CHAPTER - V
CONCLUSION

Writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, the black womanist has been experimenting with old forms used by her predecessors, male and female. It is significant that the African woman writer emerged with the advent of political independence. Handicapped by writing in a second language, she has sometimes tried to put herself on familiar ground by fusing the familiar oral tradition with the foreign written medium, while also playing the role traditionally reserved for woman: enlightening and entertaining the population left in her care. The classics of the female Afro-American novel came after the heyday of the protest tradition and took for granted the ideological backing of the black power movement. Consequently, female novelists in both continents prefer to tell of life as it is, sometimes of life as it is thought to be, and rarely life as it ought to be.

Since the feminist novel is still evolving, the following descriptive statements are tentative and hypothetical but serve as a working base: the feminist novel is a form of protest literature directed to both men and women. Protesting against sexism and the patriarchal power structure, it is unapologetically propagandist or strident or both. It demands that its readers, whether the male oppressors of the female oppressed, be aware of ideological issues in order that it may change their attitudes about patriarchy. For a novel to be identified as a feminist, therefore, it must not just deal with women and women’s issues but should also posit some aspects of a feminist ideology. A reader can expect to find in it some combination of the following themes: a critical perception of and reaction to patriarchy, often articulated through the struggle of a victim or rebel who must face a patriarchal institution; sensitivity to the
inequities of sexism allied with an acceptance of women and understanding of the choices open to them; a metamorphosis leading to female victory in a feminist utopia, or a stasis, signifying the failure to eliminate sexism; a style spiced with the acrimony of feminist discourse. As with recipes, so with works of art; results are variable. Womanist novel, while they too may possess these characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, lay stress on other distinctive features to leave an impression markedly different from that of feminist works. This divergence, the researcher thinks, necessitates the separate classification he has given to black female writers especially focusing on Alice Walker’s novels which have been discussed in earlier chapters.

If the feminist literary movement desires the illumination of female experience in order to alter the status quo for the benefit of women (Register, 269), the African woman writer’s in a feminist context becomes immediately apparent. Black women are disadvantaged in several ways: as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimized by black men; and as black women they are also victimized on racial, sexual and class grounds by white men. In order to cope, Alice Walker uses the woman who is docile (but not helpless as her white counterpart would be), hardworking, and pitted against a terrible fate; her heroines suffer from poverty or racism allied with sexism, and sometimes from all three together. Walker makes this point that the black woman’s destiny, in general, radically differs from her white counterpart’s. About the latter de Beauvoir observes:

But woman is not called upon to build a better world: her domain is fixed and she has only to keep up the never ending struggle against the evil principles that creep into it; in her war against dust, stains, mud and dirt she is fighting sin, wrestling with Satan. (de Beauvoir, 470)
In couching woman’s war in domestic and religious terms, de Beauvoir is playful and somewhat Puritanical; her account does not cover the experience of the black woman for whom Satan is not a metaphysical concept but a reality out there, beyond her home, where she must will-nilly go to obtain the wherewithal for decent survival as well as for a “better world”. For examples, Ruth’s mother, Mem does so in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Meridian in *Meridian*, Celie and Nettie in *The Colour Purple*.

In an afterword to *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), Walker describes her purpose in the book:

> The black people there [in Eatonton], as in so many parts of the world, are an oppressed colony, and as one of our great African American writers has said in their frustration and rage they of course kill each other. but what, I wondered, would happen if you could show the people in the oppressed colony the futility of this?...I believe whole-heartedly in the necessity of keeping in violate the one interior space that is given to all. I believe in the soul. The white man’s oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you, whether you are man, woman, child, animal and tree, because the self that I prize refuses to be owned by him. or by anyone. (Smith, 744)

Chikwenye Ogunyemi describes a womanist novel as one “in which fictional black women move from physical and psychological enslavement to Independence and freedom” (23). Harold bloom observes that it is characterized by the movement from “confusion, resistance to the established order and the discovery of freeing order” (Ibid. 23).
As the novel’s theme and content are also thoroughly womanistic, it strategically repudiates the bourgeois morality and replaces conventional marriage and heterosexuality with sexual and loving relationship between women. Womanism seeps into the womanist novel in the sense of sex and emotional bonding between black women against all patriarchal tyrannies. For instance, in *The Colour Purple*, it can be seen not only intense mutual longing that Celie and Nettie give full vent to in their letters, but also in one’s readiness to sacrifice anything for the other. As for as the sexual facet of Womanism in the novel is concerned, Celie’s relationship with Shug provides a solitary example. Except for her, all the other women are heterosexual, while maintaining relationship of sisterhood, affection and mutual help among themselves. However, this should not lead one to overlook the importance that the central treatment of Celie’s lesbian sexuality has; nor to ignore the fact that the Celie is lesbian in the absolute sense that is, both physically and emotionally. Her presence at the heart of the novel illustrates Walker’s preoccupation with both the physical and emotional facets of Womanism.

As stated above, an essential part of her womanist strategy walker establishes a casual relation between the black women’s lesbian bonding and the sexism, racism and classism of American society. Whether sexual or affection, lesbianism is essentially subversive of the patriarchal social order, as it involves them assertion of female subjectivity.

Being a central character and probably intended as representative of all black women, Celie is portrayed as a victim of a whole range of oppressions. She is not treated as a human. Her husband does not even look her in the face: “He look at me. It like he looking at the earth” (*Colour*, 21). She is beaten like a child because her
husband instructs his son, “wives is like children. You have to let’em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating” (Colour, 37). She is conceded little status as a subject in sexuality; her reproductive organs re controlled by men; and her babies are given away without her permission. Harpo’s heavy-handedness to his wife Sofia which a parallel his father’s to Celie, Nettie’s commentary on the Olinka people’s discrimination against their women, consistently with Walker’s Womanist design, suggest the fact that gender oppression is not limited to the Afro-American community in American south, but pervades the entire world of black men and women. The juxtaposition also produces the effect reinforcing the sense of gender oppression in the novel, to the Olinka people, as to the Afro-Americans, a girl can at most be the mother her husband’s children, that is, the breeding machine. This is what Nettie writes to Celie about the Olinka people’s evaluation of their women: “when I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: a girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something. What she can become? I asked. Why? She said the mother of her children” (Colour, 162).

Walker uses the bizarre in order to alter confining gender binaries and expose and criticize the destructive aspects of patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies. Through her narrative and the diverse characters of The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Walker exposes the repercussions of oppressive white supremacist and patriarchal orders. Walker highlights the discomfort of female adolescence through the experience of Ruth. Through her display of the adolescent character Ruth, Walker’s womanist perspective expands the Bakhtinian ideas of ‘lower bodily stratum’. Simultaneously, Walker also offers an alternative masculinity through Grange and his response to Ruth’s first period. Assuming the role of the substitute
matriarch, Grange’s care and affection offers a masculinity that rejects the patriarchal notion of female reproduction as ‘deformed and grotesque’. In her interview, Walker articulates the attention needed on individual consciousness to overcome racial oppression and sexism, as a Black community. Interviewer O’Brien comments on this work and finds “pervasive optimism” (O’Brien, 40) despite her controversial representations of Black men. He notes that she leaves readers with hope for humanity, through Ruth. He finds that her conclusion in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* proves it is never too late to improve the Black man’s method of “surviving suffering” (Cochran, 95).

Walker’s womanist wish for a reconstruction of femininity and masculinity is evident through her depictions of the different characters in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. The character who is perhaps most free is Lorene: she is monstrous, both male and female, a mother who is not tied down by her children, and a sexual carnivore who manages to escape the confining life of the Dew Drop Inn and the South. Although monstrosity is linked to female sexual excess and reproduction in this novel, Walker’s depiction of Lorene offers an alternative view of monstrosity. Moreover, although the representation of Mem as a senile, pregnant old hag is ambivalent, Walker uses Mem’s tragedy in terms of a womanist critique of the patriarchy that is ultimately responsible for Mem’s fate. Finally, Grange is offered as an archetype for a reformed masculinity. Assuming the role of the substitute matriarch, Grange is kind and caring, unlike his son, Brownfield, who remains oppressive and abusive throughout the novel.

Whiteness is mocked and satirized in several aspects through the use of grotesque. By describing whites as greedy and pig-like, as well as parodying the skin
color of whites Walker deliberately mocks whiteness and infuses her depictions of white characters with a carnival spirit. Simultaneously, Walker exposes the pain experienced by the African American individuals who are subjected to the hate of individual whites, as well as the psychological violence of white supremacist ideology. Moreover, the parodying of the system of racial categorization and the racialized gaze as depicted through Ruth further enhances Walker’s critique. Walker’s critiques of the racialized gaze and bi-racial hierarchy are also exposed through her use of the grotesque, ‘monstrous’ ‘albino’ babies. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is often overlooked, unlike *The Colour Purple*, because of the characters’ dark and complex relationship with the south, a place that once (and sometimes still) did not respect Black identities. Butler clearly states that the north made Grange like “stone” while the north made him invisible, “merely no more than a thing” (Butler, 41).

Consistently with her womanist design, Walker sets herself to expose as well as oppose all the various ways in which male American society tyrannizes over them; and, instead of simply making a sensational story of the victimization, undertakes to offer a psychological insight into her inner world, her early self-insignificance and confusion and eventual sense of triumph and clarity. The novel is characterized by the womanist element in its devotion to the theme of black lesbianism, in its allowing the black women to predominate over the black men in end, in its launching an attack against all sorts of oppression endorsed by patriarchy, and in its being structurally rooted in the matrilineal tradition of Afro-American writing.

Similarly, *Meridian* is about personal change its major characters Meridian, Truman, and Lynne - all attain some measure of self discovery. Meridian is the character in the novel that is compelled to pursue wholeness, transforms her even she
affects the other major characters. She also passes on the possibility of “surviving whole” the Truman. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* remains primarily within the context of cope land family whereas; *Meridian* encompasses the history of oppression of black people in America as well as the possibility of change on a society level. The analysis of societal forces and their philosophical underpinning’s that are implicitly in the first novel re explicitly in the second novel. Thus Meridian, the character is a synthesis of the many aspects of black southern heritage. The change that she undergoes is not personal. It is set with in the tradition of resistance (in this particular instance, the civil rights movement) that is as much a part of that heritage as is oppression. Like many of her ancestors, Meridian takes responsibility for the injustices in her society. Because of this emphasis, *Meridian* is a novel about the relationship between personal change and movements for social change.

Walker’s previous concerns about “the spiritual, the survival whole” of black people, her commitment to exploring the oppressions and triumphs of black women which is discussed in Chapter II, black women in relation to their mothers and the relationship between struggle and change, become more marked in *Meridian*. Meridian Hill is engaged in the search for selfhood by discovering meaning in her roots and traditions. She continues the struggle against the oppression of black women which Ruth dreams of. As she struggles to reclaim her past and re-examines her relationship to the black community, she gains internal strength to endure hardships. *Meridian* is a maturation novel, an examination of Meridian's growth, her movement into womanhood and her emergence as a strong woman. Walker constructs for her protagonist a lonely pilgrimage that encompasses elements of the universal monomyth: initiation, renunciation, atonement and release. Throughout the book the
liberating goal of the pilgrimage is emphasized by symbols and images related to slavery and freedom. The quest is for self-knowledge, for wholeness that leads to transcendence, as Meridian finally discovers herself and her relationship to the world at large.

Walker presents a cultural context in which motherhood becomes a vehicle for rebellion for Meridian. She employs two frames: the outer frame demonstrates that the culture gives women few alternatives to the suffocation and sacrifice of traditional wifehood and motherhood. The inner frame is the family life of the Hills. She discovers from the example of her own mother that motherhood is “being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick”. Her mother makes her feel guilty for “shattering her mother’s emerging self” (Meridian, 51). Her girlhood and young adulthood represent periods of emotional impoverishment. Meridian’s search for wholeness can be defined as her attempt to express the totality of self and how that self is related to the world. It is a search for freedom, joy and contentment in being a woman, a search for self-love and a yearning for communal love. In keeping with the black literary tradition it is a search for escape from the body and freedom for the soul by discovering “the truth” in the darkness. Walker suggests that Meridian is “Free at last”. Her ties are not with a man, a family or with a specific community.

Walker’s use of past is also reflected in her characterizations of black women. The significant development of this theme from her first novel to her second is especially dramatic. In both novels, the way in which the women are treated and the way in which they define themselves are related to the possibility of change. Grange and Brownfield participate in their own degeneration through their assault on their wives. As a result, their family is in continual danger of being destroyed. None of the
adult women, however, is able to withstand the assaults that re inflicted upon them. Only Ruth may be able to “survive whole” primarily because of Grange’s personal change. But, she too, must, in the final analysis, define herself for herself.

Like Margret and Mem, Meridian first accepts society’s definition of a woman. But her understanding of the past, her involvement in the civil rights’ movement, and her willingness to use her tradition helps her redefine herself in her own terms as a woman and as a mother. In her first novel, Walker emphasizes the oppression that has destroyed many black women; in her second novel, she shows the relationship between that oppression and the creative sparks that have enabled black women to define themselves.

In these novels, Walker emphasizes the element of struggle, which she sees as a prerequisite to real and lasting change. Both Grange and Meridian commit acts that they perceive as destructive. It is in their struggle to transcend their own violations against life that they come to the vision they have. In Meridian, the emphasis is not only on the ordeal that the individual person must endure, but on how that struggle is intimately connected to the collective struggle that society must bear.

As Walker indicates in her definition of the concept, a womanist is “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker, xi). In the same manner, she pleads for a Universalist attitude between the races, saying “‘Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?’ Ans. ‘Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented’” (Ibid. xi). Walker communicates a similar message in her theoretical writings by putting a lot of emphasis on community. This non-separatism as well as the stress on community is clearly present in The Temple of My Familiar as
well. As will be illustrated in what follows, the novel preaches a connectedness between people of different races, both sexes and even between people and other fauna and flora. Lissie for example says:

> In these days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighborhood, after all. You used the same water, you ate the same foods, you sometimes found yourself peering out of the same cave waiting for a downpour to stop. (*Temple*, 361)

Although the novel tackles issues of oppression of any sort, it does so only to come to the conclusions that universalism is the only way to become a whole person. The most explicit illustration of this attitude is the fact that, whereas in most of her other novels Walker’s protagonists are female, in *The Temple of My Familiar* three of the six are male. Moreover, these men are portrayed in a mild, if not positive, way. As Sol says:

> … amidst all the tales of oppression and male domination in the novel, none of the individual oppressors are made flesh themselves. They are “they”; whereas the individuals portrayed in the novel, even if they are members of oppressing groups - whites, domineering men - are well-meaning people who are generally seen in a positive, or at least forgiving, light. (*Temple*, 401)

Whereas Walker in *The Colour Purple* mainly focused on relationships within black community (especially the prevalent sexism), she touches again more at length on the race issue in *The Temple of My Familiar*. With the six main characters as well as most of the other ones being black, Walker can treat several dimensions of the problem, leading readers to understand that racism is age-old and has existed between all sorts
of people. As the researcher discussed in Chapter II the book relates instances of racism during very different periods to illustrate this. The overall message the book wants to convey is that a non-separatist attitude is the healthiest. Lissie, although she herself claims to have almost no positive memory of a white person and clearly is very proud to be a black woman, has had the experience of being white. She has used that experience to harmonize within herself and does not let racism devour her inner peace and wholeness. It is obvious that racism is a destructive force that only leads readers away from our goal as a human being.

One might expect her novels to treat the gender issue in great detail. This is indeed the case for *The Temple of My Familiar*, although one should add that it is not as clear cut as it may seem. In comparison to *The Colour Purple*, for example, Walker devotes far more attention to her male characters, as they constitute fifty percent of the main characters. Although each of the male characters still has to learn something and is not quite perfect as a person yet, their portrayal is strikingly less harsh than that of Mr. ___ in *The Colour Purple*, which was criticized extensively for putting forward a very negative view on men. Yet, as she herself indicates, Mr. ___ embodies Walker’s belief that people can develop positively, a view that is present even more explicit in *The Temple of My Familiar*. However, it should not surprise that the one character having reached the status of wholeness from the beginning of the novel already and who consequently serves as a guide is a woman, Lissie.

Obviously, rich novel deals with sexism and the gender issue in several ways. All of the female protagonists have been victims of sexism. The most obvious example probably is Carlotta, who tries to please men by behaving as a “female impersonator” (*Temple*, 386). The novel also implicitly, yet effectively, criticizes
some of the most important aspects of our current sexist or patriarchal society (e.g. religion, marriage, government, academy …) by numerous references to matriarchal systems. Such ancient matriarchies are opposed to the present-day institutions that Fanny describes as “unnatural bodies, male supremacist private clubs” (Temple, 274).

Walker chooses African American women as her main role models because she identifies herself primarily as an African American women situated within African American culture. In the Chapter III which is focused on Possessing the Secret of Joy, By the Light of My Father’s Smile and Now is the Time to Open Your Heart novels with Womanism: Cultural Ideologies and Identities perception, the researcher has discussed the above said ideologies of Walker. Although she identifies herself most closely with African American culture and African American women, Walker envisions the body of literature as one immense story written from a multitude of perspectives by writers from just as many different cultures. Walker often expresses admiration for writers from cultures other than her own.

Acknowledging the African American literary history she claims for herself and other African American writers, Walker says: “(O)ur literary tradition is based on the slave narratives, where escape for the body and freedom for the soul went together” (In Search, 5). This is particularly true in African American women’s slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: where the authors placed in the foreground their active roles as historical agents as opposed to passive subjects; represented as acting their own visions, they are seen to take decisions over their own lives. They document their sufferings and brutal treatment but in a context that is also the story of resistance to brutality. All of these components are seen in the life of Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy.
It has been established that Alice Walker identifies and connects herself with her ancestors, both literary and genealogically, and that she is firmly entrenched within the female African American models in her mother, story-teller and gardener, and Zora Neale Hurston, anthropologist and writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that in order for an African American woman writer to “participate in a tradition which had until recently offered women very little in the way of accurate representation or authorial canonization, “she would have to “actively seek a female precursor… who … proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible” (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 4). The reason the “woman writer. … Searches for a female model (is) not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her “femininity”, but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors” (Ibid. 7).

Alice Walker found Hurston’s works to be such an inspiration that she once declared that if she were “(c)ondemned to a desert island for life, with an allotment of ten books to see (her) through,” she would definitely take two of Hurston’s *Mules and Men*, a book of folklore and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston’s best known novel and “one of the sexiest, most ‘healthily’ rendered heterosexual love stories in our literature” (op.cit., 88).

Walker takes Hurston’s words at the beginning of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to a new psychological level in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*: Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly (*Their Eyes, 1*). Traumatied, Tashi does not want to remember her sister’s death or the circumstances surrounding it. The reader is given few details
about the event either, other than the fact that Dura had been very excited during the period leading up to her death. Suddenly she had become the center of everyone’s attention; every day there were gifts. Decorative items mainly: beads, bracelets, a bundle of dried henna for reddening hair and palms, but the odd pencil and tablet as well as bright remnants of cloth for a head scarf and dress. The promise shoes! (*Possessing*, 9)

The mysterious event Tashi chooses to forget is the initiation ceremony performed on all young Olinkan girls, often referred to as female circumcision, but more accurately described as female genital mutilation, or FGM. Although the issue of FGM is discussed within the context of a novel, Walker’s interest in FGM is serious as she is interested in the abolishment of the practice in all cultures. The associated myths of FGM reveal an underlying fear of female sexuality and a patriarchal desire to wield control over women’s bodies. Echoing these myths, Walker asserts that Tashi, like all Olinkans, believes the ancient myth that if a woman is not circumcised, “her unclean parts would grow so long they’d soon touch her thighs; she’d become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way” (*Possessing*, 121).

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the Olinka culture refer to FGM as “bathing” and M’Lissa refers to Tashi’s wound “not as a wound but as a healing.” Implying that, without FGM (*Possessing*, 246). The aesthetic of purity and enclosedness created by FGM reinforces the notion that a girl’s genitals are impure, disgusting, and require alteration in order for the girl to become a valuable part of society. Wolf, arguing that aesthetics of beauty are products of patriarchy, makes this assessment: “The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance” (Wolf, 4). FGM continues because a woman’s economic survival in many of these cultures depends on
her getting married and gaining value by producing children; “whatever will make her more marriageable becomes desirable” (op.cit., 335). Tashi’s psyche is fractured as a result of FGM, as is evident in the chapter titles which indicate who is speaking; Tashi is “Tashi” the Olinkan, “Evelyn” the African American, “Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson” the Olinkan-American wife of Adam and mother of Benny, and either “Tashi-Evelyn” or “Evelyn-Tashi,” depending on which culture appears to dominate.

In Possessing the Secret of Joy the narrator and protagonist, Tashi’s position as victim is tenuous, however, because, at least in the world’s (and the courtroom’s) eyes, she made a conscious and adult, however misinformed, decision to undergo FGM. Additionally, her murder of a cultural icon, M’Lissa, and the tradition of silence that surrounds the underlying reasons for the murder prevent conscious understanding of her position. Even Mee, another important character perhaps not understanding the cultural pressures placed on her to undergo FGM, feels Tashi needs to take responsibility for her conscious choice as an adult to have her genitals mutilated: “Yours is the pain of the careless carpenter who, with his hammer, bashes his own thumb” (Possessing, 49).

Clearly the novel explores the psychic and physical wounding Tashi receives as a result of FGM has not brought out some sort of inner strength or joy inherent to Africans; her wounding resulted in madness, murder, and her eventual physical death. However, Walker’s revisioning subverts the patriarchal process and allows Mbati to find the answer to Tashi’s query about the secret of joy. Although Mzee does not possess a full understanding of the nature of FGM, he understands the nature of motherly betrayal: “Negro women, the doctor says into my silence, can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame
their mothers” (*Possessing*, 19). This statement is Walker’s starting point in her argument for a community of women and the eradication of FGM and other similar patriarchal oppressions.

In confront in her *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, Alice Walker depicts the oppressive patriarchal abuse of religion and biblical hermeneutics as a force inhibiting female, and male, body and spiritual development. Women suffer marginalization within patriarchal structures, deprived of opportunities to express their female individuality. Men, often unconsciously, are led to complex self-destruction as they involve themselves, as authoritarian figures, in hypocritical and unnatural performances. In the novel, the author references Western Christianity as the most conspicuous expression of religious oppressive patriarchy. At the same time, Alice Walker juxtaposes the manifestations of religious oppressive patriarchy with female cultural and spiritual sojourns towards womanist love. In presenting the intricacy of the differences between womanist love and oppressive patriarchal religiosity, the author juxtaposes the fictional milieu of the Mundo and the reality of Western world.

Walker depicts Western patriarchy as religiously based. Within this system, self-contained male elite establishes their authority through biblical misinterpretation. First of all, they express identification with the image of God as an authoritarian male figure who grants men dominion over the world. Secondly, the dominant males form institutional Christian church, using its doctrines and dogmas in justification of male superiority. The system affects a variety spheres. It distorts interpersonal, intra-familial relations, as exemplified by the abuse at the hands of their fathers suffered the Greek character Irene and the black American woman Magdalena. It also considers non-Christian belief systems as inferior, savage, and immoral. This religiously
grounded conviction of superiority facilitates Western colonialism that not only involves missionary efforts to convert so-called heathens, but also entails usurpation and exploitation of the foreign peoples and lands.

In opposition to oppression, womanist love calls for concern with personal and global peace. As reflected by fictitious Mundo community, womanism rejects the conception of a patriarchal God, who anoints a selected group of people to exercise dominion over others. Not only do they envision God with feminine attributes, but they also see God as a Great Spirit that reveals him/herself in nature. For this reason, the Mundo, like womanists, recognize the sacredness and humanity of all people, regardless of gender, race, religion, or nation. Manifesting loving kindness empowered by this Great Spirit, they endeavor to act with good faith and goodwill toward others.

Alice Walker weaves *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* with religious, ecological, womanist, and political threads. The protagonists of Walker’s novel venture on spiritual journeys during which they are healed and attain knowledge. These retreats are like a baptism, heralding a rebirth and a new life. The protagonists’ religious and spiritual practices consist of elements of Buddhism, Feng Shui, Shamanism, yoga and meditation, and natural/herbal and ancient medicine. Traces of humanism, compatible but not necessarily allied with organized religion, are also found in Walker’s novels *The Colour Purple* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*:

Alice Walker’s humanism is deeply contemplative. It is, in essence, a worshipful appreciation for humanity and for the earth in general. This type of reverence for life gives it god-like status in that it must remain at the forefront of our thoughts and actions, centering our every move
within a profound sense of awe. What is called for, according to Walker, is recognition of life as beautiful and beautifully connected to all things. (Pinn, 166)

The novel is replete with American Indian influences, such as shamanistic healing practices and the worship of nature, which, for the New Age and Neopagan environmental ethics, is concerned with work to undo the damage that society has inflicted on the planet. New Agers and Neopagans organize retreats to facilitate spiritual growth and a sense of supportive community through cleansing rituals and the sharing of personal tales of trials and tribulations. When Kate returns from her retreat and meets with Yolo, they are both changed, but still in love with one another. Their separation and spiritual quest is kairic, for it helps them realize and appreciate the feelings they have for one another and to continue being together. Yolo has stopped smoking and Kate has abandoned her concerns of aging. Walker’s narratives of personal and political activism, realized in her own life and engagements, illustrate the theory and praxis of womanist theology and spotlight the nexus of self-discovery, healing, and subsequent activism on behalf of local and global justice. This empowering potential of religion and spirituality is made visible not only to women, but also to men, for the liberation and empowerment of women is not possible without the liberation and empowerment of men, a stance Erdrich also ascribes to in honoring male characters and their struggle for wholeness. Walker’s engagement in transnational and transcultural dialogue on marginalization and injustice has earned her numerous supporters as well as opponents. Richards traces a concept of transnational feminist/womanist practice in Walker’s oeuvre, which “views the experience of women more broadly than do local feminisms and at the same time
recognizes the limitations of a global perspective that homogenizes difference” (165). Walker, without engaging in comparative martyrology, explores traumas beyond the categories of nation and culture, thereby bringing to voice otherwise dispossessed and marginalized women.

Womanist writers also “reveal … a psychic connection with the cultural tradition transmitted by the oral mode from one generation to the next” (Cannon, 84). In literary works, this connection is revealed in the incorporation of songs, sermons, and folk tales. In Alice Walker’s novel, Armando’s singing spiritually empowers those taking part in the ritual. His preaching has also a central role in the spiritual development of other characters. Moreover, a folk tale comes to Kate’s mind, once told by an elderly woman, about a frozen snake that bit the man, who saved it. The woman interpreted the tale as expressing “an endless kind of a thing. Do we kill it or do we let it live?” (Heart, 10). The story underlines the consequences resulting from people’s decisions. Therefore, Now is the Time to Open Your Heart presents womanist ethics through the characters’ self-discovery, spirituality, relation to nature and ancestors as well as involvement in the struggle for social and economic justice.

Alice Walker stands firmly within the womanist literary tradition.

According, ‘womanism’ reflects a link with a history that includes African cultural heritage, enslavement in the United States and a kinship with other women especially women of color. As Walker told in Times magazine:

Feminism (all colors) definitely teaches women they are capable, one reason for its universal appeal. In addition to this womanist (i.e. black feminist) tradition assumes, because of our experience during slavery, that the black women are capable. (Shahida, 28-29)
Walker narrates black women’s experiences in opposition to those of white women. Thus womanism is different from feminism. She proves it by revealing the history of the American racism. Therefore black women are ‘womanist’ and white women remain merely ‘feminist’. Black women concern and emphasize on male-female relationships. Unlike the white women, they provide an avenue to foster stronger relationship between black men and women. Walker’s definition proves this as she notes womanist are “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker, xii). As a result, womanism supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men. Walker’s theory of womanism invokes black women’s moral and epistemological superiority through suffering under racial and gender oppression, pluralism through the cultural integrity and integration and assimilation through her claims implying black women are ‘traditionally universalist’. Thus, Walkerian Womanism stands for the empowerment of black women. It helps them to be aware that they are strong and intelligent. It enables them to determine their essence.

Being both black and female, the black woman’s situation and oppression go far beyond that of either (male) blacks or (white) women. Consequently, black women find themselves socially, politically and especially emotionally situated in a no man’s land, unable to identify with either Afro-Americanism or mainstream feminism. Although they belong to both minority groups up to a certain height, their specific predicament is never fully grasped by either. That is why, throughout the years, black women have claimed their own rightful place and have created a specifically black feminism. With her strong fascination for black women, from the start of her career, Alice Walker has presented herself as one of the advocates of this black feminism,
coining her own term for and creating her own approach to the issue. This dissertation has explored both the theoretical and practical side of that approach. Walker refers to black feminism as Womanism, a term rooted in black folk culture to indicate clearly that the concept is shaped by the specific experience of being a black woman.

Besides her theoretical reflections on the issue, Walker’s Womanism also shows in her fiction, which is comprised of all novels. This research has illustrated how that works for her all novels. A close study of her novels reveals a certain common pattern which seems to be the sufferings of Black people. This Dissertation is an attempt to find Alice Walker’s theory and principles of ‘womanism’ in all of her novels focusing on various aspect of the writer including her themes. It is hoped that this dissertation would insight further reading and discussion on Alice Walker as a novelist and place her in new perceptions.