Chapter – 4

MATRIX OF RACIAL AND SEXUAL REALITIES
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A myth. A myth like the racist myths we’re all too familiar with, designed to explain and perpetuate the superiority of one race and the inferiority of another. But the sexist myth is the greatest and most pervasive myth the world has ever told itself— at once explaining, condoning, and perpetuating male superiority and female inferiority, meanwhile denying—craftiest touch of all!—that to be secondary in everything is at all inferior.

(Sheldon Vanauken “Freedom for Movement Girls- Now” December 1986, Special Collections Library, Duke University)

We live in a society that is always busy in drawing the boundaries to divide the people in the name of different discriminations based on caste, creed, religion, region, community, race, gender, and never ending list of such other names. Building up of these walls work as a means to place people in categories to describe, identify and imprison individuals in certain groups. Basically this is the pride or ego of human beings that encourages them to establish themselves superior in the eyes of other people. This categorization of our beautiful planet called earth, in the name of such petty matters, shatters the dream of vasudhev kutumbkam and gives birth to traumas, afflictions, exploitations, and brutality and in real sense to a chaotic world.

Alice Walker has dedicated her life to establish a literary canon of African-American writers and to encourage the survival whole of the victims of race and gender. 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 struggles of racism and sexism that she uses as the general theme for most of her works. Walker’s
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 the victims of racial, sexual and economic oppression and exist under degrading circumstances.

Before discussing Walker’s novels from racist and sexist point of view, it is necessary here to know something about the meaning of these afflictions.

Black racism reminds us of the sufferings of the blacks when they were made slaves and sold by the whites. They have had to mount over many obstacles to get their standing in the society. First was the selling of their people into slavery. Then they endured slavery itself, being treated like animals. After slavery was abolished, colored people still had to deal with racial discrimination, demoralization, subjugation and hatred. 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-hate and the blacks became victim of self-negation. And in order to satisfy their injured male ego at the hands of white masters, these helpless black males used sexual discrimination as a tool to regain their lost dignity. In the consequence black women have had to deal with for being black and female, a double-edged sword.

Like race or color, gender was also a cause of hellish discrimination in Afro-American society that made the life of poor black women traumatic and gave birth to another heinous affliction; a cause of humiliation and exploitation of so called fair sex by her own near and dear ones. In fact the poison of racism so strongly affected the life of black people that in its consequences many other afflictions were born, and gender discrimination or sexism is one of them. So racism and sexism both are interconnected
with each other. We can define sexism as the belief or attitude that one sex is inferior to, less competent, or less valuable than the other. Historically and across many cultures, sexism has resulted in the subjugation of women to men; as Merlin Stone in her Internet essay “When God Was a Woman” says:

“Power has been in the hands of males since the cave dwelling days. Might make right, i.e. the guy with the biggest stick got to make the rules. When men figured out that the sex nine months earlier resulted in childbirth, they began to make rules that allowed them to control the source of this means of enlarging their power base. Women and kids meant free labor. Women put up with it today because they are pressured death, abandonment…Even here and now, an assertive woman is seen as a threat to the males in the work place and will be quickly ostracized or downsized if she doesn’t show difference to the alpha male”.

(www.bookrags.com/studyguide-when-god-was-a-woman/ United States)

Basically sexism is a particular form of oppression that can be distinguished from other forms e.g. racism and homophobia even though it is currently interlocked with the other forms of oppression as well. Sexist institutions are also racist, classiest and homophobic so dismantling sexist institutions will require that we dismantle the other forms of domination on intertwined with them.

Walker’s main focus in her novels is to depict black women’s oppression, exploitation and their struggle to come out of these hellish traumas of racism and sexism. These women were locked in the narrow shell of race and sex and exploited not only by whites but also by their own husbands, brothers and fathers who treated them as animals and forced them to live the life of slaves. Their wings were brutally crushed because God didn’t send them on the earth with white skin and so called powerful male gender. Thus
they were left as identity less insignificant creatures who occupy a very marginal place on this earth.

Walker’s first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* reveals before us the layers of pain, suffering and deterioration of poor black families that were forced to breathe the poisonous air left by white anarchists, who robbed the peace, dignity and even the right of life from these poor black people. From the very beginning of the novel we can sense the economic oppression, African-Americans suffered under the sharecropping system and its tragic effects on black families and in broad sense on the black community. Here Walker explores the interrelation between racism and sexism in the life of black people and reveals how the inferiority, deterioration and slave like condition of black males on the basis of their dark color forced them to be the master of their poor black wives, daughters and sisters in order to gain their lost power and ego. Both main male characters, Grange and Brownfield Copeland, try to prove their manliness through methods endorsed by white patriarchy: through assertion of power over women in the form of sexual conquests and wife abuse.

Story of this novel begins in rural Georgia during the 1920's with the family of Grange a Black sharecropper, living in destitution with his wife, Margaret, and son, Brownfield. Grange and his helpless wife represent black sharecropping members of their society who make every possible effort to gain their livelihood in the atmosphere of oppression, degradation, and humiliation. Grange, because of his black color is expected to act as though he is the social inferior of his employer, the man who drives the truck, Mr. Shipley. Depicting the fear of Grange of his white master, says Walker:
"When the truck came [Grange's] face froze into an unnaturally bland mask... A grim stillness settled over his eyes and he became an object... Some of the workers laughed and joked with the man who drove the truck, but they looked at his shoes... never into his eyes" (9).

This passage shows the racial discrimination prevailed in black society. To his white boss Grange, a black valueless worker is just like an object and a puppet. He is aware about this fact that, "he works for a cracker and...the cracker owned him" (5). Even the sight of Shipley fills him with fear and makes him frozen like a piece of wood. This fear of Grange is the result of the racial atmosphere prevailing in Afro-American society that regards white people as supreme power and blacks as nothing. These white masters were treated by blacks as aliens on their black land, quite differ from them in everything as Walker says about Shipley, "the man was a man, but entirely different from [Grange]," (10). This is the evil effect of the racism that the peace, dignity and even the existence of these poor sharecropper families was snatched away from them. This is the irony of the fate of these poor black people, that, they work like slaves on their own land without even achieving the essential aids for their survival. Whites not only robbed them physically but also distorted their psychology. They snatched from these black people not only money and their land but also all the human qualities as love, sympathy and kindness and left them quite frustrated and uncivilized savages as Grange and Brownfield. They suppressed these black people very cunningly and created a kind of fear in them.

This helpless fear and inferiority complex gave birth to many destructive feelings as violence, anger, jealousy and insecurity in Grange. And like all other victims of race affliction Grange also pours down all these poisonous feelings on his poor wife Margaret.
Grange treats his wife and son in the same derogatory way in which his white master treats him. He gives every possible wound to these helpless creatures to soothe his burning bosom. He follows the footsteps of his white master and in his own home wants to control and rule over everything. Margaret and Brownfield are forced to play the submissive roles to make up for Grange's feelings of lack of manhood around Shipley, and Whites in general. Brownfield states, "His mother was like their dog in some ways. She didn't have a thing to say that did not... show her submission to his father," (6). Grange, at regular intervals "would come home lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling and shooting off his shotgun" (15). The reason behind this brutal behavior of Grange with his near and dear ones is his economic oppression and his total surrender to white anarchy that forced him to make others powerless and submissive.

Here, Walker as a black womanish writer fulfills her responsibility of giving voice to the pains sufferings and traumas of black women like Margaret Mem and Josie who are forced to suffer not only by white supremacist but also by their own black relatives. Not only this, their humanity and the black female self are denied in this male dominated society and they were left to live an insignificant life without having any place of their own amid the poisonous afflictions of race and sex. These are the women who have to pay a lot for satisfying their husbands’ distorted ego. As at one place Walker reveals the slave like painful condition of Brownfield and her mother under the oppression given at home and out of the home:

“His mother left each morning with a hasty hug and a sugertait, on which he sucked through wet weather and dry across the dusty clearing or misty, until she returned. She worked all day pulling baits for ready money. Her
legs were always clean when she left home and always coated with mud and slime of baits when she came back” (6).

Under the heinous effects of economic oppression Grange had lost his humanity and turned into a devil. He degrades to such an extent that once he even forces Margret to go to Shipley to satisfy his physical hunger like a prostitute so that he may come out of the debt of his white master. In spite of her hard work and dedication to family she was totally neglected by Grange. When this poor victim of twice jeopardy didn’t get any option to escape she committed suicide, the only way left to her to get rid of all pains and sufferings. About Grange, Barbara Christian writes in *Black Women Writers*: “Grange Copeland hates himself because he is powerless as opposed to powerful, the definition of maleness for him. His reaction is to prove his power by inflicting violence on the women around him” (285).

Brownfield follows the path of his father and adopts all that is negatively left by the white exploiters. He is cruelly victimized by the extreme racism and poverty of the Georgia backwoods world in which he is born and raised. Under the pressure of racial circumstances he follows the footstep of his father and proves for his family even worse than his father. Initially he tries to flee to North like Grange in search of a Utopian world but fails in his effort. He falls in love with Mem the niece of Josie because she has all those qualities in which Brownfield lacks. Now he begins to hope for a peaceful and well-organized life with his family but here also the white phobia proves him a failure. The distorted and painful memories of his childhood, the unbearable economic pressure and loss of self identity under racial hegemony shatters his dreams and like his father turns him into a brutal savage.
Brownfield gives every possible torture to Mem in order to feel superior and to gain his lost manhood. Thus slave system of black society breaks generation after generations and families after families. This sharecropping system created by white masters has snatched every possible nourishment like love, sympathy, kindness and politeness from these poor black people like Brownfield and left them as the name suggest *Brown-Field: quite barren and unproductive.* And this barren and futile life of Brownfield produced only pain, hatred, anger and violence for the people related to him as his wife and daughters.

Mem’s act raising the standard of the family and to live with equal dignity as whites challenges both manliness as well as the self made concept of Brownfield that he can’t be equal to whites. At the same time this thing becomes intolerable for Brownfield that his wife Mem, a woman is capable to control his family and to fight with every kind of hurdle created by race affliction, of which he is not capable. Now he decides that he will not lose his power, control and superiority in his home and will dominate, suppress and humiliate his innocent wife and daughters like whites do with him. Because this is the only way left to him to feel powerful and something in this world. He rejects every decision made by Mem and orders that ‘he’ not ‘she’ should be obeyed and followed in the family matters, as he says:

“We moving exactly when and where I say we moving. Long I’m supporting this fucking family we go where I say we go…I may not be able to read and write but I’m still the man that wears the pants in this outfit”(87).

Actually this consciousness of manhood compels these helpless black people to behave before their women like a tiger to compensate their fear of whites. Here walker
reveals the fact that if Brownfield is powerful as a man, Mem is weak as a woman. Here Brownfield follows the footsteps of white anarchist who crushed the chastity of black women to suppress their voice of revolt. He uses his maleness as a weapon to weaken Mem physically, mentally and economically by making her pregnant again and again. Mem’s ignorance about how not to get pregnant becomes a kind of secret for her husband to break her completely. At one place in the novel he himself opens this secret when in a very derogatory way he says to Mem: “You thought I fucked you’ cause I wanted it? Josie better than you ever been, your trouble is you just never learned how not to git pregnant. How long did you think you could keep going with your belly full of children?”

Thus literally cheated out of land and morally dispossessed of a human foundation for his life, Brownfield is ironically condemned to repeat his father's failures. When he does discover a fruitful relationship with Mem, their marriage is ruined by the same factors which destroyed his parents' marriage. The "warm, life-giving circle" of their life together is gradually dissolved by "the shadow of eternal bondage" (49) which eroded his father's self-esteem. Bound like his father by "the chain that held him to the land" (50), Brownfield too becomes neurotically jealous of his wife and degrades her to the point where he can recover part of his ego by feeling superior to her. Like his father, who pushed his wife into suicide because he could not bear loving her and could not adequately support her, Brownfield murders Mem because a social environment that strips him of manhood cancels out his love for her. Forced by an oppressively racist society to "plow a furrow his father had laid" (45), Brownfield is indeed a "brown field,"
a crop that has failed to mature and bear fruit because his life has been deprived of necessary nutrients.

Josie is another victim of male made dogmas and has to pay like Margret and Mem for being born as black woman. She is cheated, deceived and used by every male to satisfy his sexual, mental and economical hunger. In a very bitter sense she was thrown in to the ditch of dirty ‘business’ to earn her livelihood. She was deceived by every man from whom she expected a ray of hope and at whom she looked for support. Through out the novel she is treated like a prostitute, who doesn’t have any self identity. She surrendered to her father, Grange and Brownfield completely in hope of true love and support but none of them could understand her fully. They only used her according to their selfish needs and desires. Grange and his son not only looted her physically but also economically. Even after becoming the wife of Grange she couldn’t achieve the respect of a wife and was forced to bear every blow silently in a corner of her own property like a wood.

Similar to her first novel Walker’s next novel Meridian shows how her female characters have to fight on one hand the patriarchal cultural order, so to speak, of the mainstream white, traditionally tending to subordinate them as women and as “ethnics”; and on the other hand, the patriarchal cultural order of the black community itself. What complicates matters is that the patriarchal cultural order of the black group is a reenactment of that of the whites, with the entire attendant ramification thereof.

This matrix of racial and sexual realities is prevailed throughout the novel Meridian. In the very beginning of this novel the story of the Mariliene O’Shay is quite heart touching, that reveals the bitter domination of a husband over his wife. Here Walker
links the contrasting strategies of silence (withholding one's tongue as opposed to having it forcibly removed) to the politics of racism and patriarchy. In the opening chapter, Walker crystallizes the oppression inherent in Southern segregation practices, as grown white man rush to prevent a group of black children from seeing what everyone acknowledges to be a worthless freak show, a ludicrous carnival attraction. She also examines patriarchy's ability to "kill" women, using the Mariliene O'Shay exhibit as a visual reminder, as well as a parody of society's idolization of dead women as the perfect women. After her brutal murder, her husband used her body as a piece of exhibition to earn money. The show of this mummy was arranged in various shifts. Even here the preference was given to the white people because they were the masters. In whole black city of Chicokma, a story prevailed about the infidelity of Mariliene. Meridian goes there with black children to show them this so called circus on the opposition of its owner for the entry of blacks that day. She was shocked to see the display board of this show where with the help of four titles Walker reveals the oppression of a black woman not only in her life but also after her death. “Obedient Daughter”, “Devoted Wife”, “Adoring Mother” and the last “Gone Wrong” were these four titles, which were indicating that she had fulfilled every duty faithfully but committed a blunder mistake by giving her heart to an other person.

This true story of Mariliene O’Shay has been preserved by her husband for future generations on cheap mimeographed fliers which tells us how Henry O’Shay had lavishly provided for his lovely wife, Mariliene, and how she had rebuked the role of Perfect Wife by having an affair with another man. An old black townsman’s interpretation of Mariliene’s story provides us with patriarchal society. She was objectified and privatized
while alive; she is commoditized and marketable once dead. After shooting the man who was in love with Mariliene, her husband strangled her with his own hands. By doing so, he dislodged her tongue and prevented her from resisting. Thus he avenged his pride and punished his wife, literally choking her voice forever. He turned her in to mummy, because a living woman may resist her husband’s domination but the mummy, static and refined, may be completely possessed.

The mother of Meridian also suffers the pangs of patriarchal society. Like many other black women her wings were also cut so that she might not fly in her own sky. She was bounded in the chains of the male domination. Her race-afflicted husband turned her life, which could be quite fertile, into a barren land. Her dreams were broken, her study and teaching was stopped and she was just left, as a dumb, speechless object of sexual pleasure for her lover turned husband and this sexual pleasure became a kind of ditch for her to be rotten and spoiled. She reveals the bitter consequences of this sweet pleasure and says, her husband “cried as he broke in to her body, as she was to cry later when their children broke out of it”(41). So this was the punishment of every black woman to suffer for her whole life and carry the burden of the unwanted and uncountable painful pregnancies, which had broken her physically, mentally and emotionally. Walker touches the wounds of these women gifted to them by the affliction of sexism, as she says in the painful voice of Mrs. Hill that:

“The mysterious inner life that she had imagined gave them a secret joy was simply a full knowledge of the fact that they were dead, living just enough for their children. They too had found no one to shout, “It’s not fair!” The women who now had eight, twelve, fifteen children: People made jokes about them, but she could feel now that such jokes were
obscene; it was like laughing at a person who is being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick”(42).

Meridian herself makes relationship with Eddie and gets married not because of love but to save her body and soul from the cruel eyes of other destroyers of women’s virginity. So being with Eddie was not a kind of pleasure but a sanctuary in which her mind was free from any consideration for all other males in the universe who might want any thing from her. But this sanctuary after her pregnancy transformed into a prison of slavery. Even her mother did not make her aware about this kind of condition.

About this unwanted pregnancy says Meridian: “She felt, being pregnant, almost as if she’d contracted a communicable disease, that the germs had been in the air and that her catching the disease was no one’s fault”(58). Similar to her mother for Meridian motherhood was like a slavery that enclosed her in to a narrow den.

Meridian many times sexually exploited by the white funeral home owner.

Both Dexter and his assistant sexually abused many black girls along with Meridian. Very trivially the assistant says to Meridian about taking the experience of these attacks, as he says that experience is the best, the only, teacher, and just looking at water will never teach you to swim. He rapes a black sixteen years old girl to give this experience to Meridian. He says in the voice of the colonizers of women’s body, “that the girl was his now whenever he wanted her, because he had discovered a secret few men new: how to make woman come”(64).

Dexter, who becomes a source of racial and sexual exploitation is born from a black father and faced a distorted childhood for being a seed of inter-racial relationship. In the whole story her white mother is the worst sufferer for getting pregnant by a black
Negro who worked for them. On the knowledge of this affair her parents as of Ammu; a victim of patriarchy in Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Tings*, shut her up in the cellar and threw away the key. They mercilessly killed that poor black lover as parents of Ammu did with Valutha, a black *dalit* lover of Ammu. They fed her pig bran and a little watery milk. When Dexter was born he was thrown out in to the street with the rest of the trash. Thus here the matrix of racial and sexual realities is reflected not only in the main plot or in the life of central character but here Walker very artistically reveals the deep and widely rooted afflictions with the help of many minor characters and incidents.

In Afro-American society the condition of black people was very pitiful. They were treated like slaves, savages and the murderous destructors and in true sense *the gods of small things* before *white gods of big things*. They were not allowed to speak against the tyranny. When Meridian along with Truman and other Civil Rights’ workers try to resist the wrong policies of these white anarchists, they were beaten to death and their movement was crushed under the boot of white vindictiveness. As at one place Walker describes the horrible scene that represents the intention of whole white system and reminds the pain and struggle of Indian revolutionaries in the reign of British colonization:

“The troop turned on them, beating and swinging with their bludgeons. One blow knocked Meridian to the ground, where she was trampled by people running back and forth over her. But there was nowhere to run. Only the jail door was open and obstructed. Within minutes they had been beaten inside, where the sheriff and his deputies waited to finish them…the sheriff grabbed her by the hair and someone else begin punching her and kicking her in the backs” (81).
Meridian felt the pain and suffering of racism in the form of these punches and kicks. But many times she had witnessed the poisonous effects of racism and sexism as its consequences in the terrified full faces of poor black children and women. She saw many black children, with short, flashing black legs, being chased by grown white men brandishing axe handles and old women dragged out of stores and beaten on the sidewalk. She also observed the young black men of great spiritual beauty changing overnight into men who valued nothing.

Meridian is sexually abused not only by Dexter or Truman but also by a well-known black professor Mr. Raymonds in exchange of some money that was essential to fulfill her daily needs. As an exchange student she was suffering from poor economic condition and to remove the problem she joined Prof. Raymonds as a typist. But that cruel black Prof. was not ready to pay her only for her hard work. Like his white masters he needed something else, the favor of Meridian to satisfy his sexual hunger. By creating the character of Raymond Walker makes us familiar about the destruction of black women’s soul and body not only by the men of other race but also by their so called caretakers and protectors of black virginity. He couldn’t tolerate Meridian’s talking with white students and warned her to be far from these white men, who were reported to rape so many black women in a year. He treated Meridian as his own property that can be used by him at any time and in any way. Very ironically he raises his voice against black women’s exploitation by the people of other race but he himself is free to rape and exploit them in every possible way. In the passage given below, Walker depicts the struggle of Meridian with her sexual exploiter and the pain, suffering and tears caused by this struggle in a very heart tearing way:
“Each day when she rose to go – having typed letters for him in a veritable swamp fog of bad breath- he clasped her in his arms dragging her away from the door…But she smiled and struggled and struggled and smiled, and pretended she knew nothing of his intentions-a thought no doubt aroused him all the more” (116).

These were not only black women, who faced the humiliation and hatred but also black men who faced the mental agony and public humiliation as Truman accepts the bitter reality of racism and for which he hated those people who had made his little bread hard to earn.

But very ironically this humiliated and colonized Truman does not leave even a single moment to dominate Meridian. Although he is a lover of Meridian yet he treats her exactly in the way in which his white masters treat him. Even though he is not born with white skin to feel superior, he has a male gender to show his power. His tight grip on the wrist of Meridian remind of her sexual exploitation by so many other women seducers. He uses Meridian whenever he feels a need for it and goes back to the white exchange student Lynne. He throws Meridian in to same ditch of pregnancy and motherhood that she had left long time ago. He soothes his burning body and as a result, gifts to her body lot of pains, tears, depression and an unwanted pregnancy.

Meridian neither mentally nor legally was ready to give birth to this child. She sees a ray of hope for her in the love of Truman but this very loved becomes the cause of her mental, physical and emotional oppression. This black revolutionary lover of Meridian suddenly falls in love with a white girl Lynne and leaves Meridian alone to carry the burden of social and moral humiliation. White color of Lynne that makes her attractive and interesting to Truman, forces Meridian to think as if she were less, and that
it is a curse to be born with black color. This infidelity from the side of her lover and the fear of public humiliation compels Meridian to take a bitter decision of aborting this child.

Her doctor insults her for being immoral and threaten her “to tie her tubes” so that she can’t disturb him again by being pregnant. Here Meridian takes very sensitive decision to uproot motherhood from her body so that no other man can use her for pleasure. As she says to the doctor in a very firm voice, “Burn’em out by the roots for all I care.” (119) She takes this hard decision without any hesitation because her body and soul had to pay a lot for the pleasure of its hypocritical lover. At this time she faced a “whirling hot pain shot from her uterus to her toes.” (119) She felt as if she is dead from bleeding. But very ironically when she was facing the deadly pain gifted to her by Truman, he was busy in fulfilling his desires with a white girl Lynne. We can also say that after colonizing a black body he was now trying to colonize a white empire in order to prove himself powerful enough to control a white body.

Poor Meridian’s soul becomes more tormented when her ex lover comes back to her and requests her to be a mother of his black babies; an impossible task. So Meridian here also gets a deception from her lover. At this point she breaks so much that she even tries to give up her life.

A bitter reality deplored by Walker in her novels is that women had to pay a heavy cost for these vicious afflictions of racism and sexism not only in black but also in white race. These are not only black women who had to suffer the ruthless teeth of their exploiters on their body but white women like Lynne also had to pay the cost of racism. Truman is attracted towards Lynne because in spite of being a white girl she loves black
people, black culture and everything that is black, not for her loving soul but for her white body. She is different from her ancestors and wishes for forgiveness of her guilt of being born with the color of dominators. She becomes a part of black society by leaving behind every white memory in order to soothe the burning bosoms of these victims of her white ancestors. But in spite of her great sacrifice this poor innocent girl could not make a place for her in the hearts of these long suffered people. Tommy Odds, friend of Truman hated her so much that he couldn’t even tolerate the name of this ‘white witch’. He put out this hate and anger of being exploited on Lynne. He raped Lynne and treats her as a prostitute in order to take revenge of the wounds of his people. For of course it was Tommy Odds who raped her but he said, it wasn’t really rape because she had not screamed once, or even struggled much. But for the unfortunate Lynne, it was worse than rape because she felt circumstances had not permitted her to scream. Lynne suffered everything silently because she wanted to pay back for the mistakes of her forefathers.

Thus if Meridian pays for being black, Lynn here pays for being white. Gradually her husband, Truman begins to find himself “guilty of loving that white bitch” (143). For Lynne her brightness turns in to a curse.

Beside Lynne there is another white woman Margret who is exploited by a black man Tom Johnson and who had, “lived with this white woman for years, only most people didn’t know about it. He shuttled her back and forth from his house to a friend’s house down to the street” (144). When Truman asked this friend of him that why didn’t he marry his white beloved Margret? Tom laughed and said in a very disgusting way “Boy, you don’t understand anything yet. Margret is a sweet ol’ thing. We have been living together in harmony for five years. But she’s white.” And he further reveals very
scornfully his lust, when he says: “It is just a matter of pussy. That’s all. Just a matter of my personal taste in pussy” and asks to Truman, “It’s a good stuff. Want some”?(145) His cruelty doesn’t stop here; he gives chance to his friends to use this white woman. Basically all this brutal treatment of a white woman in a black society is the result of the deep-rooted routes of racism in Afro-America society. These angry black young men, who worked themselves like dominators for their own women are afraid of white women and of their whiteness because this is the color that has robbed everything from them. And because of this mysterious fear initially nobody wanted to be seen talking to Lynne alone, and even as a group they would only talk to her from a distance. Their going back to see her in fear forced Lynne to think about her origin and white racist ancestors who had done everything wrong with these poor black folks. Their fear of Lynne in real sense is the fear of whole white community and is the effect of widely prevailed racism.

The effect of racism destroyed Truman so much that he even does not feel bothered on the rape and murder of his daughter Camara by the people of his own race to build up their destructive souls. They take revenge of their mothers, daughters and sisters’ rape by sexually abusing this white child. On asking of Meridian that, “Don’t you think you owe something to Camara?” He answers very neutrally, “I owe more to all the little kids being blown away by white’s racism” (148).

Thus like her other novels here also Walker touches the wounds of the victims of the racism and sexism. She has depicted the depression, pain and sufferings of women who were forcefully used by this male dominated society for its selfish motifs. Here Walker describes two fundamental categories of womanhood defined under male dominated heterosexuality- as –bitches and wives. The first category is composed of
white women; the second is made up of black women and is essentially the same as saying “mothers.” Both are humiliated publicly and denied any kind of freedom to fulfill their dreams. They didn’t have the power of speech, as happens in the case of Louvinie, a black enslaved story teller, whose tongue was cut in order to snatch her freedom of speech. She was killed cruelly and buried under the Sojourner tree of Spelman College. Another example of sexual exploitation is “wild child”, an orphan who was raped and left on the road to die in hunger and humiliation. Her imposed pregnancy, about which she doesn’t know any thing, turns into great physical and mental torture for her. No body gives her shelter to hide her humiliation and food to satisfy her burning stomach. And at last helpless and psychologically broken wild child dies alone in a car accident. So every character of this novel somewhere in his or her life is affected by racial and sexual oppressions. Either he or she is a sufferer or an agent to make others suffer on the trivial discriminations of race and sex.

The main theme of *The Color Purple* is to reveal the position of the black women in Afro-American society, as the lowest of the low, put on the target because of their gender and color. This is the saga of pain, suffering and tears of black women for being a woman and black, living in the frame of male civilization, racist and sexist by definition, being subject to all possible forms of oppression. As Walker writes in her book *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*, "a black woman is the mule of the world, because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else - everyone else - refused to carry" (156).

With the characters like Celie, Sophia, Mary Jane and many other unknown ones Walker here tries to touch the nakedness of Afro – American women and wounds lashed on their body for their inferior black race and female sex. Thus in every vicious incident
of the novel the reason behind is the poisonous matrix of racial and sexual realities which is prevailed and deeply rooted in this society from a very long time.

Just as Celie reaches womanhood, she finds her way into the suspension. And this suspended and marginalized woman Celie plays the role of the inclement exploit with a warped spirit as well as body. Celie’s body is first deserted through her stepfather’s sexual misconduct and following this come vicious sexual and physical abuse by her husband.

The main reason behind the sufferings of Celie, Nettie and their mother is the racial hegemony and its brutal effect on their family. The racial history of Celie’s real father, his brutal murder by his white competitors makes us shocked and reveals another hateful face of racism where black people were not allowed to earn their livelihood in a respected manner. They were Negro and according to the white supremacy were born only for slavery and service of white masters, not for doing business and be equal to them. Celie’s real father works hard and buys his own store on his own land and hires two of his brothers to support him in his store. This was an effort of a Negro to come in the main stream and to remove the slave tag from him and his family by doing the same work as whites do. But he forgot that he belongs to a black race, which is made by God only to be crushed under the feet of whites, he forgot that this is intolerable for his white masters that a black give them challenge and rise in their competition. And so his model of industry and enterprise fails, since the store’s very success leads “white merchants… to complain that his store was taking all the black business away from them” (148). Refusing to tolerate free competition from a black owned and black operated business, these wicked whites mercilessly burn the store and lynch Celie’s Pa and his two black
brothers. And thus he had to pay the cost of his life only for making an effort to sell his good to his own people on his own land. The success of a Negro became a threat for the white’s existence in black society and so they nipped him in bud in order to warn others.

After the death of Celie’s real father Alphonso another black man forcefully got married with Celie’s mother in greed of her property. Like the father of Celie, he also opens the same store but his way was different. He was very cunning and aware about this fact that without submitting to the whites he couldn’t survive amid them. So he surrendered to the bitter reality of racism and dealt with the whites in their own way. As at one place he exposes to Celie, the greedy nature of white supremacists in a very scornful way:

“Take me, he says, I know how they is. The key to all of them is money. The trouble with our people is that as soon as they got out of slavery they didn’t want to give the white man nothing else. But the fact is you got to give’em something. Either your money, your land, your woman or your ass” (155).

Alphonso in fact belongs to the other group of black people, the people who identified themselves with the white power structure and tried to live the life of the whites. He establishes paternalistic relationship with other blacks and behaves with his own black peoples as slaves. Thus when Shug asks Alphonso’s new wife, a “child” not more than fifteen, why her parents allowed her to marry him, the girl replies: “They work for him…. Live on his land” (154). First he uses the mother of Celie economically and physically to satisfy his sexual hunger but on finding the truth about her illness and incapability to satisfy him sexually he finds a substitute in her daughter Celie in order to
extinguish his fire of lust. Consequently he makes brutal sexual attacks on Celie and orders her like a savage: “You better shut up and git used to it” (2).

Fear of this powerful male figure doesn’t allow her to escape from sexual abuse in her own home by her own relative. Celie lives a life of slave with her younger sister Nettie, a sick mother and a brood of half brothers and sisters. The only dominating and controlling power in this family is Alphonso who himself is a result of racial affliction. Celie lives like a sex object for her father and as a maidservant for his other kids cooking, cleaning and looking after them. This helpless, poor girl has none to share her pain and suffering and thus on the threat of her father to shut her mouth she writes letters to God and make him a passive partner in her grief. Celie begin to write very pathetically about the pain and problems caused by her forceful pregnancy: “I’m big. I can’t move fast enough. By time I git back from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it be dinner time” (3).

Celie takes this marriage as a chance to escape from the vile sexual prison of her father. But her stepfather very cunningly prepares the ground for hatred, violence, anger and domination in the mind of Albert by portraying an embarrassing and shameful picture of Celie. He creates an impression in the mind of Albert that Celie is not a human being with feelings but a piece of wood, an object to fulfill his every need. She should be beaten regularly to work in a proper way. About Celie her father says to Albert, “She ugly…. But she’ll make the better wife. She ain’t smart either, and I’ll just be fair, you have to watch her or she’ll give away everything you own” (10).
Celie agrees for this marriage in the hope of some change in her condition but unfortunately she is quite unaware about this fact that her suffering and pain are not going to depart from her so easily and so soon. The change will be there, but only in the name of her exploiter as from Alphonso-her father to Mr. Albert- her husband. Celie fulfills all her duties, which are expected from a black woman in a typical patriarchal society. Earlier she was a slave to her father and worked as an object to serve him and his uncivilized children in every possible way. The condition is similar at the home of Albert, who treats her as his legal property and abuses her physically, mentally and emotionally wherever and whenever he wants. She works as a submissive, subordinate and obedient maidservant not only for her cruel husband but also for his three children. At one place Celie describes the insensitive treatment meted to her, as follows: “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. All I can do is not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself; Celie, you are a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man” (23). The fact is that Celie’s extreme physical pain turns her into a tree, an example of black woman’s proximity to the passive and suffering agony of nature.

While Celie suffers only at the hands of her own relatives and only for being a woman, another black woman Sofia, wife of Celie’s step son Harpoe had to pay the cost of her black color and of her female gender. Both racist and sexist supremacists abuse her. Her husband Harpoe abuses her physically and mentally to create in her heart a fear of patriarchy. We can here compare Harpoe- Sofia’s couple with Brownfield-Mem’s couple of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Like them initially this couple was also a couple of passionate lovers but gradually with the poisonous effects of racism, these
passionate lovers turned into destructors and enemy of each other. Like Mem Sofia also suffers blues in her life. She shares her struggle with Celie. White mayor’s men beat her cruelly on her rejection to be his maid. They torture her in every possible way and when she tries to revolt put her in prison in very bad condition without proper food, water and space to survive.

In this novel Walker further reveals this matrix of racial and sexual realities in the description of Olinka society through the letters of Nettie to her sister Celie. She describes the exploitation of the native African people by the white power structure that wants to establish white empire in Africa. So, these are not only Olinka people who suffer but also their land that was eradicated by white engineers in process of turning the Olinka jungle into a rubber plantation. They were uprooted from their homes and forced to sacrifice their land in spreading white industrialisms. Very ironically the development of the whites became the cause of the destruction of the blacks. In this part of the novel Walker reveals the worst effects of colonialism in the life of African people. The white colonizers had snatched away every good thing related to Africa.

Walker touches the wounds of black people caused by thousands of year’s slavery. And shows that how this physical and mental slavery left them totally destructed and confused. They couldn’t find any solid solution to cure their inferior psyche. So they having found no option chose to colonize their own women to restore their distorted male ego. Here also women were the worst sufferer and similar to other parts of Africa, racism gives way to the colonization of poor Olinka women by their own men. They were completely marginalized from male dominated society and left identity less. In Olinka society girls are not allowed to be educated and they think that, “a girl is nothing to
herself; only to her husband can she become something” (140). Here Africans are depicted very much like white people back home. Like their white masters they think that they are the center of the universe and that everything that is done is done for them. Male domination was so prevalent in this society that these poor black women were always under the eye watch of their fathers, brothers, uncles or husbands. Women were used like sex objects and maids. They were physically, mentally, economically, socially and emotionally abused and crushed. They were forcefully made mothers of so many illegal children. The atrocious treatment of women by their own relatives reminds Nettie of her “Pa” who exploited Celie in every possible way. As Nettie writes to Celie:

“There is a way that men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen long enough to issue instructions. They don’t even look at women when women are speaking…. The women also do not ‘look in a man’s face’ as they say. To ‘look in a man’s face’ is a brazen thing to do. … They look instead at his feet or at his knees. And what can I say to this? Again it is our own behavior around Pa” (168).

The theme of oppression and its numerous representations in this novel can also be interpreted as an allegory of slavery. All early situations of Celie’s life are manifestations of this: her rape by her stepfather is reminiscent of the slavery experience of the ownership of one’s body by someone else, the "theft" of Celie's children is closely related with the habit of selling children off from their mother during slavery; Celie’s marriage resembles the scene of the slave auction; and her hard work and constant abuse arouse the memories of slavery; Celie and Nettie's attempts at literacy parallel connection between literacy and freedom common during slavery.
Thus Walker’s main aim in *The Color Purple* is to expose how through ills inflicted on women by males the whole community suffers, and how the ills inflicted on the blacks by the whites go much deeper than the ills inflicted during slavery, or post slavery acts such as lynching. It is almost as if the black psyche has been impregnated by the comportments of the whites towards them. The white masters used to separate black enslaved families and mothers and their children; the blacks now have no scruples duplicating that practice. Most women do not nurture their own children and find it just as natural. The white masters used to mistreat the slaves physically; the black males now duplicate the same behavior towards their women.

Similar Walker’s previous novels, *The Temple of My Familiar* is also a saga of pain, suffering and humiliation caused by the racial and sexual hegemony. With the help of many characters and incidents of past and present she narrates the helpless condition of black people and their motherland. Here Walker correlates the sufferings of black people with each other and tells their bitter experiences through the characters like Lissie who has witnessed centuries of racial and sexual oppression. Lissie shares her racial memories of the time when she was a child. She saw that in spite of having so much fertility and greenery in their fields they were forced by white colonialists to be the victim of malnutrition.

Their own created crops and nutrition were snatched from them and they were thrown in to the hell of hunger and starvation. As she says to Suwelo, “In those days, in slavery, the people were whipped for tasting the milk or stealing the greens or eating the fruit” (55). And their white masters were healthy because of the sickness of black people. Their eyesight was good because they snatched all the nourishment from the black eyes
and bodies and left them physically and mentally blind. And above all they were happy and smiling because of the misery and tears of the black people. It was like they were on one side of a glass and black people were on the other, and they could have no real impact on what happened on black side, the side of the unknown, but they could have a great deal of impact on these black people.

Further Lissie reveals the greed of men for power and for supremacy. Men used the benefit of the weakness of the body of women in the days of child bearing and presented him stronger, one who has brought his woman in such a painful condition, as says Lissie, “when man saw he could own one woman and her children, he became greedy and wanted as many as he could get” (87).

Later this tradition of having more than one wife became the culture of Africa as we can also see in the Olinka society. They treated them like commodities and prostitutes. Many men to satisfy their sexual hunger used one woman. As in one of her lives Lissie faces the humiliation from her lover, for whom she left her family, culture and even her existence like Lynne and became the prey of the anger of society and of her own parents. As she expresses her painful experience of one life: “He denounced me to the village and my parents turned me out. After that I was the lowest sort of prostitute for the men of the village, including the husband I’d loved, until I died of infection and exposure at the age of eighteen” (88).

By narrating to Suwelo her traumatic and painful experiences of slavery, Lissie reveals the wounds of all those poor black women who suffered not only for their fair sex but also for their dark color, not only by the white devils but also by the evilness presented in their own husbands, fathers and brothers. After the death of her father at a
very early age her uncle sold Lissie to the white master along with her mother and other siblings. They were raped, beaten and crushed under the wicked feet of racial and sexual afflictions not only physically but mentally as well. Only for some coins they were forced to lose their self-dignity for their male counterparts. And whenever they tried to resist their oppression they were oppressed more forcefully and in a more heinous way. Lissie tells that this destruction of women at the hands of men had no limit. They were suffering this abuse of their owns from a long time.

Racial hegemony has broken and degenerated the black man so much that in order to fulfill his daily needs he decided to destroy his family and to sell his wife and children; quite useless for him. Another cause of this sexual exploitation of black women by black men was their lost male ego and a sense of inferiority under the brutal feet of white masters. They were living a life of colonization or slavery and so they choose to colonize the body, mind and soul of their own wives, beloved, sisters and daughters; helpless creatures of this world. The poor condition of black women in slavery is reflected, when Lissie recalls the horrible sight of her mother as a slave: “The white men sent in a couple of brutes to drag her out by her heels- one of them held a rag to his nose as they dragged her- and place her body on a cart and carry it away. I envied her. I pitied myself. I did not know how to ask the strangers or even my sisters and brothers to kill me” (65).

Whiteanarchists cut the hair of these poor black people, symbol of their culture and tradition. These poor black women were beaten and raped by several boatmen. They used to lie on the ship like dead bodies. As the consequence of consistent rapes, these helpless women gave birth to many fatherless children and faced the hellish pain of pregnancy and childbirth in such uncongenial atmosphere. They were treated like lifeless
objects and were given a brand name as a particular name or token for recognition. They were thrown on the heap of other lifeless slaves quite naked because there was no space even to sit. But newborn babies were not allowed on the ship. For being useless they were simply smashed on the ground by their own fathers (white rapists), in front of their mothers, and some of them were left on the trial to be rotten in the mud of slavery. These poor mothers were forcefully separated from their children.

After this sorrowful journey of blood shedding moans and traumas, they were forced to sing and dance in a very ridiculous way. Not only this, but to increase their misery lot of buckets of salt water were splashed on their open wounds, they were ordered to dance to keep themselves warm and for this dance, a whip striking at their feet was their sole source of inspiration.

With the seeds of racism and sexism these women were sold in to eternal slavery with unborn little slaves in their wombs. These unborn, fatherless children, consequences of the lust of some wicked blacks as well as white men, were pushed into the hell of eternal slavery even before their birth. So they were like free vouchers for these white masters. All the siblings of Lissie along with other black children were parted from each other and left alone to suffer the oppression, and exploitation of white masters.

Zeda is another black woman who reveals her painful tales of racial and sexual exploitation. In the fable of Zeda about her lover and Carlotta’s father Jesus, Walker again reveals the suffering of black men under the matrix of racial realities and the twice exploitation of black woman for her sex as well as for her color. The celebration of black bodies under white territory was unbearable for them. And thus they poured their anger
on the loving couple and snatched every ray of hope, love, happiness and satisfaction from them.

Zeda was gang raped for violating the white law. Her body and soul were crushed under the heavy burden of racism and sexism. On the other hand the body of Jesus was cut in to pieces and thrown over Zeda. And for so many days she lived alone with the pieces of that body that once loved her so much, in a very pathetic condition locked in a dark and narrow room of dense and fearful forest.

Walker uses the flashback technique and connects the past with the present by creating characters like Olivia; daughter of Color Purple’s Celie. Olivia remembers her distorted childhood and how her grandfather became the victim of racism. She tells about the father of her mother Celie, and the racial exploitation present in the black society from a long time and remembers how the whites lynched her grandfather and as an effect of this terrorist murder her grandmother had lost her mind. Olivia knows that she and her brother is the product of the rape of their mother by her stepfather, a man much admired by black and white in the community where he lived. The Africa that she encountered along with her brother and charity parents had already been raped of much of its sustenance. Here Walker in the painful voice of Olivia describes the destructive effects of white colonization on Africa and its people: “Its people had been sold into slavery. Considering both internal and external “markets,” this “trade” had been going on for well over a thousand years; and had no doubt begun as the early civilization of Africa were falling in to decline, around the six- hundreds” (148).

She further tells about the disgusting and humiliating attitude of these colonizers for blacks. It looks from their insulting gaze as if to rule over these uncivilized people,
was a heavy burden for whites. They treated these native Africans as aliens on their own land. Their intention was not good and that’s why in order to usurp the fertile and productive land of Africa they made every possible effort to snatch their land, and that every thing which was useful for the rule of white empire. To give commands to the native Olinka people in their own language these colonizers have learnt the native language. Not only this many black soldiers were accused of humiliating the chastity of white women and for these claims were lynched publicly. The bodies of black people, who have died in hunger, were useful for white student to cut them in to pieces and to do experiments and laugh at the helplessness of blacks even after their deaths.

In fact, these white oppressors could not tolerate black men’s struggle for success and therefore turned their developing steps into deteriorating steps and pushed them again into the ditch of everlasting failure that was the biggest cause of white men’s success, satisfaction and entertainment.

Fanny’s stepsister Nzingha also shares with Fanny her bitter racial experiences in an American University, where she was treated in a very derogatory way for being a student from Africa, a slave country. She reveals the evil intention of the white Professors who try their best to spoil the mother image of Africa, the pious mother who was worshipped by her children like a goddess because to the white Professor her face was ugly like a witch; with her dreadful locked hair of snake. For them she was so horrible that men used to turn to stone to see her. Basically this disgusting description is the result of the racial superiority complex of the whites that was unable to see a slave land worshipped. From these experiences of Nzingha, Fanny learns that whites were cunning enough not only to spoil and loot the life of black people but also their mother
worshipping tradition by spoiling the image of pious African mother in the eyes of coming generations in order to break the spirit of rising black youth.

Fanny’s psychic condition, her conversations and visit with the dead spirits basically are the malicious effects of racism. Her horrific dreams are the result of her and her people’s long afflicted souls. She is not able to forget the oppression of her ancestors. From time to time panic memories from her childhood to present age torture her a lot and make her sick. In her childhood, the tender age, Fanny was separated from her white friend Tanya in the name of racial discrimination. This poison of racism separated two small angels who were quite unaware of their colors. And this cruel racial beating of Fanny affected her in her childhood when she was quite unknown to the word “racism”. Her psyche is distorted so much that to see whites eating, she feels hungry and starving. She feels as if they are cannibals and satisfying their hunger by eating the black flesh. She feels their teeth on her leg, but sometimes these teeth turn in to a cold chain, a chain of racism that has bound every black sufferer in a narrow shell of nastiness and anguish. Fanny’s crisis is the crisis of an oppressed woman, but also the crisis of a black person living in the gun sights of white racism who does not want to turn into a hate-filled racist herself. A renowned writer J.M. Coatzee critically analysis the condition of Fanny, in his famous essay “The Beginnings of (Wo)man in Africa”: “It had become like a scale or a web over her eyes. Everywhere she looked, she saw it. Racism turned her thoughts to violence. Violence made her sick”(184).

In the words of Ola, father of Fanny, Walker reveals the soreness and distress of a black father in a racist society. He shares her experiences with his daughters and depicts the terrible face of long prevailed racism and its hellish effect on black children. As says
Ola, “The whites had done terrible things to us…they were destroying our children, who were starving to death—their bodies, their minds, their dreams—right before our eyes” (307). The greedy and lustful eyes of these white colonizers robbed the virginity and all the jewels like diamonds, gold, uranium, plutonium and other precious gems from the womb of African land and left her quite naked and barren. Whites wounded the people as well as land of Africa by digging it again and again for their selfish motive and to prove them as superior power of the world. Blacks were unaware about this treasure because they never imagined digging their motherland. As Ola says, “Africans thought of the earth as a body that needs all its organs and bones and blood in order to function properly” (308). It seems that perhaps to rule over the blacks and to terrorize them was the need of whites in order to feel powerful.

Along with racism, Walker dives deep to explore the matrix of sexual realities in this novel. Beside the painful sexist experiences of Lissie and Zeda, other women like Fanny, Carlotta and Nzingha too feel the pricks of sexual oppression by their own husbands. Where as Fanny finds the institution of marriage like a chain for her freedom and liberty, Arveyda, who is in love with the mother of his wife Carlotta, gives her a terrible shock.

So this was totally a male dominated society and that was why a great black female author of that time Bessie Head was forced to conceal her identity. In spite of touching so many hearts by her writings she remained in the darkness of male oppression. She knew that to reveal the name might be a cause of danger for her and her works, because patriarchal system of that society could not tolerate the success of a woman. Ola, father of Fanny reveals the pain of that writer; “She is paying for who she is with her life
but don’t we all”? (182) Not only in Africa but in America also women writers need their picture to make others feel their existence.

_Possessing the secret of joy_, Walker’s next novel is about an African tribal woman whose life as an immigrant to United States is haunted by the trauma of her genital mutilation. Like all her other novels, here also walker reflects various aspects of racism and sexism. The chief victim Tashi; an African woman of fictional Olinkan tribe chooses to undergo female circumcision (female genital mutilation); a taboo made by male dominated society for their women. Here, Walker minutely examines the hellish and destructive effects of this ritual on the body and soul of Tashi and in wide sense on all women. It depicts the horrific physical and mental consequences of this heinous ritual. It shows us the way that women were emotionally deadened, locking up a weeping child inside their hearts, because it was the only way of their survival.

Tashi chooses this ritual to make her destiny. But in reality, she has no free or informed choice. She does it to fit in, to stop the teasing of other women, to become a proper woman herself, to honor the traditions of her people and her culture, to mark herself out as distinctly Olinkan and to give herself the chance of becoming a wife. She believes that it will improve her lot in life. She is not aware about the far-reaching, terrible consequences of this honor. In reality there was no choice- all was inevitable, all was arranged and Tashi herself had little to do but to follow the tracks laid down to her by others.

Beside circumcision there is the other much more dangerous practice – genital infibulations, they leave just a small orifice, through which the menstrual blood can flow. But frequently this orifice cannot let out everything. So a mixture of blood develops
inside. As a consequence a painful infection develops, which can cause sterility. But that is not all. The woman is cut and traumatized, so intercourse becomes very painful and there create lot of problems related to pregnancy and childbirth. An area, which is normally elastic, has become a cicatrix area. As a result, many women tear, at the top and at the bottom. If they are in hospital, there may be some relaxation but women, who give birth at home, are the worst sufferer. They are left with a tear at the top and bottom, at the top causing massive hemorrhaging, at the bottom even worse- the tear can enlarge, extending to the anus, so babies are affected, too.

The psyche of Tashi is so much distorted by this ritual of female circumcision that she even can’t see a razor; that to her was always associated with men, with beards and with barber tools. And that’s why she feels a kind of fear in using this symbolic instrument (of the helplessness of women before the men made ritual) even to shave her legs. Tashi had to suffer a lot because of this ritual. Her sexual life with Adam was totally affected. It was full of pain, bleeding and tears rather than pleasure and smiles. As says Tashi; “Each time he touched me, I bled. Each time he moved against me, I winced. There was nothing he could do to me that did not hurt.”(61) Walker touches the pain and suffering of Tashi after going through this oppressive Olinkan ritual or after having a stamp of Olinka origin.

Tashi suffers severe pain during sex and during menstruation, and perhaps most of all during the birth of her son, Benny. Although she has all the advantages of Western medicine at her disposal, she is made to feel like a freak by the doctors at the American hospital where she gives birth. They study her mutilation with impersonal fascination. Benny is also slightly retarded as a result of his difficult birth. Later when Tashi (Evelyn
in the U.S.) becomes pregnant again, she has an abortion rather than suffer through the humiliation of another childbirth. The abortionist suggests her to have this second child by Caesarean section, but she cannot bear the thought of being held down and cut open, as it is too close to her traumatic mutilation experience. After years of Jungian psychoanalysis treatment, Tashi begins to come to terms with the madness brought on by her mutilation. She learns, much to her horror, that female genital mutilation came to Africa with excised and infibulated enslaved African women, and that it was used on white women.

To Tashi, this revelation comes as a terrible shock. Tashi’s psychological tension along with her failure to forget Dura’s scream and death, lead her to the point of murdering M’Lissa, the aged circumciser of the Olinka village.

Through the barbaric exoticism of such practices as clitoridectomy and infibulations, Walker presents us with the real suffering and unwillingness of their very victims, as narrated by themselves although Walker’s own voice and political stand are obviously behind them. For Walker, these rituals should not be seen merely as something exotic, but as a projection of the familiar Western male dominance and the white man’s hunger for colonial conquest. Through these sexist rituals, the female Nature is penetrated, conquered, and manipulated.

In this novel we even see how in the Olinka village, where carrying the water and procreation are a woman’s job, the elders see a justification of such ritual from the very beginning of the world. They say that it was God who first excised or circumcised the Earth. Just as God could be excused for cutting the Earth because it resembled masculinity, so could men. This is incidentally a reversal of the Freudian theory of penis
envy; the removal of the female genitals can be seen as clitoris envy instead. If God liked it tight and it was His wisdom that created the *tsunga* (circumciser), then men must obviously follow suit and be thankful for such a precious possession. They think that the woman, whose body they acknowledge has been given to them to be their sustenance forever. Thus religion is claimed as the ultimate reason for excision and its legitimate justification. Here again Walker’s incisive criticism comes to the fore in the words of one of her characters that states that, “religion is an elaborate excuse for what man has done to women and to the earth” (235).

This ritual of women’s circumcision was totally a man made taboo to fulfill his selfish motives and remove his hypocritical fears. As Tashi says that everyone in her society was aware about this fact that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they’d soon touch her thighs and as a consequence she would become masculine and arouse herself. And this condition of woman will create a great problem for man. And because of this mind set no Olinka man would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised.

To hear the suffering of women and poor children was like a taboo for these black Olinka people. Perhaps they didn’t want to wipe the tears caused by their own lashes. To talk about anything in favor of women was strictly prohibited for these powerful men. They talk about this as if it is a very sacred thing and therefore they don’t want to expose the mystery. Or it may be that they cannot and will not be bothered to listen to what is said about an accepted tradition of which they are a part. These unnatural sufferings and fearful screams of these poor victims of a male made ritual of colonizing the body and soul of their wives, soothes the heart and ears of these insensitive caretakers of society.
Besides the painful story of Tashi, we also find this matrix of sexism in the narration of the story of Torabe, a black African man, who had many wives. A few of them died in childbirth from infection. One died by snake biting and other one by drowning herself. Then he got married with a girl very younger to him, who ran away finding herself unable to bear the sexual exploitation. His wife had gone to her parents and requested for help to bring her out from the brutal oppression of Torabe. Her husband had cut her open with a hunting knife on their wedding night, and gave her no chance to come out of this trauma. She tells about these sexual wounds to her parents in hope of some soothing balm, but on the contrary her father, (a male) ordered her mother to send her back to her husband to fulfill her duties of a wife and to serve her husband in every worse condition. At one place Adam recalls the sexual and mental exploitation done by Torabe with his wives:

“He had not loved the majority of his wives; in fact he didn’t even hate them; he thought of them as servants in the most disposable sense. He barely remembered their names. But the young woman who ran away, the wife who drowned herself, he had at least thought he loved. Unfortunately, for him, “love” and frequent forceful sex were one.” For him, his wives were “like leather: the more you chew it, the softer it gets.” (166)

Later this sexist society threw Torabe out, because he loosened control over one of his wives. The family of that poor girl along with her was also murdered brutally for not following the norms of society, and rejecting the role of a wife as supposed in Olinka society.

Thus in this novel Walker has used the taboo of female circumcision as a tool of destruction for poor women in a particular society of Africa to reveal their sexual, mental
and physical exploitation. Here, Tashi, a protagonist and chief victim of this ritual, in her pain, madness and fear represents all those poor black women who were cut and blooded by their own mothers and aunts in order to be fit for men. In an author's note at the end of Possessing the Secret of Joy, Alice Walker writes that between ninety million and one hundred million girls and women alive today have undergone the procedure, which varies from simple excision of the clitoris - thus denying the victim sexual pleasure - to a full-scale scraping away of the labia.

At last to conclude this chapter we can say that racial and sexual afflictions are interwoven as the result of long prevailed white colonization. In most of her novels Walker shows the racial and sexual exploitation of the weak by the powerful as of black by white and of female by male. Racism and sexism are pervasive, oppressive, and dehumanizing, which brought with them the destruction of African spirit. Basically, Racism and racial oppression have been features of everyday life for Blacks in the United States for more than 350 years. But the persistence of racism is not inevitable, and racism, certainly in its modern form, has not always existed. Far from being the unavoidable result of interaction between different peoples, racism and racial oppression emerged in Europe's transition from feudalism to capitalism. Ancient and feudal societies before capitalism were able to do without this form of oppression.
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