CHAPTER VII

Conclusion
For years black women have been systematically misrepresented in literature and described in terms of images of sexual promiscuity and matriarchy. They were denied individuality. As Gloria Wade-Gayles laments they were entrapped in an “intricate web of misconceptions and stereotypes (that) defines black women in many roles and, simultaneously, creates the monolithic ‘black woman.’” They were characterized in some of these stereotyped roles as “Sapphire. Mammy. Tragic mulatto wench. Workhorse, ... unsupportive of black men, domineering, castrating.” Black women writers and critics attempted a reinterpretation of this deliberate distortion of Black American women’s history. They rejected all the falsely imposed myths and images of devaluation of Black women’s identity.

Black feminist writings depict the double-edged persecution of the African-American woman, her pain of being both black and female, and at the same time her desperate search for her self. Black women novelists of the twentieth century have openly portrayed in their works experiences of exploitation. Driven by a strong desire for self-assertion, they succeeded in turning their quest for identity into a source of strength. Black feminist writings, fiction in particular, have played a vital role in restoring the African-American woman’s belief in her own strengths and possibilities.

The insistent theme in the writings of African-American women is the persistent search for and assertion of an independent integrated identity within
Feminist issues and images of women are represented from two distinct points of view. The first is the psychoanalytical approach. It lays stress on the fractured self and on the role of the unconscious and the mother-daughter links in the Oedipal state. The second is the political approach which lays stress on the unitary self. Black feminist writers like Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker tried to present an aesthetic fusion of the psycho-analytic and political.

Paule Marshall, with her first novel *Brown Girl Brownstones*, leaped into the world of the ontological transmutation of black women's existential conditions in America. The novel demonstrates black women's determination to receive history and to establish their unique presence as autonomous persons and as persons responsible to the community. Unlike their predecessors who spoke to others, Marshall's women addressed their own selves and articulated that self with great force and vitality. As Helene Christol points out, *Brown Girl Brownstones* became "the starting point for the contemporary black women writer's thrust forward to a courageous revision of American history, society and literature from a black feminist perspective." Paule Marshall paved the way for the black women writers who were to emerge in the 1970's and 80's by articulating such themes as juxtaposition of woman and collective history,
interlacing of race and gender. She portrayed black women as complex persons
with an artistic creativity about them. Some of these ideas are incorporated
into the fictional canon of Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, and
Ntozake Shange.

In order to revive the numbed voice of the black women of the past,
Alice Walker and Toni Morrison insist on the spoken voice within the fictive
discourse of black women. Their perspective is rebellious, emphasizing an
alternative reality rooted in self, folk-tradition, and female bonding. This
evocation of the spoken voice is what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson analyses in
her neo-critique of black women’s multiple voice, “Glossolalia” and
“heteroglossia.” This self-definition is integrally connected with the collective
self-definition of the black community and the cultural redefinition of their
existence within post-colonial structure of the American racist and imperialistic
society. Alice Walker and Toni Morrison evoke a new language structure to
determine the distorted and erased realities of black American women. They
attempt to counteract the power-structure underlying patriarchal hegemony of
language. Both these writers recreate a female speech invoking the orality of
folk-lore and black dialect. Their language structure is multiple, at once political,
different, spiritual combining ‘glossolalia’ -- the inner speech -- and
‘heteroglossia’ -- the multiple outer speech.

Like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison’s feminist ideology is subtle and implicit
and involves intertwined rejection of univocal white feminism. She time and
again asserts the importance of the experience of the black community and a
continuing black female consciousness and experience. Toni Morrison regards
the "whole world as my canvas... I don't write women's literature as such."
Yet she continues, "I am valuable as a writer because I am a woman, because
women, it seems to me, have special knowledge about certain things." Women,
of course, are primarily black women. Like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison also
recreates a new poetics to establish the reality of the experience of the 'other'.
She rejuvenated black myth, metaphor, mysticism, spiritualism, music in order
to emphasize the reality of black community life. She, like Alice Walker, breaks
the language-structure of the dominating culture and introduces omissions and
disruptions in an inverted process. In *The Bluest Eye* she introduces an inversion
of the language-structure of white nursery tale by omitting punctuations to
encode the 'other' reality of the disordered black life within the apparent order
of white culture.

Alice Walker has devoted herself to tracing women's search for self.
Her overwhelming concern is with the survival whole of the people. Survival
whole means in part choosing which self to celebrate. Part of the celebration
of the self in Walker's work is her character's acknowledgement that there is
something of the divine in everyone and everything in the universe. Walker's
women achieve psychological wholeness when they fight oppression, whether
its source is white racism, their own black men, or their own self-righteous
anger. She speaks of her early writing as a means of survival. Her writing has
become not only a means of averting crisis but a means of achieving health. As
she has said, "I think writing really helps you heal yourself. I think if you write
long enough, you will be a healthy person. That is, if you write what you need to write, as opposed to what will make money, or what will make fame.” Walker who had felt ugly, disfigured and alone, herself, had finally come through healthy and whole. Most of her fictional characters do struggle for wholeness. Walker's survival as an artist has been bound up with physical survival. Walker’s understanding of herself as woman and as artist comes from her awareness that she is linked across continents and through generations with women who have exercised their creativity despite the racism and sexism that would deny its expression.

Walker’s women seek love and fulfillment as women. Few of her characters are totally successful in their search. Walker creates Ruth, Meridian, and Celie, who achieve a self-realization and a definition of self. Margaret died because she could never forgive herself and Mem died because she was too willing to forgive. Ruth, however, refuses to be the martyr Mem was. She chooses to live with the flaw of unforgiveness rather than believe that Brownfield is capable of change. That toughness, that willingness to be unforgiving when necessary, combined with the compassion that makes forgiveness possible once it has been earned, is Ruth's defence against the future. Her selective anger and selective forgiveness enable her to survive whole rather than merely survive. Walker’s women search and rediscover the hidden, beautiful, whole and free selves. They realize that the definition of self must come from within and that the self that survives is not a self dictated by others. Alice Walker’s women’s progress is towards physical as well as spiritual health and wholeness. Meridian
goes through a symbolic resurrection once she realizes that her duty to her own life is to live it even if that means literally fighting for her life. Her quest for womanhood finally turns into a concern for the survival and wholeness of the entire black community. She finds the real meaning of her life in her very attempt to change the present social system for the benefit of all blacks, male and female. She thus emerges as a liberated black woman with a hard-won insight into the riddles of life. Evidently the novel creates an image of the African-American woman with her complexity, diversity, and depth. In *The Color Purple* Walker elevates Black women to the heights of sovereignty. From the state of used and abused woman, Celie is transformed into an independent liberated woman. The victimized women are prepared to fight. The love of self makes them break their chains of enslavement. Walker stresses the importance of power — power to concretize one's self and realize one's ability to stand independently.

Walker feels for the countless vanished and forgotten black women writers who were neglected and oppressed because they were black and they were women. Walker argues that "what is always needed in the appreciation of art or life is the longer perspective."

Walker and Zora Neale Hurston share similar feelings and make similar efforts to preserve their cultural heritage. In Hurston, Walker finds a kindred spirit with whom she shares a concern for the theme of survival. In the works of Hurston, Walker discovers "racial health; a sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished human beings." Deeply influenced by Hurston, she is able to link the survival of the artist to the survival of cultural heritage. As an
artist she tries to preserve the stories of those unknown men and women whose everyday lives constitute the communal past. Walker's aim is "that they see themselves and their parents and grandparents as part of a living, working, creating movement in Time and Place."9 She records one incident in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. She explains that Mem's death was based on a real case in her home town of Eatonton, Georgia. Walker writes, "I describe her in the novel exactly as she appeared to me then. Writing about it years later was the only way I could be free of such a powerful and despairing image."10 The story of Celie, the main character of Walker's *The Color Purple*, is based on Walker's great-great grandmother who was raped and impregnated at the age of eleven by her master.

Alice Walker prefers to call herself a womanist rather than a feminist. Womanism in her opinion expresses women's concerns better than feminism. To her the term womanist means: "From womanish. (opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behaviour... Responsible. Incharge. Serious."11 Walker further adds, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." This definition is echoed in her novel *The Color Purple*.

Walker's womanist philosophy is a humanist one, for it is geared not only toward the full development of one gender but toward the recuperation of male and female, toward the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male
and female. The racial situation in the black diaspora, with its multiple survival strategies, has often become the major influencing factor in creating the self of an individual. Black American women writer's preference for the word womanism to feminism is based on the difference between the sexuality imagined by the French feminists and the sexuality perceived by the African-American writers. For Adrienne Rich, feminism is something more concrete. It is an emotional sisterhood with contemporary women. On the other hand, Walker's view is an almost pantheistic celebration of female history. Ogunyemi says, "More often than not, where a white woman writer may be a feminist, a black woman writer is likely to be a womanist. That is, she will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy."12

According to Alice Walker, "womanist" means a woman who is "committed to the survival and whiteness of the entire people, male and female."13 African-American womanism is much more complex than the white mainstream feminism. Ogunyemi makes a fine analysis of womanism and finds a deeper connection between it and the blues tradition of the indigenous African-American culture. She says, "The blues have had a tremendous impact on the Afro-American womanist novel, and, in contrast to feminist novels, most Afro-American womanist novels, culture-oriented as they are, abound in hope."14

Black women are doubly-burdened. They are in the words of Zora Neale Hurston 'the mules of the world' carrying the burdens heaped upon them by
society and by the family. They are victims of both racial and sexual oppression. They are often subjected to and destroyed by oppression and violence. Among the numerous themes evident in Walker's fiction, the traumatic plight of black women is her proclaimed forte. In her novels Walker emphasises the commonality of women's plights, their humble beginnings, the brutality of their male partners, and the milieu of hopelessness in which they operate. Walker's women Margaret, Mem, Celie and others represent women who are not only the victims of environmental deprivation and extreme insensitivity but also victims of the brutality of their men. The claim that Black women's conditions result from an intrinsic weakness is examined more graphically and more consistently in Walker's fiction. Her women are all plain women who struggle endlessly and are harmless as they know no wrong. Their tragedies are very personal, very real and extraordinarily bleak and black. Different though they may sometimes seem, they all push against the same barbed-wired wall of racism, sexism, age, ignorance, and despair. Often they are reduced to a level lower than themselves, become frustrated, and operate on a level consistent with their reduced state. Women in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* are cruelly victimized by their men and they move about exposing their shame to themselves and to their world. Margaret was unable to make choices about her life and was unaware that possibilities for change exist. She did not have the ability to articulate her needs. Mem's weakness is representative of a steady stream of suffering. She carries the burden of guilt and it is a heavy load on her back.

As Alice Walker reaches toward the resolution of the conflict that engulfs her women, she uses religion and death as her available options. The inherent
weakness -- the character flaw within her women -- prevents them from having
the innate ability to extricate themselves from their denigrating and immoral
situation. Walker’s women carry the burdens of the world as part of an
inheritance and because they are supposed to do so. Therefore she takes the
seed of the pain, embroiders it, and makes it larger than life. Death and religion
are welcome companions and they serve as a cure for the ills that bind their
souls. Walker dramatizes the notion that death symbolizes the relief of the
character’s guilt. Margaret and Mem are poor, struggling, and determined to
remain in the South. Each dies after much labour. Margaret commits suicide
and Mem is brutally murdered by her husband.

Walker’s modern women accept the challenge necessary to protect their
mental and physical selves. Meridian, although she has the strength to make a
different set of choices from those of her predecessors, struggles for a period
of time. The web of guilt that forms the backdrop of the novel is too deeply
and intricately woven within this Black woman’s psyche for her to avoid her
mother’s “sins” and therefore, at least to some degree, her own destruction.
Her choices difficult though they are, are not so different. But she struggles to
remain coherent about her past -- the history, the people, the land. Meridian
fights for the right to belong, to walk in the streets in peace, strives to carve a
place for herself and is dedicated to securing freedom for her people. She
succeeds in articulating her choices in life.

Celie in The Color Purple is one of the black women who is victimized
to the core. Her very existence is ignored. In this novel, Walker shows her
heroine trapped in the whole range of possible oppressions. Celie's struggle to
create a self through language, to break free from the network of class, racial,
sexual, and gender ideologies to which she is subjected, represents the woman's
story in an innovative way. Trapped in a gridlock of racist, sexist, and
heterosexist oppressions, Celie struggles toward linguistic self-definition in a
world of disrupted signs. Walker's project was to end male domination. She
writes against the erosion and the repression of female sexuality as it is
channelled by male desire and stifled by domestic life. Walker is sensitive to
feminist concerns and includes all those elements of black female experience in
her works. Her self-conscious interest in the celebration of black women's
strength, their values and beliefs stems from a desire to erase the false image
and to correct the wrongs that have been levelled against black women. She
seeks to celebrate the legends of black women and weave their dreams into
myths. Walker's richly textured fiction reflects her special and unique vision, a
vision which is a black woman writer's distinctive feminine vision.

The works of Alice Walker portray black women who "has nothing to
fall back on, not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything,"15 and
their struggle to discover the authentic black female 'self'. The formation of
an inner drive toward the assertion of selfhood is usually a dominant theme in
the works of Walker. Her novels focus on the black woman as an individual
struggling towards freedom and selfhood. Her fiction represents not only the
personal self but also the self that is collective. She affirms that writing gives
her an opportunity to find coherence in the world. It helps her to sort out the
past -- her own as well as the collective past of the African-Americans. In *Meridian*, Meridian’s personal identity becomes part of the collective identity of the blacks.

Walker believes that a continuity between past and present is very crucial because it creates bonds mutual obligations and a shared communal history of struggle. In her novel *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker tries to reconnect the character’s past. Crucial to each character’s quest for identity is the personal effort to recapture the past as a significant element in personal experience.

Walker’s narrative pattern in which each character becomes a part of his or her own history gives a picture of the “quilt.” *Meridian* resembles something like a crazy quilt, a story that jumps back and forth in time. Walker introduces the art of quilt-making which she herself works on while writing the novel *The Color Purple*. Her quilt began to grow, as she worked on her novel. By adopting the crazy quilt, the craft of her foremothers, as the structuring principle of her fiction, Alice Walker places herself within a tradition of black female creativity. This differently crafted, quilted novel is also differently sexual: its formal structure allows many playful variations on a sexual theme. Some designs emerge clearly, but the overall pattern is extremely complicated. Themes and relationships are introduced and inverted or turned, like a piece of fabric, inside out, so that the pattern can be traced a new way. Triadic combinations proliferate: characters are constantly realigned in an intricate network of configurations, apparently in a continual state of metamorphosis until the final vision, the brave new world of the ending. Quilting symbolizes female bonding,
sisterhood, and togetherness. The metaphor of quilting represents for Alice Walker the creative legacy that African-Americans have inherited from their maternal ancestors. Her mentioning of the art of quilt-making reflects her respect and love for black cultural heritage.

The aesthetics of marginality highlights the inter and intra relationships among the African-American women. It emphasizes the intimate bond between African-American men, women, and children and expresses a deep concern for them. The aesthetics of marginality envisioned by the African-American women writers owes its existence more to African-American womanist revolution. Walker is heralded for her ability to dramatize the realities of the black condition specifically and the human condition in general. The intergenerational effects of poverty and discrimination, the operative distinctions between resistance and revolution, and the plight of desperate men and women are among the numerous and varied considerations that fall within the purview of her fictional characters.

Walker dealing with various sexist and racist issues considers the concept of women bonding as a means of coming to an understanding of the self. Gender solidarity and female bonding have been as self-affirming rituals by most of the Black women writers. Walker stresses the relationship, the bonding between black women. The Black woman depended on other women in the community and became "a source of survival information, and psychic and emotional support." 16 In The Color Purple, Shug Avery provides Celie the support and strength necessary to build herself. Walker, through lesbianism, emphasises the importance of female friendship and the importance of sisterhood in black
community. Walker’s presentation of “female bonding” facilitates Celie’s search for and attainment of a mature, autonomous, and authentic sense of identity that enables her to live an authentic life. *The Color Purple* is primarily and exclusively a celebration of lesbianism. It is in a broader sense seen as a potential source of empowerment for women. Two women sharing a single husband rely on each other. They share not only a single man but also share each other’s pain, sorrow, joy, laughter, and achievements. Walker shows that two black women are sisters in body as well as in spirit. In the novel all the women unite, caring for one another’s children as is necessary. In effect they become an extended matrilineal community. In *Meridian*, Walker focuses on the relationship between Meridian and Lynne, the two women who nurture and support each other. Lynne approaches Meridian, her husband’s lover, for comfort when her mulatto daughter has been brutally raped and killed. Lynne’s whiteness becomes a signifier of her difference from Meridian and the Black community in which she has immersed herself. Walker attempts to explore the possible union of White and Black women. As a white woman, Lynne becomes a signifier not only of difference but of sameness. Her representational status within the racial discourse is compromised by her whiteness, while her status as woman places her in a common sisterhood.

Alice Walker interweaves racial and sexual issues with the theme of motherhood and treats them at various levels of human experiences -- sociopsychological, legendary and mythic. African-American motherhood in particular is traditionally viewed as a vehicle for preserving black heritage in
the face of white cultural domination. Walker, one of the best living exponents of black women’s fiction, has created women who defy all traditional levels of womanhood. She does not present motherhood itself as restrictive. Meridian wants to get rid of her maternal bonds as they prevent her from realizing her personal and social self. The myth of black motherhood as a “sacred calling” is thus reversed in the novel. Meridian rejects the role of the mythical Black mother. She does not object to children or mothers bearing children but she resents the role a woman is expected to play once she becomes a mother.

The celebration of the female within the context of a new mythology, the deconstruction of traditional, social and moral values particularly those governing women’s sexuality and motherhood and the problems that are central to Black white feminism, are seen in Walker’s novels as a manifestation of an implicit feminist consciousness. Her women like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman undertake momentous and symbolic journeys for their race and sex. Walker’s novel *Meridian* tentatively belongs to the tradition of the Bildungsroman, for it chronicles the various experiences the heroine undergoes in an effort to find her identity and develop a completeness of being.

*Meridian* marks the beginning of her quest by breaking away from her stifling origins to chart out a new course for her independent spirit. At Saxon college, she slowly and consciously asserts her growing individuality. Meridian meets Truman, “a vain, pretentious” (99), activist, in the movement and falls in love with him. She conceives his child but has an abortion when he gives up for a white woman, Lynne. Abortion is immediately followed by sterilization
which symbolizes Meridian’s ultimate liberation from the bondage of sex and motherhood. Freed from the compulsiveness of role-playing, Meridian enters into the second phase of her journey towards selfhood as she passes from her feminine weaknesses to a new sense of self. Her final phase is a return to the roots. As Deborah E. Mcdowell explains, “the continued progress of her search for identity requires that she go backward in order to move forward.” And backward is the South, “... for it is the South that is the cradle of the black man’s experience in the New world...”17 After a long painful illness brought on by the guilt created by the collective history of the Black woman, she finally journeys towards health. Meridian finally comes to terms with her roots in which she finds strength and sustenance. It is in the South that Meridian redisCOVERs the power of the black past, accepts it, and draws strength from its vital traditions, most notably from the symbiotic musical and religious traditions. She experiences a sense of unity and community. She discovers that her identity is inextricably tied up with her black people and that existence extended beyond herself to those around her.

At the end of the novel, she receives from her friend Anne Marion the picture of a gigantic tree stump from which a tiny branch is growing. It is from a tree, the Sojourner, a symbol of both the black oral and musical traditions planted during slavery on a plantation which later became Saxon college and which was destroyed by a group of rioting students. Metaphorically speaking, Meridian is that branch from the Sojourner and the Clarion testimony that although systematic attempts have been made at its destruction as the nucleus of black life, it is not dead.
Grange's return to the South puts him in contact with people who help him to assess correctly his behaviour and make amends for his mistakes. His return to Georgia, the South, helps him to recover his place in the black community and allows him to realize his mistakes and take full responsibility for them. While the North fails him because of its cold impersonal environment and locks him in solitary confinement, the South gives him a chance to return to his community and to recover his humanity.

Marjorie Pryse observes that Alice Walker "implicitly disclaims genius," and hence originality. It amounts to a participation in the task of redefining a tradition, which process involves disconnection and reconnection of the past. Meridian is a work in which an accurate reading depends on the active participation of the reader. Meridian is the medium through which the African-American history is largely revealed.

In the novels of Alice Walker female alienation stands out in bold relief. Her heroines are a study in female psyche alienated due to a lack of compassionate companionship. Their predicament is all the more for the human touch, sensitivity, and companionship of their husbands. Margaret, Mem, and Celie reflect on their husbands' non-attachment as they fervently long for their affection. Margaret is a struggling and complex woman after fighting with her husband Grange over his treatment of her. She is eventually provoked to infidelity when her emotional needs are not satisfied. She lives a life devoid of love and affection. Mem's love, gentleness, generosity and self-sacrifice counter-balance her husband Brownfield's hatred, violence, selfishness and egotism.
She is not only deprived of love and affection but is shot dead by her husband when she desires to lead a decent life. Celie of *The Color purple* is all the more deprived of the love and compassion of her husband. Her life is not only devoid of love but also of a decent life. Celie longs to be considered as a human being, wants to be liked and accepted. Her depersonalization of self results from an alienation from her real self. Celie's alienation results from her husband's oppression. At the beginning of the novel alienation is evident among the relationships between men and women, among women themselves, between people and nature and between people and God.

The wounded black psyche under the white power is the theme of Walker's first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. According to Eric Fromm "the most powerful psychic forces motivating man's behaviour stem from the conditions of his existence, the human situation." Walker shows us the way black men feel psychically injured and the way their wounded psyche works on their behaviour in its various forms:

The American social structure turns the Black man into a beast -- suppressing his human qualities and accenting his animal tendencies. The Black man, in turn, reflects his violent relation with his white landowner in his relations with his wife and son. He takes his anger and frustration out, not on the social system or the people who exercise its power but on his children and on the black woman, who, as he does in the master-servant relation, remains loyal and submissive.

Grange Copeland shedding his human characteristics becomes a passive receptor of environmental conditions. His eroded self-esteem, mind-numbing work and the inferior place given in the southern society makes him unable to assume
meaningful living. He fails in his responsibilities as a husband and as a father. He periodically suffers from serious bouts of depression which bring him to the brink of suicide. Grange's life shaped by such pathological environment makes him act in a self-destructive way. In the same way, Brownfield as a child becomes the primary victim of racism and economic exploitation. The wounded psyche affects human behaviour in different ways. Brownfield becomes one of the living dead, one of the many who had lost their souls in the American wilderness. The behaviour of both these men is the manifestation of their wounded psyche which is the result of the black predicament in white-dominated American society.

Walker has a deep regard for the value of African-American folk culture. She views black folklore and folk tradition as essential elements and introduces them in her novels. She introduces myth and folklore in her novel *Meridian*. In her narratives she inserts some mythic figures like Louvinie and some real figures like Sojourner Truth. Through the insertion of these, Walker unfolds the feminist discourse of *Meridian* and lays emphasis on the racial oppression of Black women.

Walker creates space for her black protagonist through the application of sophisticated techniques such as rememory, flashbacks, oral tradition, and the epistolary form of narration. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, Lissie's story is presented piece by piece through the act of rememory -- a pattern of revelation of her past, of recognition of the history. Rememories and dream memories are
stories told by Lissie. The novel is basically an oral history written in the
tradition of African griots. She in this novel affirms the force and the health of
oral tradition. She brings forth ideas relating to the transmigration of souls and
stresses the importance of reconstructing the past. In this novel time for Walker
is a process of growth inseparable from the notion of the self and the self's
eradicable link with the world outside. She uses selected icons or mythic images
in order to tell us a story in each movement and to convey its underlying
metaphysical meaning. *Meridian* is written in flashback pattern. The story
jumps back and forth in time. It resembles the crazy quilt fashion. Walker in
her novel *The Color Purple* reconstructs the epistolary form of writing the novel.
She lets Celie, the protagonist, tell her own story in her own voice. Celie
represents the voice of many African women whose voices otherwise remained
unheard.

Celie addresses her letters to God which reveal her growth from critical
passivity to self-affirmation. According to Susan Marie the definition of God
is “the inner spirit, the inner voice; the human compulsion when deeply distressed
to seek healing counsel within ourselves, and the capacity within ourselves both
to create this counsel and receive it.” In seeking help from God, Celie is
actually seeking counsel within herself. Celie finds within herself a twin self
who saves her from the abused consciousness and chronic physical loneliness.
In writing her letters to God, Celie is writing to that part of her personality
growing progressively stronger until she is able to acknowledge the God within
herself and demand the respect due to her. Her letters to God are directed
towards the task of creating her 'self.' She uses writing to effect self-actualization. Its standard form is modified with the elements of the oral injected into it.

Oral expression is a large part of Celie's writing. Though she records her experiences in written form, she renders it in an oral manner. Celie rejects the traditional notions of divinity. In the process redefines God. Both Celie and her sister Nettie master the written word, which reveals that they, as black women, are no longer complete victims of the racial and sexual oppression a white ethnocentric use of writing can dictate. *The Color Purple* is not only a novel in which black women make an inhospitable male environment amenable to their growth and development, it is also an epistolary novel in which black women take a form traditionally inhospitable to oral culture, the written word, and transform it making it responsive to their needs. By mastering and modifying writing Celie and Nettie change it into an implement that is no longer solely the property of black men and the whites but one used by black women to gain a greater awareness of themselves and to preserve their oral history.

The women in Alice Walker’s fiction, for the most part, do not understand the complexity of their problem. Because their limited worlds cannot assist them, they are destined to operate haphazardly. The distinctive feature of these women is the tremendous quality with which they carry their suffering. Some are genius and proud. Some are forgiving even to the men who mistreat them. Some are trusting and patient. The new women overcome insurmountable odds to change their condition. They are all resilient to a point. All these qualities contribute
to the success of Walker's literary style and effect. In forcing her readers to face the truth, she leads them beyond the normality or abnormality of an experience. In blowing a breath of life into her characters, she carries the reader to the edge of the cliff. Walker uses imagery, often in tangible, grass-roots form, to connect her characters to the South: flowers, quilts, cotton stalks, wasp nests. Plant life (often in the form of petunias) is a consistent image in her fiction as well as her poetry. Her sense of humour allows the reader to move through her fiction without becoming overburdened by its pain. Plants, often present in her death scenes at the end of some tragic moment, have a germinating quality. They symbolize hope. As a major modern writer, Alice Walker continues to water her purple petunias.

Although Walker strove for the welfare of black women, her critics have focused on her portrayal not of women but of men. Such criticism tend to draw attention away from the injustices done to women. But Walker has learned to accept the criticism with a smile. The new woman that Walker has become has learned not to confront the world with a clenched fist -- although like her version of Christ she may simply hide it behind her back most of the time -- but rather with the open hand of unity. Thus she has sought to reconstruct black womanhood and introduce a new iconography in African-American literature.

In short, Alice Walker as an African-American womanist, places the predicament of black women in its historical perspective. Throughout her writings she has tried to highlight the issues pertaining to the life of these hapless women. Her works are committed to exposing the sexist tragedy of black women
and protesting against their ongoing degradation. Her works expose sexism, racism and the patriarchal power structure and celebrate black women's intellectual capabilities and revolutionary vision. They provide a critical perception and reaction to patriarchy. However, her writings while exposing patriarchal excesses, do not lose artistic excellence.

Walker portrays the black man as an exploiter of black women. It is he, the black man, who is responsible for the plight of the black women. However, the black women who decide to live an independent life become self-conscious and develop love for their own self, and from self-love they begin to love others, especially the black women. This enables them to create a strong sisterhood, which empowers the weak women. Though Alice Walker exposes patriarchal hegemony, she does not reject the black man completely. Her women characters do reject the atrocious black men, but the moment these men change their way of life, they are welcome into the fold. In fact, Walker creates a world of black men and women based on equality, and mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. She creates a new world order defined and determined by the female of the species. The new empowerment confers on these black women responsibilities that they are capable of shouldering with compassion and dignity.
REFERENCES


11. Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, xi-xii.


