Chapter Two

Realization of Self and Identity in Woman’s Growth

Walker’s signal contribution to the cause of black women of America lies in, as Mary Helen Washington puts it, “her evolutionary treatment of black women” (Critical Perspectives 39). The black women of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are aptly described by Zora Neale Hurston through Janie’s grandmother Nanny in Their Eyes Were Watching God: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (Their Eyes Were Watching God 20). As victims of racism and sexism, they had to carry burdens placed on them by society and family. Such pressures, according to Walker, made it impossible for black women to give expression to their creativity forcing them to even abandon their spirituality:

They were creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality — which is the basis of art — that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away their spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear.

(Gardens 233)
For the black women who remained suffering sexually and racially the writing of black women writers came as a boon infusing pride and confidence in them and giving them their identity and strength to resist oppression.

Zora Neale Hurston, a story-teller as well as an anthropologist, changed the image of the black woman as a tragic sufferer into that of one who is daring enough to shape her own life. About Zora's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Walker says, "There is no book more important to me than this one" (Gardens 86). Walker would love to enjoy herself by being identified with the novel's heroine Janie Crawford. Janie's two marriages, one with an old man who is jealous of her and another with an entrepreneur who wants to keep her on a pedestal as a queen, fail to satisfy her since she wants to know herself as well as the man she loves. It is with Tea Cake, a man much younger to her and one who is not interested in her money or beauty but in her self that she finds real love. And Zora gives a striking and apt definition of love metaphorically comparing it to the sea that is moving and which can also be still and calm. It takes its shape with its meeting with the shore. Love is not as mechanical as a grindstone that repeatedly does the same job everywhere. One can find in this description the definite break with the concept of a wife's blind and fixed love to a man to whom she is married. The character of Janie serves to change the image of black woman as stereotype.
Like Zora, Paule Marshall presents women who break the stereotype and change themselves. Her women characters reflect the impact of culture and society on them, and gain power to influence the two forces in turn. Silla in Marshall’s first novel *Browngirl, Brownstones* changes from a shy young woman with the expectations of a girl into one who, realizing the relevance of protest, becomes a force to reckon with.

Furrowed over Michele Wallace’s observations in favor of the perpetuation of the stereotype images of black women, Walker responds angrily:

'It's a lie' I said ... I've been hacking away at that stereotype for years, and so have a good many other black woman writers! I thought, not simply of Meridian, but of Janie Crawford, of Pecola, Sula, and Nell, of Edith Jackson, even of Iola Le Roy and Megda, for God's sake. (Characters by black women writers Ms Wallace is unacquainted with...) (324-325)

As pointed out by Walker in this rejoinder, many black women writers have contributed to the change of the stereotype image of black women. Thus she is not alone in the crusade against the injustice perpetrated on black women and in the attempt to usher in the image of the black woman as an individual fighting for and achieving freedom and selfhood. There are forerunners to inspire and guide her, and contemporaries to
keep her going in her great endeavour of liberating black women by means of literary art.

As a woman artist, one of the basic concerns of Alice Walker in her fiction is the projection of the whole woman and her attributes, and of the steps she has to take to reach that position. Donna Haisty Winchell finds this feature to be the dominant one in Walker's fiction: "... the struggle for wholeness is the stuff Walker's fictional world is made of" (Alice Walker 28). This endeavour helps in ranking Walker as a serious artist with a specific purpose contributing to humanity's search for truth concerning the worth of a woman, her role in human relationship and her place in society.

In "Roselily" she exposes the emptiness of a black woman's life that is restricted to her house. She is confused as she is torn between the respect and security that go with marriage and the absence of purpose and vision in the role of a wife. As a new wife, she ponders over the good things she can hope to enjoy through the marriage.

But such pleasant thoughts soon give way to the thought of the possibility of her life in the changed situation losing its meaning. Ironically Walker points out that making babies will be the sole thing for her to do:
When she is rested, what will she do? They will make babies... Her hands will be full. Full of What? Babies. She is not comforted. (In Love and Trouble 7)

The story is a poignant reminder of the idea that for a woman what is more important than mere marriage or comfort is a purposeful life. Unlike Roselily, the progressive women that Walker depicts seek to be whole, gaining meaning, significance and purpose in their lives, and thereby be an asset to themselves, to those who are around them, and to the community. What Marie Bashkirtseff achieved through her Journal towards the end of the nineteenth century, Walker succeeds in getting by means of her fictional women characters. Marie Bashkirtseff’s Journal, it is said, “sparked heated discussion throughout European intellectual circles about the ‘true’ nature of woman, and gave an enormous boost to discussion of the woman question in the newly developing fields of psychology and psychoanalysis” (Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Often, Women, the Family and Freedom 33).

The Color Purple, which brought Walker fame had a similar impact especially regarding sexism in the black community. Jerome in “Her Sweet Jerome” talks about fighting white oppression whereas at home he oppresses his wife. The sexist attitude of many a black man and its unpleasant and even cruel impact on the black women who depend on
them physically as well as spiritually prove to be the undoing of the black women in the stories in *In Love and Trouble*.

Walker had to bear the cross for her depiction of sexist male characters in her fiction. The screening of the film *The Color Purple* invited much trouble from blacks on this account and one finds a mixed reaction from literary critics. But many of them applaud her endeavour to fight sexism in her own community. Pointing out that it is her love for her community as well as her commitment to truth that makes her criticize black men and women, J.Charles Washington says: “She gives praise where praise is due; however, her strong sense of moral sense, courage and commitment to truth and honesty will not allow her to shrink from criticism where criticism is due, in order that future improvement can be made” (*Obsidian* -II 3: 1 (Spring 1988) 48). Walker takes this stand in spite of the risk involved in it. She refers to this risk in her Preface to *The Same River Twice*: “I belong to a people so wounded by betrayal, so hurt by misplacing their trust, that to offer us a gift of love is often to risk one’s life, certainly one’s name and reputation” (*The Same River Twice* IX).

Besides making a significant contribution to Feminist terminology, Walker’s introduction of the term “womanism” to convey her feminist ideology led to much discussion in literary and feminist circles. Deborah De Rosa states: “Walker’s term has also spurred discussion among
historians and critics who have analyzed its implications in the context of white and black feminist ideologies" (The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States 92). Bell Hooks points out how successful *The Color Purple* was in reaching both academic and mass audiences: "*The Color Purple* broadens the scope of literary discourse, asserting its primacy in the realm of academic thought while simultaneously striking the reflective consciousness of a mass audience" (Critical Perspectives 284).

The novel presents such a triumphant picture of womanhood that brings the acclaim of many like the rich tribute paid to this aspect of the novel by James Robert Saunders who says that in it the readers "gain access to the flowering of womanhood" (*The Hollins Critic*, XXV: 4 (October 1988) 11). That in the "flowering of womanhood" the mother-daughter bond plays a crucial role is a psychologically valid fact. Celie's flowering into womanhood is vastly helped by female bonding. Nettie, Shug, Kate and Sofia all contribute to the development of Celie as a whole woman. In his essay "Celie's Search for Identity: A Psychoanalytical Developmental Reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" Charles L. Proudfit cites the views of psychologists insisting on the importance of the mother's role in the development of a woman and points out how the women characters in *The Color Purple* who influence Celie's growth act as surrogate mothers at one time or other. One of the many overt references to such a bonding is made by Celie when she
washes and combs Shug's hair:

I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia — or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat. First she say, hurry up and get finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back against my knees. That feel just right, she say. That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. Maybe grandma.

(The Color Purple 55)

Charles L. Proudfit points out how the other women, especially Shug, act as a mother to Celie in providing her with an environment in which she is made to feel secure. Looking at her mother-surrogate, Celie is able to look at herself and have a positive reflection of her self, which in turn helps her in the development of her identity or true self. The psychological significance of The Color Purple in the understanding of a woman's growth is thus brought out by Proudfit. He says that the psychological theories concerning the development of a woman underlie the novel's theme of "female bonding" and serve to illuminate the central character's progress towards "a mature female identity and healthy object relations" (Contemporary Literature 32: 1 (Spring 1991) 17). Thus in the psychological understanding of a woman's growth the contribution of this 'brilliant psychological developmental novel' (35), as described by Proudfit, is very significant. It is the inner process that counts most in a
woman's life and so the novel is rightly dedicated to that mysterious inner presence or what psychologists call the unconscious:

To the Spirit:
Without whose assistance
Neither this book
Nor I
Would have been
Written. (The Color Purple, frontpage)

Describing the women in The Color Purple as “the sacred feminine” (The Same River Twice 23) Walker says that they reveal great possibilities for women: “They also suggest infinite possibilities for women, and for myself. Womanist women”(23).

Walker's dissatisfaction with white feminists arise from their tendency to ignore black women in their study of women. In the work of a white woman feminist scholar, Walker found no reference to any black woman writer. This, to her, is “white female chauvinism” (Gardens 372). In “a feminist statement in art” (372) called “The Dinner Party” (372) Walker saw many plates displaying “creatively imagined vaginas” (373) but could not find any one displaying a black vagina. Much displeased Walker writes:

It occurred to me that perhaps white feminists, no less than white women generally, cannot imagine black women have
vaginas. Or if they can, where imagination leads them is too far to go. However, to think of black women as women is impossible if you cannot imagine them with vaginas. (373)

Walker finds that among white women true feminists who are above racism are outnumbered. At the same time she is of the firm belief that black women should not remain isolated but join with women all over the world in the liberation of women.

The female bonding that Walker has in view is expressed by her through the term “womanism.” A womanist, according to Walker, is “black feminist or feminist of color” (XI). Thus the racial politics underlying Walker’s choice of a new term becomes obvious. Maria Lauret describes Walker’s womanism “as the politics of race and gender intertwined” (Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America 126). In “Feminist and Womanist Aesthetics” Tuzyline J. Allan points out the negative racial aspect that Walker’s ideology implies in relation to the debate of white and black feminist attitudes:

By foreclosing the possibility that womanist qualities can exist in the white female imagination, Walker creates an unbridgeable gulf between white and black feminist writers, a stance that is counterproductive to her womanist vision of racial and sexual equality. (qtd. in The Oxford Companion to Woman’s Writing in the United States 929)
The relevance of colour in the relation of the terms 'womanism' and 'feminism' is seen in the equation of womanism with black feminism. Significantly Walker makes use of the metaphor of colour to relate the two terms: "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (Gardens XI). Besides colour the wish to be original in utterance also lies behind Walker's choice of the term 'womanism': "I simply feel that naming our own experience after our own fashion (as well as rejecting whatever does not seem to suit) is the least we can do — and in this society may well be our only tangible sign of personal freedom" (82).

In In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens Walker explains in detail what the term "womanist" signifies. It refers to black women who love women and are whole. The word "whole" includes the idea of "wholly" and that of "holy," completeness and sacredness. They are 'round' women who have concern for their fathers, brothers and sons — a concern not affected by their attitude towards males in general. Walker's intention is to have a term that denotes something more than preference of women over men and living separately from men. Being true to 'black cultural values', it should affirm 'connectedness to the entire community and the world" (81). It is this fact that makes Walker dissatisfied with the word 'lesbianism' because Lesbos is an island. Thus non-separatism and humanism that underlie black feminist thought, as pointed out by Patricia Collins in "Defining Black Feminist Thought," get exemplified in Walker's ideology of womanism.
The Color Purple ends on a triumphant note and it is the triumph of womanism. Celie, who has emerged as a successful entrepreneur and a whole woman is surrounded by men and women who love her and are loved by her. Beyond this joy of togetherness of a loving family, which in fact is a miniature of the larger community, lies Celie's awareness of her being one with the universe. She is at peace with herself, with others and with the universe. It is this spirit of oneness that underlies the beginning words of the last chapter with which Celie addresses God, trees and peoples. Lauren Berlant sees in Celie the finding of godly spirit in everything and “fulfillment of the womanist promise” (Critical Enquiry (14 Summer 1988) 854). “The womanist Utopia,” (ARIEL 21:2 (April 1990) 72), as Priscilla L. Walton describes the novel's conclusion in her essay, “What She Got to Sing About?” Comedy and The Color Purple, marks the culmination of a woman's journey towards wholeness.

In Sigmund Freud's analysis of the role of the sexes, the demands of civilization as well as instinct determines the differences:

The work of civilization has been increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimiations of which women are little capable... What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. (Women, The Family, and Freedom 359)
Such a subservient role assigned to women is exactly what many feminists oppose. By playing such a role, Celie does not get sexual fulfillment which she later enjoys with the help of Shug. In her transformation, sexual fulfillment plays a very important role. The womanist in Walker's ideology is "one who loves other women, sexually and / or non-sexually" (Gardens XI). It is by awakening in Celie her sexual awareness that Shug starts the process of change in her. The mirror episode in which Shug teaches Celie to get pleasure from her genitalia and her sexual stimulation of Celie by sleeping with her form the initial stage of her orientation of Celie in the progress towards a whole life.

Daniel W. Ross tries to validate psychologically the value of mirror scenes in the development of an ego. He cites Freud's words stressing the need for efforts to develop an ego: "... the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed" (qtd. in Modern Fiction Studies 34: 1 (Spring 1998) 73). The beginning of the development of an ego, according to Jacques Lacan, is marked by the mirror stage. Daniel W. Ross finds this illustrated in The Color Purple: "The mirror stage, a metaphor for Lacan, is literally enacted by Celie and Shug in The Color Purple (qtd. in Modern Fiction Studies 34: 1 (Spring 1988) 73). About sexual pleasure Shug tells Celie: "God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more" (The Color Purple 203). The sexual
The Color Purple, which Allan calls the “paradigmatic womanist text” (qtd. in The Oxford Companion to Woman's Writing in the United States 929) serves to illustrate Walker's womanism. Celie prefers female bonding to living with her husband Albert and finds much satisfaction in the company of Shug and Sofia. She maintains a continuous link with her sister Nettie through letters. Such a bonding with other women facilitates Celie's development as a whole woman. By becoming intimate with other women Celie is enabled, in the words of Charles L. Proudfit, “to resume her arrested development... to get in touch with her feelings, work through old traumas, and achieve an emotional maturity and a firm sense of identity that is psychologically convincing” (Contemporary Literature 32:1 (Spring 1991) 13-14).

A womanist, according to Walker, has strength and persistence to achieve personal development. This is found in Celie. Such a development in the central character dominates novels in the tradition of womanist bildungsroman and, though Celie's case best illustrates this aspect of womanism, there were before The Color Purple novels depicting the physical and psychological development of black women. Harriet Jacob's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Alice Childress's Like One of the Family are some of them. Gloria Naylor's Mama Day and Toni Morrison's novels that are womanist came out later. Thus Walker is not alone but in the company of other women writers in projecting the womanist cause.
fulfillment is shown to have the approval of God thereby proving to be a positive factor very much unlike the traditional association of guilt with it. In the same spiritual vein Winchell writes: “Shug offers Celie the image of a God human enough to share Celie’s need for love and compassionate enough to rejoice with his people when they find it, even in its most blatantly sexual forms” (Alice Walker 91).

Taking a psychological stand critics like Linda Abbandonato and Bell Hooks point out how sexual desire can prove to be a liberating force. While Bell Hooks speaks of “sexual desire, initially evoked in the novel as a subversive transformative force” (Critical Perspectives 286), Linda Abbandonato writes: “It is this highly disruptive potential — sexuality’s ability to resist the ideological laws that operate through its very terrain — that Shug’s erotic behaviour suggests; she embodies and embraces the notion of jouissance as a liberating power” (304).

In the movement for liberation of women sexual freedom forms an integral part. “The channeling of sexuality,” says Nicholas Davidson, “was central to the nascence of the New Woman” (The Failure of Feminism 69). The link between sexual awareness and the emergence of the New Woman is exemplified in the progress that Celie makes in her growth into a whole woman. Linda Abbandonato points out the effect of Celie’s sexual initiation on her realization of self: “Celie’s initiation and
eroticism is linked with her growing sense of self and her capacity to see wonders in the world" (Critical Perspectives 304).

Walker dedicates Possessing the Secret of Joy "with tenderness and respect to the blameless vulva." Dealing with clitoridectomy and its brutality, the novel indicts man for his crude attempt to keep woman under subjugation through sexual submission, which is tried to be accomplished with the removal of her clitoris. "Sex, for feminists," writes Nicholas Davidson, "is the primal means through which men oppress women" (The Failure of Feminism 69).

Pierre in Possessing the Secret of Joy says that being jealous of the pleasure that a woman is able to achieve without his assistance, man has her "outer sex" cut off and then he rests in his belief that "it is only his penis that can reach her inner parts and give her what she craves" (Possessing the Secret of Joy 172). Adam responds with a significant comment: "Ah, I say, the original battle of the sexes" (172). Unable to brook masculinity in woman in the form of an erect clitoris man uses religion to have the offending thing removed. "In some African cultures," says Wendy Wall, "clitoridectomy is an attempt to strip away what is masculine in the female genitalia, to deny her phallic power by removing this protrusion" (Critical Perspectives 265).

Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy says: "But there were other religious, I say, thinking of the little figure blissfully loving herself"
The little figure is the statuette of “a small smiling figure with one hand on her genitalia, every part of which appeared intact” (205). Finding sexual love by oneself or through other women, masturbation or lesbianism, is what the “other religions” that Tashi refers to convey. “Lesbian culture,” says Bonnie Zimmerman, “is like a philosophical or religious system that provides its adherents with a way of viewing the world anew” (The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 14). Such a religious system serves to liberate women from their traditional roles as passive sexual partners to men and thereby break the patriarchal system. The relevance of sexual liberation in women's movement is a conspicuous aspect. “It's a commonplace to say,” according to Beatrix Campbell, “that feminism in part grew out of the sexual and student revolutions of the 1960s” (Sexuality: A Reader 21).

Lesbian feminism aims at the creation of a new consciousness among women by relating themselves to one another. The Radicalesbians prefer the term “woman-identified” to “lesbian” and stress the political aspect of lesbianism rather than the sexuality involved in it. Adrienne Rich points out that woman-identified experiences are not limited to the erotic part alone but included other forms of intimate relationship like the coming together of women in the fight against the tyranny of man, the sharing of the inner life and the support of one another practically and politically.
Thus besides being intimate with each other physically, Celie and Shug share their inner lives too. Celie reveals her past and her unsatisfied life with Albert to Shug who shares with Celie her concept of God and religion, and her view of man. As Linda Abbandonato points out "... the novel is also lesbian in the much broader sense implied by Adrienne Rich's concept of the 'lesbian continuum', which spans the whole spectrum of women's friendships and sisterly solidarity" (Critical Perspectives 298). Celie and Shug love each other sincerely and aim at the good of each other. Shug gives Celie practical support by helping her to liberate herself from her domineering husband and gain economic independence as well. She tells Celie that she has brought her to Memphis “to love you and help you get on your feet” (The Color Purple 218).

Sharing with Celie her attitude towards man, Shug says: “Man corrupt everything” (204). Thus indoctrinated Celie writes to Nettie: “Well, you know wherever there’s a man, there’s trouble” (212). Celie’s story is in fact about a woman’s resistance to patriarchal conception of woman’s place at home and outside. Walker depicts in her fiction women suffering under patriarchy that hinders many women from becoming free and true to themselves and thereby from leading contented and useful lives. The norms set down by tradition, custom and religion for women to behave and live very much curtail their freedom and inhibit their expression of their true selves. As a result it becomes hard, as the
women in *In Love and Trouble* find, to break the notions of women as conceived by men which are, as pointed out by Winchell, "preconceived, stultifying and restrictive" *(Alice Walker 31)*.

A woman who does not resist such notions but allows herself to be exploited by man, as husband or lover, faces defeat, disappointment and even death. In "Her Sweet Jerome" the husband exploits his wife's blind love for him. Using her love and money he takes care of his interests and involvement in the revolution, turning a blind eye to his wife's yearnings for love. While he is progressing, the woman goes down from love to jealousy, jealousy to anxiety, anxiety to madness, and madness to death by burning herself: "As steadily as she careened downhill, Jerome advanced in the opposite direction" *(In Love and Trouble 31)*. Being a womanist text, although Jerome's cruelty and inhuman treatment of his wife haunts the story, it is the woman's failure to place her hope and happiness on firmer grounds that gets stressed. Walker writes: "Her troubles started noticeably when she fell in love with a studiously quiet schoolteacher, Mr. Jerome Franklin Washington III" *(25)*.

In "Roselily" Walker depicts the state of a woman who seeks redemption from her unpleasant situation in life by means of marriage with a man who will take her to Chicago where, she hopes, her troubles will end with the dawn of a new life: "But in Chicago Respect, a chance to build.... A chance to be on top. What a relief, she thinks, what a vision,
a view, from up so high" (4). But taking recourse to marriage to seek relief from stress can be, as pointed out by Betty Friedan, regressive. "The flight into marriage," says Betty Friedan, "is the easiest, quickest way to relieve that stress. To the educator, bent on women's growth to autonomy, such a marriage is 'regressive'" (The Feminine Mystique 176).

In "Roselily" there enters the element of doubt, and she becomes anxious about her life in Chicago. He has promised her rest, but she wonders what she will do after having rested: "Something strains behind her eyes. She thinks of the something as a rat trapped, cornered, scurrying to and fro in her head, peering through the windows of her eyes" (In Love and Trouble 8).

The brighter aspect is that there is in Roselily the yearning to be whole and free. "The search for psychological wholeness is, " says Winchell, "at the heart of 'Roselily' " (Alice Walker 20). Unlike many women who endure suffering and accept sacrifice as their lot, Roselily wants a full and free life: "She wants to live for one. But doesn't know quite what that means" (8). She errs in the way through which she tries to realize her wish. Marriage, a new place and a vague promise cannot ensure what she wishes. Mary Helen Washington finds her to be a trapped woman: "Walker sees Roselily, like Ahurole. (in Elechi Amadi's The Concubine) as a woman trapped and cut down by archaic
sexual initiation, marriage and childbirth in a quest for transcendence that is sometimes separatist, sometimes androgynous, and sometimes visionary. (Feminist Literary Criticism 16)

While the progressive women of Walker's fiction aim for separatism, androgyny and vision, they are averse to marriage.

Imani in "The Abortion" realizes the fraudulent nature of her marriage with Clarence and comes out of it. The woman in "The Lover" whose marriage is devoid of real feeling and passion gains sensuality through experience outside marriage — an experience she is ready to share with her husband who can also now be one of her lovers. Celie in The Color Purple is able to turn a new page in her life only after relieving herself from the shackles of her attachment to her husband Albert. Meridian's marriage with Eddie cools off and ends in separation. Giving away her son for adoption she becomes free to proceed in her womanist pursuit.

When Meridian tells Truman the story of a man who loved her dog more than his wife and children, she brings out one of the reasons for the failure of women to assert themselves — economic dependence. "Without money of one's own in a capitalist society," writes Walker, "there is no such thing as independence" (Gardens 90). To the woman's mother in Meridian's story the lack of love on the part of her son-in-law
conventions, by superstition, by traditions that in every way cut women off from the right to life" (Critical Perspectives 42).

A similar wish followed by confusion is experienced by Myrna in “Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?,” but in her the wish is more marked and the attempt at the realization of the wish is more pointed and even violent. She has rightly found out that her giving expression to her creativity can lead her to a full and free life. But this is thwarted by her husband and her lover. Her love for these men come in the way of her spiritual fulfillment. Man, in the lives of these women, is an obstacle and not a helper in the woman’s progress towards a whole life. It is no wonder then that feminists like Greer exhort women not to marry:

If women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry....

If independence is a necessary concomitant of freedom, women must not marry.... a woman who seeks liberation ought not to marry. (qtd. in The Failure of Feminism 31-32)

Some feminists accept the institution of marriage. At a Modern Language Association on Feminist Literature and Feminine Consciousness, Annis Pratt proposed a mode for fictional women incorporating institutions like marriage and childbearing:

The heroines of fiction... can be described as passing through the immanent phases of adolescent naturism,
is less important than the fact that "he owned his own house" (Meridian 224). Unable to feed her five children, the woman has to put up with the relationship with a man who saw better qualities in his dog than in her.

A similar character is Roselily who for the sake of a well-settled life marries a man whose "hand is like the clasp of an iron gate" (In Love and Trouble 8). She can get respect and a better life for her children, and she need not work in a sewing plant. But her husband's religion is one "of ropes, chains, handcuffs" (4). Giving up her present work, she marries the man relying on his economic prosperity and promises. But Walker points out the vulnerability of her wrong choice: "Proposal, Promises. A New Life! Respectable, reclaimed, renewed. Free! In robe and veil" (7).

Very much unlike this woman, Celie triumphs over her husband's contempt for her and becomes whole and happy. About her liberation and becoming whole Susan Willis comments: "Having undergone liberation in both economic and sexual terms, she is for the first time perceived not as a domestic slave or the means towards male sexual gratification but as a whole woman: witty, resourceful, caring, wise, sensitive, and sensual" (Specifying 119). Besides sexual, psychological and spiritual transformation, the fact that she becomes an entrepreneur earning money and thereby overgrows the necessity for her to depend on
somebody for her living is also an important factor taking her to wholeness. She writes to Nettie: “I am so happy. I get love. I got work. I got money, friends and time” (The Color Purple 222).

Mem in The Third Life of Grange Copeland is another woman who resists male oppression by means of standing on her own legs economically. In her case as well the oppressor is none other than her husband Brownfield. Beginning her career as a school teacher, Mem gets other jobs that save her and her children from the destructive violence shown on them by Brownfield. A redeeming feature of the novel concerning women is the fact that Mem exhibits positive and constructive qualities in contrast to her husband’s destructive ones. Twice does she save money to buy a house and twice Brownfield wastes them. Walker writes: “She was furious... unable to comprehend that all her moves upward and toward something of their own would be checked by him” (Copeland 57-58). Striving for economic independence and resisting her husband’s destructive actions are virtues seen in Mem — virtues which could have led her to wholeness. Celie reveals these virtues and succeeds in getting transformed. She is, as pointed out by Barbara Christian, “a ‘Mem’ who survives and liberates herself” (Black Feminist Criticism 95).

While the liberated woman feels free to express her creativity, the woman whose creativity is suppressed and thereby remains unsatisfied
is liable to indulge in destructive activities. Betty Freidan writes about the unhealthy consequence of a woman's failure to realize her "human potential":

It is surely as true of women's whole human potential what earlier psychological theorists have only deemed true of her sexual potential — that if she is barred from realizing her true nature, she will be sick. The frustration not only of needs like sex, but of individual abilities could result in neurosis. (The Feminine Mystique 314)

While Myrna's nature in "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" inclines towards writing stories, her husband prefers her "having a baby or going shopping" to writing "foolish, vulgar stuff" (In Love and Trouble 15). It is not surprising then to find her deceiving her husband by taking pills to avoid pregnancy. What is more dangerous is that she reveals destructive tendency by trying to slice off her husband's head with one of his chain saws.

The woman in "Her Sweet Jerome" threatens anybody whom she suspects of having an affair with her husband with a long knife. Finally she turns her destructive urge on his books and herself. She stacks Jerome's books on his pillow and with "the largest of her knives" (In Love and Trouble 34) rips and stabs them. She sets ablaze the marriage bed and screams "I kill you! I kill you! (25). Soon the fire engulfs her.
are not free, however, to think I am a fool" (223). Rosemary Radford Ruether points out that liberal feminism has made women become aware of themselves as sexually independent persons: "Liberal feminism has also turned to the underside of male control over women's bodies which nineteenth-century feminists only began to question.... It has focussed on women's right to dignity and control over their sexual persons" (Sexism and God-Talk 217).

In Meridian's growth as a sexual person one finds not mere negation of man's control over woman's body but a very positive relationship in which passion and possessiveness give way to love that is free and disinterested. Meridian gives expression to this feeling when she is with Truman and Lynne at the time of the tragic death of their daughter: "It was then that her feeling for Truman returned, but it was not sexual. It was love totally free of possessiveness or contempt. It was love that purged all thought of blame from her too accurate memory. It was forgiveness" (Meridian 175). Thus Meridian gives expression to Walker's womanism that includes woman's love of man, which does not enslave her or prevent her from being free and liberated.

In "The Lover" Walker presents a woman who carries her sexual liberation to the other extreme of entertaining a lover for the sake of excitement while at the same time keeping her love for her husband and child intact. She succeeds in making her lover Ellis assume that she
Celie is saved by Shug from joining the company of these women. When she comes to know that her husband has been hiding Nettie’s letters to her, she tries to kill him with his razor. Shug not only prevents it but makes Celie take to the creative work of sewing instead of a destructive path of wreaking vengeance. Celie muses: “A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think” (The Color Purple 153).

Meridian also gives in to anger and bitterness. When Truman makes her pregnant and goes back to the exchange student Lynne, Meridian becomes so angry that she beats him with her book-bag repeatedly till blood drips from a cut on his cheek. But unlike many of the disappointed and defeated women in In Love and Trouble, Meridian becomes mature, independent and free in her relationship with the man she loves. The possessive and dependent aspect of this relationship is discarded. Truman notices the change with dismay: “I want you love the way I had it a long time ago. I used to feel it springing out to me whenever you looked into my eyes. It flowed over me like a special sun, like grace” (Meridian 223).

Acknowledging the change Meridian tells him that she still loves him and the change lies in that being a liberated woman now, she has set him free. With remarkable firmness and clearheadedness she informs him: “You are free to be whichever way you like... and what you risk in being truly yourself, the way you want to be, is not the loss of me. You
is on the point of declaring her undying love and of wanting to run away with him” (You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down 38). But in fact she goes off from the artists’ colony where she is staying for two months to spend two days with her husband and child at home.

It is a sort of reversal of the usual man’s role of having both a family and extramarital affairs. Here man, not woman, is the sufferer. The lover Ellis is not only deceived in love but his work of writing poetry suffers as well. On the other hand the woman is happy with him as well as with her husband, and her work goes on very well. She completes a book of poems with jazz arrangements. She is a woman who, enjoying very much her sexual liberation but overstepping her sense of freedom, falls short of gaining the wholesome attitude shown towards men by Celie and Meridian when they become whole.

Celie who prefers Shug to Albert and decides to live separately from him, later spends time with him showing her concern for him. Similarly though free, Meridian cares for Truman. The fact that Truman and Lynne who are estranged need Meridian when they have to face the rape and consequent death of their daughter Camara is in itself an indication of the exalted position of Meridian in her relationship with Truman and Lynne and of her ability to help, console and guide both man and woman who are in distress.
A woman who wishes to be whole cannot afford to be a hater of man since hatred being a negative quality is opposed to wholeness. Though Celie refuses to take Albert back as her husband, she does not give up her intimacy with him. At the end of the story when she receives Nettie and her children, Albert is there with her. J.Charles Washington rightly points out that Celie's rejection of Albert is only temporary:

... for all the suffering and violence Celie experiences from Black men, she does not grow to hate them; in fact, her eventual rejection of them is no more permanent than her brief flirtation with lesbianism. Both are simply steps in the process of learning to love herself and finding her own identity which is the author's main concern. (Obsidian 3: 1 (Spring 1988) 26-27)

In her study of Meridian "Meridian: The Quest of Wholeness" Barbara Christian points out the wholesome relationship between man and woman that is made possible by woman's liberation from her traditional role of being a mere sexual partner to man and of begetting his children: "Her deepest involvement with a man, her friendship with Truman Held, develops from a sexual game-play into a truly intense and complex sharing, but only after sex and the possibility of children have been eliminated from it" (Critical Perspectives 89). Thus sexual liberation does not place woman in animosity against man. On the other hand it
bring man and woman together on higher levels with what is physical made insignificant.

As Meridian progresses in life, she reveals virtues gained through experience, and her maturity is an asset not only to herself but to others who come into contact with her. Her character is a welcome relief from that of those woman who succumb to their internal conflicts and contradictions. Alan Nadal rightly observes: “Through Meridian, Walker tests the ways one gives meaning to activities and objects, to self and to others. (Modern Fiction Studies 34: 1 (Spring 1988) 67). To attain such a status Meridian walks through the path of loneliness. When Truman expresses his anxiety about Meridian’s loneliness, she responds in a manner that befits one who, through experience, has found the fruit of loneliness: “But that’s my value. Besides, all the people who are as alone as I am will one day gather at the river. We will watch the evening sun go down. And in the darkness maybe we will know the truth” (Meridian 227).

By making Meridian realize the fact that truth can be reached through loneliness and darkness, Walker brings out their value in a woman’s journey towards attainment of full womanhood. Celie also goes through a period of loneliness and darkness. Her lover Shug falls in love with a young boy thereby causing a separation between them. She gets the information that the ship in which her sister Nettie and her children
were travelling was sunk by German mines. It is not surprising then that Celie feels like killing herself. But instead of putting an end to her life, she progresses in her knowledge of life having learnt a new lesson: “And I try to teach my heart not to want nothing it can’t have” (The Color Purple 274).

Both Celie and Meridian have the will and ability to make use of forces that seem to be threatening and destructive to a woman. This is a remarkable achievement when compared to the conduct of many women who buckle under stress and pain, and ruin themselves. For instance the tragic death of her daughter Camara makes Lynne turn “to pills, excesses of sex (or excesses of abstinence, Meridian wasn’t sure which) and had had a public mental breakdown (Meridian 178). Walker deals with such women characters in In Love and Trouble also. Mrs. Jerome Franklin Washington III in “Her Sweet Jerome,” Hannah Kemhuff in “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff” and Roselily in “Roselily“ all allow situations and circumstances to overwhelm their feelings, thoughts and actions and fail to take control of and direct their lives. About the women of In Love and Trouble and those of Walker’s later works Donna Haisty Winchell writes: “Few of them are totally successful in their search. Only in her later works does Walker create women richer in life’s intangibles and more fulfilled according to their own definition of selfhood” (Alice Walker 42).
Meridian undertakes a spiritual journey through loneliness and darkness, rebirth and realization of truth. There is spiritual rebirth in Meridian, and Truman notes the new part in her that is sure, ready and eager. As Ashis Sengupta points out, "Meridian is a maturation novel which celebrates the protagonist's triumphant emergence as a strong and wise black woman" (New Quest (July-August 1994) 222). Meridian's journey can stand for any woman's journey in quest of wholeness. It is significant that the way to wholeness passes through such a threatening as well as rewarding phase. As Maria Lauret points out, Meridian's journey represents "Christian values of redemption through suffering" (Liberating Literature 135).

Meridian does not stop attending church citing the obvious reason of white patriarchal domination there. Instead she chooses to attend the church that strives for the welfare of the blacks. There is the old familiar melody but the song's words are changed. Instead of the traditional painting of Christ with a lamb on the glass window there is the picture of "B.B. With Sword." Most important of all, instead of joining the revolutionaries who resort to killing for the sake of revolution, Meridian prefers the spiritual to the physical and decides to perpetuate her people's memory of the songs that keep them together. Walker writes about with nostalgia in In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens the deep spirituality of black women in the South: "When the poet Jean Toomer walked through the South in the early twenties, he discovered a curious
thing: black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held" (Gardens 231-232). By sticking on to such spirituality Meridian remains true to her heritage and herself.

Celie as well keeps her spirituality alive and active from the most trying circumstances in her life to the time when she is mature and whole, and so happy, contented and peaceful. Though repeatedly raped at home by her stepfather whom she thinks is her father, Celie is able to keep her sanity by communicating with one who is spiritual — God. With her increasing awareness and maturation, her concept of God undergoes change: the white patriarchal God is replaced by a pantheistic God. But the novel begins and ends with Celie's letters to God. Not allowing Celie's spirituality to die, Walker upholds Celie as a model for black women to emulate.

In contrast to Celie and Meridian, there is Roselily who gives up her religion and heritage, and marries a Muslim for the sake of material comfort. In her, Walker presents a woman who loses her spirituality and goes after mundane things like a more comfortable life for her children and herself, and gaining respect. That in this process Roselily acts against her heritage is conveyed through her recollections of her mother who is dead and her father and sisters who laugh at her decision and try to prevent her from taking up such a way of life: "They giggle, she feels,
at the absurdity of the wedding.... An arm seems to reach out from behind her and snatch her backward" (In Love and Trouble 6).

Dee in “Everyday Use” reveals a similar neglect of her spiritual inheritance. Her name is now Wangero and she comes to her mother’s house accompanied by a man who calls himself Hakim-a-barber. To her spiritual heritage is something precious to be kept in a showcase and admired. This reveals her alienation from it whereas this inheritance remains a part of her sister Maggie’s self. Realizing this their mother gives grandmother’s quilts to Maggie and not Dee. For the woman who matters is the one who nurtures her spiritual inheritance. The importance that Walker gives to spirituality is explicitly stated by her in In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: “I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people” (Gardens 250). And women have to nurture their spirituality in order to serve themselves and their community.

Walker states in In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens that Jean Toomer’s Cane is a book she loves passionately and “could not possibly exist without it” (259). About Toomer she writes: “Jean Toomer has a very feminine sensibility (or, phrased another way, he is both feminine and masculine in his perceptions), unlike most black male writers. He loved women” (259). Walker who admires androgyny in Toomer does not fail to include this element in many of her fictional characters. Marie H.
Buncombe says: “I therefore conclude that in her novels Walker uses androgyny as a metaphor for the ‘wholeness,’ the totality of the black experience as she sees it” (CLA Journal XXY: 4 (June 1987) 420).

In *In Love and Trouble* a welcome relief from the sufferings of black women who fail to save themselves being in love with men and consequently in trouble is the story of Mrs. Johnson and her two daughters wherein Walker presents an androgynous character in Mrs. Johnson, and the pleasantness and wholeness that go with it. Mrs. Johnson describes herself: “I am a large-boned woman with rough man-working hands.... I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing” (*In Love and Trouble* 48).

This woman who is “always better at a man’s job” (*In Love and Trouble* 50) acts swiftly and firmly in a crisis. When her daughter Dee persists in having grandmother’s quilts for herself in spite of the protests made by her mother, Mrs. Johnson snatches them from her and dumps them into the lap of her younger daughter Maggie. After Dee’s departure in a bad mood, Mrs. Johnson has “a dip of snuff” and sits with Maggie with enjoyment. Such a picture of a robust woman strong in body as well as in mind, combining in herself both feminine and masculine traits, and being clearheaded is illustrative of a whole woman who is pleased with herself, and thinks and acts independently. Revealing “spiritual health,”
she proves to be, in the words of Winchell, "Walker's introduction to the type of androgynous figure that in *The Color Purple* strikes a successful balance between male and female (Alice Walker 81).

Harpo in *The Color Purple* acts like a woman in taking care of his father Albert. He cleans the house, gets food, and gives his father a bath. When Albert finds it difficult to sleep, Harpo sleeps with him. Harpo's wife Sofia finds both Harpo and his father fast asleep on the bed with Harpo holding his father in his arms. He likes housekeeping and so cooks, cleans and does "little things round the house" (*The Color Purple* 63). About Harpo's love of housekeeping Sofia says, "It seems so natural to him" (63). On the other hand Sofia wants to be out in the fields or work as a clerk in Celie's store. Wearing Harpo's pants and with her "head tied up in a headrag" (64), she works on the roof of the house hammering in nails. Linda Abbendonato points out the link between gender distinction and patriarchal law: "...gender is no more than an arbitrary and fictional construct.... The essential inscription of subjects as masculine or feminine, as 'ladies' and 'gentlemen', depends on acquiescence to the Law of the Father" (Critical Perspectives 301). The 'Law of the Father' or patriarchal law and its symbolic order is questioned by means of gender reversal and its wholesome effect.

Any lesbian relationship is a rejection of established gender roles, and Shug and Celie, through their lesbian relationship, reveal their
disregard for the traditional confinement of women by means of gender. Describing Shug as Walker's quintessential androgynous character, Marie H. Buncombe says: "Though she has given birth to three children, whom she never raised, she concurrently shared the bed of her former lover (the father of her children), his wife Celie, and her own husband with equal relish" (CLA Journal XXX: 4 (June 1987) 426).

Celie who is initiated into a lesbian relationship by Shug points out the masculinity in her. When she hears Shug's words addressed to Sofia, "Girl, you look like a good time, you do" (The Color Purple 85), Celie says: "That when I notice how Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time" (85). But in the same breath Celie makes use of the same stuff that men use: "All the men got they eyes glued to Shug's bosom. I got my eyes glued there too.... Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl you look like a real good time" (85). Thus both Shug and Celie act like men whenever they feel so. Through the presentation of such experience of women Walker helps bringing about what Cheri Register calls "cultural androgyny": "Once literature begins to serve as a forum, illuminating female experience, it can assist in humanizing and equalizing the culture's value system, which has historically served predominantly male interests. That is, it can help to bring about cultural androgyny" (Feminist Literary Criticism 19-20).
Very much commending Virginia Woolf for going beyond cultural definitions “into what is human” in her delineation of Lily Briscoe in To the Light house, Marcia Holly points out that the qualities typically assigned as sex traits — the sensibility of Mrs. Ramsay and the abstract intellectuality of Mr. Ramsay in the novel — were, according to the indications given by Woolf, “not givens of the sexes” (43). These qualities get unified in Lily Briscoe. Marcia Holly writes: “In fact the burden of the book seems to be that personal wholeness develops with and from the dialectical integration of qualities seen as opposing” (43).

Celie’s transformation into a whole woman goes through this process. Her lesbian relationship with Shug is a part of it. Wearing dark blue pants and a white silk shirt she goes past the house of Albert who is not able to recognize her. This difference in Celie in the exterior corresponds with the inner change: “I feels different. Look different” (The Color Purple, 224). She becomes an entrepreneur and gets into the habit of smoking a pipe. “In short,” says Marie H. Buncombe, “Shug and Celie, with a slight twist to the Pygmalion myth, personify that unifying principle and liberating experience exemplified by androgyny, in all of Walker’s novels” (CLA Journal XXX : 4 (June 1987) 426).

Meridian opens with a masculine picture of Meridian “dressed in dungarees and wearing a light-colored, visored cap, of the sort worn by motormen on trains” (Meridian 7). Not only in appearance but also in
action she displays not the features of the traditional passive womanhood but instead the daring and active efforts that are often described as being manly. Braving the old army tank with its muzzle directed towards her chest, Meridian daringly breaks the law of segregation and leads black children on a day not allotted to them to the circus wagon where they see a mummified woman.

Breaking the old stereotypes of a black woman — the wife and the mother who support and suffer for the sake of the family, one who meekly accepts the sexual domination of man, and the black lady who tries to outfit the white woman — Meridian does away with the so-called feminine aspects, and becomes equal to man thereby experiencing growth of her self. In this respect both Walker and Toni Cade Bambara have the same objective. About Bambara, Elliott Butler-Evans writes:

She advocates a radical restructuring of male-female relationships, proposing the rejection of masculine and feminine roles and the construction of a Selfhood/Blackhood that displaces gender differentiation, thereby enabling the "Black Community" to move in unison against racial oppression. (Race, Gender and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker 11)
This description aptly fits the role that Meridian takes in Walker’s novel.

Gender reversal is beneficial to both the sexes. Besides Harpo, Albert himself takes on what is typically feminine. Once he put on Shug’s shirt. He keeps house and does cooking. He patterns shirts for Celie’s pants. For a man who once held the view that man has to be in control, the acknowledgement and nurturing of feminine traits marks a great change. He tells Celie: “... I’m satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience” (The Color Purple 267).

So Albert has turned into ‘a natural man’ and Celie who also has become a whole woman no longer hates him. He begins to love others and others love him. As Winchell says: “The extent to which men become likeable is directly proportional, then, not to their age, but rather to the extent to which they take on feminine characteristics” (Alice Walker 97).

After seeing Harpo and Albert lying on the bed fast asleep with Harpo holding his father in his arms, Sofia’s love for Harpo grows again: “After that, I start to feel again for Harpo” (The Color Purple 231). In the growing relationship between Meridian and Truman there is gender reversal with Truman taking care of Meridian like a mother and wiping her forehead with a cloth, soaked in cold water. He “was beginning to experience moments with Meridian when he felt intensely maternal” (Meridian 219).
In the woman-centered world of Walker's fiction, the idea of God being male is questioned. Celie says: "Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and low down" (The Color Purple 199). At the same time Walker is ready to identify God with objects of nature: "Certainly I don't believe there is God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake" (Gardens 265). It is with this pantheistic belief that Celie begins her last letter: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (The Color Purple 292).

Shug has taught her that God is neither male nor female: "God ain't a he or a she, but a It" (202). Such a realization of an androgynous God is, as pointed out by Lori Duin Kelly, 'a significant step' in the attainment of the selfhood that Walker visualizes for women:

The challenge to the conventional view of male-female behaviour extends, finally, to the theological sphere. Celie's shift from a male-centred image of God to Shug's more androgynous "It," a God that is everywhere and is everything... and ... within herself, is a significant step in the religious re-education and in the development of her individuality. (Notes On Contemporary Literature 18: 2 (Mar. 1988) 8)
That the realization of God and the realization of self go together is conveyed through Shug's words spoken to Celie: "God is inside you and inside everybody else.... But only them that search for it inside find it" (The Color Purple 202). The religion that Walker professes is that of wholeness or oneness with oneself and all things: "... the greatest value a person can attain is full humanity; which is a state of oneness with all things" (Gardens 265). While in Walker's fiction women like Shug, Celie, Meridian and Mrs. Johnson achieve it, many as in In Love and Trouble miss it and consequently suffer.

In Possessing the Secret of Joy Walker depicts the identification of God with what is masculine by the village elders who use God to keep women in subjugation to them. Jealous of their masculinity they forbid any aspect of masculinity in women: "God wanted to have intercourse with woman... Her clitoris was a termite hill, rising up and barring his way.... God thought it looked masculine. Since it was 'masculine' for a clitoris to rise, God could be excused for cutting it down. Which he did" (Possessing the Secret of Joy 218).

Walker is more concerned with the misuse of God and religion in the suppression of woman than in the existence of God. Ray comments in the novel: "Religion is an elaborate excuse for what man has done to women and to the earth" (218). In In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens Walker expresses her doubt about the existence of God and states that
she has spent her life rebelling against the Church and “other people's interpretations of what religion is” (Gardens 265). So she speaks against the image of God as a white male and the use of God and religion to justify clitoridectomy.

Thus the attempt to visualize God as an androgynous figure is made necessary by the misuse of religion by man to perpetuate the patriarchal system that stands on social institutions like family, community, marriage, fields of work and religion. The Walker woman dares to question and change the existing patterns of these institutions in order to liberate herself. Thus she enters the social arena redefining her place and role which forms the focus of the next chapter.