Conclusion

For we can do nothing substantial toward changing our course on the planet, a destructive one, without rousing ourselves, individual by individual, and bringing our small, imperfect stones to the pile.

(Alice Walker, AWLSxxiii)

The thesis traces Walker’s personality as a multi-faceted conglomeration of diverse ideas, values, movements, and socio-cultural mores which subsequently gets reflected in her writings. Her writings bear testimony to her battle against the forces of oppression in all their manifestations. Her socio-cultural and geographical context plays a key role in informing her fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Denise Ackermann states: “Context as a determining factor however remains, as women of different races and classes seek to understand the meaning of liberation, equality and justice for themselves in their respective milieus.”

The thesis has examined the ways in which Walker’s indigenous spirituality can provide a holistic framework which integrates the personal, spiritual, cosmic, and political with the needs of the earth and all sentient life. My research incorporates the ideas of many contemporary writers and feminist scholars such as Rosemary Ruether, Starhawk, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Gloria Anzaldua, which offer a challenging pleasure of spiritual insight. Some feminist scholars offer premises and draw conclusions that are radical departures from the conventional mores. Walker also moves toward a new feminist interpretation of life, values, and experiences that cannot be studied under the old rubrics. Though her writings have emerged as a series of vignettes and impressions in no particular order, yet I have attempted to present her literary mosaic as a trajectory to her spiritual growth and transformation. Walker links womanhood and spirituality with her black female ancestors whose artistic and creative abilities are an expression of their spiritual growth. The thesis has explored black women’s literary and artistic works which have provided both inspiration and model for her literary pursuit. Her writings are not mere an exercise in hegemonic deconstruction, rather, more importantly, these are the empowering assertion of a black woman’s voice. Her literary corpus provides a critique of deleterious forces coercing black women, women of color, and all the marginalized people to accept their ‘otherness’ in
relation to the dominant Western paradigm. Walker creates fresh discursive and practical paradigms in her oeuvre by “talking back” \textit{(Borderlands 75)} to the oppressive structures of domination. Gloria Anzaldua asserts her voice in favour of those who speak up against injustice (‘the wild tongues’). She asserts: “Wild tongues can’t be tamed. They can only be cut out” \textit{(Borderlands 76)}. This opening metaphor sets the stage for analyses and arguments Anzaldúa constructs regarding the importance of language, linguistic identity, and cultural identity. The same rebellious streak is the hallmark of Walker’s writings as she sets out to question and challenge the hegemonic discursive practices of the white supremacist culture which seeks to erase the linguistic as well as cultural identities of the people of color.

I have made an attempt to deal with the vital issues which include the narratives of black women suffering domestic violence, sexual abuse, the side-effects of somatology\footnote{In the thesis, the Western representation of the body of Saartjie Bartmann as ‘abnormal’ has been discussed and it is referred to as the ‘side-effects of somatology’. For detailed information about Somatology, Glossary can be consulted.} (as in the narrative of Saartjie Bartmann), and psychological trauma. The thesis has tried to foreground the plight of poor women of African or native American descent, or cultural hybrids such as black Indians. To enhance the dialogical networking among women of color or people at the periphery of the mainstream society all over the globe, the anthropological and ethnic studies assist Walker in her feminist and ecological concerns. Her religious syncretism encourages her to embrace the cultural, symbolic, and ritual diversity dispersed throughout the globe. Walker’s eclectic approach draws on the abundant resources of African-American culture as well as native American heritage. The thesis has studied Walker’s interweaving of the past with the present knowledge construction, and such fusing spread throughout her writing creates a dynamic and dialogic interweaving which shapes the lives of Africans, native Americans, and black Indians inter-generationally. Her cultural and spiritual hybridity bears countenance to the fact that she is open to learning and expanding her horizons. She asserts: “I’m just not interested in labels. I find all of them constrictive. They’re hard to wear . . . there are many teachers in the world today of many different stripes. The world is a marvellous place of learning, from every possible direction” \textit{(TWC 306)}. Her connectedness to all life on the planet stems from her deep relation to nature:

Self-realization is certainly up there, and of course true self-realization comes with a realization of the connectedness to all, the inseparability of the self and the all. That
leads one to understand oneself as an earthling, not an American, Canadian, African, or Indian. Beyond that I realize myself as the cosmos, the universe, the whole thing. . . . As I sit and look out at the trees, I know clearly one day that’s where I’ll be. (TWC 306-07)

Walker abides by the credo that sensuality, creativity, and mutuality and reciprocity of all life, form the basis of a sustainable earth and all-inclusive spirituality. In an interview by Astrid H. Roemer, Walker maintains:

It all seems pretty spiritual, but really it's just so natural. I am connected to nature, and I feel spiritual. For me there is no beginning and no end. There are only circles. The so-called Primitive Peoples, natives, Aboriginals, even went naked because they knew they already possessed everything—since there’s no such thing as actual possession. Civilization failed in this. Accumulating, saving, in short, forever collecting only leads to the destruction of nature and, in the end, of human beings. (245-46)

As the thesis has tried to study Walker’s spirituality under the rubric of ecofeminism, Walker’s upholding of Shamanism can be taken as exemplary of her ecofeminist approach. Orenstein maintains that “Shamanism is neither androcentric nor anthropocentric. In this sense, it is ecofeminist, for it neither recognizes one gender to be superior to the other nor place humans outside of or above the cosmic cycles or the natural ecosystems” (173).

The study underscores the eclecticism and radical implications of Walker’s spiritual vision critically. Despite Walker’s revolutionary stance as a social, political, and environmental activist, the thesis critically studies whether Walker is enmeshed in the essentialist, idealizing, and romanticizing tendencies of the spiritual/cultural ecofeminism. Some ecofeminists including Rosemary Ruether seem to be essentializing the connection between women and nature, as Ruether quotes:

Some ecofeminists do claim that there is some truth in the ideology that women are “closer to nature.” They see this closeness as having been distorted by patriarchy to dominate both women and nature as inferior to male humans. But this distortion is
rooted in an essential truth that women by virtue of their child-bearing functions are more attuned to the rhythms of nature, more in touch with their own bodies, more holistic. Women need to claim this affinity with nature and take the lead in creating a new earth-based spirituality and practice of care for the earth. (qtd. in IEWR 93)

A few spiritual or cultural ecofeminists have been criticized for perpetuating essentialist tendencies of equating women with nature because of their reproductive or nurturing qualities. The Goddess Movement’s tendency to emphasize the procreative and nurturing aspects of women by naturalizing or reifying what may be socially created or constructed, its romanticizing of the connection between women's menstrual cycles and the lunar cycles, and its belief that the primordial image of divinity was female, are indicative of its ‘essentializing’ trend. However, it requires a careful and deep understanding of their beliefs to be able to understand the essence of the Goddess Movement. At many places in her fiction, Walker’s celebration of the connection between women and nature is explicit. She believes humans to be housing both masculine as well as feminine self but keeps the ‘feminine’ at a higher pedestal as she writes:

The male effort to separate Wisdom from the realm of the Feminine is not only brutal and unattractive but it will always fail, though this may take, as with Buddhism, thousands of years. This is simply because the Feminine is Wisdom; it is also the Soul. Since each and every person is born with an internal and well as an eternal Feminine, just as everyone is born with an internal and eternal Masculine, this is not a problem for those who insist on forcing humans into gender roles. Which makes it easier for them to be controlled. (WOWF 100)

Walker clearly seems to be reiterating the ‘nurturing’, ‘caring’ and ‘ecological’ traits to be a part of the essence of ‘womanhood’. Though she maintains that males as well as females carry both feminine and masculine properties within their selves, the labeling of traits as either ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ again perpetuates the dichotomized gender identities as naturally begotten qualities belonging to the separate male and female spheres. She writes: “The intuitive part of us, the deep feminine, whether in male or female, knows when we are
being ridiculed, laughed at, told to forget about being women, or having a Feminine, being wild, or being free; led to sleep if not to the slaughter” (WOWF61). In TMF, Lissie’s recollection of ancient times when matriarchal societies existed in synergism until the males usurped the power of women and dethroned Goddesses in favor of a transcendent male deity, is characteristic of Walker’s faith in the pre-patriarchal societies and Goddess-based religions. Nevertheless, Walker’s understanding of the feminine and masculine seems to have stemmed from a dialectical relationship between the two which are in continual shaping of one’s personality. She does not regard the feminine and masculine spheres as polar opposites. Walker seems to have borrowed this spiritual connection from many religions of the world including paganism and Buddhism. Writing about sources of Buddhism for ecology and equality, Ruether posits: “There is no split of mind and matter, self and nature, but all are one, in dynamic inter-connection. There is no hierarchy of a transcendent male deity outside of the cosmos, or human over nature, but only the flux of impermanent beings in changing interrelationship” (IEWR 59). As has been discussed in the previous chapters, Walker’s love for Buddhism also has a deep impact on her understanding of the concepts of feminine and masculine – an understanding which does not create hierarchical dualisms.

Besides questioning the essentialist tendency of romanticizing the connection between women and nature, Walker’s views regarding the notion of an ideal black motherhood have been explored. Are mothers ‘naturally’ more caring and loving or is their nurturing aspect a social construct? In Meridian, Meridian Hill continues to be haunted by the guilt of having abandoned her child, and the pressing guilt robs her of peace of mind. The fact that Meridian has to come up to the societal expectations of an ideal black motherhood seems to take its toll on her. Walker’s standpoint seems ambiguous here since Meridian is much down-pressed with this guilt and her civil rights activism is a way of catharsis for her. Apart from the guilt felt towards her child, Meridian feels the shame for shattering her mother’s self too: “It was for stealing her mother’s serenity, for shattering her mother’s emerging self, that Meridian felt guilty from the very first, though she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault” (Meridian 43).

As Walker’s own relationship with her daughter Rebecca has been ambiguous, following their estranged relations, it is not clear whether Walker wants to celebrate the romanticized notion of motherhood or is critical of it. In Meridian, Meridian’s mother feels that her autonomy has been stifled and her freedom restricted due to the birth of her children.
Relating the pressures of motherhood, Walker makes a statement in the person of Meridian’s mother: “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” (Meridian 42). Walker had seven siblings, and she had felt and experienced the hardships faced by her mother as well as by her. Though her own relationship with her mother was full of love and respect, yet she portrays many characters in her novels which have ambiguous relations with their mothers. However, some of them reach a stage of conciliation towards the climax.

In her academia as well as activism, Walker tries to hail the native Americans as true ecologists attuned to a life of harmony and balance with the processes of nature. In Meridian, Meridian’s father loves Indians and this feeling for native Indians is rooted in the Indians’ reciprocal love for land. However, it seems that Walker attempts to idealize and romanticize the facet of Indians as being environmentally more sensitive than other races or peoples. Going through the historical records, it becomes clear that though Indians possessed a deeper understanding of the rhythms of earth, there cannot be any generalizing notion that they are true ecologists, since land over-use or misuse was done by Indians too since history bears testimony to this fact. In the words of David R. Lewis:

Indians were never ecologists—something that refers to a highly abstract and systematic science—but they were careful students of their functional environments, bound by material and cultural needs and constraints, striving for maximum sustained yield, not maximum production. They possessed an elaborate land ethic based on use, reciprocity, and balance. Those attitudes persist today and contribute to the debate within and between Indian communities, corporations, environmentalists, and governments about the future of Indian peoples and environments. (“Essay on native American Environmental Issues”)

However, Walker does not completely idealize her African or native American heritage, or consider it exemplary of her ‘Utopian’ vision which becomes clear after a critical

examination of her novels. _PSJ_ is a glaring example of her critique of the circumcision practice still prevalent in many parts of Africa and the Middle East. She voices her dissent unabashedly knowing well that many tribes in Africa consider genital mutilation practice as a mark of their unique tribal identity. However, Walker is sensitive to the physical and psychological damage inflicted on the innocent girls which can ruin their social as well as sexual lives forever. In collaboration with Pratibha Parmar, Walker created a documentary film _Warrior Marks_ featuring in detail the compulsive and oppressive practice which has destroyed the self-esteem and integrity of millions of women, calling for an end to circumcision which ‘scapegoats’ women as the bearers of the distinct tribal traditions in Africa as well as other parts of the world. Walker is not reluctant to depict the existing social milieu in Africa which sanctions the domination of men and denies free agency to women. In one of her letters to Celie in _CP_, Nettie details the social fabric of the Olinka tribe where polygamy is an established order and women show over-indulgence towards their husbands as any other kind of friendship with a man beyond marriage invites harsh criticism and ostracism in the Olinka society. She reveals: “No wonder the men are often childish. And a grown child is a dangerous thing, especially since, among the Olinka, the husband has life and death power over the wife. If he accuses one of his wives of witchcraft or infidelity, she can be killed” (_CP_ 151).

The thesis has examined Walker’s challenge against the body politics played out by the Western culture to keep women in a subservient position, though giving it a subtle camouflaging of fashion and health-care, which is just another way to control women’s bodies. According to Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, Foucault’s theory on the discursive construction of the body has been adapted by many feminists to bring out the patriarchal roots behind the construction of “the useful, manipulable body – what he calls the ‘docile body’” (8). The study explores and critiques the politics of surveillance and self-surveillance which is deeply implicated in constituting a set of normativities towards which female bodies aspire: “The practices of diet, keep-fit, fertility control, fashion, health care procedures and so on are all examples of disciplinary controls which literally produce bodies that are their concern” (Shildrick and Price 8). According to Walker, giving birth is an “ecstatic sense of a woman’s power” (_NTH_ 46), but women have lost that connection with their bodies because of medical intervention which has come to control this natural process. In _NTH_, while exploring caves and their petroglyphs on their journey through Colorado River, Kate and Sue ponder the triumphant feeling of giving birth to a child. However, Sue expresses
ironically; “Now most women actually thought the doctor delivered the baby” (NTH46). Through Kate, Walker verbalizes her stance about the fad of straightening one’s hair as a tool to humiliate and abuse one’s own self. This comes as retaliation against the consumerist practices of the white fashion industry which entices women (especially black women) to go against their grain, and get their curly hair straightened to expect assimilation and acceptance in a capitalist society which borders only on mercenary interests. Walker’s reclaiming of herself as a black woman, in particular, and as a representative of assertive black womanhood in general, can be found interspersed throughout her fiction. Her advocacy of reproductive and abortion rights of women have an autobiographical trace which makes her cognizant of the plight of women in general, and makes her stand firm in her conviction by taking up such issues in her writings as well as activism.

Another important aspect of the study is that it focuses not only on the literal interpretation of the beliefs and values related to Christianity or Goddess-based religions, rather an attempt has been made to delve into the symbolic meanings of what it means to be a follower of Christian traditions or Goddess-reverencing religions according to Walker. The emphasis has been placed on revision, reinterpretation, and reclamation of histories from an ecofeminist perspective. Walker’s attempt to erase the boundaries between politics and spirituality as well as between sexuality and spirituality are subsumed into a broader version of spirituality which does not indulge in self-abnegation. Though Walker’s writings may seem to be somewhat colored in ‘essentialism’ because of the foregrounding and celebration of the connection between women and nature, it also becomes clear that her radical stance paves for a new interpretation of traditional concepts of sin, salvation, sexuality, death, rebirth, and time. After a careful dissection of her fiction, it becomes clear that ‘love’ and ‘sexuality’ are as much ‘spiritual’ for Walker as any theology is. Walker is critical of hypocritical and narrow interpretation of sexuality as has been handed down to the Christians by The Bible. Sexuality has often been vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. In Walker’s own words: “I think of sexuality as something that, like spirit, has been colonized. It’s the Bible again, that book that has done so much damage to women’s self-image and their notion of what they’re about. It says something like, “Your desire will just be for your husband”” (TWC131). The thesis has tried to study Walker’s erasure of distinction between sexuality and spirituality as they are capable of overlapping and merging into a complete whole without any split. Audre Lorde explains:
The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

(55)

Walker hails the unfettered spirit and boundless energy of women. In “A Woman Is Not a Potted Plant”, Walker writes: “. . .A woman/ is wilderness/ unbounded/ between each breath/ only because/ she *is* free/ and not creepervine/ or tree/ Not even honeysuckle/ Or bee” (AWLS105-06).

Walker’s holistic approach relies on complete inclusivity. Though a victim of racial oppression, she does not lash her anger against all the white people. Walker is critical of the white supremacist culture, yet her inclusivity allows her to bring the whites too into her mould, and not exclude them in revenge. Walker’s subversive voice does not spare the elites sitting in their ivory towers as their talks are full of empty rhetoric and their concern for human suffering is merely superficial. In *NTH*, Walker criticizes the apathy of the dominant affluent classes:

Everybody arriving in limos, *trying to* [italics mine] look serious and important. But nobody wanted to smell or see anybody else. And by now the human smells of fear and suffering made humans angry. They thought they could wipe out fear and suffering if they destroyed their scent. Fear and suffering, that is always the smell of enemy. (81)

Though Walker’s candor could be unsettling for some people, yet her dedication and commitment in life and art surpass all other concerns. Walker’s book *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horrors in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel* is a searing contemplation on genocidal violence directed at women and children, among others. In this book, Walker also establishes parallels between the events in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Gaza with the Holocaust and Trail of Tears. Her ecofeminist
spirituality relies not only on her academism but also on her relentless activism. Though Walker’s writings and journalism have catapulted her to literary fame, yet she has not deterred from the challenges of an activist lifestyle. Instead, she has turned her attention to global inequities, injustices, and environmental devastation. She has protested the South African apartheid, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and female genital mutilation. Her independent thinking and conviction allow her to speak her mind uninhibitedly. She creates awareness regarding global injustices among her readers through her blog which constantly features her resistance in the form of her poems, articles, open letters, and shared links. According to Walker, it is critically important that we engage the nation in conversation and debate to avoid endless war in Iraq. Walker shares “Eight Things to Know about the Iraq Crisis” on her website and urges people to share the same with their family and friends in anticipation of a concrete positive change. In 2012, Walker declined to have CP published in Israel in protest of the Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. In her letter to the publisher, she compared the situation to South African apartheid and Jim Crow in the American South, claiming that conditions in Israel and Palestine were even worse.

To encapsulate, a veritable array of feminist and ecological concerns find expression in her activism as she continues participating in anti-war and anti-nuclear protests. Walker’s literary oeuvre has been one of her many forms of self-expression and protests against myriad forms of oppression, and it bears a strong impact on the sociological, ecological, political, and spiritual values in the contemporary era by re-orienting the minds of people in a way so as to sensitize and mobilize them towards redressing the current social and ecological issues.

Her deep engagement with understanding women’s epistemologies has allowed her to explore religion and spirituality in a fluid way, and has encouraged critical engagement of deeper theological questions. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy write about the need for the inclusion of spirituality in the mainstream academia: “And while spirituality in ecofeminism has been raised, the spiritualist wing of ecofeminism and its literary representations deserve far more attention . . .” (12). Walker’s literary representation of her spirituality has filled this void in the mainstream academia. Ursula King discusses that many women writers have explored women’s insights and experiences in their works, hence, broadening the scope of spirituality by the inclusion of sexuality, and detailing their intimate relations with one another. King maintains:
The discovery of women’s self and women’s spiritual quest is a process, a journey of exploration, discovery and adventure which has been mapped by many contemporary women writers whose novels explore in many imaginative ways women’s new experience, questions and insights. These may be concerned with women’s search for independence, strength and self-assurance, but also with women’s intimacy and mutuality with others, revealing deep connections between embodiment, sexuality and spirituality through the use of metaphor and story, which often reveal a more powerful picture than can be conveyed through abstract academic analysis. (30)

Walker’s dynamic spirituality has the potential to bring richer and deeper insights into the field of theology, feminism, and environmentalism. Her preoccupation with such counter-discursive mode of thinking and her challenge to the (distorted and twisted) perceptions of the past seem to be a wake-up call to tie the frayed ends, which may lead in the direction of liberation for all the oppressed including women, indigenous people, and nature. There is a vital hope that her writings will create a dialogic interweaving of theory and criticism. At the same time, her activism will continue to lead relentless wars in the global scenario against the forces of oppression and inequality. I have attempted to sum up the present day crisis faced by women (and all oppressed people) as well as nature and the much-needed drive to fight oppression in these lines:

The web of oppression
The web of silence
Diffused is the muted play of violence
An intricate design
Ingeniously planned
Dissent, resistance
All banned
The force of dominion
The play of power
The spectacle of violence
from the ivory tower
Dwindling is the ray of hope
In the dark, do we grope?

Amidst this darkness
Come.....kindle the light
Enlighten the inner self
Do not cringe back in fright
You are ‘Power’ personified
You are strong
Pull out the drive to redress the wrong!