed which impel her to struggle for their rights.
This is just the beginning of her development towards a richer and a larger self and it achieves a new dimension when she plunges into the Civil Rights Movement. By watching television, Meridian learns about voter-registration drive, bombing in the local movement headquarters, and the deaths of children. Meridian feels deeply disturbed and feels that she cannot be a passive observer. She cannot escape into the realm of make-belief that God is in heaven and all is well with the world. Responding to these events she volunteers to work at the local movement house "typing, teaching illiterates to read and write, demonstrating against segregated facilities and keeping the Movement house open when the other workers returned to school (M:85). She tries to mobilise black people to get themselves registered as voters, marches in the streets of Atlanta, sees old women beaten, and men brandishing axe handles chasing small children. She is arrested, beaten, knocked to the ground and kicked. Her body begins to show signs of physical deterioration: "She was always in a state of constant tears, so that she could do whatever she was doing...tears rolled slowly and ceaselessly down her cheeks. This might go on for days, or even weeks. Then, suddenly, it would stop, and some other symptom would appear. The shaking of her hands, or the twitch in her left eye (M:84-85).

Despite all problems and hardships, Meridian remains devoted to the movement with her heart and soul. She feels intensely and sincerely for the perdicament of the dispossessed and no amount of oppression can weaken her absolute commitment.
Service of others becomes a fulfilment of self for Meridian. But it does not mean the denial of self; rather, it is a fulfilment of self through a meaningful interaction and integration with the life around her. She transcends limited concerns and, like a real humanist, avoids the extremities and achieves a balance between her self and society. In her devotion to the cause of love and service of the victims of oppression, she is like a saint, and her sainthood is emblematic of her determination to suffer until her people are free from oppression. This is illustrated by the way she conducts herself in her relationship with Truman and Lynne.

Truman, her former lover, deserted her and married Lynne, a white worker in the movement. He and Lynne had done a grievous wrong to Meridian and hurt her love and sense of self deeply. But she emerges as an embodiment of ideals of forgiveness and love when both Truman and Lynne need and seek her moral and emotional support after the death of their daughter Camara. She was the first person Truman sent for when Camara died: "It was Meridian they both needed, and it was Meridian who was, miraculously, there" (M: 172). Meridian's adherence to the ideals of serving others and her ability to transcend narrow personal concerns lead her from strength to greater strength. Her whole life reveals a pattern of increasing self-reliance and inner resources to withstand pressures with grace and dignity. This becomes strikingly evident when one notices that Meridian, who had depended earlier upon Truman for love and solace, ultimately emerges as a woman
who can live and pursue her commitments with courage and confidence. In fact, it is Truman who towards the end of the novel, depends utterly on her for strength and solace. Truman cries "help me through this shit" (M: 172) and Meridian not only helps Truman but also serves as a constant source of strength to Lynne. Meridian's feelings for Truman return and "it was love that purged all thought of blame from her too accurate memory. It was forgiveness" (M: 173).

This strategy of facing life in a self-reliant and courageous manner by drawing upon one's inner resources of moral, emotional and mental strength is, in fact, something that distinguishes the response of Walker's protagonist to life from the ones adopted by the passive sufferers, escapists and conformists. People adopting this approach are capable of change and growth and display remarkable resilience in the face of pressures. It is this potential of growth in Walker's protagonists that introduces an element of hope and optimism in her fiction even when it deals primarily with the oppression and exploitation of the black, the woman in particular. The tale of Celie illustrates this aspect of the life of her protagonists in a remarkable and intensely compelling manner.

Celie's life in *The Color Purple* is a classic example of how change in one's attitudes and strategies of responding to pressures can transform life utterly and irreversibly. If Celie in the beginning is a mere object, suffering passively and helplessly atrocities and indignities heaped upon her by men like Alphonso and Albert,
she emerges ultimately as a strong, confident and self-reliant woman in total control of herself and a source of health and healing for others.

While in her teens, Celie is raped by her step-father and then married off to a widower named Albert, who for the next three decades, subjects her to domestic slavery and periodical beatings. She faces the pains inflicted upon her by numbing herself like a wood. But the change in her life begins with the advent of Shug Avery, Albert's occasional mistress. It is with Shug that she shares her love and it allows her the freedom to say what she thinks and helps her gain self-esteem and independence. She also helps Celie to come out of a state of passive submission to male oppression into a state of intense joy in the beauty and womanliness of her body. Shug kindles a desire for self-hood in Celie. She makes her stand up for herself to Mr. and to discover her own beauty and worth. Celie, who had so far hated her body, learns to value it and admire it. She becomes aware of how sexual aggression had robbed her of any awareness of her own body and the mystery of her womanly creativity. It is when Shug introduces her to the mysteries of her body and asks her to see her genitals in the mirror that she begins to be aware of her body and feels orgiastic pleasure in the discovery of her self-worth. She experiences a sense of belonging to her own self: "Stick the looking glass tween my legs...It mine, I say" (CP: 80).
This love of her body gives to her a confidence in her self and releases the courage which lay suppressed due to her oppression. This birth of confidence and courage is evident for the first time when she refuses to accept the beatings of Albert and throws back angry words at her voluble oppressor: "Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say. Then I say, you better stop talking because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me. Look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shape words...The jail you plan for me is the one which you will rot, I say" (CP:213). She defiantly asserts her identity as a woman with full courage and confidence: I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (CP:214).

These words of Celie speak volumes of her courage and reveal that now she is no longer prepared to suffer servilely the abuses of Albert. This quality of Celie to show courage in the face of oppression is a distinctive feature of her personality after her transformation under the influence of Shug Avery. Imbued with a sense of self-worth, courage and confidence, Celie embarks upon the business of making and selling pants and, thus, earns for herself the status of an economically independent woman. This emergence of the qualities of entrepreneurship further underlines her abilities to take crucial decisions with a firm and independent mind.

It is noticeable that Celie's self-reliance does not get perverted into selfishness. Her individualism is not cynical or anarchic; rather,
it exudes grace, hope and strength and gets fulfilment through a useful integration with the larger life around her. Her very act of making pants to meet the demands of others shows her involvement in rendering useful service to others. Now she is more at ease with herself and becomes a source of hope and joy to all. It is important to see that now Albert comes to her, takes instructions from her and respects her as a woman. Celie wins a level of parity with her husband, her former oppressor. But this does not disturb her sane and balanced approach even to men like Albert. Her mind remains singularly free from evils like prejudices, arrogance and presumptuousness. Her basic human qualities of a sympathetic understanding of others show itself strikingly when she accepts Albert, her brutalizer with grace and dignity. She, in fact, exercises a humanizing effect on him and transforms him from a vulgar, cruel and callous creature into an acceptable companion. Now they sit together and talk with each other at ease with mutual respect: "Look like he trying to make something of himself...I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience" (CP:230).

This ability of Celie's to transform even a man like Albert hints at another feature of her approach to the questions of life, namely her immense capacity to embrace one and all with love and sympathy. Her love is not narrow and limited to self but extends freely even
to the world of trees, birds and animals. It seems that love of life in all forms is her religion and every act motivated by this noble human impulse is an act of worship. This serves as an inexhaustible source of strength for her even in the face of serious crises.

The writer's faith in the validity and viability of a humanistic approach to life is further evident in her portrayal of Shug Avery, a woman who steers her life towards wholeness and fulfilment of self with freedom, courage and confidence. She displays marvellous abilities to take decisions independently and act upon them with an unswerving mind. It is this quality of her mind that enables her to choose the career of a singer and defy all the circumscriptive concepts of womanhood created by man to perpetuate his domination over her. Shug moves from place to place, gives concerts and leads a life of her own, affirming her freedom, dignity and identity as an individual. Her music which keeps her audience spell bound is an expression of beauty and joy that sustain them even in the midst of oppressions and exploitations. This indicates that she is a woman who has achieved freedom for herself and also exercises a liberating influence over others as well.

She, thus, grows into a symbol of strength, love and liberty. These humanistic values enable Shug to triumph over the racist and sexist prejudices woven into her social structure and at the same time turn her into a kind of saviour. This social role of Shug to serve others becomes evident when she brings about a complete
metamorphosis in the life and attitudes of Celie. Though Celie is the wife of Albert, her lover, and, thus, a natural rival in love, she transcends her selfish concerns and gradually develops a strong and tender love for Celie. She, as a woman, understands Celie’s plight, sympathizes with her and like a mother rises to protect her from Albert’s brutalities. She kindles in Celie a love of self and, thus, awakens the courage and confidence in her to move forward firmly towards a life of wholeness. It is she who first makes Celie love the beauty of her body and explore her sexual self. Though she is a strong and self-confident woman, her relationships are never characterised by a desire to dominate or control others. She exercises a restorative and healing effect on Celie and even plays an important role in bringing Albert to his senses. She is not only a kind of mother figure for Celie, she emerges as an example of mutually loving and caring friend.

All of these qualities which determine her strategy of with­standing the pressures of life as a woman enable her to live her life at her own terms and to lead others as well towards the exploration and realization of their natural humanity. In fact, the secret of the peace and joy she seems to experience within herself lies in her humanistic code that guides her in every facet of life. Her per­ceptions of and response to life are informed by values which seem to be fully realisable as they do not apparently belong to the realm of mere abstractions. Her approach to life is basically geared to affirm her full humanity in the face of challenging realities of her
milieu. This rootedness in life appears to be a very important element even in her concept of God. She does not look for this Almighty in any Christian heaven but finds it pulsating within herself. Like a true humanist, she regards this life on earth as most important and all her actions only affirm her faith in the centrality of mankind in the scheme of things. It is this knowledge that she imparts to Celie and tells her to look for God within herself: "God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, Lord" (CP: 202). Her words to Celie reveal another important aspect of her perception of life namely her holistic view of the world accommodating all – big and small – in a state of harmony. This further underlines the breadth of her mind and largeness of her soul which embrace everything in love.

This humanistic expression of a kind of religious faith in the sanctity of life is evident in Walker's portrayal of another important character, Samuel. He, too, tries to find answers to some of the questions of life that he faces by drawing strength and guidance from such values as human service and love. Though he is an American working as a missionary in Africa, his basic impulse, motivation and commitment come from his rootedness in real life. He has been a victim of racist discrimination in American Society and has suffered indignities heaped upon him because of his color. This
injustice and oppression seem to motivate him to go to Africa and work for the victims of racist oppression.

He goes to Africa because there he finds the worst victims of oppression and misery. He feels that it is ignorance which is largely responsible for the sufferings and degradation of the people of this continent. He, therefore, takes up the task of fighting ignorance and bringing to the Africans light of knowledge and awareness. For this purpose he builds up a school and sets out with his wife to teach the Olinkan.

It is important to note that though he is a missionary, his sole aim is not to convert the Africans into Christianity. He seems to be concerned more about creating in them a sense of love and respect for their African heritage. He is deeply conscious of his own African roots and it is this sense of belongingness to Africa and its people that makes him get so intensly involved in efforts to ameliorate their lot. His aim is to free Africa from the forces of oppression and exploitations. He develops a deep sympathy for them for their grievances and even has the courage to speak about them to the bishop in England. Though he is a missionary, he refuses to act as the agent of the white man and pleads frankly with the bishop against racial discrimination. The fact that he is a man of courage and knowledge becomes obvious when he rejects the assertion of the white man that biblical characters were all white. He tells his people in Africa that many of biblical characters were of black
descent. He tries to instil in them a sense of pride for their own history, something which the white imperialists have been trying systematically to destroy. He tells them that "the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa" (CP:138).

His love for Africa, however, does not blind him to their failures to change and develop in order to meet the challenges of modern life. He, as a missionary, campaigns against the practice of polygamy in African society and tries to restore women to a status of respect. He tries to inspire Olinkan men and women to discard obsolete traditions and to develop a more rational approach to life.

This commitment of Samuel to larger social and human cause of serving the oppressed imparts meaning and significance to his own life as a crusader against ignorance and injustice. This is the strategy of humanist to resist the forces of oppression and human degradation instead of surrendering to them like a weakling.

What impresses one about Samuel is his integrity not only in preaching these values in respect of others but also in living them fully in his own life. His relationship with Nettie, Adam, Olivia and, above all, his wife Corrine provide a fine illustration of this aspect of his moral character. His marriage with Corrine is just wonderful and as Nettie tells, "I don't believe they've spent a night apart since their marriage" (CP:196).
It is a relationship rooted in mutual love and respect. Samuel nowhere appears to be trying to dominate Corrine or to undermine her individuality and sense of self-worth. They seem to be well adjusted in their marriage. Though he is a Christian missionary, his knowledge of his religion does not dilute his capacity for love with his wife. His concept of love is not purely spiritual or abstract; rather, it is humanly realistic and balanced. He is not distrustful of flesh, and loves his wife with body and soul. The way he is struck with grief on the death of his wife only reveals how much, like a man, he needed and loved Corrine. Again, he does not turn to any abstract philosophy for comfort when faced with the vacuum created in his life by her death. He responds to this crisis not by negating but by affirming the value and significance of love between man and woman.

After Corrine's death, his relationship with Nettie, which was earlier characterized by a spirit of friendship and concern for each other, develops into more intimate bond culminating in their marriage. Corrine's death had left him lonely and he had no one to talk to and unburden the grief of his heart. It was at this time that Nettie tried to comfort and help Samuel overcome his despair. But this concern awakens in both of them feelings of love and soon passion for each other takes over this relationship. Both of them love each other with their heart and soul and regard each other with mutual respect. If Nettie loves "him bodily, as a man... his walk, his size, his shape, his smell, the kinkiness of his hair... the very texture
of his palms."(CP:244) there is a beauty of plain love for Nettie which can be read in his eyes too. His love is so deep and natural that he publically puts his arms around her and declares his intention to marry her.

Samuel, thus, tries to overcome challenges and crises by a spirited and enlightened participation in life. His role as a missionary signifies not only his resolve to serve the oppressed and the ignorant, but it also testifies his abilities to read and interpret history and to present facts courageously. This imparts meaning and a sense of self-worth to his life. It is this response to the questions of racist oppression as well as personal tragedy, resulting from the death of his wife that enables him to survive with grace and dignity. Though his character appears to be rather flat, his role acquires a special importance when viewed in contrast with that of other male figures.

Walker's treatment of black male characters like Alphonso reveals a strong denunciation of anti-human tendencies in one's attitudes and actions. Alphonso emerges as a cruel, vulgar and lecherous man who, like a beast, preys upon the helpless and the ignorant. He appears as a villain driven by greed and self-love in every sphere of his life. With his indifference to others and blinded by lust and avarice, he offers a contrast to Samuel, motivated by his impulse to fight oppression and serve others in an intelligent and well informed manner. If Alphonso acts as an agent of deception, disruption and
destruction, Samuel stands out as an embodiment of the powers of truth, hope and rejuvenation. Thus these two characters, forming two opposite polarities in their ways of responding to life, reveal clearly Walker's endorsement of the set of values which guide Samuel through all the difficulties he has to face in his journey of life.

If in *The Color Purple*, Walker affirms the value of humanistic principles as a means to cope with the pressures of life by moving her characters out of the darkness of misery and helplessness into the light of love and hope, *The Temple of My Familiar* further underlines the validity of this approach by "holding her characters in a state of tension created by living consciously in historical, geographical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual domains." Their understanding of and response to the questions of life reveal a constant process of change, development and growth in their outlook and commitments. They all face the great question of identity, race, injustice, oppression in the form of racism and sexism, and seek to liberate themselves from the bondage of conventional thoughts and institutions and try to move towards the discovery of truth and self. They can be seen trying to build humanly satisfying and fulfilling authentic relationships with each other and the environment around them in their own different ways. Most of these characters embody one or the other aspect of humanistic values which Walker seems to prize most not just as a philosophy but as a way of life.
The importance Walker attaches to the necessity of developing a humanist perspective becomes apparent by her depiction of the transformation in the character of Suwelo. He is a professor of history in a California University and initially appears to be a slave to the intellectual stuff he has been fed on. He sees black history as the white man looks at it and is content to teach traditional mainstream textbook history: "He wanted American history, the stuff he taught, to forever be the center of everyone's attention what a few white men wanted, thought, and did" (TMF:178). This ignorance of the past of his race seriously limits and even distorts his understanding of life. His mind at this stage appears to be permeated with the attitudes and values of the white. The history of racism and imperialism based on the concepts of white man's superiority do not seem to trouble him. The role of white man as an exploiter and rapist of the planet and the oppressor of the black does not disturb him much. He, like the white man, views life and its happiness mainly in terms of the satisfaction of his physical and material needs as an individual.

His egocentric outlook and behaviour prevent him initially from experiencing a sense of harmony that comes from the recognition of and respect for everything in the scheme of the universe. That is why he seems to be uprooted and adrift, unable to establish a fulfilling relationship even with his wife. The fact that he does not know anything even about his parents and uncle Rafe is an evidence of his alienation from his own real self. The adoption of
the white man's perceptions and principles, thus, fail to provide him with a viable strategy of responding to the questions he has to face as a black man in America.

Suwelo's life, however, reveals a pattern of development and growth through exposure to experience and sources of knowledge. His journey from California to Baltimore, to the house of his uncle Rafe, Lissie and Hal is a journey of exploration and discovery. It is there that he learns from Lissie about his own father and mother, his uncle Rafe, and the history of Africa since the time men and women, birds and beasts, trees and stones all lived in a state of complete harmony. Lissie, through the narration of her memories of several incarnations, reveals to him how this idyllic peace and harmony gradually disappeared, giving way to strifes and conflicts between species, races and even genders, resulting in the oppression and exploitation of one by the other.

This knowledge appears to contribute much to the change one perceives in his attitudes towards others, women in particular. A greater degree of realism and maturity becomes discernible in his perceptions of life and human relationships after his education by Lissie and Hal. He finds that Lissie and Hal had an authentic connection with life: "They had connected directly with life and not with its reflection; the mysteries they found themselves involved in, simply by being alive and knowing each other, carried them much deeper into reality than 'society' often permits people to get. They
had found themselves born into a fabulous, mysterious universe, filled with fabulous, mysterious others; they had never been distracted from the wonder of this gift. They had made the most of it"(TMF:192).

This knowledge of the real human values which had enabled Lissie, Hal and Rafe to experience the fabulous wonders, mysteries and richness of life, transforms his own pattern of relationship with others, particularly with Fanny, his wife.

Suwelo "being a man within a patriarchal system"(TMF:283) does not have, in the beginning, any respect for the identity and freedom of women. He sees himself as the centre of his relationships with women and considers them as mere objects meant only to satisfy his needs and desires. He loves to use their bodies "as if they're calendar pinups, centerfolds, or paper dolls"(TMF:321). He is so possessive and self-centred that he cannot tolerate Fanny's attempts at expansion and realization of self through meditation and sexual liberation: "Think of me! Me! My body, my cock! he was always crying. At least this is what she felt, even when he didn't say anything. She'd accused him of trying to colonize her orgasms"(TMF:386).

In the beginning, his attitude towards women, in fact, seems to be basically superficial and even perverted. He looks at them only as a means for the gratification of his carnality. He is always guided by his playboy mentality and his goal seems to be that of the "red blooded man" to "pierce as many women as possible"(TMF:281).
He treats "their minds, their creative gifts, and their professional abilities as added sexual stimulation, nothing more" (TMF:281). He regards even Carlotta with superficiality and smugness and tells Fanny: "Carlotta meant very little to me... She had no substance" (TMF:320). His lascivious behaviour becomes all the more clear when Fanny leaves him and goes to Africa. He thinks it to be his legitimate right to give full play to his sexuality:

"I was hooked on girly magazines, naked women in quarter-to-peek glass cages, bondage films, and 'live' sex acts on stage. When I thought of what Fanny's six months in Africa gave me, it was the enjoyment, without guilt, of pornography. My woman had left me, you see, taken my rightful stuff off to another continent, totally out of reach of my dick, and left me high and dry. Well, I knew how to get off without her. There were plenty of other women in the world. This was my attitude" (TMF:245).

According to him, "it was a freedom I'd never had" (TMF:281). He even justifies his indulgence when he says that "maybe she stayed away in Africa for such a long time because she wanted me to have the freedom to fuck around" (TMF:281). His relationship with his wife shows as if she meant only to appease his sexual desires. Consequently sex fails to provide him with any sense of fulfillment and happiness. It does not solve any of his problems and only leads him into a deeper state of misery and discontentment. Experience of love as a source of meaning and purpose remains utterly unknown to him in this phase of his life. Because of his
ego-centricity, male chauvinism and excessive carnality, his marriage with Fanny fails to bring them together in a genuine relationship of love and care. In the absence of respect for Fanny's identity, their marriage becomes only a burdensome bondage for her.

Suwelo's perception and responses to persons and situations, however, do reveal a pattern of change and growth. He gradually learns to treat women at parity with himself and, thus, overcomes his excessive ego and possessiveness as a man. This is apparent from the way he comes to terms with the idea of dissolving their formal marriage. His ability to accept Fanny as a friend and not as wife, playing a subsidiary role, is a sure sign of his growing respect for her independent identity. This further indicates his own liberation from ego-centricity and possessiveness which has earlier seriously constricted and distorted his vision of life. He is so transformed that he emerges as a man with a heightened and expanded sense of self who lives with others on the principles of reciprocity and relatedness. Suwelo, who was earlier mal-contented and mal-adjusted, now appears to be at peace and harmony with himself as well as all those around him. This transformation in his life corresponds directly with the changes in his methods of responding to the pressures and challenges he is confronted with. The development of a humanistic perspective and reliance on the values of freedom, equality, love and human dignity, irrespective of race or gender give Suwelo strength and stability, harmony and peace.
This indication of the use of humanistic values as a source of strength in the face of pressures further becomes crystalized when one examines Walker's treatment of Fanny's commitment to these ideals. Walker has presented her as a figure with central significance in the thematic design of *The Temple of My Familiar*. Walker's reader cannot remain unimpressed by Fanny's tremendous energies, creative powers and a zeal to serve suffering humanity without compromising with her identity and individuality as a woman. She puts up a courageous resistance to all those forces which seek to stifle and circumscribe the growth and expansion of her self.

Like Most of Walker's female protagonists, Fanny, too, has to reckon with the patriarchal world with its oppressive traditions and institutions. To her, marriage is an institution devised by man to keep woman in bondage. It is an instrument used by man for centuries to legitimise the domination and exploitation of woman and, thus, to deprive her of her autonomy and dignity. She faces this challenge to her identity as an enlightened woman, drawing strength not from any source outside herself but from within her own mind and soul. Unlike most of her sisters who suffer supinely, Fanny not only protests against but also completely rejects her place in marriage as subsidiary to her husband. As a sensitive and self-respecting woman, she is acutely conscious of the toll of her freedom her marriage with Suwelo has taken. She tells Suwelo, "I don't feel free... I've never felt free, never in my life. And I want to" (*TMF*: 138). She further insists that "it's marriage I don't want" (*TMF*: 138). Fanny
realizes that her marriage bond allows Suwelo a right to use her body as he wants and that his only sexual interests in her tend to degrade the sanctity of her body and soul. She decides to dissolve her marriage for she regards the freedom of her body from Suwelo as the biggest step towards the expansion of her self. She leaves him and goes to Africa in order to become sexually free from him. And after a long interval when she comes back she does not surrender to his implorings "to stay with him" for she is aware of his perverted sexuality colonized "by the movies he saw and the books he read. The magazines he thumbed through on street corners" (TMF: 386). She feels so sick and degraded by his overt sexuality that she can feel no joy or orgasm with him. In his company she "thinks of the years during which her sexuality was dead to her" (TMF: 386). She experiences her orgasm not when she joins men but when she learns to masturbate: "She'd found herself free. Sexually free, for the first time in her life. At the same time, she was learning to meditate, and was throwing off the last clinging vestiges of organized religion. She was soon meditating and masturbating and finding herself dissolved into the cosmic All. Delicious" (TMF: 386).

This awakening of her body to its new mysteries makes her capable of entering into a meaningful and mutually fulfilling and satisfying relationship with men even after her divorce. It becomes evident when she longs for a sexual union while massaging Arveyda. She feels "terribly aroused, as she looks at Arveyda's smooth defenseless back, his humble neck, his beautiful hands and mimble fingers,
the tips of which, touching his instruments, have already given her so much pleasure" (TMF:408). She takes his little candle into her warm hand and "they begin to rock, turning now so that they lie, their arms around each other, equitably, on their sides. Weaping they begin to kiss" (TMF:408). This shows that Fanny can act and participate in life through her own free will without feeling guilty and degraded. This joyous orgiastic pleasure liberates Fanny from the matrix of institutionalized man-woman relationship and allows her a fulfillment of her self.

However, this does not mean that her responses to her situations are tainted by egocentricity or selfish individualism. On the contrary, her approach is basically positive and affirmative in nature. It is informed by a very broad and mature vision of life, human relationships and the role of individual in the scheme of things. She transcends all narrow concerns and, thus, overcomes her frustrations and circumscriptive circumstances by integrating herself with larger humanity by way of her services as masseuse. Her choice of working as masseuse is a sign of her liberation from petty concerns with self-preservation and her emer­gance as a woman with an all-embracing self. She feels deeply injured and hurt when she sees Carlotta's body "recently and repeatedly struck. A body cringing" (TMF:321). Like a healer, Fanny massages her body and tries to "uncramp her legs, untangle her knee joints, flatten out the curve in her neck, restore free movement to her toes" (TMF:320). Thus, Fanny is able to restore Carlotta's body to health and release it from pain.
Suwelo, too, is transformed through Fanny and is able to get better insight into life. In her company he learns to respect and value the identity of woman and liberates himself from his obsessive sexuality and is able to participate in life with profound joy.

Thus Fanny’s enlightened response, her love of freedom and ability to liberate herself from the thralls of conventional behaviour and institutions make her a lovable and admirable figure. This also shows that the responses of such characters "affirm the possibility of achieving balance, sanity, and health, and suggests that social progress is best achieved by those engaged in personal growth." Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar*, like other novels, underlines unequivocally the inherent strength and ability of the individuals for their own growth, improvement and enhancement of all their relationships. In fact, she seems to regard the potential for growth and enrichment as something natural to human beings, and, therefore, essential for a life of real happiness and fulfilment. It is this idea which Walker appears to convey when "*The Temple of My Familiar* celebrates the possibility of happiness restored with the reconfiguration of the family as open, extended, and loving, and with the characterization of individuals who are not afraid to abandon social prescriptions for honest relationships."19

Tensions and conflicts which often dog human relationships and which are almost always the result of jealous possessiveness
and dishonesty tend to disappear when the individuals develop their relationships on the basis of mutual love, respect and acceptance, evincing courage and strength to resist conventionalism from outside and selfish individualism from within. The fact that Walker regards this kind of approach as something fully realizable is quite apparent from her treatment of Lissie-Hal-Rafe relationship and the way they emerge as celebrants of life in the midst of its sorrows and sufferings. The unique harmony that permeates their lives is the result of their human understanding and natural wisdom unadulterated by possessiveness and lust. We come to know that Hal and Lissie had courted each other since he was in his "short pants" and she was in "long dresses" (TMF:41). Their coming together was just very natural. They "gravitated toward each other, 'cause that's where life felt safest and best" (TMF:42). This attraction and caring for each other resulted in their marriage. But, like all marriages, theirs too had to face the pressures and turmoils of real life. They, however, remain in full control of themselves and do not allow these pains and challenges to overwhelm their relationship. On the contrary, their experiences continue to be the source of mutual strength, happiness and joy and they face life with a sense of complete togetherness. Hall tells: "When we made love we never thought of anybody or anything else. I never did, anyway. Just as when I drank a glass of water that I tried to pretend I was also drinking. This way of loving just exactly who you're with seems totally out of reach of half the people making love in
This happiness is put to test by the tragedy of life which strikes them when Lissie delivers their first baby with the help of Hal who has no knowledge of it. Lissie's screams while delivering the child leave a scar on Hal's psyche and he himself seems to be "dying from the pain Lissie was feeling" (TMF: 106). It fills him with a sense of overpowering guilt and renders him almost incapable of having any desire for sex: "I swore it would never happen again, and my desire for her, for sex with her or with any woman, died, and I became a eunuch myself. I just knew I would never be able to deal with making love to a woman ever again" (TMF: 106-7).

This is the most serious kind of threat to the peace and harmony of their relationship. Hal's failures to gratify the needs of her body generate sexual tension and frustrations in the life of Lissie. She tries desperately to arouse him, to awaken his desires for her. But more he "said no, the hotter and madder she got "(TMF: 109). It also causes moments of misery and a feeling of guilt in Hal for failing his woman. But both of them succeed in overcoming this serious crisis because their relationship is rooted in genuine feelings of love for each other. Their bond of love and mutual understanding is so strong that it never gives way to any of the pressures. Theirs is a relationship borne out of deep concerns and respect for each other and not warped by lust and selfishness. That is why it not only survives this crisis but also becomes deeper and stronger,
even when Lissie turns to other men for her gratification. She runs away with a painter and then falls in love with Rafe, a friend of Hal and Lissie. All this does not disturb Hal in any way. On the contrary, he encourages Lissie for it and feels happy when he learns that Lissie and Rafe are carrying on. It is his understanding of her feminine needs, his deep desire to see her happy and fulfilled, and his heart free from male jealousy and possessiveness that gives their relationship a new strength, depth and resilience. Lissie, too, shows a great understanding of and respect for Hal's state of mind. Though she is in love with Rafe and even mothers two children by him, her love for Hal, too, never lessens. Thus, Hal-Rafe-Lissie relationship underlines the fact that human understanding, tolerance and total and wholehearted acceptance of each other is essential for a fulfilling relationship.

Walker seems to regard these humanistic values as absolutely necessary not only for happy personal human relationship, but also for encountering larger social, cultural and political issues of the post-colonial era. She is a writer with a very vast canvas which she has used to deal with almost every important problem being faced by mankind today. She focuses her reader's attention on a very wide range of questions, including those of environmental degradation due to the greed of man, problems of nuclear waste, spread of diseases like AIDS, neo-imperialism and oppression based on class and gender. She has used her art not only as a means
to highlight these problems besetting modern life, but has also underlined the imperatives of an enlightened resistance against every form of oppression and exploitation, discrimination and injustice. This resistance, she seems to emphasize, must be motivated by one's commitment to the larger human causes, aimed at affirming equality, freedom and human dignity as the governing principles for human conduct in every sphere of life—personal, social, political and cultural. It is only a response based on these humanistic ideals of thought and behaviour which alone can save life on this planet from further degradation, even extinction and can transform it into an experience of peace and harmony enveloping all. The efficacy and necessity of this approach as an answer to the complex questions of life and death being faced by man today have been dramatized by her nowhere more vividly than through her depiction of the life of Ola in *The Temple of My Familiar*.

Ola is a versatile personality and all his thoughts and actions illustrate the qualities of a true humanist. He appears in the novel in a number of roles—a freedom fighter, minister of cultural affairs, an artist, a husband and a father. This wide range of his interests and experiences is only an index of his spirited involvement in life with all its complexities. What impresses about him most is the uniformity of the pattern of behaviour and response characterized uniformly by his firm commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, justice, and above all, complete harmony with one's surroundings. His commitment to these values seems to become
deeper and stronger with every new challenge and he, thus, grows into a fearless articulator and practitioner of these principles in the face of daunting pressures.

His commitment to the cause of freedom becomes evident first when the reader learns about his active participation in the struggle of his people to throw off the yoke of foreign rule. He joined the Mbeles, the African 'underground' to overthrow the white government with force. His participation in the struggle to free his country was motivated by his firm faith in the principles of equality and dignity. He sought to drive away the white government as it was based on the doctrine of racism. It was a fight against repression and exploitation of one nation by another. Committed truly to the principles of justice and equality, he even risked his life in his struggle against imperialism and made his contribution to the political freedom of his country.

Ola's concept of freedom and equality, however, is so comprehensive that political independence alone does not exhaust it completely. He and his friends had joined the Mbeles and fought against the foreign rule with the hope that it would free the people of his country from poverty and suffering, exploitation and oppression: "They'd had such dreams, he said, when he and his friends went off to join the Mbeles. They thought that removing the whites from power would be the last of their work to insure a prosperous future for their country. Instead, it had proved only a beginning. Not, however, a small one; for that he was grateful.
He had hoped that political freedom would inaugurate the process of change and would lead to the establishment of a social, economic and cultural order based on equality, freedom and justice for all. But he feels deeply distressed when he finds that political freedom has failed to bring about any real change in the life of his people. The old white rulers have been replaced by a new class of their own political leaders who are as oppressive and exploitative as the whites. These new rulers become an exclusive class grabbing all powers and privileges for themselves: "Only the president, his wives, his mistresses, his ministers, his relatives, and the army have enough to eat. Only their children can afford to go to school" (TMF:180). Though it is the government of their own people, it doesn't seem to be for them and by them in any of its policies and actions. Programmes aimed at people's well-being are nowhere on its agenda. This indifference to the lot of the common man hurts Ola because he wants "the government should try harder" to "pave a road" and "build a hospital" (TMF:180).

What troubles Ola most is the use of same old repressive ways and means by his own people in government as were used by the colonial oppressors before freedom. They are so undemocratic that they cannot brook any opposition from their own countrymen. In order to keep themselves in power, they even employ means of repression reminiscent of the ways of the imperialists in the pre-
independence era. The curfews are common, and Ola regrets "that every night the only people one sees are in army uniforms" (TMF: 180). He sounds bitter and indignant when he protests: "Why a curfew...One thing, at least, that Africans always owned before was the night. With 'freedom' they seem to have lost even that" (TMF: 180).

Ola's response to the post-freedom scenario of his country reveals his firm commitment to the principles of freedom, equality and justice. He cannot accept the distinctions between the ruled, the privileged and the dispossessed. It underlines clearly his complete rejection of the government which is insensitive to the pains and suffering of its own people. His love and sympathy for the masses and his urge for common weal testify his deep and abiding adherence to humanistic principles. The way he criticizes and condemns anti-democratic and repressive measures of his government only indicate his irrepressible passion for freedom and justice.

Like a true crusader for human dignity and equality, Ola stands up for women's cause as well with great courage and conviction. His "insights into the oppression of women, black women by black men, who should have had more understanding – having criticized the white man's ignorance in dealing with black people for so long – made many of the people uncomfortable" (TMF: 261). He uses his plays to attack his own society for discriminating against women. What offends him most is the way women are kept out of the structure of power – social, political and economic. Though women played an important role and fought side by side with men for the free-
dom of their country, they are pushed completely into oblivion once the country is free. Nzingha's mother, for example, had helped "through immense risk and personal sacrifice" (TMF: 256) the freedom movement to succeed, but once her government comes into power she is conveniently forgotten. This was "true of all the women. They were forgotten" (TMF: 256). Ola is critical of the way men think of women only in terms of sex and breeding. They could think of no way of relating to women: "Other than the one they traditionally practiced...A woman was for breeding, a woman was for sex" (TMF: 256).

It is his commitment to the cause of freedom, equality and justice which gives him a unitive apprehension of all, irrespective of race, nationality, gender and class. His concerns are for the survival of the whole human race, of everything on this planet. His plays awaken people to the dangers of nuclear waste, being clandestinely dumped into African countries by Russia and the Western powers. He feels deeply agonised at the thought that our planet is dying a slow death because of the greed and stupidity of the people in power. As a man with acute sensitivity, deep knowledge, resolute will and moral courage, he resists all the forces of death and destruction, oppression and injustice. He is so much imbued with these humanistic values that nothing can daunt or dissuade him from lashing at all those people who try to thrive on the oppression and exploitation of others. He writes plays about taxation without representation, the oppression of women, the smug middle class, the
butalization of the poor, the barbarity of the military, the violence by the government against the people and the nuclear-waste dumpings.

Ola emerges as a man with full faith in the possibilities of change and improvement. As an artist he appears to be confident "that his work could be an instrument for change" (TMF:257). He gives a message through his plays of responsibility, tolerance, justice and, above all, harmony with everything in one's surroundings. This is the message of life and hope which is conveyed not only through his plays, but also through the example of his own life as an individual. He confronts every pressure and finds answers to every challenge with his commitment to the ideals of humanism. Here he seems to come very close to his creator and articulates Walker's own belief in the necessity and efficacy of these values in the face of modern reality.

Walker's treatment of the strategy of facing pressures and challenges with strength derived from humanistic values and principles imparts a note of hope and optimism to her fiction. This affirmative aspect of her vision of life does not appear to be facile as it is fully rooted in her faith in human potentials for resistance against oppression and injustice. The fact that the viability of humanistic values has been dramatised through those of her characters who emerge as strong and admirable figures underline Walker's commitment to these values as a source of strength, motivation, guidance and the fulfilment of self through a meaningful integration with the larger life around them.
NOTES


4Joyce Carol and Ellen G.Friedman, p.511.


7Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (New York:Washington Square, 1970). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as *TLGC* for such textual quotations.

9 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Washington Square, 1976). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as *M* for such textual quotations.


11 ibid., p.132.

12 ibid., p.135.


14 ibid., p.30.

15 Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square, 1982). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as *CP* for such textual quotations.
16 Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar* (New York: Washington Square, 1989). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as *TMF* for such textual quotations.


18 ibid., p. 206.

19 Joyce Carol and Ellen G. Friedman, p. 517.