Chapter IV

Feminism in *The Color Purple*

Hailed as one of the great voices of contemporary African American literature, Alice Walker has earned widespread recognition for her considerable achievements as a fiction writer. Her third novel, *The Color Purple* (1982) is her life-changing breakthrough masterpiece which won American book award and the Pulitzer prize for fiction in 1983. It enjoyed enormous popularity in the form of a play on Broadway, but received serious critical accusations of male bashing because of its honest and unflinching representation of the sexual oppression and domination of black women by black men.

*The Color Purple* is one of the most acclaimed novels of the 1980’s, which, by introducing black feminity into the male-centered black nationalist discourse, contributed powerfully to the re-shaping of traditional Black Aestheticism. Black cultural nationalism and the Women’s Liberation movement mutually gave impetus for each other, being rooted in basically similar ideology. Black women, however, were prevented from both of these movements and liberationist discourses. This double exclusion is ironically painted by the slogan all the women are white and all the blacks are men. As M. Dubey states, “Black women’s novel, in the 70’s do not simply oppose to contemporary nationalist discourse on black identity. They imagine black feminity as an absence, and draw attention to the textual effects of this absence”(30). The renowned black critics consider it as a Walker’s new innovation. Humanity is her central theme of the novel.
In the words of Bell Hooks:

Walker parodies those primary texts of autobiographical writing which have shaped and influenced the direction of Afro-American fiction—"the slave narrative"—one that changed the African-American history; that led the groundwork for the development of a distinct African–American literary tradition (291)

She continues further:

Indeed the magic of *The Color Purple* is that it is so much a book of our time, imaginatively evoking the promise of a world in which one can have it all; a world in which sexual exploitation can be easily overcome; a world of unlimited access to material well being; a world where evils of racism are tempered by the positive gestures of concerned and caring white folks; a world where sexual boundaries can be transgressed at will without negative consequences; a world where spiritual salvation is the lot of the elect. This illusory magic is sustained by Walker’s literary technique,…autobiographical narrative.(291)

Written in the epistolary tradition, *The Color Purple* dramatizes Celie, to tell her story in her own native tone to regain her lost heritage. Traditionally a semi-private genre, the epistolary form has mostly evolved around the domestic life of women like Celie who is poor, nearly-illiterate and suffers from physical and mental exploitation. Walker emphasizes on speech as a liberatory vehicle, not only for Celie, but for generations of black women.
Dona Haisty Winchell in her book *Alice Walker* (1992), highlights that the *Color Purple* has an autobiographical touch. Raped by her stepfather, Walker’s heroine, Celie, follows the model of the author’s own great-great-grandmother, who was impregnated by her master at the age of eleven. Separated by a gap of five generations, Walker herself is the genetic product of that union. By the same token the novel also mirrors certain key literary influences. The sexually and ideologically rebellious character of Shug is representing the writer Zora Neale Hurston, whose work Walker has campaigned with great success to rescue from disuse.

Walker’s admirers of her first and second novel respectively *The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian* get assured that to read Walker means to enter into Alice in Wonderland. Her favourite country is Georgia, a world of rural background, long neglected by the most whites, perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps out of willed indifference. There a fourteen years old girl Celie, along with her sister Nettie and a brood of half brothers and sisters, lives a life of abuse and drudgery with her sick mother, worn out due to excessive pressure of child-bearing and soon dies, and Alphonso, whom she thinks her father, but who, it later turns out, is only her stepfather.

Celie has so little going for her in life except her natural ability and creativity displayed in her quilt-making and sewing. In the beginning expressing her talent in this way serves almost as an escape from her downtrodden, painful, dull, daily existence but, in the end it becomes her salvation giving meaning to her life which leads her towards women empowerment. Walker moves her central character mainly through three
phases, like her stage of suffering and victimization, self-awareness or awakening of consciousness, and then transformation.

In the beginning, Celie’s story concentrates first on tyrannies like sexual-abuse, beating and bargaining by her step father. This malady of child abuse is not limited to black community; rather the situation has deteriorated to the worst in every nook and corner. Here is the first quotation from the very outset of the text which is true to almost every girl. “then he put his thing inside my pussy, when that hurt I cry. He start to chock me, saying you better shut up and go it used to it.’ (CP,3). Forcing himself on her, her step-father warns Celie “You better not never tell anybody but God. It’d kill your mammy”. (CP3) It captivates the reader’s mind how Celie shares her shameful act to none else except God who is all merciful, omnipotent, omnipresent and benevolent to all. Falling victim of sexual atrocities of her stepfather she writes to God: “Dear god ,I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl .May be you can give me a sign of letting me know what is happening to me’’. (CP3) The striking of “I am” ,but not erased it completely is ironical here because she is prey right now whose identity- crisis could be over in future. Due to this, she suffers from inferiority complex. Her mind is polluted with guilt-consciousness. Being born in a poor family, she is forced to overhear her mother and father:

Last spring after little Luscious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain’t well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain’t gonna. Can’t you see I’m already half dead, an all of these chilren. (CP,3)
Singh

Celie’s alleged father who seems to possess Satyr like potency and who is like a walking phallus is eager to rekindle the sexual relationship with his wife shortly after she has given birth. His interest is conveyed by him “pulling on her arm”. When his wife refuses to fulfill his wishes, Pa rapes his oldest daughter Celie. Now her oppression becomes more severe, intense and unnatural that she gives birth to two children born out of this sexual crime. She is not allowed to love her own kids because they are powerfully removed from her. Her motherly breasts overflow with milk but she finds no child to feed. Celie like Walker’s other characters Mem and Margaret had no fate to enjoy motherhood. After her mother’s death Alfonso wants to dispose Celie whom he considers as “use and throw”. She is no longer “fresh”. she is no better than a mule or a cow to be ordered to turn around. And inspected .Mr.-, is called for bargaining. When Albert comes for second inspection the transaction is completed .Walker’s intention is explicit here to remind the Slave’s auction of the past, where Celie’s status is just of a slave, or chattel property—subservient to father and later to husband expected to perform domestic, field and sexual labor. Then she is given to Mr.-, (Albert) who marries her, separates her from her beloved sister Nettie. Protective of her younger sister Celie encourages Nettie to study, while Celie has been taken out of the school because of her pregnancy.

Celie’s marital relation with Mr.-, also focuses on her dehumanization “He never ast nothing about head bandaged, Nobody ever come, I say,[19] Celie gets beaten by Albert “cause she my wife” (23) but she never cries rather she becomes wood to bear torturous pain and controls her emotion “It all can do not to cry. I make myself wood.” : I say to myself, Celie, you a tree.”(23) When Nettie comes to visit, she recognizes her sister’s broken
spirit and urges her to fight; however, Celie contents herself with merely staying alive. Celie believes that “this life soon be over, I say .Heaven last all ways.’(44) Causing frustration due to corrosive pain and impact of alienation takes Celie towards degeneration. The famous critic Wendy Wall explains that Celie’s all attempt to negate her pain by desensitizing herself creates within her emotionally hollow spaces (84), which result in fragmentation, alienation, and unresponsiveness. She tries to ignore herself and her body. Mr.-, use of ‘it’ for Celie in place of “she ‘describes her absolute negation under male dominance. “He look at me .It like he looking at the earth’ (23)’ When Albert’s sisters advise him to fulfill Celie’s basic needs, he avoids and insults her “She tells lies,” She a bad influence on my other girl(9). His sole purpose to marry Celie is to look after his unruly children and to keep house, as well as to satisfy himself sexually.

Walker accepts the fact that thinking of a human being is a relative act. One cannot neglect what other persons are thinking about him or her, sometimes self-evaluation is done according to the world. Celie too has no courage to protect herself against the rude behavior and distorted image harbored by Mr-. So she is not reacting against self –dignity, when Mr-. comment, “She aint smart either”(9). It is a historical fact that black women are guilty of their own psychological abstractivism. Celie too transforms herself into a non-living being when her husband beats her. Adrienne Rich remarks sadly “But fear and hatred of our bodies often crippled our brains. Some of the brilliant women of our time are still trying to think- from somewhere outside their female bodies –hence they are still merely reproducing old forms of intellection.”(284)
A chronological study of Black male writers from pre and post Harlem Renaissance during 1920s mirrors black women as persons who are inferior even to the less important to black male characters. Like Claude McKay in his novel *Banjo* reflects the black women either as prostitutes or sex-objects whose body can be utilized by men at will and pleasure. Richard Wright “, father of modern Afro-American literature” and “spokesman for some twelve million black people in America” showed his explicit faith in phallic power in his popular essay entitled *How Thomas Bigger was Born*. His famous books like *Native Son*, *Black Boy* and others portray black women marginalized who define themselves always in relation to their male counterparts. It is a well-known fact that ‘one rotten apple spoils the others in the basket’. That means exploited by the whites, the black male exploited the black women and at times even annihilate their existence. In the words of Calvin Hernton:

Just as white people have created and maintained a racist culture, So have (black) men created and maintained a sexist culture. Racist culture teaches all whites to be racist in some manner or the other. In and through an elaborate system of masculine verses feminine gender Imperatives sexist culture socializes all men to be sexist. (10)

So, assaulted all the time by all those common forces, the black women, to quote Maya Angelou, “caught in a tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power”(231) It is obvious that women if they are being positioned as objects or as other, if they represent negative or positive value of ‘male’ then women gets placed in a negative space. Walker has looked at the black women from an insider’s point of view and attempts to discover what happened to her as she raised a
family under ghetto conditions or as she lived with a man struggling with his own powerlessness.

Since slavery aims at silencing the victims, blacks lost not only their language but also their heritage voiced through it. Celie, in Walker’s *Color Purple*, Margaret, in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maud Martha in Gwendolyn Brook’s novel *Maud Martha*, Francie in Merewether’s *Daddy Was Number Runner* are those black heroines who for some reason or the other, preferred silence and perpetuated their misery. Celie and Margaret remain silent even after being raped by men and Maud Martha learns the art of “taming all that [feminine] anger down.”(39). Francie Coffin’s response is worth quoted by Meriwether “I stood there patiently while his [the butcher’s] hands fumbled over my body” (41). Throughout American history, the violent nigger has been the most popular commodity. In the words of Linda Abbandonato in *Alice Walker: Critical Perspective Past and Present*:

Trapped in a gridlock of racist, sexist and heterosexist oppressions, Celie struggles towards linguistic self-definition. She is an “invisible woman” a character traditionally silenced and effaced in fictions; and by centering on her, Walker replots the heroine text.(297)

It is rightly said ‘where there is a will there is a way’ So, being an optimistic writer, Walker gets confident and determined to bring smile on dejected face, and beauty in full bloom in dark skin. So, Walker’s Celie who has surrendered herself to god is completely and absolutely safe, because ‘God helps those who help themselves’. Her letter to God in which she shares her all inner but shameful incidents has nothing to do with her broken
language. The crudeness and the style of her language reflect her traumatized, depressed, mental and emotional state of mind. Walker gives reason that she has not accepted an alien description of who she is; and neither has she accepted completely an alien tongue to tell us about it. Her being is affirmed by the language in which she is revealed, and like everything about her it is characteristic, hard-won and authentic. Talking about Celie’s **special Southern language** Linda Abbandonato views that:

The *Color Purple* offers a view from elsewhere is through its displacement of Standard English. Aware that “*the master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house*”, Alice Walker has confronted the challenge of constructing an alternative language by exploiting her formal and linguistic resources. Celie’s own natural language seems organic and original in comparison to “Nettie’s stilted verbosity.” Thus Nettie’s dreary and dry “standard (White)English” is challenged by Celie’s dreary inferior but privileged over Nettie’s correctness. (298-299)

Thus it must be said that the dialect is both natural and symbolic. If it is tried to confine the work to realism it is must that Walker’s Womanist aims will be missed. Though her purposeful transgression of generic boundaries, is considered as a lack of artistic control, yet it is entirely consistent with current feministic practice.

Walker’s portrayal of Mr.-, as indifferent, frustrated and whimsical shows his abnormality. His hatred for Celie causes her alienation because of her lack of beauty, confidence and loveless conjugal life. Celie’s perception and observation of human behavior change as she enters into adulthood.
Justifying the old saying ‘we see the world, not as it is but as we are’, she now passes through various stages in course of the novel and struggles cautiously to follow the footprints of those women around, who have the upper hand in their relationship with their male counterparts. Celie moves from a relationship with a stepfather who is sexually abusive to a relationship with her husband who exploits her labour and sex, to finally a lesbian relationship with Shug Avery, who loves her, teaches her the reverence and mystery of her body and the means of earning of a livelihood through her own industry and creativity. To reach this level, over and over again, she accepts abuse and victimization.

The feeling of gender affinity is known to all human being everywhere in the world. This concept is explored in Celie and Nettie’s relationship and the other in that of Celie and Shug. In the relation of Celie and Nettie, the physical separation and geographical distance do not make much difference. Their staying away from each other brings them closer through their letter and thoughts. “I think about my sister Nettie, thought so sharp it go through me like a pain… somebody to run to. It seems too sweet to bear” .(56)Celie’s gradual self awareness comes from her friend like sister Nettie, who also faces gender and particularly racial discrimination. Celie’s stepfather and Mr.-, had an inner desire to spoil Nettie sexually. But luckily, she escapes their evil intention. She, being a studious child keeps herself update. “All day she read, she study, she practice her hand writing and try to let us to think.”(17)When Celie complains about the misbehaviors of her stepson and daughter Nettie trains her “Don’t let them run over you… you got to fight, you got to fight”(25).
Celie has never got opportunity to participate with extraordinary women’s company before Sofia’s arrival in her life and in her family as her daughter-in-law. As a mute observer, she watches Sofia’s daring attitude towards Harpo as a wife with great astonishment. She sees “Sofia stand up herself before Mr.-., refusing to be cowed down by his mean allegations. She is a big strong girl. Arms got muscles. Legs too. She swing that baby about like nothing it. She… give you the feeling she all there. Solid. Like if she sit down on something, it be mash.”(36) Her attitude is not mechanical like Harpo, so she is fed up and decides to leave. Her fortnight behavior, while staying with Celie, works as an eye-opener. She recognizes the difference between her relationship with Mr.-, and Sofia’s with Harpo. Sofia is outspoken. She guides Celie not to bear torture and encourages fighting and reacting against suppression. Sophia retorts “you ought to bash Mr.-, open…Think of heaven later.(44). Sofia is able to escape gender discrimination by leaving her husband.

In the mean time, she is lynched by white racist which is a more systematic evil force. Punished for assaulting the mayor and his wife, she is jailed, deprived of her children’s tender touch for twelve years; she buries her sentiments deep, yet retains a selfhood which is evident in her rejection of Reynolds. She resists domination by anyone, white or black, male or female. When Celie sees her, she wonders how she is still alive. “They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side….She can’t talk. And she just about the color of eggplant.”(92) Sofia is paroled for good behavior, and again she gets pressurized to serve as a maid the in white mayor family. Sofia obeys Miss Millie, the mayor’s wife’s order, looks after her small white kids but with heavy heart and enraged soul, because she is
allowed to see her own child once in a five year and only for 15 minutes. And even then she is cursed as ungrateful. Though the situation takes the ugly turn and she becomes prey to racial abuse. Walker in her scathing criticism of white racism, makes Sofia comment: “They backward ,she say, Clumsy ,and unlucky. White folks is a miracle of affliction.”(106)

Sofia, like Walker’s other emergent women characters like Ruth and Meridian, restores her spirit from her sisters with whom she has a supportive and nurturing relationship. Sofia’s bold statement against Harpo (her husband) brings a dawning impact on Celie that female passivity is not the only possible response to male domination. In Sofia, she sees a woman who is not dependent on a man for maintaining her existence in the world, not a victim of circumstances, but a controller of circumstances.

The center of the novel is considered as Walker’s heart where she is personally present. She describes her womanist preoccupation as both physically and emotionally. In literature, generally, the writers, who challenge the traditional views of ‘woman as weaker sex’ are termed as ‘feminist’ and their important task is to topple the dominant ideology by placing the unorthodox and marginalized at the centre of the discursive and cultural stage. It is imperative to mention that writing in the first half of the twentieth century in America was orientated to the resistance on the basis of race. However, the latter half of the century has seen a drastic shift in America, particularly African American, culture and literature. One major shift has been from the focus on race to that of gender. In the preface of the book Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives: Past and Present it is mentioned:
Walker’s patient work structurally centers around a tradition of African-American women’s writing, and indeed, within a larger tradition of Black letters as a counterpoint to the naturalist art of Richard Writing.”(Preface ix)

It is also further mentioned that:

while the theme of racial oppression has been one of the great concerns of black fiction… theme of oppression of Blacks by Blacks does not have a long history. The *Color Purple* axes the domination of Male over female, Black male over Black female” (ix).

Alice Walker revolutionized against gender marginalization and her revolution has emerged as a unique decolonization of traditional love. Walker’s feminist theory constructs ‘homosexuality’ in order to challenge heterosexuality where a female becomes the commodity of exchange and where patriarchal world flourishes. Her novel, in the words of Peter S Prescott presented in a *Newsweek* review opines that *The Color Purple* is an American novel of permanent importance, that rare sort of book in which love redeems, meanness kills. Walker’s redemptive love requires female-bonding. The bond liberates women from men, who are predators at worst, idle at best. She focuses on patriarchal family, where there is love, there is togetherness but where the love decays, things fall apart. Besides love, music is used as a collective expression of the black people.

Music has its various forms. One of them is “Blues” originated from black tradition and culture. Its values lies not only in its sound but also in its relationship to the history of the people. In the words of Amiri Baraka, a black scholar, in his famous book *Blues People: Negro Music in White
America “the term blues relates directly to the Negro experience ,it is one music the Negro made that could not be transferred into a more general significance that the one the Negro gave it initially”. (94) The blues, black America’s spirited and often ironical statement of hard times ,hopes and triumphs, was first performed by women in the 1920s. These blues singers gave the music worldwide recognition and their profession gave them freedom and independence from back-breaking field work or domestic servitude. Baraka further comments about the music scene of the 1960s in the Introduction to Blues People, his classic work on the place of jazz and blues in American social, musical, economic, and cultural history:

The path the slave took to 'citizenship' is what I want to look at. And I make my analogy through the slave citizen's music -- through the music that is most closely associated with him: blues and a later, but parallel development, jazz... [If] the Negro represents, or is symbolic of, something in and about the nature of American culture, this certainly should be revealed by his characteristic music."(94)

By highlighting the traditional folklore music, Alice Walker brilliantly illuminates the influence of African Americans on American culture and history. She gives a full-throated applause to those blues singers by immortalizing them in her novel. Like classic blue singers like Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, She represents Shug as a blue singer. She becomes the embodiment of feminist existential freedom who is also Celie’s husband’s lover. Walker breaks the taboo through her agent “Shug” who is self-invented character. She lives independently possessing all manly qualities. She becomes Celie’s teacher showing her how to find pleasure in her own
body and to follow the intuition of her own mind. To cite Adrienne Rich in *Alice Walker: Critical Perspective Past and Present*:

Why the female child should redirect her libidinal activity from the original object of desire. The mother, to the father and conclude that heterosexuality is a political institution into which women are conscripted ideologically, by force and through the censorship of alternative models of sexuality. (302)

Shug, who is Celie’s talisman, contributes the most to Celie’s transformation and her initiation into black womanhood. She guides her very sympathetically to regenerate her feminine urge, physical beauty and to love black sisters. Both women get closer at their adverse and lowly position in their lives. Celie, trapped in an unRewarding marriage and Shug, returning from a not-very successful music concert and with a “nasty woman disease”. (CP,48). Though their first-sight-meeting was awkward, and for Celie sometimes menacing as she washes or cleans Shug’s dirty and diseased body, but she serves her very patiently without any ill-will.

Celie begins a new life of independence because of her relationship with Shug who serves as a vehicle through which Celie gets empowered to challenge the oppressions over her. Shug has grown strong and independent by being true to her own experience. Celie sometimes feels that there is something masculine about Shug. Celie states ‘.When you look in Shug’s eyes you know she been where she been.(276)’. From the basic intensities of friendship and love their relationship is based on interdependence and trust. It covers all aspect of life –sexual, moral, economical and spiritual. Celie is overwhelmed by her attachment and motherly care. When Shug informs
that it’s the time for her to leave, Celie shatters. In her misery she blurts out her burden—‘He beats me when you not here, I say….For being me and not you’(78-79) Shug listens in amazement as Celie describes her loveless sex relationship with Mr.-, because she herself finds sex enjoyable.

Alice walker unlike her previous two works has extended the canvas of her vision by depicting on a lesbian relationship. Tackling this taboo subject walker shows the relationship to be one of the restoration and freedom and emphasizes the importance of female friendship in the black community. According to Adrienne Rich’s concept “Lesbian continuum” (648) spans the whole spectrum of women’s friendships and sisterly solidarity. Walker’s term womanist” is clearly influenced by Rich’s this terms women’s love for women is at once centralized and incorporated into a more diffused model of woman identifying women.

To compensate the emotional trauma Celie attracts to Shug, who gives her physical and emotional love and care. Despite becoming mother of two children by Alfonso and being selfishly fumbling by Albert, she is sexually innocent and remains a “virgin”.(79) Walker stresses the acceptance of female biology. She undergoes a transformation which involves her sexual awakening. Both Shug and Celie were deprived of enjoying bliss of the mother-child relationship, so this lesbian relationship gives them the inner satisfaction. Besides Shug showers motherly and sisterly relations to heal up emotionally, sexually and physically broken Celie. Her sleeping with Shug is described as ‘little like sleeping with mamma’. ‘Us sleep like sisters, me and Shug’, (155) Shug declares “Us each other’s people now”.(189) The love between the two is nurturing and healing a physical as well as a spiritual
experience. It is through her awareness of her right to the passion, creativity and fulfillment that life offers that she empowers herself.

Though Celie is well-aware of her dark-skin and ugliness and feels surprised: “sometimes I think “Shug never loves me I stand looking at my naked self in the looking glam. What would she love - Nothing young and fresh my hair must be young and fresh though it feel like it blooming blood’’(266) Celie’s inferiority complex of “being ugly’’ is perfect example of her divided or contrary instincts which flourishes under the banner of patriarchal oppression. But Shug tries to dispel her ignorance and narrow-mindedness by boosting statements time to time .She tells Celie that God is to be found in all joys of life and whole of the creation. The relations between two moves ahead through physical intimacy and reaches its height. It is an erotic exchange between two women which is poignantly depicted as a mutual representing.

First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth. I thought I had turned into a man. What you staring at? She ast. Hateful. She weak as a kitten. But her mouth just packs with claws. You never seen a naked woman before? No ma’am, I said. I never did cept for Sofia, and she so plump and ruddy and crazy she feel like my sister. She say, Well take a good look. Even if I is just bag of bones now. She have the nerve to put one hand on her naked hip and bat her eyes at me. Then she suck her teef and roll her eyes at the ceiling while I wash her.I wash her body, it feel like I am praying .My hands tremble and my breath short.(47)
It initiates the process by which Celie learns how to love herself and establish her own identity as a human being. In the words of critic Daniel W. Ross that:

One of the primary object of feminism is to restore women’s bodies, appropriated long ago by a patriarchal culture to them. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, have learned to fear or even to hate their bodies. (70)

Though Nettie and Sofia suggest Celie to feel confident and independent, it is Shug who truly creates favorable atmosphere for her to come out of her shell (fear and torture) and declare her independence. Shug’s presence not only transforms Celie into a bold and powerful woman who awakens her inner-strength to defy Mr.-., (Celie’s husband), she also realizes that she must follow her female friends’ advice and fight for her own survival. Nettie’s letters consequently function as catalyst for Celie’s revolt.

When Celie learns that Nettie is alive and well in Africa, she gets relaxed but the meanness of hiding Nettie’s, letters by Mr.-., enrages her. She loses temper and she thinks of killing him. Shug prevents her from doing so. “Don’t kill, she say. Nettie be coming home before long. Don’t make her have to look at you like us look at Sofia.” (150). She draws out Celie’s in-built talent by channelizing her life-force into a purposeful direction. It is apt to cite here that an empty mind is devil’s workshop means Walker, being a magnanimous-hearted writer, never advocates killing rather she advocates survival whole. Shug Avery’s relationship with Celie, however, does not remain on the level of lesbian love, but its ultimate goal is to make Celie
self confident and to develop her ability to appreciate herself, and to discover whatever is valuable around her, or, using Shug’s terminology, whatever is purple in life. It is also this relationship that develops the kind of sensitivity in the heroine that later makes her able to enjoy heterosexual love as well.

Initially, Celie’s letters are addressed to God. Her relationship to God is, however, turned from distant fear to loathing when she learns that Albert has been appropriating Nettie’s letters for years. Celie’s anger is for God who is also a male, like her villain husband. She stops addressing her letters to God. Consequent changes in her also mark a shift in the style of her writing.

What God do for me”? I ast . . . he give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won’t ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown (CP173).

But Shug praises God ‘just act and says “God is an “it” rather than a “he” ‘not one but many’,(199) .Mae Henderson views that Shug “Unlike Celie, who derives her sense of self from the dominant white and male theology ,Shug is a self-invented character whose sense of self is not male inscribed. Her theology allows a divine, self-authorized sense of self.”(16) Shug’s religious concept involves universal humanism, means God is beyond the description of gender which Celie’s shallow mind knows. Shug further teaches Celie that God is omnipresent. He is all-pervasive. In her words:
Here is the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don’t know what you looking for. (202)

She reveals an “expansive god of encompassing nature, who loves every tings that one loves” (203) and then finally Celie’s vision of God becomes all encompassing. So she, addresses God as “Dear God, Dear Stars. Dear Trees, Dear sky, Dear peoples, Dear Everything, Dear God” (292), a vision that begins and ends with God. Thus Walker adds a new dimension to the spiritualism of women. She believes that animism has its root in African heritage which has been retained by African-Americans. In the words of O’Brien “a belief that makes it possible to view all creation as living, as being inhabited by spirit.” (326) Walker salutes the soil of her native place which brings forth her into such elated position. It is essential here to produce her feelings.

I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you’ve found it. My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling is part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact when it happens, you can’t miss it. Everything wants to be loved. Us sing and dance, make faces and give flower bouquets, trying to be loved. You even
notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk?” (178-79)

Shug’s representation as a feminist existentialist is highly symbolical. Her association with the color “purple”, the color of life, the “polysemous sign”,(Evans 169) meant to be the main symbol of the book. Shug, by promoting a transformation in Celie’s consciousness and individuality, also becomes the spokeswoman of the “womanist” ideology. Shug’s spiritual interpretation of God is strongly rooted in the transcendentalist, Unitarian concept of God, conceived as an all-pervasive, pantheistic spirit on the one hand, and on the other hand as an echo of Walker’s womanist philosophy, as formulated in her essays collected in a volume entitled *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (Walker xi-xii) Its detail is already discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

As the novel progresses, Mr-, whose brutal controlling power dominates in the outset, recedes gradually into powerlessness, as two women in his life get united against his authority. Celie’s journey of resistance begins onward with the bond of sisterhood. Once, Shug suggests Celie to wear pant for being comfortable like her. “you do all the work around here …How you keep from falling over it or getting the plow caught in it is beyond me.”(CP) Flexibility about dress codes has been explicit in lesbian culture.

Alice Walker, through her agent Shug, helps to bring out Celie into a feminine world, a world of her own imaginative and artistic creation. When Albert objects Celie to wear pant in order to go to Memphis along with her friend Shug, Celie retorts. “You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong I say. It’s
time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And you’re dead body just the welcome mat I need. (207) Secondly when she gets confirmed that Alberts hides her loving sister’s letters from Africa she curses him like a supernatural being. She shouts: “Until you do right by me, every thing you touch will crumble. (213) Shug is startled to see Celie’s wrath against her husband which is unbecoming usually. Albert, unable to understand the situation, tries to humiliate her as he does early: Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all” (213) No longer afraid, she continues her curse, feeling as if the words come to her from another world: “Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail….Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice….The jail you plan for me is the one in which you will rot.” (213). Finally she asserts her selfhood as a human being in this world: “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here.”(214). It is a positive and creative move towards self-recognition and establishment of worth. Celie affirms the supremacy of speech over, physical, material despotism which are the elements of patriarchy. Her assertion reflects her reaction against stoic passivity.

The unexpected discovery of Nettie’s letters written over a period of thirty years changes the vistas of Celie’s mind. This marks the dissolution of her isolation which already appears in her persona after Shug’s entrance in her life. She gets psychologically matured about the God and its forms. She firmly decides to be concerned with Nettie for further sharing her feelings because she realizes that “If he ever listened to poor colored women, the world would be a different place.”(175). This depicts Celie’s changed religious faith, which hitherto meant her only source of energy and
consolation as she tolerates the abuses and hardships of life. The unexpected
discovery of Nettie’s letters give Celie mind –opening information about
White God, about her native country Africa. In their letters, Celie and Nettie
talk about God. Celie confesses that she sees God as white, but Nettie replies
that being in Africa has made her see God differently. Her African
experience has made her see God spiritually rather than in the physical form
that is represented in Western Christianity.

Celie’s individuality starts to take shape and her sense of self becomes stronger, in fact that is marked not only by the shift in the addressee of the letters but by the concomitant change of the ending formula. Nettie’s letters are a kind of historical facts of Olinka. She gives light on social condition of black women, African tribal traditions and women’s health which is not sound. The girls are deprived of education as well. In the words of Deborah E. McDowell: “The majority of Celie’s letters represent the private paradigm of the African American female tradition in the novel, and the majority of Nettie's letters can be said to represent the public paradigm” (47). Walker, through Nettie’s letter, highlights African tribal women’s lowly and mechanized position in society, limited as a tool of reproduction.

There is a way that the /Olinka/ men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don’t even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not “look in a man’s face” as they say. To “look in a man’s face” is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa” (CP149)
Nettie also informs that Olivia and Adam are Celie’s own children and Alfonso (stepfather) is not their true father. She goes to Africa with a team of a black missionary couple Samuel and Corrine. There she gets acquainted with African culture and her own people at close quarter. Her experience with Olinkans seems bitter. They treat women universally as “a girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something. She herself is treated as missionary drudge” (162), because she is not owned by any man. Still, Nettie refuses to be demoralized and dedicates her soul and energy for the upliftment of African men, women and children. Nettie’s letters from Africa in which she clears Pa was not her real father; her children were not born incest, this feeling liberates Celie from guilt-consciousness born out of forced incest relationship with her step father.

Nettie further describes Celie that there is an open sex role in Africa. She writes that once Olivia asks to me about her childhood friend Tashi “Why can’t Tashi come to school? When I told her the Olinkans don’t believe in educating girls she said, quick as a flash’ they’re like white people at home who don’t want colored people to learn.”(CP)

Both Nettie and Shug open Celie’s mind about God and its Creation. She further learns that violence is not as powerful as the inexorable force of nature. She gets aware that this Natural Creation of World is itself the God’s manifestation, like a blade of corn, god-like flowers little wildflowers and a field blooming purple. She believes that those sufferers and oppressed one can empower themselves by imbibing this force into themselves. Here, it is relevant to cite, John Keats’s universal line ‘Beauty is Truth and Truth is Beauty.’ Walker’s religious belief is explicit here. She does not believe in
“a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a Leaf or a Snake.” (ISMG 265)

We find that some other woman character in the novel, also has learnt to fight for herself. Mary Agnes is strong, her nickname is Squeak, and she is the mistress of Harpo. Although Sofia hates Squeak, once beats her, yet she cares for Sofia’s children, when Sofia goes to jail. Mary Agnes endures rape for Sofia’s sake in order to get her released from prison. Mary Agnes represents the kind of sacrificing ‘women’ in order to bind herself together in a community to fight against the odds collectively. Shug and Mary through singings blues, what Russell called coded artistic “language of resistance” (Lauret 113), metaphorically outcries voices silenced by patriarchy, announce their sufferings and oppressions and free their voices in their own songs. Squeak’s singing reverberates the log-lasting hushed sound of Negro women who individually and collectively work toward their own and each other's salvation throughout the history. Russell suggests, Blue singers “talk to us,….they are the expression of a particular social process by which poor black women have commented on all ….political questions facing us ….” (Lauret, 113).

Walker explicitly establishes herself as a black and Southern writer by displaying a richness of vision. She comments about the missing in mainstream of American literature in book In Saving the Life That is Yours Own: The Importance of Models in the Artists life. She claims that the gloom of defeat is thick. And there is overall pessimisms in modern American Literature. American Writers tended to end their books and their characters’ lives. Whereas Afro-American specially women writer not only stoop to the level of grotesque or the morbid rather they regenerate their literature with
fertile imagination, keen observation, the vibrant and lyrical mode. Walker confirms that her characters suffer as much on account of her inner conflicts as on their external problems like racism, sexism, colonism and many others. Her men and women begin an act of atonement but seek redemption by overcoming the conflicts in their own imaginative and creative way like adopting the art of gardening, quilting, sewing, and music and singing.

Focusing on the female bonding one of the critic Nina Auerbach has written a very interesting book entitled ‘Communities of Women’. She compares male and female communities and find out a very significant difference between them. She discovered that male communities possess a grandeur and magnitude. Female communities do not. Male hankers for power and symbols and they refer to one another as “king”, “captain” and “master”. (7) However communities of women has no such lofty aspiration “In almost all instances, the male quest is exchanged for rootedness- a school, a village, a city of their own” (Auerbach 8). A Woman’s activities center around the home as she has to discharge multiple and awesome number of daily routine which deprives her of sparing personal time for her own desire and inner creativity to give an outlet. In the words of Ellen Mores, “a woman’s life is hard in its own way, as women have always known and men have rarely understood” (3). The same feelings are traceable in “A Room of One’s Own” by Virginia Woolf. She blames the women writer who do not emerge successful, the reason behind is they allow unimportant, unnecessary, irrelevant distractions to take precedence over their work. According to her, money and privacy are the two requirements to be a successful writer. She adds: “Genius needs freedom; it cannot flower if it is
encumbered by fear, or rancor or dependency, and without money freedom is impossible.”(viii)

Being a black feminist Walker makes us realize that time has come to acknowledge the huge burden so many women have been forced to carry, especially those who are born black, time to pay tribute to what they have managed to perform given so little to work with and so much oppression, time to expand our vision of what constitutes art; time to become aware of our maternal heritage, to be proud of it and do our best to carry on the tradition.

However, Walker insists that one should be broad in perspective. She describes that racism denied the black people to read and write. She gives example of recent singers with those “saints” (her suspended black women characters) who were legally forbidden to use their right to live independently. She says that today’s Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin and other can describe well about those restricted voices muzzled for life. She gives example of her own mother who, despite bringing up eight children, working beside her husband all day, produced an extraordinary piece of quilt after working in spare time or overnight. Walker muses: “But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or care about feeding the creative spirit?” (ISMG,2379) She praises her mother’s extraordinary merits. She further recalls her own mother’s hobby of gardening:

… my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. and not just your typical straggly country strand for zinnias, either. She planted ambitious gardens- and
still does- with over fifty different varieties of plants that bloom  
Profusely from early March until late November. (2380)

Walker observes her Mother as Creator (of beauty), her creations of garden praised by community “a garden so brilliant with colors so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity (2381). She watches her ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of valuing the skill whatever one possesses. An intellectual and literate male have all chance to be poet or author, on the other hand her black women who possess the legacy of art as a born gift also could become victorious in life. Walker’s main reason to establish Celie as a successful entrepreneur is to give her economic independence, besides her aesthetic-vision, in a capitalist society. Celie, like skilled and experienced artist does various experiment with the designs to seek perfection.

I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain’t been able to stop. I change the cloths, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants sug tease me. (218) “Then finally one day I made the perfect pair of pants” (219).

In the words of Bell Hooks The Color Purple transcends the narrow boundaries of any specific classifications and slotting to “affirm the integrity of her artistic vision (480). Another fiction-writer Willa Cather presents the similar recognition about gardening, quilting, and the meal as creative continuity of the women. Cather’s link with this female tradition gives her
with an important emotional support when she worked in her immigrant neighbor’s garden.

Cather had personal grounds for praising woman’s role in preserving life from one home to another. The rituals of domesticity-preserving cooking, gardening, housekeeping-are the bearers of culture in her fiction, where establishing a home signifies the human ability to transform an empty into an inhabited one. (O’Brien 74)

So, it is noticed that Walker has shown her deep respect for Southern creativity. She worships her mother as creative god whom she has immortalized in her autobiographical work In Search of Mother’s Garden. She brings similarity between her mother’s art of gardening with Celie’s art of sewing pant which becomes popular far and wide. It enables Celie to decide to leave her Mr-, and moves to Memphis with Shug to begin a new life, because she wants to utilize her inner talent to make her both ends meet. “I am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time What else could any person want?” (222).

The Color, Purple can be called a womanish novel, not merely because two central female characters become ‘lovers’ but because women are positioned as central, and sharing a rich, inner life bonding against male tyranny and giving and receiving practical and political support. Walker’s introducing of “art of quilting’ serves two purpose; first it gives economic independence second it helps to overcome hatred and despair which is harmful for health. The quilt which Celie works upon with the company of Sofia and Shug is the “Sister’s choice,’’ pattern with “little yellow pieces, look like stars” (53) stands for love and beauty. Celie is liberated from her
oppression through her transformation, resulting in feminist consciousness. Her hatred for Mr._ gets reduced with her creative regenerations. The relationship between Shug and Celie is important not only to Celie, but also for Shug, who, with Celie’s help, is able to deconstruct the isolation caused by the prejudices of the black community towards a woman who is able to earn her own living as a bar-singer. In Olinka Corrine see people making beautiful quilts which are full of animals and birds. She too began to make a quilt that alternated one square of appliquéd figures with one nine-patch block, using the clothes the children had outgrown and some of her old dresses.(159)

In the process of quilting Corrine learns that Nettie is the real aunt of her sister’s children. ‘Quilting’ developed the bond of togetherness between two female. Prior in her letter Nettie who has informed that Olivia and Adam are Celie’s own children and Alfonso (stepfather) is not their true father. The novel celebrates not simply black womanhood but the very making of feminine roles as mother, sister, daughter, wife and beloved. As Adrienne Rich describes that sewing or weaving emphasizes woman’s transformative power. (101) By sewing Celie narrows the gap between the sexes, making pants for both men and woman. Sewing also links Celie to woman’s primordial power that pre-dates patriarchy. Shug acts as a redeemer who helps Celie to regain her self-respect. She says to Celie “I brought you here to love you and help you get on your own feet.”(218).

To Alice Walker art is a primary source to which women can resort for obtaining their own selves in restrictive society in which women’s crashed individualities depicted in her works can be regained by employing diverse forms of art. Subsequently, underscoring the role of art in society,
she asserts art should “make us better; if [it] doesn't then what on earth is it for?” (Davis, 28). Androgyny is not an innovative aspect in arts, but among Afro American women writers Walker has to be credited for employing it as part of her personal aesthetics. Androgyny concept involves, in the words of Buncombe “totality of the black experience, male and female, sharing and caring in the struggle for freedom, harmony and unity” (427).

In the concluding part, there is harmony in the relationship. The notions of women’s work and men’s works break down. As Harpo and Mr-, enjoy feminine work like cooking, sewing cleaning and looking after babies. Whereas Shug, Celie and Sophia do masculine work like building roofs, designing houses and owning a store normally associated with men. Shug and Mary Agnes make music. Harpo makes a place for people then Albert makes comfortable shirts to go with Celie’s pants. Corrine, Samuel and Nettie build a school for betterment of African children.

Thus, By unifying all the characters and ending their conflicting gap by the end both the wife and the husband Celie and Albert feel if not love for one-another, at least an easy companionship should be established. Albert opens his heart. “I am satisfied this the first time I ever lived on earth as a natural man, I feel like a new experience” (CP, 122). The presence of male is either denied or detested in Walker’s feministic world. A woman is freed from the clutches of man. In the end of the novel, it is observed that the sufferer female protagonist progresses from nothingness (of dumb and dull slave) to a significant, free and liberated self-independent woman. Albert confesses of ill treatment towards Celie “two old fool left over from love keeping each other company under the stars and he offers to Celie for
remarriage “in the spirit as well the flesh, “ but she refuses preferring” to be friends”. (209)

Therefore, we find that Walker has used this universally-acclaimed novel as tools to give instruction as well as delight. In *The women of Brewster Place*, Gloria Naylor portrays the lesbian relationship between Lorrain and Theresa which is hidden from the outside world and results in tragedy. Walker portrays lesbian relationship as authentically normal and natural. It is a glorifying bond between women to women to overcome the destructive experiences of life. She also made attempt to highlight that her work has a therapeutic value emerging from her womanist ideology to combat negative aspects of power politics.

Black women’s writing has become an ‘extended metaphor’ in their literature. Celie in Alice walker’s the *Color Purple* (1983) and Sula of Morrison *Sula* (1974) are examples of women who break away from the defined sex-role of the oppressive society to the fresh niche in a world of her own. Alice Walker, as a sensitive writer, draws sustenance from her roots and her traditional heritage in this novel. Inspired by her inherent African-American tendency, she endows her characters with a pluralistic creative sensibility to overcome racial and sexual discrimination .As Philip M. Royester rightly says that, “Walker’s fiction confronts such issues as racism, intra-racism, sexism, neo-colonialism and imperialism in order to transform both society and individual” (348).In the same flow it is said that to bring change, Walker took to writing first to expand herself as much as she could and seeing herself in many roles and situations as possible.
Alice walker as a novelist has surpassed her previous two works and has extended the canvas by depicting on a lesbian relationship. Tackling this taboo subject walker shows the relationship to be one of the restoration and freedom and emphasizes the importance of female friendship in the black community. According to Adrienne Rich’s concept lesbian continuum spans the whole spectrum of women’s friendships and sisterly solidarity and Walker’s term womanist” is clearly coined under her influence. It opines that women’s love for women is at once centralized and incorporated into a more diffused model of woman identifying women. In the end, it is justifying to mention Alice-Walker an all-time friend, philosopher and guide who introduced this ancient but universal -sewing art deliberately to ameliorate the jeopardized condition of economically under privileged women, not only of one continent America and Africa rather to awaken the ‘female class in general’ and black female in particular.

Alice Walker eulogizes Zora Neale Hurston, her mentor and creative guide. She states referring Hurston’s *Their eyes were watching God*, there is no book more important to me than this one(25)Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Hurston’s- *Their Eyes were Watching God* embody similarity in concerns and methods, ones that characterize the black woman’s literary tradition. Hurston and Walker reclaim too often deprecated territories, the language of black folk culture and the experience of uneducated rural Southern women.

Alice Walker represents broad spectrum and shows specific nature of womanist of color. A feminist narrows down her perspective because she limits herself to the emancipation of sex and whereas a womanist is a humanist who remains committed to the survival of all and wholeness of
entire people male as well as female. Walker also shows her eagerness as a writer to draw attention towards other burning issues like poverty, disease, primitive wars and many other problems of third world women in her later works. The novelist has spotlighted man’s concept of womanhood--housekeeping, children rearing, fulfilling men’s need and societies responsibility But Walker’s Afro-utopian community crushed down their false-ego through inculcating love for maternal heritage and depicting black women’s matrilineage history and her aesthetic sensibility. All her female characters learn all masculine works including fulfilling physical need for which women in general need male and do not bother for them. Their solidarity proves that being fed up with their own helplessness against male-chauvinism they form their own life not only comfortably possible but pleasantly enjoyable. Walker’s guideline proves the safe harbor where the ship (black women) can anchor safely after being buffeted about in the high seas (male), for so long. *The Color Purple* is a novel charting ‘a way of travelling a point of arrival, ’an invitation to wander and secure a habitation free from all domination.
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