

CHAPTER - VI

**CONCLUSION : FROM OPPRESSIONS TO TRIUMPHS
OF THE BLACK WOMEN**

A realization that one is oppressed just because one is black and female creates a feeling of self-awareness. Naturally this awareness brings an understanding that compels one think strategies that could help in ending such an oppression. The aim of this dissertation is to study the celebration of black women characters in the novels of Alice Walker.

Alice Walker's female characters grow as they progress from positions of vulnerability to positions of relative strength. Walker has projected the black women characters from insiders point of view. Walker tried her best to highlight the issues pertaining to the life of these helpless women. What has been neglected in Walker scholarship is the fact that her male characters also grow and change, when they acknowledge women's pain and their role in it. Her women achieve psychological wholeness when they are able to fight oppression of their black men. However, as a womanist her major concern is with the survival of whole of her race. According to her survival whole means in part choosing which self to celebrate. Part 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 in a polemical sense celebrates the black women's intellectual capabilities and the revolutionary vision. She has presented the conscious struggle of the black women against orthodoxy, racism and patriarchal institutions.

The struggle of the black to reclaim their identity and self-worth is depicted increasingly through the struggle of black women which is based on love and self-awareness. Alice Walker is one of the few writers of the Civil Rights Movement who located the struggle within the self.

Alice Walker prefers the term womanist to feminist. For her womanist means one who is committed to the survival and integrity of the entire black race. In her major novels, The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Meridian, The Color Purple and The Temple of My Familiar, she creates black male characters who are atrocious human beings, who are the symbol of black women's oppression. Through a series of black women characters Walker creates a saga wherein the womanist consciousness surfaces through the ordeal of experience.

Walker highlights the awareness among the black women about the unjust treatment given to them by their men. Hence, these women characters refuse to cooperate with the black men and try to destroy the very source that enables the black men to exploit them. Her protagonists try to find ways to save themselves by sharing their burdens. Her women stand up for their right. They all show generosity in their sufferings : some forgive their bullying menfolk, most are trusting, patient, even proud. Many display contradictory attitudes. Yet they are prophetic in representing the potential of their community. At the end of The Third

Life of Grange Copeland Walker shifts to the granddaughter, Ruth, to affirm possible futures, stolen from the brutalized generations of the past. The novel posits rural self-sufficiency as feasible. The Color Purple, finally brings the work-place and living space together as Celie sews colourful trousers.

Walker's women are rebel who are aware of the power of patriarchy. Hence they fight for equal rights and for upholding human dignity and revolted whenever necessary against their men. For example, Mem, literate teacher wife of an illiterate Brownfield tries to assume the role of a provider to her family and at a gun point forces Brownfield to obey her. Meridian also rejects Truman Held, when she understands his betrayal. She ties her tubes so that nobody could thrust motherhood on her. In the same way Celie rejects Albert when she regains her identity and self-worth in the company of Shug and decides to be self-reliant and economically independent.

Lissie and Fanny in The Temple of My familiar are also quite conscious of their plight as women. Lissie knows oppression from parents, siblings, relatives, governmental authorities and talks about it. The novel is a saga of the black woman's decline and fall on the one hand, and rise and triumph on the other. Walker's female protagonists succeed in creating a new social order in a hostile environment.

Though Walker has presented black men as oppressors of black women, some of these men do actually change over a period of time and ultimately compromise, the moment they understand that black women have become self-conscious and awakened. Characters such as Grange Copeland, Albert, Truman undergo change for the betterment of their lives. As Alice Walker stresses in her anthology In Search of Our Mothers' Garden :

I believe in change : change personal and change in society. I have experienced a revolution (unfinished, without question, but one whose new order is everywhere on view) in the South. And I grew up - until I refused to go — in the Methodist church, which taught me that Paul will sometimes change the way to Damascus - So Grange Copeland was expected to change. He was fortunate enough to be touched by love of something beyond himself. [His Son] Brownfield did not change because he was not prepared to give his life for anything or to anything . He could find nothing of value within himself. To become what he hated was his inevitable destiny.¹

Like Walker, Toni Morrison's novels The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, and Beloved express a strong critique of the male dominance. As a result her characters such as Sula, the protagonist of Sula, Pilate, one of the major black characters of Song of Solomon and Jadins the protagonist of Tar Baby try to create a world of their own. The Bluest Eye demonstrates how lack of proper role model creates havoc in the life of a black girl. Pecola's madness is the result of the influence of

the dominant culture that is both white and male. Her father rapes Pecola just to express his concern for the daughter. Jadine, all her life tries to be feminine rather than feminist. In *Sula*, Morrison creates an entirely self-contained and women-centred universe. Eva Peace brings order and at times proves to be terrible mother. For *Sula*, women's friendship with each other is of greater importance than their relation to black men. The protagonist of *Beloved*, Sethe, expresses her consciousness freely. She realized her life as less than that of an animal and her womanhood is being trampled at the hands of white masters. As a result, she flees and commits the most heinous crime of killing her own baby girl to protect her from the evil of white racism and slavery. Like Walker, the black female protagonist of Morrison try to come out of the trap prepared by hostile men and try to free themselves from the evil of oppression called sexism.

Walker uses her skillfully crafted work to raise consciousness among the black women. She tries her best to focus on issues related to the life of black women by placing black women in the background. She expresses the commitment of fellow writers to her people, making the world revalue them. Walker has made it very much clear in an interview with John O'Brien :

I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of the black women.²

Walker along with Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison has taken the tradition of the black feminist consciousness to its apex. Walker tries her best for the betterment of the oppressed black women of her time in the American society by creating very powerful female characters like Margaret, Mem, Meridian, Celie and Lissie, who succeed in the process of survival in a hostile milieu in her novelistic universe. Because of her contribution to the body of African-American tradition of novel both in terms of themes and techniques she enjoys significant place in the broad community of African-American women writers which includes writers like Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Alice Walker , In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p.10.
2. Johan O'Brien, Interview with Black Writers, (New York : Liveright, 1973), p.192.