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The purpose of literature is to soothe the burning bosoms of deprived and tortured and to show them a new rising sun after a dark and cloudy night. Purposeful literature is always considered like a pole star in the stormy and dark night, which paves and enhances the path of wandering barks of human lives amid the whirlpool of this world. In the words of Robert Frost, the great American poet, its aim is to affirm the faith of its readers in them, in this world and in each and every particle of this universe and to make them feel that “Earth is the right place to love. (“Birches”) Even after so many blows, so many traumas, so many tears, smile is there, hope is there and last but not the least life is there to love, to embrace and to dignify.

Alice Walker is one of those great writers who have fulfilled this purpose of literature and are serving humanity with their pen by toiling day and night without any stoppage. Winner of both Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award for The Color Purple, Alice Walker is a shining star in the galaxy of Afro-American literature. Walker has dedicated her life to establish a literary canon of African-American writers and to encourage the survival whole of victims of race and gender. She has won special recognition in Afro- American literature such as Zora Neale Hurston and Frances Ellen Wilkins Harper and has placed their contribution in the fabric of her own artistry.

Alice walker is no stranger to the hard knock of life that comes with racism and civil rights violations. Having been born in the Deep South she is well acquainted with
the heinous effects of racism and sexism that she uses as the general theme for the most of her works.

Writer of fifteen fictional novels, six poetry collections and ten non-fictional works, Walker belongs to a group of writers in America, as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Paul Marshal, Gboria Naylon; for whom writing is a literary tool, a subversive strategy and artistic mode of self expression. As a black woman writer, Walker claims to be concerned above all, with the idea of black community once meant, how it has changed, what it is and how it should be maintained.

Walker’s writings including novels, stories, essays and poems focus on the struggle of African Americans, particularly women, and this exposes the views hidden in the societies that are racist, sexist and violent. These writings deal with the human experiences in general but especially from the perspective of the suffering and the downtrodden, the hurt and the oppressed. Many of her characters are victims of racial, sexual and economic oppression and exist under degrading circumstances. Nevertheless, these characters particularly the women, do not lie down and suffer passively in the face of such traumas, rather they manage to transcend their desperate and painful circumstances in order to affirm life.

I. Afro-American Literature

African American writing has its roots deep in the historical circumstances of slavery. No matter whether born in slavery or not, most major writers of Afro-American literature before World War-First launched their literary careers in the form of the slave narratives. The shackles of physical and spiritual bondage brought forth anguished chronicles of the psychological trauma of enslavement to expose the truths and horrors of
American slavery in order to speed along its abolition. In fact Afro-American literature can be described as a documentation of multi-faceted oppression. Protesting against the commonly accepted sub human status of black people and the idea of the old Negro as servile, docile and puerile, much of the literature of the period of enslavement was an assertion of the humanity of the black. In contrast of the cruelty, ignorance and callousness of the pre-civil war, these narratives attempted at restoring the individual dignity and personal self worth of the blacks.

They used their tradition as a weapon to fight against all kinds of discriminations. They poured down their feelings of spirituality, of freedom and of all suppressed desires from the dark corners of their hearts through these folk narratives. For these long suppressed people with this heavy burden of slavery, their folk tradition and narratives worked like an ever-ready balm for their bruised self-conception. To give voice to their pains and aches they used many of the elements of the oral and folk tradition such as the “trickster” tales popular in folklore, celebrating the power of wit in the face of oppression. Another important influence was the “spirituals” with their profound expression of suffering and yearning for freedom. Reflecting the abiding forces of racism and discrimination, these traditions came to play a vital role, helping to forge community ties and establish a sense of identity out of which a distinctly black fiction emerged. In these slave narratives, narrators portrayed slavery as a condition of extreme physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual deprivation, a kind of hell on earth.

Important novels of this period are William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), the first novel written by an Afro-American, Harriet Wilson’s *Our Hig or Sketches From the Life of a Free Black in a Two Story White House* and Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a
Slave Girl Written by Herself (1961). Jacobs was the first Afro-American female slave to author her own narrative and to show how sexual exploitation made slavery oppressive especially for black women.

Tremendous change or turn of the century came with the writers like Charles Waddell Chesnutt (The House Behind the Cedars), James Weldon Johnson (The Autobiography of an Ex Colored Man), W.E.B. Dubois (The Soul of Black Folk) and the poet Paul Lawrence Dunber. These writers chart the frustrations, inner turmoil and sense of duality of newly emancipated people, even as they celebrate their resilience, industry and ingenuity.

Gradually a movement came into light in Afro-American literature, which was known as Harlem Renaissance. The term refers to the burgeoning of writing about race and identity and the African American’s place in the artistic, social and cultural life in America during the early 1920and 1930s. Harlem was a Utopian place created by the mind of those who yearned for such an imaginary dawn of freedom, of love, of equality, unity and fraternity, i.e., where all suppressed desires of the hearts of those long-suffering people may be fulfilled.

Alain Locke’s book The New Negro (1925) created a landmark in the history of black literature. He changed the picture of Negro from victim to the fighter, from defeated to the victorious and from depressed to the hopeful. He has given to the world the concept of ‘New Negro’ who is the symbol of an awakened racial pride fostered not only by his American heritage but also by his African roots in a race of warriors and kings. This new consciousness enlightened the path of coming generations of black authors to show the world that they also have intellect, feelings, and the power to fight
against tyranny and to achieve the right place for them in this beautiful planet called Earth created by the supreme authority.

It was a time of reclamation of the African heritage and celebration of folk roots of African culture, an age of black writers like- Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Claude MacKay Jessie Fauset, Nella Larson and Zora Neale Hurston whose novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a black feminist text, became an important influence on Alice Walker.

The Civil Rights Movement of 1960s brought with itself a great revolution and change in Afro-American literature. This movement overturned the color bar and lobbied for equal rights of legislation for all. And through this very movement women long suffering and denied began to search their own place, their own garden in this male dominated society. This movement had various consequences for the US society, two major ones being the women’s liberty in movement and the emergence of multiculturalism. This development occurred in last quarter of the 20th century to bring about in creative literature a preponderance of ethnic women authors, a development which itself was to be crowned with the Nobel Prize for literature being awarded to first black female author Toni Morrison in 1993.

The decade of 70s represented another Renaissance in black women’s writing. The addressed issues were gender, sexism, black womanhood, black female identity, mother-daughter relationship, sisterhood, sexual orientation, black heterosexism, domestic violence, family, community and culture. The writers insisted that a fully integrated self is grounded in cultural, communal, and ancestral truths. Poets such as Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Sonis Sanchez, and novelists like Toni Morrison, Toni
Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid and Gloria Naylor created a body of writers that has established the Afro-America literature as a milestone in the literary world.

II. Double Consciousness

Basically Afro-American literature is the documentation of the ‘double consciousness’. Black authors revealed the perplexity and dilemma of the mind of Afro-American people in their texts, in a very effective way. In his book *Souls of Black Folk* 1903, W.E.B Dubois famously described black American as possessing what he called a ‘double consciousness’ caught between a self conception as an American and as a person of African descent. So double consciousness in its contemporary sense is a term coined by Dubois, used to describe an individual whose identity is divided in two factors.

Initially this term originated from an 1897 Atlantic Monthly article titled *Strivings of the Negro people*. It was later republished and slightly edited under the title *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*. In his collection of essays *Souls of Black Folk* Dubois spoke of “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (*Of Our Spiritual Strivings* 2). Because of the experience of being black in America; African-Americans have a heightened awareness of both their own blackness and of the whiteness around them making it so that the presence of whiteness in the texts by black authors would be much more self conscious and self reflexive than the presence of blackness in texts by white authors.

It is through this phenomenon that African Americans do not see their heritage bonding with their citizenship, causing them to “feel (their) two ness an American, a
Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unresolved strivings; two working ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (*Of Our Spiritual Strivings* 2).

On exploring the depth about this double consciousness in relation to slavery and racial issues we find that the history of the American Negro is the history of his strife, and longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and true self. In this merging the Negro wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa, he does not wish to bleach this Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes that Negro has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development.

Another famous writer Hariston’s concern for people of double consciousness is to maintain their roots in their past as a means of preserving identity and building community. In this way people can successfully resist conformity on account of the color of their skin, the way they speak and so on.

If we talk about Afro-American literature, this double consciousness occupies three manifestations; first the power of white stereotypes on black life and thought, being forced into a context of reflexive truth, second the racism that excluded black Americans from the mainstream and finally and most significantly, the internal conflict between being African and American simultaneously. Black American today is permeated by a new double consciousness. A tacit sense prevails among a great many black Americans
today that the “authentic” black person stresses personal initiative and strength in private but dutifully takes on the mentality of victim hood in public.

In this way, double consciousness has become a prominent issue of discussion among Afro-American writer. This dilemma of duality basically is the result of racism prevalent between two prominent races white and black. So most of the writers of black culture and background emphasized on the racial issues to catch the spirit of common mass and to reveal the naked and bitter reality layer by layer to express their double consciousness.

(a) Racism

Racism and prejudice has always existed in society, but in different shapes depending on the time in history. The fear of the unknown is a natural reaction. Throughout history people have made borders and strong defenses to keep strangers out. This striving towards safety has started several wars and killed millions of people. Any discussion of racism needs to examine the roots of racism in order to understand it and to struggle against it effectively. There are basically three explanations for the existence of racism. The dominant view, which is rarely expressed as a worked out theory, is that racism is an irrational response, which causes some people with white skin to have hateful attitudes to people with black skin, which sometimes leads to violent and evil actions. People who have this understanding of racism usually advocate awareness and education as a way of preventing the practice of racism. The second view is that racism is endemic in white society and the only solution is for black people to organize themselves separately from whites in order to defend themselves and to protect their interests. The third view and the one, which liberal communists and social anarchists advocate, is an
explanation of racism based on a materialistic perspective and views racism as a historically specific and materially caused phenomenon.

Racism is basically a product of capitalism. It grew out of early capitalist’s use of slaves for the plantations of the New World. It was consolidated in order to justify western and white domination of the rest of the world and it flourishes today as a means of dividing the working class between white and black, and native and immigrants or asylum seekers. Racism is a particular from of oppression; discrimination against people on the ground that some inherited characteristic, for example skin color, makes them inferior to their oppressors.

Racism has historical roots in the European colonialism that started more than 400 years ago. It had serious consequences for societies and nations all over the world. Western empire grew in wealth and power because of their exploitation of their colonies around the world. In the beginning European traders got gold and land in exchange for glass, pearls and other worthless items. Later the Europeans conquered large areas of land and made them into colonies. The native people served as slaves on the land that had once belonged to them. In some areas the entire native population was wiped out or driven away.

The European traders or colonists defended their oppression of the native population by claiming that they were superior to the natives and therefore had the right to treat them as they did. Hundreds of Africans were chained and shipped away to European colonies. The conditions aboard the slave ships were so bad that a large number of the slaves died during this painful journey. A great writer A. Sivanandan says about racism in his essay “Poverty is the New Black”: 
“It (racism) has always been both an instrument of discrimination and tool of exploitation. But it manifests itself as a cultural phenomenon, susceptible to cultural solutions such as multicultural education and the promotion of ethnic identities. Tackling problem of cultural inequality however, does not by itself redress the problem of economic inequality. Racism is conditioned by economic imperatives, but negotiated through culture, religion, literature, art, science and the media” (116).

Thus racism is a social system of ethnic or racial inequality based on class. This system of inequality is reproduced in many ways. Dominant white group members may engage in everyday discrimination against dominated group and their members while at the same time acquiring and using the beliefs that form the mental basis of such discrimination. When we talk about racism, it reminds us of the sufferings of blacks when they were made slaves and sold by the whites. In due course of time these slaves were deprived of the language, symbols, beliefs, traditions, religions and institutions they once had in Africa. Naturally this led to self-hatred and the black became victim of self-negation.

Most African American writers carry the burden of their race in their literature. They also try to highlight how dominant ideology of racism; the class exploitation and cultural hegemony of the whites are responsible for their plight. Thus being a black writer is an enabling exigency in black literature and it constitutes one of the supreme enrichment of black life and black culture. This has been and is the burden as well as heritage and the legacy of every black writer in white America, and Alice Walker like other writers is quite successful in dealing with this legacy in her works.

Like other black writers she portrays slavery as a condition of extreme physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual deprivation, a kind of hell on earth. And this very
slavery, a result of class conflicts resulted in the twice or double consciousness later in the minds of its victims. Characters of Walker reveal the perplexity in every novel. This trauma brought them into the condition of ‘Trishanku’; an Indian mythical character who is supposed to be hanging in between earth and sky till now. Similarly these victims of racial jeopardy are hanging between blackness and whiteness, Africanness and Americanness. Neither they can adopt one completely nor can sacrifice the other. Till now they are fighting with this double consciousness or with their two identities, first deeply rooted in their own dear African culture and the other in their American ness, which is imposed upon them by their masters and once called oppressors.

(b) Sexism: Feminism

This slave history of Afro-American people left them to rot with many types of discriminations. One of such widely discussed discriminations, is sexism, a kind of oppression like racism, in which women are exploited and tortured in every possible way as physically, psychologically and sexually by their men who think of themselves as superior in their comparison. So as in racism a person suffers for the dark color of his skin in sexism a woman suffers for being a woman; an inferior creature, not a man. The burning affliction of sexism has been discussed as the main theme by many black authors, especially female authors who might have faced it in their lives too. Our concerning author Alice Walker’s fiction is well known for its portrayal of the African-American women’s life. In her fiction, she depicts vividly sexism, racism and poverty that make their life often a struggle. Through her pen she reveals the bitter reality that while white women have suffered only for being female, black women have had to suffer this trauma twice, one for being female and other for being black.
Basically sexism means discrimination based on sex. Sexism can be compared to racism; in both the differences between two (or more) groups are viewed as indications that one group is superior or inferior. Sexism can refer to either the belief of the person doing the discriminating or their words and behavior. It is both discrimination based on gender and the attitudes, stereotypes, and the cultural elements that promote this discrimination. Given the historical and continued imbalance of power, where men as a class are privileged over women as a class, an important, but often overlooked, part of the term is that sexism is prejudice plus power. Thus feminists reject the notion that women can be sexist towards men because women lack the institutional power that men have.

The word "sexism" became widely known during the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s. At that time, feminist theorists explained that oppression of women was widespread in nearly all human society, and they began to speak of sexism instead of male chauvinism. Whereas male chauvinists were usually individual men who expressed the belief that they were superior to women, sexism referred to collective behavior that reflected society as a whole. Alice Walker’s works are known for their portrayals of the African American woman's life. She depicts vividly the sexism, racism and poverty that make that life often a struggle. But she also portrays as part of that life, the strengths of family, community, self worth and spirituality. Many of her novels depict women in other periods of history than our own. Just as with non-fiction women's history writing, such portrayals give a sense of the differences and similarities of women's condition today and in that other time. Alice Walker continues not only to write, but also to be active in environmental, feminist/womanist causes, and issues of economic justice.
Not only Walker but many other feminist writers also gave voice to the long suppressed and defeated speechless women. Feminism is grounded on the belief that women oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Feminism is relatively a recent term for the politics of equal rights for women. It is also a system of critique and has as its central focus the concept of patriarchy, which can be described as a system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women. Its concepts overlap with those of women's rights. Feminism is mainly focused on women's issues, but because feminism seeks gender equality, some feminists argue that men's liberation is therefore a necessary part of feminism, and that men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles. Feminists are person[s] whose beliefs and behavior[s] are based on feminism.

Feminist theory exists in a variety of disciplines, emerging from these feminist movements and including general theories and theories about the origins of inequality, and, in some cases, about the social construction of sex and gender. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's rights—such as in contract, property, and voting — while also promoting women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy and reproductive rights. They have opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In economics, they have advocated for workplace rights, including equal pay and opportunities for careers and to start businesses.

Feminism is a serious attempt to formulate the issues and find solution to gender problems. Feminism and feminist literary criticism are often defined as a matter of what
is absent rather than what is present. In its diversity feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women, that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. Most feminists believe that our culture is a patriarchal culture; that it is organized in favor of the interests of men. Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalance due to gender in a given culture is reflected in or challenged by literary texts.

Elaine Showalter had for the first time identified three historical phases of women’s literary development; the feminine phase (1840-80) during which women writes imitated the dominant tradition; the feminist phase (1880-1920), during which women advocated minority rights and protested; and the female phase (1920-present) during which dependency on opposition that is, on uncovering misogyny in male texts-is being replaced by a rediscovery of women’s text and women. Even earlier the problem of inequality between the sexes was highlighted by Mary Wollstoncraft in her book, A vindication of The Rights of Women (1792) and by Olive Scheiner in Women and Labour (1911). Virginia Woolf is another important writer who in her work A Room of One’s Own (1929) examined the problems women face; she advocated a balance between a ‘male’ self realization and ‘female’ self annihilation. She rejected the notion of a separate feminist consciousness and hoped to achieve a feminist unconsciousness to avoid a conflict between male and female sexuality as an escape from the confrontation with femaleness and maleness. Women writers, according to her were imprisoned in the ideology of woman hood, the ideal of the ‘angel in the house’ in addition to the taboo about women talking about their passion prevented them from telling the truth about their experiences as a body. These obstacles, she feels, can be removed only when women achieve social and economic equality with men. Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work
The Second Sex (1949) points out that women are not a minority like the black and they are not a product of history like proletarian.

There were also some male authors like John Sturat Mill (The Subjection Of Women, 1869) and Fredrich Engels (The origin of the Family, 1884) who wrote about the problems of women’s inequality in society. Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics (1970) makes a distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. Here Millet argues that women as much as men are responsible in perpetuating the sex submissive role of the female. Shulamith Firestone’s The Dialectic of sex (1972), Toril Moi’s Sexual/Textual Politic (1985), Germaine Green’s Thinking About Women (1979), Marry Ellmann and Michele Bartlett’s Marxist Feminist presentation in Women’s Oppression Today; Problem in Marxist Feminist Analysis (1980) are some of the influential works in the general area of feminism.

In general sense Feminism is a critique of patriarchy on one hand and an ideology committed to women’s emancipation on the other. While feminism as an activist must demand for political and economical reform, it has always been informed by serious reflection on the nature of sexual difference and the mechanism by means of which sexual difference is enmeshed in, even created out of, relations of power and oppression. Most of the Feminist novels are centered on the themes of women’s oppression and women’s resistance. As Wilson Thomas says in “Feminism Post Feminism and Contemporary Women’s Fiction”: “their characteristic structure encompasses mythic progress from oppression, suffering victimization, through various stages of awakening consciousness to active resistance and finally some form of victory, transformation or transcendence of despair.”
Sexism is the main theme of feminist writers because in their works they discuss about the discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women on the base of sexual difference, for being women not men. What makes a particular form of oppression sexist seems to be not just that it harms women, but that someone is subject to this form of oppression specifically because she is (or at least appears to be) a woman. The suggestion that sexist oppression consists in oppression to which one is subject by virtue of being or appearing to be a woman, provides us at least the beginning of an analytical tool for distinguishing subordinating structures that happen to effect some or even all women from those that are specially sexist. But problems and uncertainties remain forever.

In patriarchal society women have been forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to men who have assumed the position of purposeful control because the social and familial structures are in their favor. As the famous feminist writer Simodne de Beauvoir described in one of her books that this humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not to her. She is incidental and inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute, and she is the other.

This secondary status has not been imposed by natural feminine characteristics but by strong environmental forces, which placed woman in a dependent status. Beauvior always finds woman as man’s dependent if not his slave. According to her the two sexes have never shared the world of equality and even today woman is heavily handicapped. The sexual issues especially regarding the gender of female in patriarchal society run on stereotypical line. Noticeably the female has to continue to work within the parameters
laid by her role in a patriarchal system characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition. Gentleness, preservation, submission, sensitivity, supportiveness, humility and unselfishness are categorized as ‘feminine’ psychological traits.

Thus in their revelation of sexism these feminist writers aim to abolish this discrimination from roots and make their readers conscious and aware about women’s life and problems. They know that the exploitation of woman is caused by patriarchal hegemony and it has to be ended if one has to build a society based on equality. These feminists regard sexism as a particular form of oppression and so their objective is to end sexism because it is the main cause of inequality between male and female. While white women authors fight with sexual afflictions, there are black authors who fight not only for their sex but also for their race because they have to carry this double burden of racism and sexism in their writings. In her novels Alice Walker also deals with black women’s struggle with both of these afflictions. So before dealing with the novels of Walker; a black woman author from racial and sexual perspectives, it is necessary here to discuss the term black feminism or in Walker’s language womanism.

(c) Black Feminism: Womanism

The efforts of black female writers for freedom, equality and for self-establishment were given the name of black feminism. African-American women writers have always tried women’s situation, since they had to battle on many grounds against white patriarchy, against white women’s racism and against sexism of black men. They have always militated against the tendency of white feminists to take their own situation as the paradigm of women’s position. They take the view that white women have not had
to interrogate either whiteness or their heterosexuality as political institutions, which have cushioned them against the worst effects of racist and sexist violence.

Black feminist writing provides an incisive critical perspective on sexual political issues that affect black women. It generally depicts the significance of black women’s relationship with each other as a primary source of support. Black feminist writers may be classified as such because these authors identify themselves as a feminist and have demonstrated commitment to women’s issues and related political concern.

With black women refusing to be silenced, their struggle was aided by the writings and works of the progressing black artist who focused on destroying the myths and images which had crippled and degraded black people, and the creation of new myths that would liberate and empower them. This was the ideological basis of the Black Aesthetic/ Black Arts Movement. Their works reflect the rise of a new revolutionary consciousness and militant spirit, which assessed the values and standards of two contemporary social orders and rejected whatever, militated against a wholesome self-definition. Many black poets and novelists, like Audre Lorde, Sonia Sachiz, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and many others drew the attention of world towards the sufferings and exploitations of black female, through their works. They prompted a revival of interest in, and commitment to, the African American Folk heritage and the African past. Black women authors have enabled black women, especially those most marginalized by race, caste and class, to have their voices heard and their histories read. In the field of literary critics, black women struggled to establish a tradition that reflects their distinct concerns.
Black women’s writing is shaped by history in that it involves reconstructing the development of the character’s individual personality in relation to the historical forces that have shaped the migrations of her race and the struggles of her community. In fact, the point of view of black feminist writing may be termed Afro centric as opposed to Euro-centric i.e. it has its root deep in African culture, it draws on the religion, values and language of black communities and on an interdependence of orality, culture and community activities and in particular, on the cultural significance of texts, because African American women writes share a collective legacy of racist and sexist domination in addition to an awareness of historical continuities.

Alice Walker the prophet of new world coined a new term for this African-American feminism or the feminism of color, in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womenist Prose*. This new term ‘Womanism’ as she explains: “I just like to have words that describe things correctly. Now to me ‘black feminist does not do that. I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture that really expresses the spirit that we see in black women. And it is just…. Womanism” (ISMG 254).

This is a folk term peculiar to the African-American tradition, which refers to a characteristic of boldness, premature adulthood, and a spirit of inquiry inappropriate to children, particularly female children, but which also suggests capability, responsibility and leadership.

Thus the two terms, black feminism and womanism can be seen as interchangeable—both are concerned with the struggle against racism and sexism by black women who are themselves part of the black community. Walker’s idea of womanism has a definite impact on themes of her novels. It reflects her intention to champion as a
writer, the cause of black people, especially black women. Walker’s writing exposes the complexities of the ordinary by presenting it within a context of duplicity and change. Within this context, Walker peels back the hard cast cover of African and American women’s lives to reveal the naked edge of truth and hope. In minds of these female characters of Walker that are laid bare to each other, to themselves and to readers. In her works the complex self of woman is naked and exposed in the misery of its pain or the celebration of its worth, who touches the writings of Walker, touches a woman.

Thus through her writings Walker continues to express with her creativity her wishes for wholeness, for those who have been erased from history, torn from their racial heritage, silenced, suppressed and denied freedom within comparable vision and sight. Walker captures the folklore, language, pain, spirit and memories of African Americans only to weave them into a quilt of compassion that she spreads before the world full rich and flowing. Walker has always championed the right to live freely and fearlessly, as she says: “I am pre occupied 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” [ISMG 250-51].

III. Alice Walker: Life and Works

Alice Melisinior Walker was born on February 9, 1944, to Willie Lee and Minnie Tallulah Lou Grant Walker in the farming community of Eatonton, Georgia as their eighth and last child. Father of Alice, a sharecropper, earned only 300 dollars a year. Her mother seemed a large, soft, loving eyed woman who was rarely impatient in her home. Her quick violent temper was on view only a few times; when she battled the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest that her children need not to go to school. During the working days, she labored beside not behind- Alice’s father in the fields.
Alice began going to school at the age of four. She was an outgoing and self-confident child who loved getting up in front of people, especially at church and recite speeches. She loved to explore the world around her and one of her favorite pasttimes, she has said, was ‘people watching’. She was a tomboy who grew up with her older brothers. Nevertheless, the seeds of her decidedly female point of view were sown in a household where boys were unfettered and girls tied to domestic duties.

At the age of eight, while playing cowboys and Indians, Alice Walker was accidentally hit in her right eye by a pellet from a BB gun shot by one of her brothers. Her brothers rushed to her side and forbade her to tell the truth, and she reluctantly agreed, not only to protect them, but also to protect herself from them. She realized that if she does not back up their explanation of what had happened, that it was an accident of her own mistake, her brothers would find ways to punish her.

Though she lost sight in that eye, the wound healed into what she called “a hideous white scar”. After her accident, her fear of being seen as ugly made her withdrawn and introverted. She turned to prayer and took to reading books for hours on and as a way to cope with her trauma and loneliness. She discovered the great classics and also started writing poetry. It was also an experience that sharpened her talent for realistic observation of people. She says: “For a longtime, I thought I was ugly and disfigured. This made me shy and timid, and I often reacted to insults that were not intended… I believe… that it was from this period from any solitary, lonely position of outcast…. That I began really to see people and things into solitude and real stories and began to write poems” (ISGM 244).
For years together, she suffered debilitating shame. And it was only a longtime afterwards, when her young daughter remarked in wonder “Mommy, there is a world in your eye” that she was able to make peace with her wound. She says, “Yes indeed, I realized looking into the mirror. There was a world in my eye. And I saw it was possible to love it: that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner vision, I did love it”(ISGM 249). The scar now seen as world became an essential and beautiful part of her, a source of strength and a promise of infinite possibilities.

At the age of fourteen on a visit to her brother Bill in Boston, Alice Walker underwent surgery to remove the scar. She emerged from her shell to popularity and friendship, graduated, at class valediction, was voted the most popular student in high school and selected queen of the senior prom.

In 1961, at the age of seventeen, she was awarded a rehabilitation scholarship from the state of Georgia, which enabled her to attend Spelman College, an institution dedicated to the education of black women. She left home with three gifts from her mother, each with a symbolic significance- a suitcase with which to travel to a world beyond her poor, rural surroundings, a typewriter with which to write and express herself, and a sewing machine to make her self-sufficient and afford her economic freedom. Her family and friends pooled together to collect $ 75 for her bus fare to Atlanta. It was on this trip that her rebelliousness and activism showed up. She refused to sit at the back of the bus, as the law demanded of blacks. Though her protest was not successful; it revealed the strong influence of the speeches of Martin Luther King that she had heard through the summer.
During much of her time at Spelman College, Alice Walker was an active participant in the fight for Civil Rights in Georgia where she joined marches and demonstrations. In the summer after her first year, Alice Walker traveled to Helsinki for the world where she heard Dr. Martin Luther King deliver his famous “I Have a Dream” speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial. She was not particularly happy at Spelman, which she felt was a school “opposed to freedom, to change and to understanding” (ISGM 130), and in 1963 she accepted a scholarship to the liberal arts institution, Sarah Lawrence College, in Bronxville, New York. In 1964, she traveled to Africa, where she spent a summer as an exchange student in Uganda. “She returned to school healthy and brown, and loaded down with sculptures and orange fabric and pregnant. It was a period of extreme emotional trauma. She recalls the suicidal despair she experienced while seeking an abortion. She poured all the emotions of her ordeal—pain, anxiety, and depression into poetry. Her work attracted the attention of her teacher, Muriel Rekeyser, who submitted the poems to the publishing house of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. They were published in the form of her first book Once (1968). Had she not overcome her experience through her writing, she would not have survived at all. Her frank revelations of this intense painful and personal experience as the basis of this work are an early indication of her courageous commitment to critical self-revelation in her work.

After graduation Alice Walker worked with the welfare rights movement in Georgia registering voters in the African American community in the Deep South. This gave her first hand experience of the impact of poverty on the relationship between black men and women. In her free time, she continued to write. In 1966, she was awarded her first writing grant. This was the time she met Mervyt Leventhal, a white Civil Rights
attorney whom she married in March 1967. They left New York and went to live in Mississippi. They became the first legally married inter-racial couple in the state and had to face hostility because of prevailing racial prejudices. Between 1968 and 1971, Alice Walker was a teacher and writer in residence at Jackson State College and Tougaloo College. One year later, she won a prize award of $300 for an essay “The Civil Right Movement: was it Good?” she also published her first short story “To Hell With Dying”. Walker describes in it a story about an old man saved from death countless times by the love of his neighbors’ children.

The late sixties were a time of turmoil in the U.S.A. to which the Vietnam War and the assassination of Martin Luther King contributed. This was the time when Alice Walker was writing her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and completed it three days before the birth of her daughter Rebecca in 1969 and published in 1970. This novel shows Walker firmly going back to her roots as a Southern black writer. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the heritage of love and hate, as well as enormous richness and beauty. As she says, “we inherit a great responsibility as well, for we must give voice not only to centuries of silent bitterness. And hate but also of neighborly kindness and sustaining love” (*ISGM 21*).

At Jackson, Alice Walker attended a course being taught by poet and writer Margaret Walker. It was there that she first learnt about an African American woman writer Zora Neale Hurston who was later seen such as the “mother” of twentieth century black women’s writing and a great influence on Walker. Hurston’s books, *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes were Watching God* along with jean Toomer’s Cane, became the most important books Walker had read.
From Hurston Walker got the inspiration of the depiction of the courageous struggle of black women to rise above sexual and racial oppression and seek control over their lives. She admired Hurston’s sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished beings, her pride in black people, and the way she followed her own road. From Toomer came the idea of folk culture as an inseparable part of the black tradition.

In 1972, Walker moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to teach at Wellesley College. There in a path-breaking move she taught a course on African American women writers. Her next job took her to the University of Massachusetts in Boston. In 1973, she published her second book of poetry, *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* which was nominated for the National Book Award, and which won the William Smith Award from the Southern Regional Council. These poems of Walker are about (and for) those few embattled souls who remain powerfully committed to beauty and to love even while facing the firing squad. They are celebration of people who will not cram themselves into any ideological or racial mould. Because of this refusal to bow to convention, they have to suffer, but for Walker the answer lies in resistance. Other volumes of poetry would follow later—*Good Night Willie Lee, I’ll See You in The Morning* (1979), *Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful* (1984) and *Her Blue Body Everything We know: Earthling Poems* (1965-1990). She also published her first short story collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) which received the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Award from the American Institute of Arts and Letters, a volume which according to Barbara Smith, the famous black feminist critic writing in Ms. Magazine in February 1974, sets out consciously to explore with honesty the dilemmas and terrors of black women’s lives. She goes on to say: “I believe that the worst results of racism in
this country have been to subvert the most basic human relationship among black man, women and children and to destroy their individual physics. It is on this level of interpersonal experience that Walker succeeds in illuminating black women’s lives”(79).

In 1973, Alice Walker acknowledged the debt she owed as a black writer to Zora Neale Hurston by making a memorial trip to Hurston’s birthplace where, posing as Hurston’s niece, she tried to find out Hurston’s burial place. She not only succeeded in her quest, but also paid her tribute to have a marker over the grave with the inscription as, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Genius of the South, Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist 1901-1960”. In Hurston, Walker saw a sister artist who “Followed her own road, believed in her gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from the common people” (ISGM 91) Another of Walker’s lasting tributes to Hurston was the volume I Love My Self When I Am Laughing: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader, 1979.

In 1974 Walker wrote a book on the legendary Harlem Renaissance poet Langstone Hughes. She also became contributing editor of MS Magazine, Moving back to New York with her husband and daughter, she published her second novel Meridian (1976) that chronicles the sexual and racial politics of the Civil Rights struggle and is partly autobiographical.

In 1978, walker received a grant from the Prestigious Guggenheim Foundation, which enabled her to focus solely on her writing. Leaving New York, she went to San Francisco, living with Robert Allen whom she knew since her days at Spelman College. From there they moved to Mendocino in Northern California, a place that reminded her of Georgia. She already had another novel in her mind and it took less than a year to complete. It was her world famous American Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winning
novel *The Color Purple* (1982) that won her great fame and made her First African American to win this prize. It has been translated in twenty-two languages and sold over four million copies. Steven Spielberg also has made it into a big budget film starring Whoopie Goldberg, Deanery D. Glover and Oprah Winfrey.

In 1983, Alice Walker wrote a series of essays with a wealth of self-revelation entitled *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens; Womanist Prose*. This book is a memoir of Walker’s experiences and observations of African American Women’s culture and continues her exploration of the hidden truths defining female wholeness.


Over more than three decades of her writing life, Alice Walker has immersed herself in protest of Civil Disobedience, writing, speaking, traveling and filmmaking on behalf of numerous causes. Using her writing in a politically engaged and socially responsible manner to give voice to the voiceless, she stands out as a pioneering literary
figure, creating new voice and visions, of the role, that literature can play in shaping and critiquing society.

The aim of present study is the exploration of twin affliction of racism and sexism in the five selected novels of Walker viz. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Meridian, The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar and, Possessing the Secret of Joy* by doing a thematic study under the titles as Celebration of Self, Fables of Recovered Origins, Matrix of Sexual and Racial Realities, Resistance as a Voice of Protest and Journey from Powerlessness to Empowerment.

Alice Walker is adept not only as a novelist but she is also a teller of tales of misery, frustration and violence. Much work has appeared in print and her novels got much attention and fame but her works deserve more attention. Her works now form a substantial body for study. Thus purpose of proposed study is to do a critical study of two poisonous discriminations racism and sexism in some selected novels of Walker and to bring out the causes, effects and remedies of these discriminations from various perspectives so that we may explore the struggle and true feelings of Afro-American society and place the novelist in the right perspective before the readers. But before doing this thematic study a brief summery of all selected novels for this research work is necessary.

In her first outstanding novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, she deliberates over the black man-woman relationship. This novel describes the economic oppression African Americans faced under the sharecropping system and its tragic effects on black families and the black community. Here she explores the intersection of African American families, depicting black men who give vent to their anger and frustration, not
on the whites who exploit them, but on their powerless wives and children. The two main male characters Grange Copeland and his son; Brownfield both try to prove their manliness through methods endorsed by white patriarchy through assertions of power over women in the form of sexual abuse and beatings.

Though apparently it is the life story of Grange Copeland, a sharecropper, it is also the story of the sufferings, pains and hardships that black women; Margaret, Mem and Josie-face in their life. Their sufferings lead them to understand their situations and to launch a struggle to gain a meaningful place in the black world. In this novel these three characters Margaret, Mem and Josie have been victimized by the black men; Margaret, was left behind, discarded and abandoned by Grange to die a silent death; Mem was killed at the gunpoint by her husband, Brownfield and Josie was driven out of her own house by her own father, a man who stood for religion.

This novel depicts the story of Grange Copeland, black share cropper, enslaved and dehumanized by poverty and debt, who breaks free at the point where he would have killed his wife, for betraying him with the white landowner. Instead, he abandons her and his son, Brownfield, and heads north. Consumed by hatred for Grange, Brownfield nevertheless is condemned to repeat his father’s evil. Stripped of his manhood by an oppressive racist society, he degrades his wife Mem to the point where he can recover part of his ago by dominating her. He batters and crushes his wife and their three daughters and eventually kills her out of neurotic jealousy. The youngest daughter, Ruth is taken in by Grange, now returned and transformed by time and experience in to a wise and saintly old man.
He nurtures Ruth, in the end to the point of killing his son Brownfield and sacrificing his own life. Thus Grange Copeland evolves from a victim of abuse by his white boss to a perpetrator of abuse against his own wife and son and, finally, in the “third life” into the protector and guardian of his beloved grand daughter Ruth.

This novel, story of Grange Copeland’s metamorphosis; is also a story about awareness of Margaret Copeland, the most illiterate and submissive; Mem literate and ambitious, who dreams of her own world; Josie, an enterprising black woman who creates a world of her own and establishes her economic empire where she dictates her terms to others as a boss. It is also about Ruth, the fourth woman character, who is yet to grow and yet to create her own world.

Walker’s next novel, Meridian is a story of a young southern black woman from her childhood to her thirties and her relationship with Truman Held, a black artist and activist, and Lynne, his wife, also a civil rights organizer. It records her pilgrimage to spiritual well being, propelled by her sense of guilt at giving up her son to others and aborting her second pregnancy, and thus having violated life at its deepest level, Meridian embarks on a search for meaning in both her personal and political life. The novel probes the ideology of motherhood and extends the meaning of mother, of cherishing life, to that of the revolutionary.

Meridian’s is a journey from the ordinary position as a high school drop out to a self illuminated person who has attained selfhood and knows what is the purpose and mission of one’s own life. To begin as an ordinary black female and to end as an assured person is not an easy development. To gain the glimpse of her self-identity, which is in full bloom, she has had to undergo innumerable trails and tests. As a result she is evolved
“from a woman robbed by racial and sexual oppression to a revolutionary figure effecting action and strategy to bring freedom to herself and other poor discriminated black in the south” (Marry Helen Washington, An Essay on Alice Walker 148).

Thus Walker’s vision transcends both racial and sexual barriers as she forces her characters to go beyond the boundaries of the black community to see themselves in relation to the white community. In spite of Meridian’s painful private experiences, she is born anew and succeeds in evolving a new self and in due course of time emerges as a leader of the black race by fighting with all kinds of exploitations and decimations and gives a message that we can find our own path even in the dark night and by struggling with pains and sufferings one day can see the dawn of liberty, fraternity and equality.

Our next concerning novel The Color Purple (1982) chronicles the life of black girl, Celie who is poor, near illiterate and suffers from physical and mental exploitation. Walker tells Celie’s story in the form of letters, first written to God and later to her sister Nettie. Celie writes to God to help her to survive in the mud of spiritual, emotional and physical abuses, she suffers at the hands of her father. She discloses her powerless and worthless condition only to God because there is no one else to listen to her woes and to soothe her burning bosom. She gets a kind of satisfaction and a little bit of strength after revealing her pains, sufferings and traumas to God. Thus she begins her journey from powerlessness to the state of full empowerment and from self-abnegation to self-recognition.

From beatings, abuses and rejection at home Celie is passed to Mr. Albert to endure a similar fate for the next there decades. Her selfish and insensitive husband offers Celie no love; he only uses her as a medium or as a tool to satisfy his lust and needs. His
sexual relationship with Celie reinforces all the negative features of patriarchal exploitation and oppression. In this novel through her female characters like Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery, beloved of Celie’s husband, Sofia wife of Celie’s stepson Harpo, Mary Agnes and many others, Walker introduces the concept of sisterhood and shows a kind of bond among these women; a bond of sisterhood, a bond of suffering, a bond of resistance, a bond of love and a bond of celebration to make an effort to provide healing touch to these sisters.

Walker’s next prominent novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) further emphasizes on these burning issues of race and sex and strength of Walker’s faith in human life to fight with such traumas. The central theme of this novel is the challenge marginalized people face everywhere in creating an identity. So revulsion against the death fest of the west and root of revulsion against a countervailing black violence is the agony at the root of this novel. In this novel Walker presents the saga of a black woman called Lissie Lyles who has taken birth in different races and at different times. It is a chronicle not only of the life of black women but also of the women of different races. It is the story about the manner in which women were brought under the control of patriarchal social order. It is an analysis of how women lost their happiness and were pushed into unhappy life style.

The story of the life of Lissie is the story of thousand lives, each one touched by the double concern of race and sex. She has been many women; an African peasant sold into slavery by her uncle, subjected to the horrors of the Atlantic crossing, raped and brutalized; Moorish witch burned by the inquisition; a lesbian living in a harem; a pygmy living in a prehistoric forest that covered the whole earth and many others. The novel
opens with the epigraph of Lissie; “If they have lied about me/ they have lied about every thing”. Lissie suspects that the people are wrongly informed about her. She believes that without knowing the black woman’s story, no story about the world can be completed, authentically. Thus her story is the only true story about herself and by implication about the black women around her.

Thus we can say that this is a novel about the triumph of woman after so many defeats. At the same time this is a novel about love in all its forms, love for all people regardless of color, sexual preference or age and love for all living things. It is about the compassion for the oppressed, for the victims of racism and sexism and about the ray of hope for everyone and everything.

Walker’s next novel Possessing The Secret of Joy (1992) uncovers the mysteries of a ritualistic past that has imposed its presence into a changing world- a world that defines clitoridectomy (female circumcision) a blinding domination and abuse. This novel functions as an example of revolutionary action against the oppression of those colonized by the imperialist gaze. The female body is revealed as a site of male and national colonization through the ritual of clitoridectomy and infibulations that the protagonist Tashi/ Evelyn Johnson undergoes. Tashi an Afro-American woman and daughter in law of Celie, explores the complex web of relationship between pain and womanhood and shows how, in the process of forging female selfhood, the struggle forces the need to change the ritual.

In Olinkan culture, similar to other tribal cultures this ritual is based on a desire of limiting women’s sexuality and increasing male’s pleasure. Without this ritual of clitoridectomy the woman is imaged as dirty, masculine and whorish: Tashi also has a
scar marked on her face. These rituals are painful, but they are signifiers of her idiosyncratic African identity, the only thing that whites failed to erase from African’s lives.

Here another character M’Lissa stands as a symbol of patriarchy, as a symbol of domination of male and female and that is resulted by the domination of whites over blacks. Thus while M’Lissa is a monument to patriarchy Tashi becomes a heroine to the oppressed and subjugated women world wide and through her execution she gives a message that resistance to every kind of oppression or domination is the secret of joy. In her dying Tashi reconciles herself to the ancient African women’s vision of freedom.

In her fiction even in the phase of the painful disjunctions of life, Walker’s emphasis is always on the inherent yearning for unity in all life of body and mind, of flesh and spirit and especially of the universal female experience, an experience made complex and contradictory by phenomenon of love.

Her novels, poems and short stories mostly deal with the themes of rape, violence, isolation, troubled relationships, multi generational perspectives, sexism and racism. Her novels act as revolutionary manifesto for dismantling system of domination. She strongly exposes this fact that simply to strive for social and economical equality is not enough, although liberal and conservative ideology might propose these as solutions for sexism, racism and classicism. She says that instead of this, complete system must be overturned and the first step is overcoming the silence that empowers dominant groups; this is a part of an overall resistance that might very well be the key of the secret of joy.

With the magic of her art, Walker creates a new world of black men and women based on equality and mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. This new world is
free from all pains and sufferings, melancholy and monotonousness and full of colors, happiness, hope, faith, resolution to stand, establishment and dignity. At last we can sum up the contribution of Alice Walker as a great artistic writer in the words of Barbara Christian:

“As a craftsman, Walker sorts out the throwaways, the seemingly insignificant and hidden pieces of the lives of Southerners, particularly black families and stitches them in to a tapestry of society. Who is to blame for the waste in our lives she asks? Ourselves? The society that seems at every turn opposed to blosooming? The wrath of God? The question of responsibility for personal action and societal change is one recurrent motif in the complex quilts that Walker makes out of thrifty sentences, knotted questions, tight metaphors, terse sections” (Black Woman Novelist, 198).”