

**FEMINIST PRAGMATISM IN ALICE WALKER AND CONTEMPORARY
NAGA WOMEN WRITERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

*(Thesis submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English)*

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I, *Ruokuobeiü Rosemary Dzüvichü*, hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Feminist Pragmatism in Alice Walker and Contemporary Naga Women Writers: A Comparative Study* is a record of bonafide research done by me under the supervision of Dr.Nigamananda Das, in the Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus during the period of 2011-13 and that it has not been submitted either in full or in part to any other university or institute for the award of any other degree, diploma and title.

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The 9th December 2013

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PREFACE

Women down the ages and throughout history have been considered as second sex. From her birth till death a woman faces discrimination. Though this discrimination has been questioned by both male and female thinkers across the centuries, women oppression and their second-class citizenry have not yet been nullified altogether. Their rights at par with men have been denied and in spite of all kinds of empowerment policies and international conventions and declarations and recognition of women's rights as human rights, the struggle for gender equity continues. Debates and discussions are taking place in innumerable forums in innumerable ways. Theories and praxes are of no help. Hence to chew the chewed has been a solace for the researchers to explicate possibilities and analyze the design, aesthetics and dynamism of the feminist writers and activists to continue the dissension till the goal is reached.

In the undertaken project the humble researcher analyzes the works of a very great African-American activist-writer Alice Walker, who is a novelist, poet and cultural and political activist along with selected Naga women writers to compare and contrast their views, voices and efforts to justify the cause of women and to support them wholeheartedly to make them able at least to voice their protest against the discrimination of women

at large and their individual conditions. Naga writers like Kekhrievou Yhome, Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Changkija, Temsula Ao and others including some Tenyimia women poets of early 20th century have been analyzed and compared and contrasted with Alice Walker. Alice is a stern activist and visionary for a new age who has portrayed the angst of African American women while the selected Naga women writers are also writers with some feminist inclinations and aspirations. All these writers have strong ecofeminist sentiments.

Alice Walker (1944-) is the eighth and youngest child of Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker and Willie Lee Walker. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982). She is a poet, fictionist and non-fiction writer with strong feminist ideology and sentiments. Married and divorced, she herself has suffered the demonic patriarchal oppression and has experienced and witnessed the traumas of these age-old maladies. Throughout her works there is a strong protest against the myriad mutilations of women's body, mind, honour and ego. This is echoed to a certain extent in the works of the proposed selected Naga women writers which have been exposed and explicated in course of the discussion in the study.

Observing some feminist similarities between the thematic treatment in the works of Alice Walker and Naga Women writers, the researcher aims at analyzing them objectively and dissecting the contours of feminist pragmatism. All writers may not be activists, but in their thoughts they pragmatize the activism. As such the title has been so framed to take care of the reality. Major works of Alice Walker and Naga women writers have been taken into consideration while analyzing and carving out the themes/designs of feminist ideologies of the selected writers.

New critical close text reading and comparative diagnosis have been the basic tools for analysis. Besides textual reading, the writers have been interviewed by the researcher to seek their opinion about their art and craft, and the world in general and their views on women in particular. While applying feminist theory and its contextual praxis in the analysis of the works of the selected authors, the views of these authors collected during the interviews have also be considered. Besides that field study on the status and predicament of Naga women in general have been made to expose their subalternity comparing that with Alice Walker's presentation and vision of feminism/ womanism and condition of the women class at large. The secondary sources, though not available sufficiently on the

selected topic, have been used to support the observations of the researcher to carve out the findings.

Though the selected Naga women writers do not share the same socio-cultural environment that Alice Walker lives and experiences, they uphold similar aesthetic sensibilities that exist in the Naga society, conditioned by patriarchy, custom and culture. Like Alice Walker, they ventilate similar agonies, ambitions and perspectives on life. They share in writing a similar vision of the future world or the new age. Both the types of writers dream of women's liberation and permanent women empowerment for the benefit of the women and the world at large. They uphold strong ecofeminist vision and champion the rights/dignity of women and ecology. In the first chapter the concept of feminism and womanism has been defined. Ordinarily feminism/ womanism means championing the rights of women for safeguarding and promoting them. Women's consciousness about their rights, enjoyment of liberty and their empowerment and all sorts of activities for the promotion of status of women in the society, come under the purview of feminism/ feminist pragmatism. Along with theoretical background of feminism in general and womanism in particular, the researcher has introduced the concerns of Alice Walker and major Naga women writers in this chapter. In the second chapter the fictional works of

Alice Walker and their feminist and ecofeminist concerns have been analyzed and justified. In the third chapter the characteristics of Alice Walker's womanist interests have been identified in her poetry and non-fictional prose works and their activist dynamism has been appropriated. In the fourth chapter the similarity between the African-American and Naga Women's predicament and the matrices of these coincidences have been contrasted. In the fifth chapter aesthetic similarities have been compared and dissimilarities have also been identified. The importance of their contribution to contemporary feminist thought and aesthetic congruity has been highlighted. In the concluding chapter the findings of the research have been ruminated and its contribution to new knowledge and possibilities of further research and its hinterland have been indicated.

Both the types of writers dream of women's liberation and permanent women empowerment. They uphold strong ecofeminist vision and champion the rights/dignity of women and ecology. Though they live in a traditional matriarchal and patriarchal society, they ventilate their obsessions for a world of liberation and equality with their male counterpart. The Naga women's yearning for equality is very similar with that of Alice Walker/ African/ African-American Womanists.

The present work in comparative perspective is the first of its kind to compare Alice Walker with Naga women writers. Though critical works in this field is not available, yet this effort will open up new avenues of criticism. It is expected that Naga women writers will aspire to achieve glorious liberty to venture into new ideologies to realize their own outcast state of life which would help them to struggle ambitiously to bring radical changes in the society.

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

We are in the era of feminisms- the movement has undergone so many versions and is not restricted to the first or second wave only. Over the centuries and in different countries, women have articulated their deep concerns for their sex, their oppression, their needs and their hopes for the future as women and equal citizens in their societies. While women in other countries had different experiences and definitions, in England, even until the 1960s the word 'feminist' was usually pejorative. The American feminist Estelle Freedman argues that right from its origins, the word has carried negative connotations that surprisingly few politically engaged women have styled themselves feminists. (Walters 2005:3)

Some of the first European women to speak out for themselves and for their sex did so within a religious framework and in religious term. Hildegard of Bingen (11th century) (known as a remarkable and impressive writer and musician) ventured into preaching even though at that time only priests were allowed to preach. Julian of Norwich in the early 15th century raised the questions of equality and asked, "Just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of

God....?”(ibidem 7). By the late 16th century many other women were beginning to argue their case more consistently and more aggressively, though it was in a religious framework. However, though the reformation did bring education opportunities to women, any woman who wanted to defend her sex had to confront negative descriptions and scriptural images of women: Delilah was treacherous, Jezebel murderous, and even Eve was portrayed as being responsible for the Fall of Man and the human race. Saint Paul himself was against women who spoke out or asked awkward questions about the church and her attitude towards women. In his letter of the Corinthians, he says, “Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak” (ibidem 9). The gradual move of few women to defy these scriptural prohibitions and negative images was through interpretations of the Bible. The 17th century still saw women being condemned to death for witchcraft and being crazy. But there were political implications to the outburst of religious fervour. The Anabaptists recognized women as being equal to men and allowed them to pray and speak at meetings. The Quakers encouraged women to develop their skills as administrators.

Secular self assertion developed more slowly as it was one thing to act in unfeminine ways if divinely inspired but not easy to act

unconventionally out of personal ambition or beliefs. Mary Estell was perhaps the first English writer to explore and assert ideas about women which we can still recognize and respond to as she identified with and spoke directly to other women and shared their problems. Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first English women to write eloquently and at times angrily about the rights of women and the discrimination of women. In her *A Vindication of the rights of women* (1792), she states:

If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation, those of women by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test...who made man the exclusive judge if women partake with him the gift of reason? (qtd in Walters 33)

She stressed on the fact that in the age that she lived, women were inferior because they were oppressed from birth, uneducated and insulated and sheltered from problems of the real world. She echoed what is still so relevant to feminism today that men and women must be educated by the opinions and manners of the society they live in and believed that without a radical change in society there can be no real revolution in female manners.

The 19th century was a period that saw an increasing widespread and articulate statement of women's claims for equality and liberty and by the second half of the century the movement became more organized as a campaign, especially for better education, right to work outside their home and a reform for laws affecting married women and right to vote. In the 19th century United States feminism emerged out of the anti-slavery movement, in which women were very active. When women were banned from taking part in the anti-slavery debate, Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott became leading feminists who organized the women's convention and campaigned for rights, including the political right to vote for both women and blacks. Sojourner Truth who herself was a former slave spoke out angrily after the Civil War and the emancipation for slaves, when the right to vote was only given to former male slaves and not to the women, who had participated with equal fervour. After a long struggle for the right to vote, the effect of the First World War has a huge impact on the minds of the society, in the words of Christabel Pankhurst who said the war was "God's vengeance upon the people who held women in subjection"(ibidem 85). It was only in 1918, women over the age of 30 were given the right to vote and in 1928 they finally won it on equal terms with men.

What is sometimes termed 'second-wave' feminism emerged, after the Second World War, in several countries. In 1947, a commission on the Status of Women was established by the United Nations, and two years later it issued a Declaration of Human Rights, which both acknowledged that men and women had equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution, as well as women's entitlement to 'special care and assistance' in their role as mothers. Between 1975 and 1985, the UN called three international conferences on women's issues, in Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi, where it was acknowledged that feminism

constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds....There is and must be a diversity in feminism, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves.(ibidem 97)

African women offered a salutary reminder that

Women are also members of classes and countries that dominate others...contrary to the best intentions of 'sisterhood', not all women share identical interests. (qtd in Walters)

One of the most influential was, and remains, the French writer Simone de Beauvoir and her work, *The Second Sex* (1949). Within Western feminism or Women's Liberation as it soon came to be called—there was initially, at least, great variety, and an energy that sprang in part from anger at having been excluded in existing leftist groups, in part from fruitful disagreements within the emerging movement itself. In America, expressions of feminism ranged from Gloria Steinem's accessible and glossy *Ms* magazine, first published in 1970, to the Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers. In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett set out to analyze patriarchy as a political institution. Politics, she insists, refers to all power structured relationships, and the one between the sexes is a relationship of dominance and subordination which has been largely unexamined. Women are simultaneously idolized and patronized, she argued, backing up her thesis with a scathing analysis of the patriarchal attitudes of writers from different periods and cultures like Freud, D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet. She saw little immediate hope for women; "it may be that we shall...be able to retire sex from the harsh realities of politics" she concluded, "but not until we have created a world we can bear out of the desert we inhabit"(ibidem 105-6). Other political statements included the American Shulamith Firestone's *The*

Dialectic of Sex (1970), which argued that the basic division, the most profound oppression, in society was not class but sex; she hoped for a true 'feminist revolution', but argued that revolution would demand

An analysis of the dynamics of sex was as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic revolution. More comprehensive, for we are dealing with a larger problem, with an oppression that goes beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom itself. (qtd in Walters 106)

In England, the Australian-born Germaine Greer's provocative *The Female Eunuch* (1970) challenged the 'sense of inferiority or natural dependence' which women have too often accepted placidly, passively, allowing it to distort and impoverish their lives. The middle-class myth of love and marriage; on which being 'an object of male fantasy' actually desexualizes women, and on the way 'cooking, clothes, beauty and housekeeping' can become compulsive, anxiety-producing activities. One of the most urgent concerns of second-wave feminism has been a woman's rights over her own body. Western feminists have often addressed questions about beauty and the value placed on a woman's external appearance. Driven by the tantalizingly glamorous media images, many

seek refuge in an anxious, often ruinously expensive, pursuit of the latest fashion. Others turn to more desperate and self-destructive measures: dieting often turns to the point of anorexia or at other times seeking the beauty of self-mutilation that is cosmetic surgery.

Susie Orbach's *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1981) and Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) explore the physical self-hatred and the fear of ageing that plague so many contemporary women. And even in the affluent West, women have had to fight hard for the right to better health care: for adequate gynaecological advice and care in childbirth, for the right to contraception and, if necessary, abortion; and for more attention to those cancers, of the breast and the womb, for example, that particularly affect women.

'Sisterhood is powerful' was one of the most popular feminist slogans in the 1960s and 1970s. But the phrase has been questioned, and sometimes contested, both at the same time. As the black American poet Audre Lorde argued, it glosses over

difference of race, sexuality, class and age...Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between the women is the grossest reformism.

It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives.(ibidem 117)

Her concerns were echoed by Len Ang, an Australian of Chinese descent, who suggested that the inevitable moments of failure of communication between feminists

should be accepted as the starting point for a more modest feminism, One which is predicated on the fundamental *limits* to the very idea of sisterhood...we would gain more from acknowledging and confronting the stubborn solidity of 'communication barriers' than from rushing to break them down in the name of an idealized unity.(ibidem)

Both writers believe that white middle-class women often seem to be dictating a feminism that concentrates on gender discrimination, while tending to overlook for example, the class differences and racial discrimination that complicates ideas about gender. Brazilian women have argued that feminism is 'eurocentric', that it has nothing to say to them about urgent local problems: racial violence and health issues, as well as difficulties black women may encounter when looking for work. Indeed, some Latin American women actually reject the word 'feminism'. There is also an increasing recognition that, whereas Western feminists have

struggled against sexism, and against social and political inequalities, women in the 'Third World' have had to confront additional, and even more intractable problems. They often have to combat sexism in the form of deep-rooted local beliefs and practices, to do with class, caste, religion, and ethnic biases. In some countries, their battle with these issues have been combined with, and sometimes complicated by a struggle for the establishment of democratic government and for the most basic freedoms.

The term 'Third World' is widely used in contemporary feminist and postcolonial studies; but it is fraught with difficulties. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for instance, defines it geographically: 'the nation states of Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia, China, South Africa, and Oceania'; she also includes black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous people living in the 'West'. But the phrase is sometimes seen as a pejorative label, implying 'underdeveloped' or 'undemocratic' when used by Westerners. Some references to 'Third World women' are, indeed, a 'polite' way of saying 'women of colour', implying a native 'other' in contrast to the 'norm' of Western feminism, and it is sometimes considered more 'correct' to define it as 'postcolonial feminism'. This is a powerful reminder to western feminists of how little they know about the reality of these women's lives, and the complications of deep-rooted local

beliefs, by practices arising out of class differences, caste, religion, ethnic origins and also by the legacy of colonialism.

Nevertheless, the fascinating history of feminism in Latin American countries is noteworthy. In Mexico, for example, the 'first wave' of feminism was born during the revolution against the hated dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz, a bitter struggle that continued between 1910 and 1918. Women took an active part in the struggle against the tyranny. *Soldaderas* established camps, foraged for food, cooked, and looked after the wounded; but there were also female soldiers, who actively took up arms. Some, dressed in skirts and their best jewellery, followed the men into battle. Others were accused becoming masculine, 'both inwardly and outwardly', though it was admitted that a woman could at the hour of combat prove with weapon at hand that she was no longer a *soldera*, but a soldier. This kind of feminism born in Mexico finds an echo in the Naga women revolutionaries who carried out almost the same activities in the Indo-Naga war which began in the 1950s in the jungles of Nagaland. The fervour for freedom burnt inside their hearts as they witnessed their men killed, their villages razed and burnt to the ground, their granaries and hard labour vanished in the sadistic fires by the Indian army and they

themselves, their daughters, mothers and sister, raped, molested and often killed.

The continuous rise in atrocities and violence against women has become a global concern and the age-old phenomenon is assuming new shapes and dimensions in various climes and times. The movement in third world countries called third world feminism has multiple essences covering multiple issues related to women oppression/ subjugation and to thwart the colonizing forces. There have been several strategies culminating in diverse shapes of feminism. Women in the third world are most insecure facing multiple kinds of atrocities and in Islamic and African countries, there are the most harming elements that impede the peace, prosperity and stability of women's existence. The Eurocentric existence and dominance of feminism is no more influential and the struggle for the cause of women's liberation has been very dominant in the third world countries.

In tribal communities in the Northeast region of India, there exists today, a strong movement by women groups and women organizations for redefinition of their rights and liberties which have been put in direct conflict by patriarchal structures of tribal society. With issues of denial of women's rights over land, inheritance and other resources, the questions of development that has for so long been exclusive is being raised by many

writers. The Naga women's struggle for political space in decision making bodies and governance has become a force to be reckoned with in Naga tribal society. Age-old customs and practices of negation of women's rights and subjugation of women is being questioned by activists and feminist thinkers of the younger Naga generation. The conflict of customary laws and social practices which do not recognize the rights of women and legal and constitutional mandatory laws and international conventions on gender equity have brought the gender debate into sharp focus among the Nagas.

The present study examining and comparing the feminist and womanist concerns of Alice Walker and select contemporary Naga women writers has highlighted some significant issues including a new form of feminism opposing the matriarchal dominance over the women. The matriarchal support of patriarchy neglecting the women and the consequent women's struggle for liberation from the matriarchal domination supporting patriarchy is a new form of feminism delineated in Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, where a Naga grandmother severely neglects and oppresses the girl child and fosters the male children with wholehearted blind support which upsets and asphyxiates the girl child traumatically. This form of feminism is being articulated by younger women writers both in

fiction and poetry, where the stoic silence and acceptance and support of patriarchy is being questioned.

Day by day atrocity on women has been multiplying and the age-old phenomenon is assuming new shapes and dimensions in various climes and times. The movement in third world countries called third world feminism has multiple essences covering multiple issues related to women oppression/ subjugation and to thwart the colonizing forces. There have been several strategies culminating in diverse shapes of feminism. Women in the third world are most insecure facing multiple kinds of atrocities and in Islamic and African countries, there are the most harming elements that impede the peace, prosperity and stability of women's existence. The Eurocentric existence and dominance of feminism is no more influential and the struggle for the cause of women's liberation has been very dominant in the third world countries.

The topic of research is a combination of theory, praxis and practice to examine the feminist projects, revolutions and drawbacks/ hindrances impeding the movement to a grand success. Women oppression and the efforts for their liberation is the age-old predicament and it does not have a permanent solution so far. The patriarchal domination is extreme and unbearable and as such women all over the world are suffering more and

more. Equality of rights and so many issues relating to women's welfare have been discussed, the feminist movements have taken place in many different forms, but so far there is no permanent settlement of the issues. As such the present research aims at analyzing issues combining theory, praxis and practices in different milieus. The coined topic 'feminist pragmatism' is deliberate combination of theoretical and practical ways to highlight the women's eternal subalternity. The feminist movement has achieved a lot. Women of today in all the countries have advanced many steps. But we can't claim that they are fully liberated from the age-old domination. The term 'pragmatism' means thinking about solving problems in a practical and sensible way rather than by having fixed ideas and theories. Our feminist and womanist writers and activists have presented the praxis of feminist issues in their works and at many places they have suggested the practical ways for the liberation of women from their subalternity. The present study thus has combined theory and practical and sensible ways to solve the problems relating to women's eternal subjugation and predicament. The work is a comparative analysis of feminisms prevalent among the African American and Naga women as is narrated by Alice Walker and contemporary Naga Women writers. Alice Walker used the term "womanism" to describe black feminism or feminism

of colour. But feminism, black feminism and womanism do not mean the same. Womanism was in use during the 19th century, though its use in the current sense came into being from 1984. Alice Walker is the first to use the term to describe black feminism or feminism of color. Womanism can be defined as a

Theoretical perspective focused on the experiences and knowledge bases of Black women [which] recognizes and interrogates the social realities of slavery, segregation, sexism, and economic exploitation this group has experienced during its history in the United States. Furthermore, womanism examines these realities and Black women's responses without viewing them as a variation on or derivation of Black male or White female behavior and social circumstances. (Wikipedia)

An important aspect of womanism is the fundamental focus on racial inequalities. All Black women are not womanist as all women are not feminists. Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. Womanism provides equal and viable representation of Black male struggles. It encompasses Black gendered struggles while possessing associative commonalities with the separate notions of

feminism, Black feminism, Africana Womanism and secular womanism. Alice Walker explains the womanist commitment and its essence of loving “other women sexually and non-sexually” in her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983:12). Womanism emerged from the Black feminist recognition of the ignorance of racial struggles in the first and second wave of feminism due to factors like deliberate neglect, racism and perpetuation of the white women's agenda. Really the Black women are less likely than white women to be identified as feminists. That is why womanism is different from the traditional notions of feminism. The lack of anti-racist ideologies and doctrines within the first and second wave of feminism made women of colour feel severely othered, painfully invisible and underrepresented.

Womanism purports a racial framing of black gendered struggles whereas Black feminism constitutes a national alignment to gendered Black politics. Africana Womanism can be viewed as an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. Grounded in African culture it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist and African womanist. The Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both

White feminism and Black feminism. Thus womanism is a form of feminism but not fully the same as feminism and it chiefly celebrates womanhood and African American women's strength and experiences, and expresses a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class.

Women across the globe through the years from time immemorial have been the worst sufferers of the patriarchal/ matriarchal dominance because of their tolerance, humility, sincerity and strong devotion for loving and caring children and family. Women's subjugation is as old as humanity. A woman is presented as physically, mentally and morally weak. Across centuries the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' have been interpreted in different ways. If not much in the third world countries, consciousness and revolts demanding women's rights arose in other continents including Europe and that has helped boosting their status though not fully uprooted their griefs and sufferings altogether. After the Second World War emerged the second wave feminism when Simon de Beauvoir insisted 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (Walters 98). So a woman can change her condition if she so desires and becomes bold. There is no salvation only in love. So Beauvoir presents an image of 'the independent woman'

...wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as man. (qtd. in Walters 98)

She also objects to man's manipulation in interpretation of values which have prevailed over the confused forces of life. This manipulation has subdued Nature and Woman. Beauvoir also argues that Woman stands for Nature, Mystery, the non-human and "what she *represents* is more important than what she *is*, what she herself experiences"(ibidem). Femininity is a kind of myth invented by men to confine women to their oppressed state. So women should make themselves full scale human beings. Only asserting themselves is of no use and it would not free them of their subalternity or marginal status.

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from women who are most victimized by sexist oppression, women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically and spiritually-women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* is still heralded as having paved the way for contemporary feminist movement- it was written as if these women did not exist. Friedan's famous phrase , "the problem that has no name"(Walters

102) often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society actually referred to the college educated, middle and upper class, married white women- housewives who wanted more out of life. She did not speak of the needs of women without men, without children, without homes. She ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women. When she wrote *The Feminist Mystique*, more than one third of all women were in the work force. Friedan is a principal shaper of contemporary feminist thought. Significantly the one dimensional perspective on women's reality presented in her book became a marked feature of the contemporary feminist movement. White women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries. Past feminist refusal to draw attention to the racial hierarchies suppressed the link between race and class. Yet class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politics of white supremacy. White women who dominate feminist discourse who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politics, of the psychological

impact of class, of the political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state. It is this lack of awareness that leads Leah Fritz to write in *Dreamer and Dealers*, a discussion of the current women's movement published in 1979: "Women suffering under sexist tyranny is a common bond among all women, transcending the particulars of the different forms that tyranny takes. Suffering cannot be measured and compared" (Hooks 2000:134). A central tenet of modern feminist thought has been the assertion that all women are oppressed. This assertion implies that women share a common lot that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines in which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women. Sexism as a system of domination is institutionalized but it has never determined in an absolute way the fate of all women in the society. Being oppressed means the absence of choices-which is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor. Many women in the society do have choices. Therefore exploitation, discrimination are words that more accurately describe the lot of women collectively in the United States. Many women do not join organized resistance against sexism because sexism has not meant an absolute lack of choices. They may know they are discriminated on the basis of sex but they do not equate this with oppression. Under

capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restrict women's behaviour in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres. The absence of extreme restriction leads many women to ignore the areas in which they are exploited or discriminated against; it may even lead them to imagine that no women are oppressed.

Black women's literature has a unique set of characteristics and emphases which distinguish it from other work. Black feminist writing provides an incisive critical perspective on sexual political issues that affect black women. With black women refusing to be silenced they raised their voices in some of the fieriest writing of the era. The decade of the 70s represented another renaissance in black women's writing. The issues that were addressed included gender, sexism, black womanhood and black female identity, mother daughter relationships, sisterhood, sexual orientation, black heterosexism, domestic violence, family, community and culture. The writers insisted that a fully integrated self is grounded in cultural, communal and ancestral truths. Poets such as Mikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez and novelists like Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid and Glorai Naylor created a body of literature that has been canonized and academically accepted. They have enabled, in the words of Alice Walker "Black women

especially those most marginalized by race, caste and class, to have their voices heard and their histories read". Barbara Smith in her essay "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" said, "Feminism is the political theory that struggles to free all women: women of colour, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically, privileged, heterosexual women."(Awkward 2000:94)

African American women writers have always tried to assert the unique nature of their experiences, which they felt were distinct from the white woman's situation since they had to battle on more fronts- white patriarchy, against white women's racism and sexism of Black men. They have always militated against the tendency of white feminists to take their own situations as the paradigm of women's position. Walker's major themes of her fiction and poetry is about vulnerability, having a mind of one's own, the price of childbirth, friendships among women, the problems of loving men who regard women as less than themselves, sensuality and violence. She comes at universality though the black American woman's experiences and is brave enough to write about such delicate fictional themes as interracial sex and oppression of women by many cultures in Africa.

However, feminist emphasis common oppression in the United States was less a strategy for politicization than appropriation by conservative and liberal women of a radical political vocabulary that masked the extent to which they shaped the movement so that it addressed and promoted their class interest. Initially, radical participant in women's movement demanded that women penetrate that isolation and create a space for contact. Anthologies like *Liberation Now*, *Women's Liberation: Blue print for the future*, *Class and Feminism*, *Radical Feminism*, and *Sisterhood is powerful* all published in the early 1970s contained articles that attempted a wide audience of women, an audience that was not exclusively white, middle class, college educated and adult. Sookie Stambler articulated this radical spirit in her introduction to *Women's Liberation: Blue print for the future*:

Movement women have always been turned off by the media's necessity to create celebrities and superstars. This goes against our basic philosophy. We cannot relate to women in our ranks with prestige and fame. We are not struggling for the benefit of the one woman or for a group of women. We are dealing with issues that concern all women.(qtd in hooks 136)

These sentiments shared by many feminists early in the movement were not sustained. As more and more women acquired prestige or money from feminist writings or from gains from feminist movement for equality in the work force, individual opportunism undermined appeals for collective struggle. Women who were not opposed to patriarchy, capitalism, classicism or racism labeled themselves "feminists". Their expectations were varied. Privileged women wanted social equality with men of their class, some women wanted equal pay for equal work, and others wanted an alternative lifestyle. Many of these legitimate concerns were easily co-opted by the ruling capitalists, patriarchy. French feminist Antoinette Fouque states that the actions opposed by the feminist groups are spectacular and provoking. But provocation only brings to light a certain number of social contradictions. It does not reveal radical contradictions within society. The feminist claim that they do not seek equality with men, but their practice proves the contrary to be true. Feminists are a bourgeoisie avantgarde that maintain an inverted form, the dominant values. Inversion does not facilitate the passage to another kind of structure. Reformism suits everyone. Bourgeois order capitalism fellow centrism is ready to integrate as many feminists as will be necessary. Since these women are becoming men, in the end it will be only men a few more men.

Feminists in the United States are aware of the contradictions. Carol Ehrlich makes the point in her essay, "The Unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Can it be saved?" (Hooks 137) that feminism seems more and more to have taken on a blind, safe non-revolutionary outlook. As feminist radicalism loses ground to bourgeoisie feminism, stressing that "we cannot let this continue" (ibidem), the ideology of competitive atomistic liberal individualism has permeated feminist thought to such an extent that it undermines the potential radicalism of feminist struggle. The usurpation of feminism by bourgeoisie to support their class interest has been to a very great extent justified by feminist theory as it has so far been conceived. Any movement to resist the cooptation of feminist struggle must begin by introducing a different feminist perspective- a new theory one that is not informed by the idea of liberal individualism.

The exclusionary practices of women who dominate feminist discourse have made it practically impossible for new and varied theories to emerge. Feminism has its party line and women who feel the need for a different strategy, a different foundation often find themselves ostracized and silenced. Criticism of alternatives to establish feminist ideas are not encouraged. Yet groups of women who feel excluded from feminist discourse and praxis can make a place for themselves only if they try to

create via critics, an awareness of the factors that alienate them. Many individual white women found the women's movement a liberatory solution to personal dilemmas. Having directly benefited from the movement, they are less inclined to criticize it or to engage in rigorous examination of its structure than those who feel it has to have a revolutionary impact on their lives or on the lives of masses of women in the society. Non-white women who feel affirmed within the current structure of feminist movement seem to also feel that their definitions of the party line, whether on the issue of black feminism or on other issues is the only legitimate discourse. Rather than encouraging diversity of voices, critical dialogue and controversy, they like some white women seem to stifle dissent. As activists and writers whose work is widely known they act as if they are best able to judge whether other women's voices should be heard.

Frequently, white feminists act as if black women did not have sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiment. They believe they are providing black women with the analysis and the program for liberation. They do not understand and cannot even imagine that black women as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience just as they developed strategies of resistance. These black women observed

white feminist focus on male tyranny and women's oppression as if it were a new revelation and felt such a focus had little impact on their lives. To them it was just another indication of the privileged living conditions of middle and upper class white women that they would need a theory to inform them that they were oppressed. The implication being that people, who are truly oppressed, know it even though they would want to be engaged in organized resistance or are unable to articulate in written form the nature of their oppression. These black women saw nothing liberatory in party line analysis in women's oppression. Neither the fact that black women have not organized collectively in huge numbers around the issues of feminism nor the fact that they have not had access to the machinery of power that would allow them to share their analysis or theories about gender with the American public, negate its presence in their lives or place them in the position of dependency in relationship to those white and non-white feminists who address a larger audience.

The condescension they directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind them that women's movement belonged to the white. That they were able to participate because white allowed them or even encouraged it. They did not see black women as equals or treat them as equals. Though they expected black women to provide first hand

accounts of black experience they felt it was their role to decide if these experiences were authentic. Frequently college educated black women were dismissed as mere imitators. Their presence in movement activities did not count as white women were convinced that real blackness meant speaking the patois of poor black people, being uneducated, streetwise and a variety of other stereotypes. If we dared to criticize the movement to assume responsibility for reshaping feminist ideas and introducing new ideas their voices were turned out, dismissed, silenced. They could be heard only if their statements echoed the sentiments of the dominant discourse.

Attempts by white feminists to silence black women are rarely written about. All too often they have taken place in conference rooms, classrooms or the privacy of cosy living room settings where one lone black woman faces the racist hostility of a group of white women. From the time the women's liberation movement began, individual women went to groups. Many never returned after a first meeting. Recent focus on the issue of racism has generated discourse but has had little impact on the behaviour of white feminists towards black women. Often the white women who are busy publishing papers and books on "unlearning racism" remain patronizing and condescending when they relate to black women. This is

not surprising given that frequently their discourse is aimed solely in the direction of white audience and the focus solely on changing attitudes rather than addressing racism in historical and political context. They make black women the “object” of their privileged discourse of race. Racist stereotypes of the strong superhuman black woman are operative myths in the minds of many white women, allowing them to ignore the extent to which black women are likely to be victimized in the society and the role white women may play in the maintenance and perpetuation of their victimization.

Privileged feminists have been unable to speak to, with and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand fully the interrelatedness of sex, race and class oppression and refuse to take this interrelatedness seriously. Feminist analysis of women’s lot tends to focus exclusively on gender and do not provide a solid foundation on which to construct feminist theory. They reflect the dominant tendency in western patriarchal minds to mystify women’s reality by insisting that gender is the sole determinant of women’s fate. Certainly it has been easier for women who do not experience race or class oppression to focus exclusively on gender. Although socialist feminist focus is on class and gender, they tend to dismiss race or they make a point of acknowledging that race is

important and then proceed to offer an analysis in which race is not considered.

As a group, black women are in an unusual position in American society for not only are they collectively in the bottom of the occupational ladder but the overall social status is lower than that of any group. They bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. At the same time they are the group which has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor and that we are allowed not institutionalized other that they can exploit or oppress. White women and black men have it both ways. They act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be oppressed by racism but sexism allows them to act as oppressors and exploiters of women. White women may be victimized by sexism but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favour their interest and support the continued oppression of other groups. Black male sexism has undermined struggles to eradicate racism just as white female racism undermines feminist struggle. As long as these two groups or any group defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others. Black women with no institutionalized "others" that they can

discriminate against, exploit or oppress often, have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist, social structure and its concomitant ideology. This lived experience may shape our consciousness in such a way that our world view differs from those who have a degree of privilege. It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point their marginality gives them and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist and sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter hegemony. Black women have a central role to play in the making of feminist theory and a contribution to offer that is unique and valuable. The formation of a liberatory feminist theory and praxis is a collective responsibility that needs to be shared.

The subsequent chapters present the analysis and comparison of Alice Walker and select Naga women writers like Kekhrievou Yhome, Easterine Iralu, Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalang and others in the light of various feminist or womanist ideologies.

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CHAPTER-II

FEMINIST PRAGMATISM IN ALICE WALKER'S FICTIONAL WORLD

African American women writers have always tried to assert the unique nature of their experiences, which they felt were distinct from the white woman's situation since they had to battle on more fronts- white patriarchy, against white women's racism and sexism of Black men. They have always militated against the tendency of white feminists to take their own situations as the paradigm of women's position. Alice Walker's major themes in her fiction and poetry is about vulnerability, having a mind of one's own, the price of childbirth, friendships among women, the problems of loving men who regard women as less than themselves, sensuality and violence. She comes at universality through the black American woman's experiences and is brave enough to write about such delicate fictional themes as interracial sex and oppression of women by many cultures in Africa. The exploration then of the process of personal and social growth out of horror and waste is a motif that characterizes Walker's works. She specifies the mission of the artist as recovery of female forbears: "We must pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity, some of our great grandmothers were not allowed to know"

(1983:107). The authentic art of the Black woman then produces not only her own voice but also that of her matrilineal line.

Since the 1960s when she was a civil rights activist to the 1990s when she became a spokeswoman for women subjected to ritual genital mutilation and Earth subjected to waste and depredation, Walker through her poetry, short stories, novels, essays, feature films and documentaries has always championed the right to live freely and fearlessly. Alice Walker's novels deal with the human experience from the perspective of the suffering and the downtrodden, the hurt and the oppressed. Many of her characters are victims of racial, sexual and economic oppression and exist under degrading circumstances. Nevertheless, these characters, particularly the women do not lie down and suffer passively in the face of such trauma; rather they manage to transcend their desperate and painful circumstances in order to affirm life. Love in its various forms offers an avenue for regeneration and healing. Another source of empowerment is resistance. Third source of power is through connecting oneself to one's ancestral past for understanding the cultural history, though the past reflected in the songs of the people is necessary for an understanding of the present and also for a sense of identity. As Walker writes in the novel *Meridian*: "For it is a song of the people transformed by the experiences of

each generation that holds them together and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul”(56). Central to Walker’s thinking is the idea that all living things must love themselves and try to be free: that spirit will eventually triumph over convention no matter what the cost.

The Color Purple that emerges out of Alice Walker’s central concern with defining the existence, experience and culture of Afro- American women and the brutality of complex systems of oppression that shapes these. It deals with the role of male dominance in frustrating the black women’s struggle for identity and independence. It shows how women are oppressed and manipulated by men and humiliated into powerlessness. It is also a novel of liberation and redemption showing women oppressed by violence moving from victimization by society and men to a growth in consciousness that allows them to control their own lives. It celebrates the courage and resilience of the indomitable female spirit.

While shaping black feminist theory, African American women writers have always tried to assert the unique nature of their experiences, which was different from that of white women, as they had to struggle against white patriarchy, white women’s racism and the sexism of Black men. They have seriously questioned the stand of white feminists who tried to take their own situation as the paradigm of women’s position. Frequently

white feminists act as if black women did not know sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiment. They do not understand that black women as well as other groups of women who are oppressed often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience, just as they develop strategies of resistance.

Black feminist writing has its roots deep in African culture, religion, values and language of Black communities and also on the cultural significance of mother and female bonding. Their texts are different from white feminist texts because African American writers share a collective legacy of racist and sexist domination. In *The Color Purple*, Celie symbolizes the epitome of abused suffering right from an early age by her step father which continues into her marriage with Mr. Domestic. Violence perpetrated by sexual violence and the horrors of traumatic childhood abuse was brought out by Walker into the public domain in the story of Celie. The sharp reaction of the Black American society, particularly men, who protested against the depiction of black men in this novel almost drove Walker to being ostracized. Celie, the protagonist, survives the daily abuse, both physical and mental. She moves from being the victim to become the protector of her younger sister Nettie, and learns to be strong for the sake of the other. The entry of Shug Avery into her life in the midst of marital

discord changes her life forever. Walker brings out the importance of the effect of the woman bonding on both these two women and the forging of a relationship based on respect, friendship and passion.

As a Black woman centred story, *The Color Purple* is written in an epistolary form, collecting the memories of Celie's black woman experience, her inner conflicts and sufferings and the gradual change in her outlook and life, a growing internal strength. It is a celebration of a woman's struggle against racism and sexism and Alice Walker's identifying mark is her deep concern for the lives of black women. As a civil rights activist, deeply engaged in social issues of the black Americans, Alice's experiences are ingrained into the web of stories that build up *The Color Purple*. She explores the oppression, the insanities and the loyalties of black women and depicts the oppression faced by women in their relationships with Black men. The need for Sisterhood and the liberating possibilities for black women are defined within the relationships of Celie, Shug Avery and Nettie.

The specific systems of oppression that operate in Celie's life symbolizes the subtle operations of patriarchal power in the lives of women .She represents the plight of many other Black women who do not have the courage to come out of oppression. Her sexuality is controlled by

men and her submission is enforced through violence. In her terrified acquiescence to such brutality, Celie symbolically mirrors every woman. Here is a strong celebration of her roots and her Black ancestry in the language Alice Walker uses for Celie. Celie's letters to God reveals her sense of her world, but also reveals what has been done to her by a racist and sexist system. It is to be observed here that to confront the body is not only to confront an individual's abuse, but also the abuse of women's bodies throughout history. The necessity for women to assume responsibility and have self esteem to appreciate and love oneself has been explored by most black women writers.

Walker expands her canvas and tackles the taboo subject of lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug Avery and the positive effect it has on Celie's growth as a strong woman. In this novel, Walker reduces the system of compulsory heterosexuality to its basic level, making it abstract. Her women refuse to become objects of exchange between men and Celie is rescued from an identity crisis by Shug who tells her "Use each other's peoples now" (189):

Shug becomes the embodiment of feminist existential freedom in choosing her career as a blues singer and in refusing to settle down

to a life of domesticity. Shug has grown strong and independent by being true to her own experience. As Celie says, "When you look in Shug's eyes you know she been where she been, seen what she seen, did what she did. And now she know". (276)

Celie's narrative is about breaking silences and appropriately its formal structure creates the illusion that is filled with unmediated voices. Trapped in a gridlock of racist, sexist and heterosexual oppressions, Celie struggles towards linguistic definition. Her story represents the story of the most marginalized of heroines, the black lesbian who challenges the patriarchal constructions of female subjectivity and sexuality. Walker's narratives of black women's experiences of racism, sexism and the ability to strike a balance between the politics of her time and the aesthetic sensibility gives her works an extraordinary validity. *The Color Purple* exemplifies not only the political strains in her thought but also those essential values which impel the human psyche to overcome the constraints of power politics and reach out to formations of relationships in life.

Embracing the womanist theory, Walker adopts a better feminist stand, which is more distinctive and appreciative referent as it

encompasses men, women and children in the social structure. The debate over the political and apolitical reading of her works will take on a timeless perspective because her personal aesthetics enhances her political commitment as it transforms the tragic struggle of the black community and the larger concerns of humanity as a whole to a positive vision.

Alice Walker's novels such as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989), and the anthologies of short stories, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973), *You can't Keep a Good Women Down* (1981), deal with the life of African- Americans with special emphasis on the black women's life.

Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is her first novel. Her major concern in this novel is black man –woman relationship. In an interview, Alice Walker has stated about her aim behind this novel: "And I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their Masculinity. Why are women so easily "tramps "and "traitors" when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? Why do women stand for this? (1983:244)

Read in the light of the above comment, we realize that all the major women characters in the *Third Life of Grange Copeland* such as Margaret, Mem, and Josie are abused as whores by their own people, and especially their men. Walker, therefore, tries to tell their side of the story in the novel. Though apparently it is the life story of Grange Copeland, it is also the story of the sufferings, pains, and hardships that the black women –Margaret, Mem, and Josie face in their life. Their sufferings lead them to understand their situations to launch a struggle to gain a meaningful place in the black world. These three characters, Margaret, Mem, and Josie, have been victimized by the black men. Margaret was left behind, discarded and abandoned by Grange, to die a silent death: Mem was killed by her own husband, Brownfield and Josie was driven out by her own home by her own father, a man who stood for religion. This is how the white man becomes a symbol of the black women's oppression.

This novel is the story of Grange Copeland's metamorphosis. It is also a story about the awareness of Margaret Copeland, Mem Copeland, Josie Copeland and Ruth Copeland. In addition to this, it is also a story of three different women: Margaret, the most illiterate and submissive: Mem, literate and ambitious, who dreams of her own world: Josie, an enterprising black woman who creates the world of her own and establishes her

economic empire where she dictates her terms to others as a boss. It is also about Ruth, the fourth woman character, who is yet to grow and yet to create her own world.

Like *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *In Love and Trouble* (1973) highlights the problems of black women in their day-to-day life. They are led to self-discovery and self-knowledge and ultimately attain regeneration. These stories present a kind of gallery of black women and their moves towards self-discovery, to tentative uncompleted exploration: to disillusionment: to recognition of their own worth, to rage, peace, death, and life. As the title suggests, love for these black women portrayed in this anthology is synonymous with trouble.

Roselily, the heroine of "Roselily" marries a Black Muslim to realize that her husband's hand is no less confining than that of "the clasp of iron gate" that prevents her from enjoying freedom. Similarly, Myrna's husband does not pay attention to her artistic temperament which ultimately suffocates her so much so that she goes insane. In "Her Sweet Jerome" we come across a black woman who goes mad because of the negligence of her husband. *In Love and Trouble* has nineteen stories that tell the tales of thirteen black women who are mad, raging, loving, resentful, hateful,

strong, ugly, weak, pitiful and magnificent, and who try to live with the loyalty of black man that characterized all their lives.

Similarly, Walker's *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* is a collection of short stories. However, compared to Walker's previous women characters, her black women in this anthology are slightly independent and advanced. They do what they want to do without any compunction, and whatever they do, they do with confidence and full trust in themselves and their own men in some cases. They are a bit conscious about their own status, position, power in the world and they want to enjoy what they have without any inhibition. Unlike the black women of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *In Love and Trouble*, the women of *You Can't Keep Good Woman Down* are black women, the theme that Walker explores predominately in *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*.

Meridian is about a female protagonist of the same name who gradually awakens from her subordinate status as a black female, daughter, wife and mother to her own self and tries to become the maternal provider of larger black community. Unlike Sula, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Meridian never declares: "I don't want to make somebody else {babies} but I want to make myself"(Sinha46). On contrary she experiences the motherhood in the initial stages of her life and then

decides to get rid of her own baby Eddie Jr to seek admission in a college to find out her own path and identity. This new way and identity enables her to attain, 'the highest point of power, prosperity, splendor, health, vigor, etc. As a result, she develops "a completeness of being" (ibidem). Hers is a journey from most ordinary position as a high school drop-out to a self-illuminated person who has attained selfhood and knows what is the purpose and mission of one's life. To begin as an ordinary black female and to end as a self-assured person is not an easy development. To gain the glimpse of herself which is full bloom she had to undergo innumerable trails and tests. As a result, she is evolved from woman raped by racial and sexual oppression to a revolutionary figure effecting action and strategy to bring freedom to herself and other poor disenfranchised blacks in the South. In fact, Meridian's quest for wholeness and her involvement in the civil rights movement is initiated by her feelings of inadequacy in living up to standards of black motherhood.

Alice Walker's novel *The Temple of My Familiar* presents the saga of a black woman called Lissie Lykles who has taken birth in different races and at different times. It is a chronicle not only of the life of a black woman but also of the women of different races. It is the story about the manner in which women were brought under control of patriarchal social order. It is

also an analysis of how the women lost their happiness and were pushed into unhappy life style. *The Temple of My Familiar* basically an oral history, written in the tradition of the African griots who were living encyclopedias of their culture in non-literate societies. These poet- priests memorized and stored prodigious amount of information, passing down the stories of their ancestors from one generation to the next, and thus keeping the communal identity alive. The griots were almost invariably men, but Alice Walker who has spent much of her literary career projecting womanist consciousness in her writing inserts women into a male role and portrays female story tellers.

The griot of *The Temple of My Familiar* is Lissie. The story of her life is the story of thousands of lives, each one touched by the doubled concern of race and gender. She has been many women: an African peasant sold into slavery by her uncle, subjected to the horrors of the Atlantic crossing, raped and brutalized, a Moorish witch burned by the inquisition, a lesbian living in a harem, a pygmy living in a prehistoric forest that covered the whole earth, etc. The novel opens with an epigraph of Lissie: "If they have died about me/they lied about everything" (1). Lissie suspects that the people were wrongly informed about her. She believes that without knowing the black woman's story, no story about the world

could be complete and authentic. Thus, hers is the only true story about herself and by implication about the black women around her.

Walker brings out some of the most horrifying truths about the way women are treated. Lissie tells that they were possessed by men like any other commodity. They were forcibly pushed into slavery and branded with their master's name, of which Lissie herself is a victim. Lissie tells us that she, along with other slaves, was dragged to a ship. At that plank that led up onto the deck, their last remaining garment, the strip of cotton around their hips, was snatched away and they were forced onto the ship bald, branded and naked as they came into the world. Lissie fought to hold on to that last small badge of modesty but a white man struck her with a blow to the head almost without looking at her and because he had blue eyes, she fancied he must be blind and she reeled onto the ship with the rest. When the ship landed, they were sold to the needy planters. Lissie, her sisters and brother were sold to different planters; thus, making them impossible to see each other in future. As Lissie is the story of woman who was born time and again, she uncovers different types of atrocities committed on women.

Alice Walker firmly believes that one of the chief reasons of women's exploitation has been the male's greed for possession. She tells us that because men "were stronger, at least during those period when

women were weak from childbearing , began to think of owning women and children....when man saw he could own one woman and her children, became greedy and wanted as many as he could get”(28). Through a set of such relationships, *The Temple of My Familiar* unfolds the womanist meaning of freedom and the perpetual attempt by men to dominate women and other men. As stated earlier, the history of the war between the sexes is dramatized through the stories told by Lissie. Thus, Walker recapitulates the history of woman since the days when human civilization began and describes how the society which was based on the egalitarian principles was transformed into a society of male dominance. Walker projects in *The Temple of My Familiar* her own vision of a more complete, harmonious and healthy human beings, healthy in body and expansive in soul. To do so she re-interprets history by initiating an alternative myth- the goodness before God, the mother before the father , womb envy rather than penis envy and presents her perspectives on race, feminism, love, marriage, and Africa.

The women in *The Temple of My Familiar* are depicted as risk takers and adventurers, men passive and diffident. Women force, instruct and prevent men from colonizing sexuality. Fanny, for instance, advocates a new sexual freedom and finds herself dissolved into the cosmic all. Naturally, by the end of the novel, Carlotta and Fanny are inventing less

constricting forms of marriage and the lovers achieve oppression-free happiness. Consequently, these women do not turn to men for aid and comfort but they turn to each other. It is only after the feeling of one's own self, one of young woman dares to wear a T-shirt that denotes: "A woman without a man is like a fish without bicycle"(90). We can clearly notice here that even the male, patriarchal idiom has been undercut.

Her black women characters, in earlier works, who depend on their husbands are depicted to be devoid of any sense of self. Walker portrays black man as an exploiter of black woman. It is he, the black man, who is responsible for the plight of the black woman. However, the black women who decide to live an independent life become self-conscious and develop love for 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 these once 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 were welcomed in their company. In fact, Walker creates such a world of black men and women based on equality and mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence which is full of happiness and prosperity. Thus,

Walker creates a New World defined and determined by the female of the species. The new empowerment confers on these women responsibilities that she is capable of shouldering with compassion and dignity. Walker wants women to walk tall in all spheres of human endeavor.

The Color Purple insists in its visionary form on black women's struggle to continue the heritage of Womanism in resistance to male-sexism and homophobia of the black society. Womanism is an interrelated fight not only against sexism, but also against racism—Sophie in the novel is victimized by racism; she is tortured and out into jail because she refused to submit to the Mayor's wife. Walker emphasizes that sisterhood among black women is the necessary beginning of the sisterhood across racial lines, even among black women and struggling white women. Matrilineage is a significant perspective and theme of Walker's feminist dialectic. Walker expresses the significance of the theme in her famous essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" and another essay on her foremother Zora Neale Hurston.

In *The Color Purple*, this theme has become both the content and form of the novel unlike the white feminists, as Gilbert and Gubar have analyzed in *Mad Woman in the Attic*. Alice Walker shows no signs of anxiety or melancholy in acknowledging her predecessor Zora Neale Hurston. She

believes that she writes because Zora's texts of black legend and female liberation enable her to "re-vision" her perspective through her own writing. Adrienne Rich calls such "re-vision" central to a female literary tradition for the women as reader and poet, "look(s) an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 31). Because of her underlying concern regarding the singularity of black woman writer in white and male-dominated literature of America, Walker searches out her model in Zora Neale Hurston's writing.

The matrilineal heritage for black women is a different experience and different history. The special task of black women writer to seek her motherhood originates from her lost history of slavery. Walker recreates the idealism of matrilineality to counteract the psychic deformity, conscious anger creates. She re-establishes the lost tradition of mother culture in order to erase the history of black women's oppression and subjugation because of double victimization of race and gender. Thus in *The Color Purple*, Walker expands this theme of motherhood and sisterhood that she time and again analyzed in her various critical writings. As we come to know through Celie's letters, paternal incest has metaphorically killed her mother and made her "big." In *The Color Purple*, Walker defines Hurston's subversive anxiety about motherhood and critique of heterosexuality by emphasizing

on the positivity of women bonding, women loving each other, sexually and spiritually and their economic independence.

This theme of matriliney is also manifested through Walker's specific form of the novel. Through the epistolary form of the novel, Alice Walker has attempted to signify a new mode of representation to make the black women's voice speak. Walker revises Hurston in Celie's written voice to God, the reader. Hurston interprets the free indirect discourse as a written voice, as an oral "hieroglyphic." In Celie's voice, Alice Walker combines a mimetic voice as a dialogue voice and at the same time a dialogic voice as mimetic one. Celie's self-awareness is here symbolized as an act of writing. Thus Walker has renovated a black pioneering text to claim literary ancestry or motherhood, not only for theme but also for structure. Henry Louis Gates in *The Signifying Monkey* insists on this doubled-tripled and multifarious voice of black women (James 2000:4) writing and analyses this mode of significance in Zora Neale Hurston's and Walker's narrative mode. Walker rejuvenates Celie's erased consciousness in introducing the epistolary form of the novel – Celie's dialogue with God in the first person. Celie constantly struggles against the dominant language of patriarchy and racism and renovates her lost expressivity in terms of her mimetic expressions. So for a black woman like Celie, mimetic voice of

self-awareness symbolizes her dialogic expression and in this process Walker restructures a specific feminist expressivity in terms of black women's resurrected consciousness.

The two different representations, Celie's private world of growing consciousness and Nettie's feminist critique of the public world, that of Africa against imperialistic social structure constitute the feminist structure of the novel and emphasize the global oppression of women. Nettie's narration of Olinka experience in Africa and Celie's self-narration of her physical and spiritual dehumanization both constitute together the 'womanist' ideology of Walker. The imperialism of Africa and racism in America are both here marginalized in order to insist on the subterranean history of sexual oppression of black women throughout the world. The womanist ideology in the novel is here focused through Celie and Nettie's expressivity of the suspended and silenced voices of women like Mem and Margaret. The specific epistolary form of the novel reconstructs images and representations associated with women's oppression, and thus establishes a mode of feminist consciousness within the dominant discourse of racism and imperialism in the novel.

In **Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart, (2005)**, Alice Walker has created a work that ranks among her finest achievements: the story of a woman's spiritual adventure that becomes a passage through time, a quest for self, and a collision with love. Kate has always been a wanderer. A well known writer married many times, she has lived a life rich with explorations of the natural world and the human soul. Now, at 57, she leaves her lover, Yolo, to embark on a new excursion, one that begins on the Colorado River, proceeds through the past, and flows, inexorably, into the future. As Yolo begins his own parallel voyage, Kate encounters celibates and lovers, shamans and snakes, memories of family disaster and marital discord, and emerges at a place where nothing remains but love. Walker dedicates this story to her murdered paternal grandmother, Kate Nelson, citing the novel as a "memorial to the psychic explorer she might have become."

An intense commentary on the human spirit and what can happen when it is neglected, **Now is the Time to Open Your Heart** asks the reader, among other things, to acknowledge the existence of mother earth and her powerful healing power. This theme of being healed by nature is undoubtedly the predominant theme in the book, yet Walker also touches upon other issues including relationships, the wisdom and the seemingly endless current of violence in the world..

She writes that when one witnesses the various that occur on a daily basis somewhere on the earth and how far everyone is from peace, and how they get no nearer the longer they talk, this gives an indication of the problem. She also questions humankind that if one sees a human being, really see them ... how could one kill them? Walker writes and targets a multicultural adult audience, with her message that if you get you mind and body right the rest will follow. The message of universal peace is one that can be understood by people of all ages. The novel is written in the voice of the third person, except for certain segments in italics where the Mother Earth concept (known in the book as "Grandmother") speaks in first person. The story follows a woman named Kate Nelson whose existence is changing into something unknown. Past her mid-50s and already married many times, she is a loving mother as well as an extensively published and popular author. Still, something is not quite right with Kate's life. She is beginning to care less and less about the material world. One day she burns several hundred-dollar bills just to demonstrate to herself that these items were not the God/Goddess of her life. She's no longer worried about her house and all the things about it that need fixing. In fact, she's even contemplating selling it. She is unconvinced of the need to do anything further with her life. So when a recurring dream of a river

spurs her to go out and find the real thing she journeys, with several other women, to travel the Colorado River, crossing the Grand Canyon. From the very beginning of the trip, Kate undergoes a literal purging as hidden memories and repressed emotions surface, forcing her to confront them and neutralize their negativity. Eager to continue her personal evolution, she travels to the Amazon on another discovery of the spiritual side of her life. Under the guidance of the Devic Kingdom and a powerful shaman, Kate and several others ultimately transform themselves into newer, cleaner and more balanced versions of the people they once were. At the same time, Kate's partner, whom she has left behind in America, is undergoing his own spiritual metamorphosis. The trip to Hawaii originally intended to be a regular vacation, quickly becomes much more valuable an experience than Yolo could ever imagine.

In this alternate storyline we learn about the island's history and its previous rule thousands of years ago by Hawaiian Queen Lili'uokalani. (Who knew?) We also learn about the importance and reverence placed upon land and nature by the Hawaiian people. The story created with deep imagination echoes the experiences of Alice herself. She states in the preface to the book that her father's mother was murdered and this is a dedication to the psychic she would have been. The strong portrayal of the

grandmother brings into focus the story of Alice's own grandmother. The reference to dreams and the importance of the environment and nature flows through the story of Kate. The novel includes characters who are Makus—women that are really men and Alice Walker plays with the notion of a fluid gender identity. Through the intricacies of the narration and story she explores the notion of female power and a matrilineal society.

All the fictional narratives of Walker uphold the multiple issues of women oppression, thereby exposing the eternal subalternity of African women. Alice is a firm feminist and ecofeminist. Her writings expose her message to the World for a crusade for justice, equality, prosperity and peace for the cause of Black Women as a whole and for all the women of the world who have been suffering since time immemorial.

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CHAPTER-III

CONTOUR OF WOMANIST DYNAMICS IN HER NON-FICTIONAL EXPLORATIONS

With fists as well as hands Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), uses the term womanism to refer to African-American feminism or the feminism of colour. "I just like to have words that describe things correctly....I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture, that really expresses the spirit that we see in black women. And it's just ...'womanish'"(1). Walker defines womanist also as a woman who loves other women sexually or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and women's strength. She says that a womanist

Loves music, loves dance, loves the moon. Loves the spirit, loves love, loves the folk, loves herself regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender". A womanist is one who loves herself, her culture and who is committed to survival. Womanism is an empowered form of feminism, just as purple is a bold and empowered version of lavender. (1983:xii)

Walker's concept of womanism thus stresses the sense of solidarity and sharing, the sense of community that brings about a blossoming of self and society..."I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival of whole of my people. But beyond that I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women".(31)

I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited and the pops out in wild and unlikely places...(ibidem)

In Search of Our Mother's Garden is a collection of the non-fiction writings of Alice Walker, poet and novelist, from 1965-1983. As collection, the writings gathered here, which includes book reviews, speeches, articles and personal statements, cease to be simply responses by the writer to singular events. Instead, many of the individual essays become tangible pieces of history, artifacts. In this instance, however, the re-arranging of the scattered potsherds and pieces have not been left to the chance of some later archaeologist. The artist has taken it upon herself to gather the remnants of her own personal history and piece them tighter as a living gift, anticipating the needs of the daughters.

The recipe begins with the essay entitled, “Saving the Life that is Your Own: The Importance of Models...”(3). It is commonly accepted that there is a basic human need for models that we can imitate, measure ourselves against, and from whom we inherit our spiritual touchstones. In this first essay, Walker recalls the period in her life during in which she discovered that she could not continue her natural evolution as a writer with the models she had at hand – namely, White, European , and /or male. Walker realized that there were valuable lessons in the tragic struggles of a Vincent Van Gogh, in the impeccable style and empathetic morality of a Fannery O’Connor, and in the beauty and simplicity in the flattering romanticizations of a Jean Toomer. However, these people and others like them could not help her to conquer her special dilemma: how to be a black woman and an artist working under “the oppression of silence”. As Walker discusses these various artists and their considerable influences upon her, the reader becomes painfully aware of the dexterity and mental diplomacy that she needed to employ in the reading and interpreting of their work. There is no way diminishes the quality or importance of the work of these artists, but only points up the void that exists for a black woman seeking herself within their sole example. As Walker states it “I don’t know the exact moment I sat out to explore the works of black womanbut I found I

was in need of something that only one of them could provide”(9). Clearly it was more than mere curiosity purred by the total absence of black woman writers from her college reading lists; it was necessity which started Walker on a personal search which climaxed in her “discovery” of Zora Neale Hurston.

Hurston, a little known black female anthropologist and writer of fiction who lived from (roughly) 1901-1960, became (by Walker’s admission and frequent mention in her essays) a substantial figure in her evolution as a writer, chronicler, and woman. Hurston filled the void of the sought after and missing model. Walker eventually visited Eatonville, Florida, Hurston’s birthplace, to place a stone on the woman’s unmarked grave- a cornerstone experience chronicled in the article ‘Looking for Zora’. This singular act reveals the purpose of this collection of essays: it is taking a step toward breaking the “curse of silence” that has kept black women isolated from themselves and each other, cut off from the seeds to be gleaned from our artistic history. It is a necessary step backward to self-discovery.

Knowing this allows us to understand the phrase “Our Mothers’ Garden” as Walker intends in the context of this collection- as a symbol for all the unacknowledged but rich artistry, tradition, ritual, and stories handed

down by anonymous or scantily known black women of unmarked graves who, through their creativity were rarely preserved in any formal way, managed to keep alive “a notion of song”. The search for these little known, uncelebrated women provides the central consciousness of this collection. In this first collection of non-fiction, Alice Walker speaks out as black woman, writer, mother and feminist in these thirty six pieces ranging from the personal to the political. The essays touch on her own work as well as that of other writers, accounts of the civil rights of the 1960s and the antinuclear movement of the 1980s and include a vivid courageous memoir of the childhood injury to her eyes.

Walker addresses a broad range of issues: artistic, political, and personal. She recalls the tragedy of growing up in a racist society to suddenly “meet” her elders who, through her adult eyes, had lost their stature- appeared diminished, squashed by the unrelenting society. She recounts her own disappointment in her father and the process of forgiving him which involved understanding that he was only a product of his time. She looks at the women of our childhood, no rose colored glasses to soften their flaws, none needed to recognize their beauty and humanity. These portraits sent me back to the pages of recent history to study the photographs of faces I had forgotten- faces implacable and removed from

the prods and dogs –to try to decipher the source of their calm. But Walker is not stirring at white guilt, but establishing the place and time of which she is the physical and philosophical product. And in the course of these essays, which are portrayed as stories, Walker offers logic for the reclaiming of the South as home. Throughout these pieces, it is clear that Walker decided early on not to settle for the creation of beautiful, non-controversial icons. Instead, she has struggles to evolve a philosophy which would transform the ugly. Out of her writing comes a positive approach to life and art which somewhat clarifies Walker's ability in her fiction to deal with the most damning side of human nature and social politics and still allow her characters to transcend themselves and their era. It is a philosophy which would allow her, an expatriate of the racist south, to reclaim the land which is hers (and ours) as birth right and creative well spring, retain the spiritual wholeness of the men and women who comprise home, and also permit her to interpret the civil right movement, and what it did or did not accomplish on her own terms.

The title essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Garden" (231) forms the apex of the collection. It is the metaphor for all of the pieces before and after it: it is the coming of the age of the artist. Within the essays in this third section, certain elements conjoin just as the mature artist is a

combination of all the shards and scraps of the poverty and richness of her youth. Within the title essay, and throughout the section, Walker explores her relationship with the black women artists whose excellence and creative gifts have been all but lost to us, also exploring their weakness in a meaningful context. Walker also takes a long look at how black women have been defined, outside of such context, in literature.

What does it mean to be a black women and an artist? What did it mean in Hurston's time, Phillis Wheatley's time? In yours or my mother's times? There is a need to reach back and reclaim the valuable artistic past that has been hidden from us, or that we have made ourselves blind to. Primarily, it is about attaining vision, becoming able to interpret the work of these artists within the context of their lives, becoming able to recognize the art practiced by women who had not the leisure or finances or indulgence of society to paint their pictures on board canvases or sculpt their idea into stone or metal who owned no museums- except their children- within which preserve their wisdom or their history. Walker encourages all to recognize the importance and endurance of our own mothers artistry-even a thing as natural as the stories she repeated often and with care, the stories that shaped us. We should become able to recognize the creativity that women brought to daily activities without

benefit of audience or accolade. As Walker says: “Perhaps (your mother) was herself a poet- though only her daughter’s name is signed to the poems that we know.”(241)

In her powerful essay “The Same River Twice Honoring the Difficult” (1996), which is an evocative, intriguing book about her life, especially after the success of *The Color Purple*. While Steven Spielberg was making the book into a film for Alice Walker, this critical success was also an extremely difficult time as she became the target of attacks both personal and political. Most Black American men saw the novel as an attack on them and an insulting portrayal of Black men. At the same time her mother suffered a major stroke and Alice Walker also fell ill with the debilitating condition in Lynne disease. In her heartfelt and extremely personal account of this time, Walker describes the experience of watching the film being made as she weathered the controversy surrounding it. It is a graceful and searingly honest view of the way public and private challenges mesh and of the integrity at the heart of Alice’s work.

In “We are the Ones We Are Waiting For, Inner light in the time of darkness” (2007), Alice Walker opens with “It is the worst of times, it is the best of times. Try as I might I cannot find a more appropriate opening for this volume. Terrorist attacks, natural disaster, global warning, ongoing

warfare in Iraq and the Middle East, the future seems bleak, yes in this work”(1). Alice presents a culture of hope. She reasserts the power of the individual in making change happen. Looking at subjects such as sending our children to war, the rich, the poor divide, modern gender roles, women in the military set up, Walker looks towards an optimistic view of the future through a more intuitive understanding of the self and the world around us. Recollections of her personal involvement in civil, and political protests for just causes intensifies her belief of the possibilities to make changes in the world. She says “If you have seen happiness, you know what it looks like. The experience of happiness is something one never forgets” (243). The power of the chant of blessing resonates, designed to grow the soul and change the world:

One Earth

One People

One Love (218).

In her collection of Earthling poems from 1965 to 1990, entitled *Her Blue Body Everything We Know* (1991), Walker dedicates the work of her poetic inspiration as:

Always to you

Beautiful One

From whom

I have come.

And to whom

I shall happily

Return. *(vi)*

In the short poems titled African images, Glimpses from a Tiger's Back, conjures up amazing imagery of the African mountains and the wild, as she describes herself:

Beads around

My neck

Mount Kenya away

Over pineapple hills

Kikuyuland' Or the tall warrior standing and at his feet 'only elephant bones'.(1991: 8)

Walker brings out the stark vivid images of Uganda and the fusion of mountains, the valley and the zebras running wild:

Uganda mountains

Black soil

White snow

And in the valley

Zebra. (1991:23)

The sharp contrast of the American from Minnesota who speaks scholarly and 'harvardly' of revolution with the men of the Mau Mau tribe, their fists holding

Bits of

Kenya earth (1991: 55)

Her recollections of the South in her poem 'The name of Home' bring stirring memories of her childhood injury of her eyes-

All that night

I prayed for eyes to see again

Whose last sight

Had been

A broken bottle

Held negligently

In a racist fist (1991:99)

The poem ends on a note of the need to love and forgive and the richness of Nature and God's love:

God gives us trees to plant

And hands and eyes to

Love them. (1991:99)

Speaking of the impossible kind of love in her poem 'Mornings', she tells of the heartache of her love going away and the 'cloud and threat of snow' and wishing

On the morning you woke beside me
Already thinking of going away
The sun did not fill my window as it does most mornings
Instead there was cloud and threat of snow.
How I wish it could always be this way
That on mornings it cannot come itself
The sun might send me you.

(1991:.119)

Her vulnerability as a woman as someone who loves and is loved, seeps through most of her poems on love. There is also a sense of resignation and acceptance in her recognition that love is transient.

In “Johann” Walker brings in a tenderness in her portrayal of the German lover:

You are the Golden Boy,

Shiny but bloody

And with the ancient martial tune

Only your heart is out of step-

You love'....

But white I think is the color

Of honest flowers,

And blue is the color

Of the sky. (1991:126 -127)

The collection of poems *Revolutionary Petunias and other Poems* reflect Walker's delight in being once again in a Southern African American environment and her realization that the sincerest struggle to change the world must start from within oneself. She recounts how she was saved from despair many times by the flowers and the trees she planted and the soothing balm of Nature and Mother Earth. The poems are about Revolutionaries and Lovers and about the loss of compassion, trust and the ability to expand in love. She also acknowledges her ancestors because she realizes that 'we are not the first to suffer, rebel, fight and die'. The grace with which we embrace life, in spite of the pain, the sorrows, is always a measure of what has gone before'. In her poem "In these dissenting times" she says:

I shall write of the old men I knew

And the young men

I loved

And the gold toothed women

Mighty of arm

Who dragged us all

To church. (1973: 156)

In 'Women' she extols the strength of mothers and housewives, who managed their homes and taught their children, despite their biggest drawback:

They were women then

My mamas generation

Husky of voice-stout of

Step....

How they knew what we

Must know

Without knowing a page

Of it

Themselves. (1973: 160)

Her philosophy of life seeps through her poetry, particularly in her two poems, "Expect Nothing" and "Be Nobody's Darling". In "Expect Nothing" she advises to live frugally on surprise and become a stranger to the need of pity:

Expect nothing.

Live frugally

On surprise

Become a stranger to the need of you

Or, if compassion be freely

Given out

Take only enough

Stop short of urge to plead

Then purge away the need.

Wish for nothing larger

Than your small heart

Or greater than a star

Time would disappoint

With cares unmoved and cold

Make of it a parka

For your soul.

Discover the reason why

So tiny human giant Exists at all

So scared unwise

But expect nothing

Live frugally

On surprise. (1973:191-192)

The poem 'Be Nobody's Darling' dedicated to Julius Lester, speaks of the necessity to be an individual and not follow the general masses. The strength of contradictions in life can be used as a shield like a shawl to protect oneself and keep the warmth of liberty and individualism. She reiterates one should cast away fear and be not afraid to be alone or give contradictory answers that would surprise people. The poem is typical of the belief that she holds throughout her struggles as a writer, poet and visionary for women:

Be nobody's darling

Be an out cast

Take the contradictions of your life

And wrap around

You like a shawl,

To parry stones

To keep you warm.

Watch the people succumb

To madness

With ample cheer;

Let them look askance at you

And you askance reply.

Be an outcast;

Be pleased to walk alone

(Uncool)

Or line the crowded

River beds

With other impetuous

Fools.

Make a merry gathering

On the bank

Wherethousands perished

For brave hurt words

They said.

Be nobody's darling

Be an outcast.

Qualified to live

Among your dead. (1973: 193-194)

The futility of a girl's life in a man's world is lamented by Alice in her poem 'The Girl Who Died -2' where she describes the agonies that women condemned by men go through though like snakes in the grass they call her 'sister'. There is venomous recollection amidst the tragedy and the imagery of sexual assaults carried out by the so called 'brothers'. The hypocrisy that exists within the society where the brothers of men follow the

casket of the dead girl vowing vengeance for their own selfish needs is reflected poignantly by the poet:

No doubt she was a singer

Of naughty verse

And hated judgements

(black and otherwise)

And wove a life

Of stunning contradictions,

Was driven mad

By obvious

Professions

And the word

“sister”

Hissed by snakes

Belly-low,

Poisonous,

In the grass.

Waiting with sex

Or tongue

To strike.

Behold the brothers!.

They strut behind

The casket

Wan and sad

And murderous

Thinking whom

to blame

for making this girl

die

alone, lashed

denied into her room.

This girl would not lie;

And was not born

To be “correct”. (HBBEWK Pg 208-209)

In her poem ‘A native person looks up from the Plate’ Alice brings out the fear of indigenous people for their land and resources which are gobbled up by corporate giants. The devouring of lands, and its people, artefacts and weavings, indigenous designs and creations, forest resources and environment faces depletion through such invasions. She creates an imagery of threat and fear and the loss of history and destruction of the traces of the community:

They are eating

Us

To step out of our doors

Is to feel

Their teeth

On our throats.

They are gobbling

Up our

Lands

Our waters

Our weavings

And our artefacts.

They are nibbling

At the noses

Of

Our canoes

And moccasins.

They drink our oil

Like cocktails

And lick down

Our jewelry

Like icicles.

They are siphoning

Our songs.

They are devouring

Us.

We brown, black

Red and yellow

Unruly,

White

Morsels

Creating life

Until we die:

Spread out in the chilling sun

That is

Their plate.

They are eating

Us raw

Without sauce.

Everywhere we have been

We are no more. everywhere we are going

They do not want.

They are eating

Us whole

The gling of their teeth

The light

That beckons

Us to table

Where only they will dine.

They are devouring

Us

Our histories

Our heroes

Our ancestors

And all appetising youngsters

To come.

Where they graze

Among the people

Who create

Who labour

Who live

In beauty

And walk

So lightly

On the earth

There is

Nothing left.

Not even our roots

Reminding us

To bloom.

Now they have wedged

The whole

Of the earth

Between their

Cheeks.

Their wide

Bellies

Crazily clad

In stolen

Goods

Are near

To bursting

With

The fine meal

Gone foul

That is us. (ATGE pg 52-55)

Dead men

Love war

They sit

Astride

The icy bones

Of

Their

Slaughtered horses

Grinning.

They wind

Their

Pacemakers

Especially tight

&

Like napoleon

Favour

Green velvet

Dressing

Gowns

On the

Battle

Field.

They sit

in board

rooms

dreaming of

a profit

that

outlives

death.

Dead men

Love war

They like to

Anticipate

Receptions

And balls

To which

They will bring

Their loathsome

Daughters

Desolation and decay

They like

To fantasise

About

Their rare vintage

Of blood

To be

Served

And

How much

Company

They are going

To have. (ATGE 97-98)

Violence on women and girls by society, whether black or white is reflected in her poem “The Girl Who Died” and the plaintive cry of the young girl ‘I am not perfect, but still your sister’, and the vengeful action of an unforgiving, frenzied society:

But the mob beat her and kicked her

And shaved her head;

Until she saw exactly

How wrong she was. (1973: 205)

Her collection of poems published in 2003 titled *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* are poems of maturity and written in her home on the

central coast of Mexico. The poem 'The Love of Bodies' inspired her after the bombing of 9/11 where she prays:

May she know peace

Eternal

Returning to

Her source

And

That her beauty

Lofty..

.....

I send love and gratitude

That Life

Sent you. (2003: 6)

The fear of corporates invading the good earth, destroying its essence and fertility and a generation of people is reflected as:

They are devouring

Us

Our histories

Our heroes

And all appetizing youngsters

To come. (2003: 54)

In “Until I Was Nearly Fifty” the generosity of giving that comes with growing older is revealed as:

But now

As I approach

Becoming

An elder

I find I want

To give all

That I know

To youth. (2003: 81)

The poem "Dead Men Love War" evokes the terrible imagery of dead men grinning and sitting astride 'slaughtered horses'. Dressed in green velvet almost like Napoleon himself she pictures them ridiculously dressed on the battlefield. She associates desolation, decay and loathsome daughters with these dead men who love waging war on others and bringing destruction through their greed as a strong protest against war. Walker describes in her poem "Thousands of feet below you" the reality and the futility and horrors of war and bombs and the suffering of children and people who live in these war torn lands facing daily threats of death. The dangers of air drops of bombs which has completely destroyed generations of people in many lands is brought out in this strong poem of protest:

Thousands of feet

Below you

There is

A small boy

Running from

Your bombs.

If he were

To show up at your mother's

On a green

Sea island

Off the coast of

Georgia

He's be invited

In

For dinner.

Now, driven

You have shattered

His bones.

He lies steaming

In the desert

In fifty or sixty

Or maybe

One hundred

Oily, slimy

Bits.

If you survive and return

To your island home

And your mothers

Gracious

Table

Where

The cup

Of loving kindness

Overflows

The brim

(and

From which

No one

In memory

Was ever

Turned)

Gather yourself.

Set a place

For him. (ATGE pg 99-100)

Her criticism of the American policy of waging war on weaker nations is strongly built up in this poem where she says if the boy lived in Georgia he would be invited to dinner instead of being shelled and killed:

He lies steaming in the desert

In fifty or sixty

Or maybe one hundred

Oily, slimy

Bits. (2003:99)

Her belief in womanism strongly emerges again in “To be a Woman”, when she says that being a woman does not mean wearing a shroud or facing death. She strongly states that the Feminine is alive, seething with anger and biding her time for change:

The Feminine

is not

Dead

Nor is she

Sleeping

Angry, yes

Seething, yes

Biding her time;

Yes.

Yes. (2003: 107)

Her poem “Falling Bodies” is an elegy for the dead killed in the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre. She laments the senseless killing and loss of innocent people, who were seen helplessly

leaping holding hands as they jumped to their death from the 'flaming windows' and the towers:

To these ones

Leaping holding hands

Holding

Their own

I open

My arms. (2003: 119)

The circle of love that must exist between people no matter which corner or part of the world is reflected as:

Consider: the pilot

and the

Hijacker

Might

Have been

Holding

Hands. (2003: 121)

And an appeal for love and better understanding, and a hope it comes in another lifetime 'if it does not come in this lifetime is reflected ambitiously as:

And if it does not come

In this lifetime

We may be hopeful

For the next. (2003:121)

Her hatred of war is reiterated in her poem 'Not Children', where she says war is not a creative response for any society.

War is no

Creative response

No matter

The ignorant

Provocation

No more

Than taking

A hatchet

To your

Stepfather's

Head is

Not to mention

Your husband's.

It is something

Pathetic

A cowardly

Servant

Too base

Emotions

Too embarrassing

To be

Spread out

Across the

Destitute globe.

The only thing we need

Absolutely

To leave

Behind

Crying

Lonely

In

The

Dust. (ATGE pg 151-152)

Another war poem 'Why War is never a Good Idea', in which she describes a picture as poem for children blinded in war:

Though War speaks

Every language

It never knows

What to say

To frogs. (2003: 150)

The futility of war and the destruction of all living creatures and the sorrow in every heart resonate in the poem with images that flow like a series of pictures. 'War has bad manners, war eats everything' brings out the monstrous effects of war and is a lesson to small children to learn never to like war or become crazy for war.

Patriotic to the core, Walker in her maturity, seems more peaceful with all those around her when she says in her poem "Patriot":

Love your country

By loving Americans....

Love us

We are the flag.(2003:189)

The acceptance of age and grey hairs and the wisdom that comes with it is reflected in her poem 'Some things to enjoy about aging':

The dignity

Of

Silver:

New light

Around

My head.

Forgetfulness:so much less

To recall!

Talking to myself

Amusing company

For me

And

My dog. (ATGE pg 204)

The humour of Alice springs into a surprising poem on 'Wrinkles':

Wrinkles

Invited by life

Have

Entered

This house.

Someone

New

Is living

In my

Face. (ATGE pg. 206)

The poem 'Life is never over' brings out the pathos of old age and the slow draining of alert energies and the beginning as she expresses, of the journey of vegetation that comes along with old age:

Life is never

Over

After this one

Begins

The journey

Of

Vegetation

Of being roses

Of being trees.

Only after much

Unhappiness

And many

Bad decisions

So long a time

We need

Hardly

Even think

Of it.

Begins

The life

Of dumb metal

Of being

Glancing

Axes

Whining saws

Rust weary

Shears. (ATGE pg. 207)

Her poetry also reveals Alice Walker's fascination for Maria Sabina, the Mazatec Indian. Healer, priestess, who inspired her to celebrate her womanhood and strength and the beauty of mother Earth. The memorable words of Maria Sabina begin the introduction to her poems and also sums up Alice Walker's imagery and vision of womanhood:

Woman who thunders am I, Woman who sounds am I,

Spider woman am I, hummingbird am I,

Eagle woman am I

Whirling woman of the whirlwind am I,

Woman of a sacred enchanted place am I

Woman of the shooting stars am I.(2003:226)

Her essays highlight many issues and persons including Hurston. Hurston, a little known black female anthropologist and writer of fiction who lived from (roughly) 1901-1960, became (by Walker's admission and frequent mention in her essays) a substantial figure in her evolution as a writer, chronicler, and woman. Hurston filled the void of the sought after and missing model. Walker eventually visited Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's birthplace, to place a stone on the woman's unmarked grave- a cornerstone experience chronicled in the article 'Looking for Zora'. This singular act reveals the purpose of this collection of essays: it is taking a step toward breaking the "curse of silence" that has kept black women isolated from themselves and each other, cut off from the seeds to be gleaned from our artistic history. It is a necessary step backward to self-discovery.

Knowing this allows us to understand the phrase "Our Mothers' Garden" as Walker intends in the context of this collection- as a symbol for all the unacknowledged but rich artistry, tradition, ritual, and stories handed

down by anonymous or scantily known black women of unmarked graves who, though their creativity was rarely preserved in any formal way, managed to keep alive “a notion of song”. The search for these little known, uncelebrated women provides the central consciousness of this collection. In this first collection of non fiction, Alice Walker speaks out as black woman, writer, mother and feminist in these thirty six pieces ranging from the personal to the political. The essays touch on her own work as well as that of other writers, accounts of the civil rights of the 1960s and the antinuclear movement of the 1980s and include a vivid courageous memoir of the childhood injury to her eyes.

"Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987" (1998), is an excellent collection of essays and journal entries. In this work, Walker shows the essential union of her political, spiritual, and artistic "selves." She writes about animal rights and the need to protect animals and their lives, the environment and nature in all its glory. Alice also writes about her family and daughter, her father, the problematic legacy of Joel Chandler Harris, pioneering African-American thinker Benjamin Banneker, vegetarianism, Reggae music legend Bob Marley, her trip to China in 1983 and more. Fascinating are her thoughts on the controversies surrounding her masterpiece 'The Color Purple'. The backlash on the release of her book

and the strong reaction of the community around her, both men and society were lessons Alice never forgot. The book is an example of her passion and insight into life and people and the society around her. She does not hesitate to voice out her opinions and her strong belief in the power of women within themselves.

This collection of recent prose reflects Walker's belief in the spiritual connections among all peoples and between them and the earth that sustains them. It further examines how this precept, and themes of race, gender, sexuality, and political freedom, illuminate her life and the lives of friends, and ancestors. Entertaining and often stirring, it ranges widely, moving from observations made on trips to, Bali, China and Jamaica to Walker's views on her connection with San Francisco's lesbian and gay communities and her valuable insights into the controversies surrounding the filming of *The Color Purple* .

The ability to speak in different, authoritative voices as fictionists, essayists, reviewers, and culture critics is a mark of particular distinction among contemporary writers of African American origin like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gayle Jones, Audre Lorde, and Margaret Walker, to name only a few, are the descendants of black women writers who like Anna Julia Cooper, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Zora Neale Hurston wrote

across both genre and gender distinctions. In one of the first books devoted entirely to Alice Walker, Donna Haisty Winchell explores the reciprocity between this important writer's life and work.

In *Alice Walker*, Winchell constructs a dialogue in each chapter that weaves together Walker's essays, poetry, and fiction. For example, chapter one ("Survival, Literal and Literary") uses the autobiographical *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, to chart Walker's early personal and artistic development through her close familial ties to her mother Minie Lou Walker and to Zora Hurston, her spiritual "foremother,"

Alice Walker's second volume of essays, *Living By the Word* (1988), is also an essential part of the conceptual frame Winchell uses throughout the book to contextualize Walker's poems, short fiction, and novels. The motif that gives form to Walker's life and art like a jazz riff that keeps changing form is the search for "wholeness": "Walker speaks of her early writing," Winchell claims, "as a means of survival, an alternative to despair. Over time, though her writing has become not only a means of averting crisis but a means of achieving health" (p.27). What is true for the artist is also true for her art. Although not all of Walker's fictional characters come through their ordeals "healthy and whole," Winchell stresses that "their struggle for wholeness is the stuff Walker's fiction world is made of" (28).

Wholeness is, in part, a matter of "resistance," of rebellion against an almost overwhelming array of forces racism, misogyny, cultural and dogmatic religiosity, that can produce despair and self-hatred. Winchell's book constructs a convincing dialogue out of the ways that Walker's life and art are informed by these issues. Wholeness and resistance are empowering ideas in chapters like "The Burden of Responsibility, The Flaw of Unforgiveness: The Third Life of Grange Copeland" (chapter four); "Beautiful, Whole, and Free: You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down" (chapter six); and "Harmony of the Heart and Hearth: The Temple of My Familiar" (chapter nine). The ten comparatively short chapters that make up Winchell's work provide a remarkably incisive, multi-voiced discussion of Walker's life and writings.

Alice has ventured into arenas where no one else had dared to question in most of her works. In 'Warrior Marks', (1993), she along with film maker Pratibha Parmar documented through visual art the horrifying tragedy of female mutilation in Africa to bring the practice to public awareness and put an end to such painful experiences of the girl child and women. Female genital mutilation is still widely practiced in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Walker, whose 1992 novel '*Possessing the Secret of Joy*' explored the life of a genitally mutilated African woman, teamed up

with Indian filmmaker Pratibhato make a documentary film about this abhorrent practice. This forceful account of how they filmed *Warrior Marks* in Africa in 1992-93 include letters, journal entries, photographs, poems and interviews with victims of female circumcision, their families, women who perform clitoridectomies and activists opposed to the practice. Included is a medical testimony suggesting that female genital mutilation may contribute to the spread of AIDS. This remarkable cross cultural collaboration was also meant to help break the deafening silence surrounding a taboo subject such as genital mutilation in a strong patriarchal society.

Alice Walker opened a painful door: where she brought the issue of female genital mutilation, a practice that affects one hundred million of the world's women, to the attention of the reading public. For many readers, this first encounter with a subject previously unfamiliar to them was shocking and unforgettable. Alice Walker decided early in the process of writing her novel that she had not yet done enough to help stop this age-old practice. She resolved to make a documentary film that would further educate people about the harmful, sometimes deadly process of removing the clitoris - and often the remaining outer genitalia - as a means of maintaining tradition and ensuring a woman's "cleanliness" and fidelity.

This book chronicles their odyssey together. *Warrior Marks* describes a unique filmmaking journey, from Alice Walker's first letter to Pratibha Parmar proposing the idea of the film to the many journal entries and observations each of them made along the way. From California to England to Senegal, The Gambia, and Burkina Faso, *Warrior Marks* follows Walker and Parmar as they interview people who are concerned with and affected by the practice of female genital mutilation. The text includes transcripts of their interviews, three new poems by Alice Walker, and over fifty photographs offering a vivid and poignant portrayal of the people and places they visited. For its insights into the collaborative creative process, as well as its perceptions about the politics of filmmaking, *Warrior Marks*' is an extraordinary work . It is also the adventure of two remarkable women who together fulfilled a dream and realised also the dream of Alice and her long battle for women's issues to be taken seriously and heard.

In *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, (2005) ,Alice has created a work that ranks among her finest achievements: the story of a woman's spiritual adventure that becomes a passage through time, a quest for self, and a collision with love. Kate has always been a wanderer. A well known writer married many times, she has lived a life rich with explorations of the natural world and the human soul. Now, at 57, she leaves her lover, Yolo,

to embark on a new excursion, one that begins on the Colorado River, proceeds through the past, and flows, inexorably, into the future. As Yolo begins his own parallel voyage, Kate encounters celibates and lovers, shamans and snakes, memories of family disaster and marital discord, and emerges at a place where nothing remains but love. Walker dedicates this story to her murdered paternal grandmother, might have become.”

An intense commentary on the human spirit and what can happen when it is neglected, *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* asks the reader, among other things, to acknowledge the existence of mother earth and her powerful healing power. This theme of being healed by nature is undoubtedly the predominant theme in the book, yet Walker also touches upon other issues including relationships, the wisdom and the seemingly endless current of violence in the world..She writes that when one witnesses the various that occur on a daily basis somewhere on the earth and how far everyone is from peace, and how they get no nearer the longer they talk, this gives an indication of the problem. She also questions humankind that if one sees a human being, really see them ... how could one kill them? Walker writes and targets a multicultural adult audience, with her message that if you get you mind and body right the rest will follow.

The message of universal peace is one that can be understood by people of all ages. The novel is written in the voice of the third person, except for certain segments in italics where the Mother Earth concept (known in the book as "Grandmother") speaks in first person. The story follows a woman named Kate Nelson whose existence is changing into something unknown. Past her mid-50s and already married many times, she is a loving mother as well as an extensively published and popular author. Still, something is not quite right with Kate's life. She is beginning to care less and less about the material world. One day she burns several hundred-dollar bills just to demonstrate to herself that these items were not the God/Goddess of her life. She's no longer worried about her house and all the things about it that need fixing. In fact, she's even contemplating selling it. She is unconvinced of the need to do anything further with her life.

So when a recurring dream of a river spurs her to go out and find the real thing she journeys, with several other women, to travel the Colorado River, crossing the Grand Canyon. From the very beginning of the trip, Kate undergoes a literal purging as hidden memories and repressed emotions surface, forcing her to confront them and neutralize their

negativity. Eager to continue her personal evolution, she travels to the Amazon on another discovery of the spiritual side of her life.

In the short story “Kindred Spirits” in Alice Walker’s work of fiction, “The Way Forward Is With a Broken Heart,” the protagonist treasures old hats, stroking their familiar brims, finding endless meanings in their stains, wearing them defiantly. This character’s fixation is a fitting metaphor for Walker’s creation of this new book -- a highly personal work -- because Walker’s themes, characters and message surely are old hat to readers by now. Walker begins the collection with a preface that dedicates the work to “all those who love, and who seek the path instinctively of that which leads us to love, requires us to become intimate with what is foreign, and helps us to grow. The middle-aged women who inhabit the book are all from bad relationships, regretting the mistakes made with their lives and demanding understanding. They’re all attractive, successful, wealthy satisfied, reminiscent of the flawless, heroines of Harlequin romances.

The story “To My Young Husband” is written in the form of a diary and explores events largely true to Walker’s own life: her marriage to a white man, their difficult life in the segregated society of Mississippi, that frowned on their marriage, the birth of their child and their committed struggle for civil rights, that changed the thoughts of Americans. The story

reflects much of the autobiographical events of Walkers own struggles and life and brings to us the poignancy of trying to be a voice for the voiceless women.' Kindred Spirits 'is a tale of resentment among family members and the tensions that the protagonist, who is a writer goes through, when they accuse her of appropriating the family's collective memories in her stories and writings.

The remaining stories are slice-of-life portraits, a scene of a day as a woman dredges her past, makes peace with her present or babbles on in self-awareness .Most of the stories involve "getting in touch" with a thing from the past. In the story "There Was a River," Big Sister and Little Sister search for the cabin where their Auntie Putt-Putt once lived, searching for the place they ran away to .They search for the house where their aunt was a slave to her husband, which is in sharp contrast to their present freedom as women of their generation. They find the cabin and then celebrate their liberty .In "The Brotherhood of the Saved" -- a woman takes her elderly female relatives, all wearing giant, floppy Sunday hats, to see "Deep Throat." Alice's characters here are very vocal about their women. Domesticity creeps into the story "Orelia and John", which is about two people who get together after all the mistakes of their lives and find peace with each other. In "Cuddling," Orelia is infatuated with someone else

and she needs the restorative power of cuddling to win John back into her life. In the next story "Charms," in oscillating flashbacks, we learn the history of the lives of Orelia and John and that she is able to forgive John for his unfaithfulness, which grows with maturity.

"These are the stories that came to me to be told after the close of a magical marriage to an extraordinary man that ended in a less-than-magical divorce. I found myself unmoored, unmated, ungrounded in a way that challenged everything I'd ever thought about human relationships. Situated squarely in that terrifying paradise called freedom, precipitously out on so many emotional limbs, it was as if I had been born; and in fact I was being reborn as the woman I was to become." So says Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker about her beautiful new book, in which "one of the best American writers today" gives us superb stories based on rich truths from her own experience. Imbued with Walker's wise philosophy and understanding of people, the spirit, sex and love.

The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart begins with a lyrical, autobiographical story of a marriage set in the violent and volatile Deep South during the early years of the civil rights movement. Walker goes on to imagine stories that grew out of the life following that marriage—a life, she writes, that was "marked by deep sea-

changes and transitions." These provocative stories showcase Walker's hard-won knowledge of love of many kinds and of the relationships that shape our lives, as well as her infectious sense of humor and joy. Filled with wonder at the power of the life force and of the capacity of human beings to move through love and loss and healing to love again, .

Walker addresses a broad range of issues: artistic, political, and personal. She recalls the tragedy of growing up in a racist society to suddenly "meet" her elders who, through her adult eyes, had lost their stature- appeared diminished, squashed by the unrelenting society. She recounts her own disappointment in her father and the process of forgiving him which involved understanding that he was only a product of his time. She looks at the women of our childhood, no rose colored glasses to soften their flaws, none needed to recognize their beauty and humanity. These portraits sent me back to the pages of recent history to study the photographs of faces I had forgotten- faces implacable and removed from the prods and dogs – to try to decipher the source of their calm. But Walker is not stirring at white guilt, but establishing the place and time of which she is the physical and philosophical product. And in the course of these essays, which are portrayed as stories, Walker offers logic for the

reclaiming of the South as home. Throughout these pieces, it is clear that Walker decided early on not to settle for the creation of beautiful, non-controversial icons. Instead, she has struggles to evolve a philosophy which would transform the ugly. Out of her writing comes a positive approach to life and art which somewhat clarifies Walker's ability in her fiction to deal with the most damning side of human nature and social politics and still allow her characters to transcend themselves and their era. It is a philosophy which would allow her, an expatriate of the racist south, to reclaim the land which is hers (and ours) as birth right and the creative well spring which retains the spiritual wholeness of the women who comprise home, and also permit her to interpret the civil right movement, and what it did or did not accomplish on her own terms.

Her recollections of the South in her poem 'The Name of Home' bring stirring memories of her childhood injury of her eyes-

All that night

I prayed for eyes to see again

Whose last sight

Had been

A broken bottle

Held negligently

In a racist fist.(99)

The poem ends on a note of the need to love and forgive and the richness of Nature and God's love which also reminds us of her ecofeminist attitude:

God gives us trees to plant

And hands and eyes to

Love them. (99)

Speaking of the impossible kind of love in her poem 'Mornings', she tells of the heartache of her love going away and the 'cloud and threat of snow' and wishing: "That on mornings it cannot come itself, the sun might send me you"(119).Her vulnerability as a woman as someone who loves and is loved seeps through most of her poems on love. There is also a sense of resignation and acceptance in her recognition that love is transient. In 'Johann', Walker brings in a tenderness in her portrayal of the German lover:

'You are the Golden Boy,

Shiny but bloody

And with the ancient martial tune

Only your heart is out of step-

You love'.....

But white I think is the color

Of honest flowers,

And blue is the color

Of the sky. (126 -127)

The collection of poems *Revolutionary Petunias and other Poems* reflects Walker's delight in being once again in a Southern African American environment and her realization that the sincerest struggle to change the world must start from within oneself. She recounts how she was saved from despair many times by the flowers and the trees she planted and the soothing balm of Nature and Mother Earth. The poems are about Revolutionaries and Lovers and about the loss of compassion, trust and the ability to expand in love .She also acknowledges her ancestors because she realizes that 'we are not the first to suffer, rebel, fight and die. The grace with which we embrace life, in spite of the pain, the sorrows, is

always a measure of what has gone before'. In her poem 'In these dissenting times'(156), she says:

I shall write of the old men I knew

And the young men

I loved

And the gold toothed women

Mighty of arm

Who dragged us all

To church. (156)

In 'Women' she extols the strength of mothers and housewives, who managed their homes and taught their children, despite their biggest drawback:

They were women then

My mamas generation

Husky of voice-stout of

Step

With fists as well as hands....

How they knew what we

Must know

Without knowing a page

Of it

Themselves. (160)

Her philosophy of life seeps through her poetry, particularly in her two poems, 'Expect Nothing' and 'Be Nobody's Darling'. In 'Expect Nothing' she advises to live frugally on surprise and become a stranger to the need of pity:

Take only enough

Stop short of urge to plead

Then purge away the need. (191)

Almost the same kind of philosophy continues in her next poem, 'Be Nobody's Darling':

Be nobody's darling/ Be an outcast.

Take the contradictions/Of your life/And wrap around

You like a shawl,/To parry stones

To keep you warm. (193)

Violence on women and girls by society, whether black or white is reflected in her poem 'The Girl Who Died' and the plaintive cry of the young girl 'I am not perfect, but still your sister,' and the vengeful action of an unforgiving, frenzied society:

But the mob beat her and kicked her

And shaved her head;

Until she saw exactly

How wrong she was. (205)

Her writings contain diverse issues relating to women's predicament, both old and new, and her only crusade is to fight for justice and to sing the songs of suffering endlessly until total woman empowerment is achieved.

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CHAPTER-IV

COINCIDENTAL PREDICAMENT OF NAGA AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Naga women's experience of repression and exploitation set in the backdrop of patriarchy, customs and exploitation is the root of both their historiography and feminist discourse and can be seen as rejuvenated and reinterpreted in the perspective of feminist criticism. The theoretical structure of creative literature of Naga women writers stems from this erased and hidden historical experience of their existence. The earliest voice of women's poetry in Tenyidie are poems of Tuonuo and Duosieü in 1945 where they composed a folk poem 'Japan Rühuo' (Japan War) on the Japanese war and the horrors and sufferings of war, bringing into focus the battlefield of Kohima in the second world war and the defeat of the Japanese at the hands of the Borchaha (Big Boss). Colonial references to the white man, the Big Boss who protects and saves them from the Japanese. Their voices represent thousands of Naga women who were witnesses to the war and the Japanese, who according to them came with nothing but destruction and left defeated. The poem "A Kesuoü" (by Tuonuo and Duosieü) is poignant with longing for their life before marriage and the company of her age group of friends. The lonely life of a married woman, in the midst of endless warfare, all alone in the fields, suddenly

hears the sounds of songs sung by her friends carried by the wind. The poem conveys the hard work and loneliness of women who are married and sent off often to other neighbouring villages. Arranged marriages are the custom and everything is at the consent of the parents and not the girl.

Dinuo, in the nineteen fifties, finds a mixture of themes on society, life and nature. In *Tenyimia*, it is a strong critique on the *Tenyimia* people and the times and she expounds on *Tenyimia* society to learn to be unselfish and be good leaders, while her other poems *U Kelhou* (Our Life), *NhicuZha* (Childhood days), *Themvu* (Star), *Kesia* (Death) and *Niaki* (Sun) bring echoes of the Romantics and modern poets. *U Kelhou*, a poem about the various aspects and meaning of Life is poignantly philosophical and is a strong voice from a woman writer who believes in positive changes and that one change makes one's own destiny. Our life can be made into dawn, our life can be made into night, our life, and we ourselves can make it. Our life, we ourselves can dismantle it. Her poem "Nhicu Zha" (Childhood Days) speaks of the innocence and happiness of childhood and compares it to the forest flower blooming alone in the dark thick forest, making a difference in other's lives, a short life like that of songs of happiness, passing us by, in the blink of an eye. She analyses the magnitude of the power of death in 'Kesia' in a dark sombre mood, while in *Niaki* (Sun) there is a celebration of

the journey of the sun, its beauty and brightness that lightens everything in its wake. There is a comparative note she brings in hoping that we will also live our life like the sun, circling around its brightness if we could only fly. In the poetry of Dinuo, there is depth of feelings masked in simple truths of Nature. Questions on society and life resound in all her poems, at a time when Naga women were supposed to be silent followers and home makers, unquestioning of patriarchy that resisted outside conquests and yet brought untold grief and suffering to its women and children as victims of the longest decades of violence. Perhaps Dinuo's voice is one of isolation because there were very few women who were educated or had the courage or time to write and dream.

Naga women writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalung or the most prolific Tenyidie poet and novelist Kekhrievöü Yhome are trying to locate a space for expression to the repressed speech and through their literary work they have defined a new mode of expressivity of Naga women, while emphasizing a speakerly voice within the text. These writers have attempted to reconstruct Naga feminist ideology in terms of their creative work whether through fiction or poetry. The literature of Naga women writers is both self definition and redefinition.

Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy* is rooted in the history of stern Naga matriarchal attitudes and discrimination of the girl child, not by the men of the family but by women themselves. *A Terrible Matriarchy* is a challenge to the feminist ideology. It is not only the patriarchal dominance which oppresses the womankind, but the matriarchy in the matriarchal society or even in the patriarchal society makes women suffer. In her novel she presented cases from Nagaland where women suffer for terrible matriarchy. The story narrates the case of a five year old girl named Dielieno, the only girl child and youngest of the five children. The child underwent severe mental agony feeling the discrimination of her grandmother in the family where boys were given enough importance. Dielieno, briefly called Lieno felt unwanted in the family as her parents often made her wear the leftover dresses of her brothers. At such tender age she knew that her grandmother did not love her, when she refused to give her a much desired chicken leg. The granny said, "That portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions"(1). Lieno also observed how her mother lived a very unhappy life, in the dread of the granny who never appreciated her mother. The brothers were not allowed to do any work and the child Lieno was sent to do works like fetching water, etc. The granny advised her mother, "Don't let her run about with her brothers any

more. That is not the way to bring up girl-children”(4). Lieno had no identity. The granny never called her by her name. She called her ‘girl’ all the time. The granny did not like the schooling of Lieno. She told Lieno’s mother, “I really don’t know what it is your generation sees in school. Your children are not being taught the skills of life because they are too busy studying....She will completely forget all I have taught her now” (37). Lieno suffered all through her life, but she finally forgave her granny in her death-bed. One’s suffering at the stages of growth handicaps and keeps one aggrieved throughout life. Lieno suffered like that.

Kekheievoü Yhome’s two novels *Kijü nu Kelhou*(*Life on Earth*) and *Rüleitatuo* (*Will be at Rest*) create women protagonists and re-examine the role of women in society through the exploration of the role and status of women and the creation of families of choice and the speaking voice who knows where she comes from. Yhome’s writing is rebellious, defining an alternative reality, deeply rooted in Naga societal tribal traditions and the strength of women, both as destroyer and builder of family bonding. There is a political consciousness behind Yhome’s texts, whereby she challenged the dominant hegemony of patriarchal culture, while exposing the hidden treasure of the cultural acumen of the Naga women and their worlds. In her fictive discourse Yhome presents the chains of continuity of Naga women’s

experience and tries to link experiences of different women –sisters and best women friends in a dramatically changing world of fame and fortune.

In her writings, Yhome represents the community and the tribe to which she belongs, which is the Angami tribe and reflects the age-old beliefs and conditioned mindset of Angami women representative in Naga women themselves through the stories of gender discrimination, abuse, violence and silent suffering endured by them, both from within their homes and outside. Her narrative is framed on the dominant Naga patriarchal structure and the sufferings and denigrations of the Naga female. It is also an alternative feminist historical discourse of Naga women.

Her powerful novel *Kiju Nu Kelhou(Life in this world)* is a significant remodelling and rethinking of the issues of tradition and gender and thus becomes an alternative feminist/historical discourse of Naga women. There is an emphasis on a specific feminist ideology, where the reader reconsiders Naga women's position as oppressed as a significant cultural history and politics of oppression. The narration is powerful and brings into focus the sacrifices of the eldest daughter of the family. Khrienuo, who is forced to give up her studies, gets into the Government service and supports all her younger siblings, which is an echo of many stories and experiences of Nag women. The sharp staccato statements of her aunt

Khoü, “No need to bother about girls” encourages violence against girls within the homes and tradition of not bothering about the future or education of girls, sending brothers to better schools and the girls ill-treated and even differences in food served, reveal the hidden pains of young girls and women in many Naga homes. The narrative also focuses on the tragedy of the single woman in Naga society, hardworking yet abused which is reflected in the protagonist. Her decision to leave for a faraway place and even hide her identity and change her name to Bunou encourages the redefinition of womanhood and her strength in the midst of adversity, as she is highly regarded and respected in the new place.

Yhome’s *Rüleitatuö* focuses on the familial bond between the two sisters Siedzeleü and Dzieszenuo whose lives take different turns with marriage. Yhome’s sceptic depiction of unhappy arranged marriages in Naga society is in the portrayal of the forced arranged marriage of Seedzeleü to Neichüo and the choice of wealth by many families over love and character. The novel also represents another vital theme within the family, the relationships that women build within themselves to share their pains and experiences and form their own community in resistance to the sexism of men. Siedzeleü’s husband Neichü-o keeps a mistress, but she is unable to escape from the marriage because of her children and bears the

abuse and violence in silence. The bonding between the two women, from different villages and backgrounds, is held together by each other's experiences and strength.

The common struggle of Naga women not only within their families but also in the societal circle of expectations and structures is sharply reflected in Yhome's narration. The responsibility and drudgery of the lives of women, the lack of appreciation from children for whom one sacrifices one's happiness and the living reality of many Naga women is exemplified in the life of Seidzeleü. The strong matrilineal bonding in Naga women is different experience and different history. The special task of a Naga woman writer to seek her motherhood originates from her lost history. Yhome in her two novels re-creates the idealism of matrilineal and the strength of women to counteract the psychological abuse and anger. There is a resurrected consciousness of Naga women in Yhome's depiction of the women protagonists and a specific feminist expressivity. The two different representations, Khrienuo's private world of growing consciousness, the characters of Siedzeleü and Avulü and the feminist critique of the Naga societal structure constitute the feminist structure of the novels and that also emphasizes on the global oppression of women.

Just as Alice Walker recounts about the Groits- poet priests, in her work and making Lissie a female Groit, there are similar echoes faced by Naga women where the Phichü u- the high priest, is male and never are the women recognized for these priestly rituals. The patriarchal context of both African and Naga society resonates in the writings of its women, as poems, fiction, essays or other literary outpourings. The theoretical structure of creative literature of Naga women writers stems from this erased and hidden historical experience of their existence. Kekheievou Yhome's novel *Kijü Nu Kelhou* (Life in this world) is a significant alternative feminist/historical discourse. Yhome's sceptic depiction of unhappy arranged marriages in Naga society is in the portrayal of the forced arranged marriage of Siedzeleu to Neichüo and the choice of wealth by many families over love and character. The novel also represents another vital theme within the family, the relationships that women build within themselves to share their pains and experiences and form their own community in resistance to the sexism of men.

Temsula in her *Songs That Tell* (1988) voices her search for roots, the trend which has been prevailing since the earliest days of Indian English poetry. Though the collection contains many impressions of various times, yet the poet's legitimate voice of her reactions to our conditions and the

vision thereof are the important concerns. 'A strange place', 'Woman', 'Mother Teresa', 'The Healing Touch', 'Requiem', 'Lament for an Earth', 'My substance' are some important poems of this collection which reveal the obsessions of the poet.

The occasion of the songs and the influences for them has been indicated. As an academic, the poet has been in constant touch with the greater bards and as such her reactions to the happenings in her life and surroundings have been similar with that of the greater bards or poets. But still the poetic exploration of her feelings sometimes have been different which are distinctly her own voice and her responses to them. In her poem, she again says in her 'Songs Dedicatory':

... songs which

Sometimes

sing in ecstasy

And weep in agony.

Sigh for memory

And sometimes

Laugh with fantasy. (ibidem 9)

Many of the songs are tragic, exposing ecstasy, agony, and sad memories of the poet. The 'coming-of-age' troubles the poet's vision and she has been disturbed by the thought of ageing and the decadence of self:

At forty

the silver streaking

through my hair

And lines invading

My face with care

I often contemplated

My coming-of-age

At twenty-one.

"How terrible it would be"

I had thought

"to be forty"

An age so remote

And so removed

from youth. (ibidem 13)

The sorrows and sufferings of the youthful dream of Love
have been voiced in 'A Lover's Prayer':

If some-times you dream, sweet heart

Of flames that burnt for you,

May be scorched you,

Or some that never sparked,

But when you wake

To find

The dreams gone

The regrets done

You may need some one

To light your way.(ibidem 15).

The familial or social relationship which has made the worldly co-existence cordial or which has been the staple source of our solace in this world has also been an important concern of the poet.

Father and sons

Antagonists and intolerant

Struggling for supremacy

over an earth

Both want to straddle

Mothers and daughters

Rivals, suspicious

of the blooming

And the fading

of an evanescence. (ibidem 17).

The quest for roots, and pondering over miserable conditions of the downtrodden tribes, social inequities and injustice have made the poet ruminant their maladies:

This is a place where
A Berlin wall divides
The haves and have-nots
Into tribal enclaves
with skyscrapers and slums
Co-existing
In incongruous proximity
Each insulated
Against the other

By self-imposed exile.(ibidem 19)

The poor downtrodden sufferers (as eternal subalterns) are the blessed beings in this world because of their non-involvement in the selfish race of the world of injustice. The poet reveres them in her poem 'Blessings':

Blessed are the poor,

In rags,

For they shall inherit

The crumbs

from the rich

who knowing no hunger

cannot savour

of their plenty

Though they possess

the granaries of the earth. (ibidem 20).

The injustice done to women since time immemorial by society has been reacted upon by the poet. The conditions imposed upon her by Nature, Time, Man and Religion have been referred by the poet in the poem 'Woman', which pronounces her firm eco-feminist ideology:

Nature fashioned her thus/ To bear the burden/To hold the seed/

And feed/ Every need/ But hers

But woman/ Thus fashioned/ Thus oppressed/ Beguiled and betrayed/
sometimes rebelled/ To break the mould/ And shake off the hold/ That
nature devised. (ibidem 22)

The extremely self-less and solemn devotion of Mother Teresa has enticed and elated the poet and as such she glorifies the sacrifice of the divine lady describing her 'angel of mercy'.

The living skeletons

Are her lovers

And the stench of sores

The only perfume, she knows.

...

The energy is unfailing

The faith unyielding

In this "angel of mercy"

Bringing new light to humanity.(ibidem 33).

The poet's complaints against the suffering of women and her own womanhood have been a constant obsession with her and she reacts to that sorrowfully:

For twelve long miserable years

My life coursed away

At the core of my womanhood

Draining all joy and hope,

Tainting existence

With the leprous out-pouring

Of unhealing emanation. (ibidem 37).

The deforestation activities continuing in the hills and valleys of the Northeast India has obsessed the poet. She portrays the destruction of nature which has become a menace to mankind and reacts in the following words:

Once upon on earth

There was a forest,

Verdant, virgin, vibrant

with tall trees

In majestic splendour

....

Alas! for the forest

which now lies silent

stunned and stumped

with the evidence

of her rape.

As on her breasts

The elephants trample

The lorries rumble

loaded with her treasures. (ibidem 45).

The 'academic self', 'domestic self' and various obsessions of the 'self' are also significant concerns of this Naga poet. That life has been a burden and in spite of all such burdens, living is a journey in quest of better

possibilities. In the following lines the poet refers to her ‘domestic self’ at Shillong, where she spent the better part of her life away from her homeland:

The domestic self at Bara Bazar

Eyeing the rahu and the hilsa

But finally setting

For the common carp,

And haggling

Over the price of tomatoes

In the cheaper side of the mart.(ibidem 59).

Temsula’s second book of poems, *Song that Try to Say* explores her visions of tribal life, human relationship, her own life, Naga ethos, religion and some momentary impressions. Above all, the poet’s love of lyric and deep aesthetic sense and rhythmical lines reveal her fine serene sense of symphony and mellifluity. Her inquiring voice in the poem “why do songs live” is very evocative and appealing:

Why do songs live
long after songsters
Are gone and forgotten?
Why do songs speak
Though sung in alien tongues
And unfamiliar tunes?
Why do songs appeal
When children squeal
In shaky voices and broken rhymes?(1992: 9).

Contemporary happenings like air-crash of Kaniska, love, sex, earthquake, religious rites are the major concerns of the poet in this collection. Timelessness being an obsession has been reacted upon sympathetically:

There are so many songs
I want to sing,

But so little time

To sing them in (ibidem 39)

Sex in the personal life for child reproduction or as a biological need is found in the poem 'Rites' and has been prioritised as the "self-giving rite":

Every time we enact

The self-giving rite,

I hold you deep within

the very best of you in

Primeval contact.(ibidem 42).

The system of living has been defined by the poet in her poem 'The System' and the transactions in life have been called as bargains, barter, etc.:

The art of living

According to some

Is but a system

of bargains and barter.

Buying and selling

Sales and jumbo sales,

Are part of the fun

And fan-fare of living.(ibidem 43).

The religious creeds of the monks and preachers have been revered by the poet. The selfless contributions of the religious preachers have been considered sympathetically by the poet:

Monks/ Pious preachers/ learned in scriptures/

selfless servers/ and renunciators/

who are but/ Humans too.

('On Monkish Creeds', ibidem 44)

The poet also celebrates the glory of places in Assam, Nagaland and the like with her impressions on their importance. The poet's race and place consciousness are evident from this. For example, in one poem entitled 'Jatinga', she tells about the birds which commit suicide there. Jatinga is a mysterious place in Assam. Every year birds come here and commit suicide en masse. The poet in her rhetoric question wonders about the mystery and feels that the suicide perhaps immortalises the birds.

Hence their recurrent practice of committing suicide remains an eco-mystery:

What leads you there

O you immortal birds?

The strength

of your tiny wings

or the dying cries

of your singing throats?

...

What compels you

O you immortal birds?

To willingly dare

To ultimate snare

Only at Jatinga?(ibidem 48)

The ethos of Ao sNagas has been revealed in the poem ‘Stone-people from Lungterok’. *Lungterok* in Ao language means six stones. According to the Aos, their first forefathers emerged out of the earth at the place called *Lungterock*. There were three men and three women. The ‘stone people’ at Lungterok were the progenitors of Aos. They were poetic, politic, barbaric, balladic, polyglots, knowledgeable in birds language and animal discourse, romantics, who believed in “the sun can sulk”, the potters, weavers, planters, growers, hunters, carvers, singers of songs and takers of heads, gentle lovers and savage heroes, builders of homes and destroyers of villages. These stone people were “worshippers of unknown, unseen spirits/ of trees and forests, of stones and rivers/ and believers of soul and its varied forms, its sojourn here/ and passage across the water into the hereafter”. The same ‘stone people’ were the savage and sage of the race of Ao. (ibidem 49, 50).

In this collection of poems, there are poems on the time of the year like ‘Dread of Winter’, ‘December’, ‘October’, where the poet gives her impression on the time:

Winter is not the season

for the aged or the desperate

with decay in their bones

And despair in their souls: ('Dread of winter', ibidem 25)

December is a bad month

For lonely hearts

When the ground frost

Quickens the dull ache

Within.(December, ibidem 26)

October is the month

which has a way

with my heart

And turns it nostalgic

with its magic ('October', ibidem 57)

Temsula's third book of poems *Songs of Many Moods* (1995) like the previous volumes contains poems of tragic vision. The introductory poem is about the craft of writing. The first poem entitled 'Words' refers to the art of the poet:

Words are trying to escape

My efforts at articulation

They refuse the confines

of defined languages

And phonic systems.(ibidem 9).

Transition of environmental conditions over the years has made the poet unhappy. She has been nostalgic about the early days of her life when she was overjoyed with the gorgeous natural environment. In the poem 'My Hills', the poet's nostalgic view of the past has been exposed:

The sound and sights/ Have altered/

In my hills/ Once they hummed/

with bird-song/ And happy gurgling brooks/

Like running silver/ With shoals of many fish.

The trees were many/ Happy, verdant, green/

The seasons playing magic/

On their many-splendoured sheen....

But today, I no longer knew my hills/

The bird song is gone/ Replaced by the staccato/

of sophisticated weaponry/The rivers are running red,/

The hillsides are bare/

And the seasons/ Have lost their magic.(ibidem 49).

In her *Songs from Here and There* (2003) Temsula explores the multi-ethnic scenario of her region and the current ecological imbalances and waste colonialism prevailing everywhere, which have made the denizens nostalgic of the glorious ecological paradise of the region. She feels how the elements of nature protest against man's insensibility. This shows her sympathetic responses to the nature. A monolith, which now stands at a village gate or somewhere else claims of its dissatisfaction and ignominy. So in its prayer, it says to other elements of nature not to tell its beloved about its outcast state:

O you elements

When you pass by the forest

And my beloved queries

Just tell her

I have gone to my glory
 But please, please, never
 Tell her the story
 Of my ignominy (2003:5)

Temsula is a social chronicler and eco-humanist. The women's suffering in Nagaland and everywhere else has troubled her and this is revealed in much of her writings. Hence she has never forgotten to reveal women's responsibility and sincerity in spite of their suffering:

She steps nimbly over huddled figures
 And puts rice into boiling water
 In careful measures
 The hut is soon filled with the aroma
 Of wood smoke and cooking rice (ibidem 13)

Her latest collection of poems entitled *Songs from the Other Life* (2007) makes her a homebound pilgrim. The myths of various clans of Naga tribe and many of Ao-Naga myths have been explained in the poems. Through these explanations she seeks to explore/search the identity of her tribe. The loss of script of her Ao-Naga tribe, the Tiger soul, the Soul-bird,

the boatman in the river between the land of the living and the land of the Dead, the Tiger man/ woman, the Sangtam legend of Mamola, the legends of head hunting and the like are the many mythical/legendary tales which expose the identity of Nagas as a ferociously chivalric tribe who are honest and truthful in their attitudes to all. The Naga oral tradition is very powerful. The whole system of social, historical, religious and ethical knowledge has been retained in the memory of the people through the oral tradition. It is because they had a script inscribed on a hide and hung on a wall for all to see and learn. Once a dog pulled it down and ate it up. Since then, the whole system of knowledge has remained alive in the oral tradition. Temsula refers to this myth in her poem “The Old Story Teller”:

So when memory fails and words falter

I am overcome by a bestial craving

To wench the thieving guts

Out of that Original Dog

And consign all my stories

To the script in his ancient entrails. (2007:13)

Temsula Ao's mystic sensibility has been exposed in some of the poems. Most of the poems seem to be the intellectual exegesis of our

situations and conditions. Lyricism, verbal melody, economy of expression and mellifluous language make her poetry much enjoyable. Expressions of stark realities of life in romantic overflows of songs have been excellent in her works. For her melodious writings and songs, she has been called 'the Nightingale of North Eastern India.' (Das 1998:26)

An autochthonous poetess, Nini Vinguriaü Lungalang (born 1948) who teaches at Northfield School, Kohima, exposes her tragic views on life, tribal way of life, neglected people, her concerns for her father, the space of Kohima, the heritage of Naga people, youthful days as some of the obsessions and observations of her early life:

I look back on the morning years

That have trickled like water

Through my uncaring young fingers.

When I only delighted in the touch and taste

Warmth and cool

of those sunlit, perpetual-seeming days (1994: 1)

The same nostalgic memory of past rituals and serene environment is aroused in another poem 'Chapel':

I come to light the candles.

In the serene gloom of the sanctuary

The saints stand tranquil....

...

Faint scent of incense and faded flowers

Nostalgic of past rituals.(ibidem 9)

The similarity of appearance between mother and daughter has moved the poetess emotionally and she thinks over it through the metaphor of mirror:

So you see, I look a lot like my mother.

She's stamped herself soul-deep in me

With things that are of hers

....

Yes, I look a lot like my mother

And my daughter looks

A lot like me. (ibidem 11)

The poet has deep sympathy for the downtrodden and desperate sufferers. She writes about the street sweeper, the tragedy of youth senselessly killed and maimed, old tribal woman suffering in a city hospital and so on:

A ragamuffin

Snot-nosed little sweeper

watches the giddy traffic

with enormous wonder-filled eyes.

Task forgotten, her arm drags

The broom with mechanical reflex. ('Street Sweeper', ibidem 12)

On 20th March 1989 at Kohima, two young boys were killed and eighty others maimed in a senseless firing incident by the Nagaland Police on young students during a protest rally which the poet witnessed. Remembering this fatal tragedy and the death of young Naga students she writes a dirge grieving the great loss:

Black flags flap in macabre frivolity

On the ribald wings of spring.

...

We returned home,

But without them

we left them there, at the crossroads.

...

Our sons, our brothers

their ardent beauty, their young strength

Unripe, untried

Fallen.(Dirge, ibidem 26).

A spark of Indian mysticism can be seen in her poems. The poet makes herself Gopi and exposes her love for her Krishna in a poem entitled "To Krishna 'S'":

Shri Krishna

Bliss in your presence, tranquility.

Once upon an enchanted time

I, the Gopi

My hands lifted

Resistless at the bidding

of the insistent flute. (ibidem 20).

The claim of ancestry of the Nagas from the mountains has been revealed in her poem "On Puliebadze". Puliebadze is a mountain about ten kilometres away from Kohima. In this poem the poet cautions her race to revere the mountain Puliebadze:

Stern sentinel trees silently guard

The secret pulse that throb beneath the skirts

of ancient ancestress Puliebadze.

Walk with care: for here is holy ground,

Let not your footfall sound farther

Than the crisping crush of twig or leaf!

Let then the wisps of mist that stroke

The flanks of old Puliebadze! (ibidem 46)

Nini as a poet is the priest of nature, precursor sentinel of safeguarding ecology depletion and the cause of the subaltern.

Easterine Iralu (1959–) who taught English at North Eastern Hill University, Kohima Campus and at Nagaland University, Kohima and is at present teaching in Norway, published her first collection of poetry when she was twenty three. She mingles her vision of past with the current realities and reflects the erosion of environment sincerely. She envisions the decadence of time and is nostalgic of the glorious heritage she inherits. The Naga myth of the Utopia (*Kelhoukevira*) haunts her and makes her passionate of the glorious world of the past:

Keviselie speaks of a time
 when her hills were untamed
 her soil young and virgin
 and her warriors worthy
 the earth had felt good
 and full and rich and kind to his touch.
 Her daughters were seven,

with the mountain air in their breaths
 and hair the colour of soft summer nights
 every evening they would return
 Their baskets overflowing
 with the yield of the land
 then they would gather round
 and their songs filled all the earth.

["Genesis":1982:1/Nongkynrih&Ngangom 2003: 219).

In this poem the poet has made 'Plague', a personified malady responsible for the ecological devastation that has swept over her glorious land. The patriot in Easterine mourns aloud to see her eternally heroic clan cold and coward:

The night of the flame flower, all desire turns
 Alien around me; and I stand unrequited
 By waters that no longer move to my name.

...

My golden people are grown cold

They wound my lips, my hands, my eyes

They bleed my poems

In the quiet of the afternoon

And blind my songs

On silent, starless nights,

Cry, cry my beloved hills

And let me feel no more. (1982:9)

She finds glory of the virgin land and ecology in the conscience of her iconic hero, Keviselie and glorifies him:

The spirit of the hills have found

An answering spirit in thee

Thy nature noble, mirrors

Their rich heritage

And their songs of resistance

Echoes in thy pilgrim soul; ...

It is thee, Keviselie, it is thee. (ibidem 6)

The ecology-depletion is occurring so fast that the persona in a poem feels the need of keeping an imprint of it and she speaks to her son about that and draws and paints a glorious picture to at least preserve a picture to view and memorize the glorious ecology:

Before you are born/ into an ever changing world/

before the green pines/

Fall prey to the woodcutter's axe/

and stumps stand, gory/ remains/

of once beautiful trees;/

before the gloriously/ setting sun/ is veiled in city smog/

and all I have viewed/tonight/ fade into memories irrevocable/

before the changing world/ churns itself into ashes/

let me imprint (2001:111)

Easterine also writes on romantic and religious themes. She is a patriot in her writings and is passionate about the glorious heritage of her motherland and very critical about the patriarchal dominance in Naga society and the age old suffering of women.

Ecological inequilibrium in our times is one of the important concerns of Monalisa Changkija (1960–), a stern feminist and ecofeminist. She is the editor of a newspaper *Nagaland Page* which is published from Dimapur. An eco-chronicler and sentinel of time, in one of her poems, Monalisa says:

Yes, I've seen our rice fields

turn into factories and hills

reduced to barren brown

our rivers have dried

and our once sparkling fish

lie dead on sandy banks.

But I wonder why you remain silent

When I say we are hungry.

(Nongkynrih&Ngangom 2003: 216)

In the preface to the first book of her poems, Monalisa speaks about her feminist concerns:

The first part of this collection, **weapons of words on pages of pain and to whom it may concern** reflects some of my thoughts on

battered and abused women, on domestic violence and on women's ability to rise above the "second class citizenry.' Yes, I am empathising with and also crying out at the same time along with women who have suffered and continue to suffer in a discriminate society. (n.p.)

In several of her poems Monalisa raises the basic question about inequality and sexual discrimination in the society and against the atrocity and patriarchy which exploits the weakness and innocence of the fairsex and shatters their "liberty, peace, prosperity and right to live independently at par" (Das 2008:125) with their male counterpart. As such she seeks justice for the eternally oppressed, exploited and dominated women class:

If god made man

In His own image,

Where shall the

Battered seek justice? (1993:1)

Being ambitious of the victory the women subaltern, their age-old predicament, insecurities and sufferings, she feels that these do not speak of their inadequacies, but Man's violence, dominance and atrocities and his

inadequacies. About the pages of pain and the destiny of eternally suffering women she is sympathetic and feels acutely troubled:

Violence-induced miscarriages,

Black-eyes and bloodied –lips

Blue bruises and broken ribs

Within the sanctity of marriages

And security of homes,

Are unrecorded indexes

Of man's "progress and growth"

On this planet's unwritten

Pages of pain. (ibidem 7)

Rapid changes in the bio-diversity of Nagaland and places around Northeast India, the suffering of tribes amidst the environmental degradation, degeneration and extinction of rare flora and fauna and the impact of the ecological inequilibrium on the human habitat and living conditions create recurrent provocations in her to protest:

Yes, I've seen our rice fields

Turn into factories and mills

Our green hills

Reduced to barren brown

Our rivers have dried

and our once sparkling fish

lie dead on sandy banks.

It's no more the Pines I can smell

Nor hear the Tragopan and the Hornbill (2007:29)

Besides the rare flora and fauna, birds like Tragopan and Hornbill which are the symbols of Naga heritage are extinct now and this gives pain to the poet to ponder over the culture and ecology of her motherland.

KekhrievöYhome says that real life experiences which she had seen or heard have formed the basis of her novel *Kijü nu Kelhou*. Spinster stories and mistreatment by relatives has been fictionalized by her, where the girls are treated as nothing according to the common saying "girls are nothing". The characterization of Khrienuo, the protagonist is from an older

generation story very common in Naga society, where the eldest girl has to sacrifice her education, love and happiness for the responsibility of her younger siblings and brothers. Situations for spinster sisters and single women in the family become worse when brothers don't marry good women and they continue and encourage discrimination of the sister. In the Naga context of feminism, both in Yhome's and Easterinelralu's work like *A Terrible Matriarchy*, the violence against the girl is carried out not only because of men but by also of the elders, in laws or even the mother, mother-in-law or grandmother. Khrienuo's aunt in the end of the story realizes the value of daughters and importance of girls, as well as the destruction of the family by daughter in laws who are not good women. (Interview with Yhomeon 14.6.2013)

Her latest novel *Rüleitatu* (2011) focuses on alcoholics and womanizers and the tragedy it brings into many Naga families. Violence, alcoholism and the cycle of patriarchy, protected and preserved by the society, including the family and mothers themselves is revealed through the heart rending story. Yhome's own personal experience of alcoholism within the family and the tragic marriage breakdown of friends because of the relentless womanizing of the husband expose the façade of marriage and relationships. The situation of women who dare not break away from

abusive husbands and failed marriages because of the fear of losing their children brings to the fore the Naga custom of custody of children to the father and not the mother. *Rüleitatu* shows that men realize too late their folly and this is when their own children grow up like them, squandering family wealth and name and follow in their father's footsteps. Often, according to Yhome children get out of control due to anger and bitterness, watching their own father's irresponsible ways. It is obvious she refers to the Naga concept of many families spoiling and pampering the son, thus making them more irresponsible as they grow up. Naga women on the other hand are forced to be responsible for their siblings and homes, and this prepares them to be stronger, resilient and cope with bad situations in life, come what may. The tenacity and devotion of the wife in *Rüleitatu* and the belief that rest and peace will only come to women after death is a strong message of the futility of marriage and relationships in the face of alcoholism or philandering by men. The resignation of women to such situations in marriages, bound by tradition and family commitment to marriage and the honour of the family is stressed by Yhome throughout her novel.

The recurring themes of women and violence and battered lives, domestic violence, incest, threats, victims of prolonged political conflict are

found in both fictional and poetic worlds of Naga women writers and their art. Within these artistic expressions, Naga women writers recount historical stories of discrimination and political consciousness of rights are slowly realized. With more than a hundred poems and ten novels to her credit, Yhome is regarded as the foremost women writer in Tenyidie literature as well as the one amongst the Naga women writers. In her novel *KephoumaZakhra*, (*The Price of Sin*), she brings out the effects of abortion on the lives of those responsible – the rich young man Neitho-o who studies theology, womanizes, but becomes a leader of the church and who demands for abortion of the baby from his girlfriend. He is never blessed with a child after his marriage later on and is often ‘woken up by the cry of an infant’, alluding to his guilt and sin. The young woman traumatized by guilt for the rest of her life with memories of the abortion and the lost baby, even after she has children of her own after her marriage. Yhome shows the reality of Naga families who send pampered sons for theology, no matter even if it is not his calling and the after effect of abortion on young couples, especially girls who are given no choice.”I have witnessed and heard of so many cases of abortion and the story was born out of my deep concern for the lives of young girls” (Interview with KekhrievoüYhome, 14.6.2013.)

Simone Beauvoir says, “One is not born a woman, but becomes one”(1997 : 295). This principle makes women aware of their role in the society. As mothers, sisters or daughters, they should be the real crusaders to bring upheaval in the society and makes changes possible by making people aware of their responsibilities. In her collection of poems, *Weapons of words on pages of pain*, Monalisa brings out the truth of domestic violence and violence against women in Naga society, Naga homes and Naga marriages in her poetry, resounding and heartrending. Pointing to the patriarchy of Naga society which has allowed such violations on women, she refers to a tragedy of unending physical abuse that goes unabated behind many homes:

Masculine hands

Raining blows on bodies

Soft and feminine (WWPP 12)

Monalisa in her terse language is explicit in her opinion about the brute force of men and speaks of the strength of women whose stories will become the weapons of words. There is a constant deep concern for the Nagas and the land and its women in most of her creative outpourings, including those in her second volume *Monsoon Mourning* (2007).The

poignancy of the continuing horrors and suffering of women in warlike Nagaland where

Our brothers are at war

Our land is awash with blood

Our rice fields need tending

Our children caring. (7)

And yet the dream for peace and longing in her 'Field of Baby's Breaths' is reflective of the situations and longing of women:

I wish I could wear

A pretty Pale Pink

Ankle length Calico dress

With frills,flounces and lace.....

....romping on a field of Baby's Breath.' (MM 16).

As a woman journalist facing the threats on life and extortions from different militant groups in the state as well as for the tragedy of the killing of the Editor of *Ura Mail*,ChalieKevichusa, she pours out her grief in 'Not be Dead':

If tomorrow

My body

Is riddled

With bullets

I shall not be dead

Nor will I

Be defeated and silenced.' (MM 18)

Her strong protest against diktats by armed men finds expression in the trilogy "OfA People Unanswered- III":

Don't waste your time

Laying down diktats

And guidelines

On how to conduct my life

On matters personal and political'

And

'Stop this nightmare, I beg of you

Wherein I have to write of another child orphaned,

Another girl abused, another woman widowed' (MM 20)

Monalisa brings out the stark reality of a land and its people threatened by guns and diktats and voices against so much of violence at the hands of gunmen who move in the name of the nation and where individual opinions are silenced. In her poem "Shoot" she says:

Go ahead, shoot and blast us to eternity

I give you my word, we will not move

Neither from our stand nor to distract your aim

Shoot, what's stopping you?' (MM 22)

Naga feminism has not become a force as the Black feminists', either in literary works or in movements till recently. The demand for protections of women's constitutional rights pitted against claims of men that Naga customary law does not allow women in decision making bodies has driven Naga tribe women organizations to demand for their rights in the mid nineties and to move the court to seek legal justice. Naga women, especially the enlightened and educated, which include writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu and Monalisa, Kekhrievou Yhome are more

aware of their rights and express their feminist concerns on Naga women through their literary works, either in fiction or poetry .Emerging from the stronghold of Naga patriarchy has been a difficult move because the difference with Naga feminism, as explicitly defined in Easterine's *A Terrible Matriarchy*(2007), is that the protest is also against the constrictions of the Naga matriarch- the mother or grandmother who discriminates Dielienuo, representative of the Naga girl, till the very end. Not only is discrimination and violence committed by men, but also in the Naga context it is perpetrated by women themselves in the form of the mothers and grandmothers. Gender sensitization and equity is linked with education and the fact is that most Naga mothers and grandmothers of the older generation were uneducated and unaware of women's rights. So movements of feminism articulating women's rights has gained momentum only from the late fifties, born out of violent conflicts and the aftermath of the relentless killings of men and innocent women and children by the Indian army. Today, Naga feminism is strongly being articulated in poems of younger women and essays that draw the attention of the Naga public and the outside world on the serious questions of gender based violence and domestic violence behind the fragility of the veil of Christianity and marriages.

This movement for women's rights, though late, is similar to the African American women's movement for civil and political rights that brought women like Zora Hurst to the fore and deeply inspired Alice Walker and younger writers. The difference one needs to understand is while Black American women were fighting for their rights and against discrimination, in a supposedly peaceful country, Naga women's movements have sprung up in the midst of more than half a century of armed political violence and movement for self determination, which has compounded the violence faced by Naga women. Protesting voices emerging from rape and the violence of Indian army atrocities is replete in many creative writings of women in Nagaland. There is a very strong political consciousness inbuilt in most Naga women, which makes it very natural for these poets and writers to speak out on behalf of the silent suffering half of the Naga population.

Alice Walker blends the sexual and spiritual in an exploration of women's identity. Written in the voice of the Father who witnesses the growth of his daughter is reflected through Walker's powerful portrayal of sexuality and incestuous recollections of a father daughter relationship, lesbian love, the angelic quality of a young innocent girl and the explorations of sexuality. The contemporary Naga women writers as

discussed in chapter differ from Alice Walker in many respects. They are not vocal and strong like Alice except a few privileged women but the ray feminism that lurks in their heart and mind. They are influenced by many forces including the church, patriarchy and traditional matriarchy. In spite of all these forces, change is visible and time will positively bring a revolutionary turn in them which is predictable from the symptoms exposed in the writings.

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CHAPTER-V

AESTHETIC CONGRUITY IN ALICE WALKER AND NAGA WOMEN WRITERS

Alice Walker and Naga Women writers have profuse thematic similarity. Except Monalisa Changkija, other Naga women writers selected for the present study are writers with momentary feminist expressions. They are mild feminists in the sense that they only write about their predicament. They are not bold enough to struggle consistently for the equality of rights and for necessary social changes. They are nostalgic of the past, nature's bounty, divine graces and write on multiple themes with multiple queer experiences. Alice Walker is a strong feminist, a chronicler of the past with acute nostalgia about the predicament of African and diasporic African Americans, both men and women. She depicts the mute suffering of the women, the eternal subaltern and her depiction has its immaculate identity and perfectitude. Through sufferings the African women have learnt the decency and acquired the ability to pronounce the truth. The mellifluous expressions of Naga women writers can be seen in the passages of Alice Walker's works and in the lines of her poems. Alice Walker exhorts the readers not to be selfish and not to take anybody's favour. Here is a full poem where she talks about 'spirit of the poor':

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

Did you ever understand this?

If my spirit was poor, how could I enter heaven?

Was I depressed?

Understanding

editing,

I see how a comma, removed or inserted

With careful plan

Can change everything.

I was reminded of this

When a poor young man

In Tunisia

Desperate to live

And humiliated for trying

Set himself ablaze;...

Blessed are the poor, in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven....

This is the kingdom of owning the other as self, the self as other;

That transforms grief into

Peace and delight.

I, and you, might enter the heaven

Of right here

Through this door.

In this spirit, knowing we are blessed

We might remain poor.... (5)

Emphasizing on the individual liberty, Alice talks about decency in life by living an outcast's life and not by relying on somebody selfishly:

Be nobody's darling;

Be an outcast.

Take contradictions of life

And wrap around

You like a shawl.(6)

Alice has a deep sense of beauty of living and the sense of independence in life. She exhorts her readers to live frugally not expecting anything from others:

Expect nothing. Live frugally

On surprise

Become a stranger

To need of pity

Or, if compassion be freely

Given out

take only enough

stop short of urge to plead

then purge away the need. (9)

The Naga women writers have exposed their deep aesthetic sense in their writings by narrating cultural diversity of the mother land, history, rituals and racial glory as presented in the previous chapters. Their sense of beauty is exposed in the mellifluity of expressions and thematic raciness. Naga feminism has not become a force as the Black feminists', either in

literary works or in movements till recently. The demand for protections of women's constitutional rights pitted against claims of men that Naga customary law does not allow women in decision making bodies has driven Naga tribe women organizations to demand for their rights in the mid-nineties and move the court to seek legal justice. Naga women, especially the enlightened and educated including writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu and Monalisa, Kekhrievou Yhome are more aware of their rights and express their feminist concerns on Naga women. Alice Walker and Naga women writers share superb similar aesthetic sensibilities through their writings expressing their concern for their rights which provokes the major aesthetic concern as to living with awareness and living beautifully.

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CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

Women down the ages and throughout history have been considered as inferior and called as second sex. From her birth till death a woman faces acute discrimination. Though this discrimination has been questioned by both male and female thinkers across the centuries, women oppression and their second- class citizenry have not yet been wiped out altogether. Their rights at par with men have been denied and in spite of all kinds of empowerment policies and international conventions and declarations and recognition of women's rights as human rights, the struggle for gender equity continues. Debates and discussions are taking place in innumerable forums in innumerable ways. Hence to repeat the old stories claiming justice and equality have been modes of solace for the researchers and activists to explicate possibilities and analyze the design, aesthetics and dynamism of the feminist writers and activists to continue the debate awaiting till the goal is reached.

The undertaken work analyzes the works of the great African-American activist-writer Alice Walker along with selected Naga women writers to compare and contrast their views, voices and efforts to justify the

cause of women and to support them whole- heartedly to make them able at least to voice their protest against the discrimination of women at large and their individual conditions. Naga writers like Kekhrievou Yhome, Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Changkija, Temsula Ao and others including some Tenyimia women poets of early 20th century have been analyzed and compared and contrasted with Alice Walker. Alice is a stern activist and visionary for a new age who has portrayed the angst of African American women while the selected Naga women writers are also writers with some feminist inclinations and aspirations. All these writers have strong ecofeminist sentiments.

Alice Walker (1944-), the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982) is a poet, fictionist and non-fiction writer with strong feminist ideology and sentiments. Married and divorced, she herself has suffered the demonic patriarchal oppression and has experienced and witnessed the traumas of these age-old maladies. Throughout her works there is a strong protest against the myriad mutilations of women's body, mind, honour and ego. This is echoed to a certain extent in the works of the proposed selected Naga women writers which have been exposed and explicated in course of the discussion in the study.

Observing some feminist similarities between the thematic treatment in the works of Alice Walker and Naga Women writers, the researcher has analyzed them objectively and dissecting the contours of feminist pragmatism. All writers may not be activists, but in their thoughts they pragmatize the activism. Major works of Alice Walker and Naga women writers have been taken into consideration while analyzing and carving out the themes/ designs of feminist ideologies of the selected writers.

Close textual reading and comparative explication have been the basic tools for analysis. Besides textual reading, the opinions of the Naga women writers about their works and experience have been examined by the researcher to analyze their art and craft, and the world in general and their views on women in particular. Besides that field study on the status and predicament of Naga women in general have been made to expose their subalternity comparing that with Alice Walker's vision of feminism/ womanism and her opinions on the status of the women class at large.

Though the selected Naga women writers do not share the same socio cultural environment that Alice Walker lives and experiences, they uphold similar aesthetic sensibilities that exist in the Naga society, which has similarly been conditioned by patriarchy, custom and culture as the African American woman. They ventilate similar agonies and sufferings,

discrimination, gender based violence that pervades the home and the society through their poems and narratives. The struggles of women are the same that go beyond boundaries of colour, race and territories and the images that emerge of women can be identified as a projection of ones own self as seen through the works of these writers. Like Alice Walker they share their dreams and perspectives of what the ideal life would be for the happiness of a woman, freedom to think and live as one desires, free from the shackles of conventions and strictures imposed upon them since childhood as small girls.

They indicate a shared vision for the future world and the new age for women, a life of change, peace, respect and the freedom of choice and liberty. Both in the writings of Alice as well as these contemporary Naga women writers, there is a strong sense of the need to empower and change the lives of women and girls and in the process change the world and society. In both the works of these writers, there is a strong ecofeminist vision that is celebrated in their poetry and fictional narratives. There are constant echoes for the rights and dignity of women and ecology reflected in their works. The bond of women, Nature and the environment are reflected and articulated very strongly.

In the first Introductory Chapter the concept and history of feminism and womanism has been defined. Feminism or womanism means fighting or standing up for the rights of women to protect and promote them. The consciousness of women about their rights- be it political, social or economic, the enjoyment of their freedom and liberty, empowerment and the various activities, policies and laws to enable the upliftment of the status of women in the society comes under the purview of feminism or feminist pragmatism. The researcher has traced the history and theoretical background of feminism in general and womanism in particular and introduced the feminist concerns of Alice Walker and selected Naga women writers of English and Tenyidie in this chapter.

In the second chapter, the fictional works of Alice Walker and their feminist and ecofeminist concerns have been analysed and justified. Whether it is about her role as a spokeswoman for women subjected to genital mutilation, or the earth destroyed by waste and degradation, she has championed the rights of women to live freely and fearlessly as equal human beings.

In the Third Chapter the characteristics of Alice walker's interests have been identified in her volumes of poetic works and non fictional prose and essays and their activist dynamism have been appropriated.

In the Fourth Chapter the strong similarities between the African American woman and the Naga women's predicament and the matrices of these coincidences have been contrasted. There is also a reinterpreted and rejuvenated perspective of feminist criticism as is evident in the works of these writers.

In the Fifth Chapter, aesthetic similarities have been compared and dissimilarities have been identified. The importance of their contribution to contemporary feminist thought and aesthetic congruity has been highlighted through this chapter.

In the Conclusive Chapter the findings of the research have been ruminated and its contribution to new knowledge and possibilities of further research and its hinterland have been indicated.

The comparative study can be summarized with the following findings:

Though the selected Naga women writers of English and Tenyidie do not share the same socio cultural environment that Alice Walker lives and experiences as reflected in her literary works, they share similar aesthetic sensibilities that exist in the Naga society, which are also conditioned by patriarchy, matriarchy, rigid custom, tradition and culture.

These writers very much like Alice Walker share and ventilate their agonies and sufferings as women, their dreams and ambitions and their perspectives on life through their artistic articulations and narrations.

Both Alice Walker and these Naga women writers share a similar vision for the future of women, a new world of changes and equality. They dream of women liberation, empowerment in all spheres of life, an end to discrimination, gender based violence and a life of freedom and happiness.

Both Alice Walker and these writers have a strong ecofeminist vision and belief as reflected in their works and they stand for the rights and dignity of women and ecology and share deep concerns on the environment.

Though they live in a traditional patriarchal and matriarchal society, deeply rooted in customs and conditioned culture, they articulate very strongly the need for a liberated world of freedom and justice and equality to live in dignity and respect , with their men as equal partners.

The Naga women's yearning and struggle for equality in all spheres of life, be it political participation, social recognition for equality or economic empowerment and freedom from poverty, is as similar to the aspirations of the African American women and of Alice walker herself.

It has also been observed that compared to the strident and strong voices of feminism among the African American women, the Naga women writers identified in this work can be defined as milder feminists, who articulate their agonies and struggles, but have not been very visible in the women's movement and struggle, unlike Alice Walker who took the civil liberties movement into her stride.

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