

***NEMESIS OF CONSCIENCE: A STUDY OF BLACK WOMAN'S SUFFERING IN TONI
MORRISON'S BELOVED AND ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE***

**(Dissertation submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English)**

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2020

DECLARATION

I, Riyaj Hussain, hereby declare that the subject matter of my dissertation entitled *Nemesis of Conscience: A Study of Black Woman's Suffering in Toni Morrison's Beloved And Alice Walker's The Color Purple* is the bonafide record of work done by me under the supervision of Prof. Nigamananda Das and that the content of the dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

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12th June 2020

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Nemesis of Conscience: A Study of Black Woman's Suffering in Toni Morrison's Beloved And Alice Walker's The Color Purple* is the bonafide record of research work done by Riyaj Hussain, Regn No. 59/2020, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2019-20. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title and that the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations May 2016 (amended) and the candidate has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for submission of the dissertation. The dissertation has undergone plagiarism check and the similarity of 8% has been detected. Hence the dissertation is recommended for the process of evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Nigamananda Das for his patience and all help he rendered towards correction of the dissertation. I am certain that I would not have been able to complete my research without his assistance.

I also thank the Deputy Librarian and Library staff of Nagaland University for enabling me to access the study materials and using other existing facilities without which it would not have been possible for me to conduct this research.

My sincere thanks are due to the faculty members, Head of the Department of English and Dean, School of Humanities & Education, Nagaland University for giving me the opportunity to register myself as a research scholar and for their best wishes and cooperation in the course of my research.

I am also grateful to my parents, my sister and my friends for giving me the space and the time and continuously supporting me spiritually throughout the writing of my dissertation.

Last but not the least I thank the Almighty for his blessings and kindness throughout my difficult times and seek for the same even in the years to come.

Riyaj Hussain

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CONTENTS

Candidate's Declaration	i
Supervisor's Certificate	ii
Acknowledgements	iii

Chapter I : Introduction

Chapter II : Metaphysics of Suffering and Quandary of the Slave Black
Mothers with Special Reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Chapter III : Modes of Subalternity: A Study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Chapter IV : Black Woman's Voices for Redemption and Resilience in the Face of
Death and Disaster

Chapter V : Conclusion

Bibliography

Abbreviations used in the Dissertation

<i>The Color Purple</i>	: <i>TCP</i>
Alice Walker	: <i>AW</i>
Toni Morrison	: <i>TM</i>

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.

- (Hughes, lines 2-12)

Suffering is part and parcel of human life. Suffering in common parlance denotes the state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship. No one is there in the world who is blessed with only happiness. Starting from a beggar to a billionaire, everyone has their respective sufferings. Everyone born in this world has to suffer either physically or mentally whether male or female. But the point is that the intensity and variance of suffering of woman is more compared to that of man. Even there is variance of suffering amongst women owing to social and cultural customs. The suffering of some women is unbearable whereas the suffering of some women is somewhat bearable and less.

The suffering of Black women is one of the predominant facets of Black narratives. The phrase '*Suffering of Black woman*' clicks the sense of insecurity, anxiety, menace, harm and also pain that is more painful than any other pain which includes the sense of fear also. There are innumerable ways in which women suffer, and are made to suffer. There is no country, no society where women have not suffered. The suffering of women ranges from simple suppression to exploitation, abuse, belligerence, and harsh oppression. It also includes rape, wife-beating, and refutation of basic needs to girls, harassment emotionally, physically as well as mentally. Accordingly, all such kinds make the term more horrifying. Although in the black narratives there is a projection of suffering of black people, black women have suffered more compared to that of white men. It is a fact well known that from time immemorial women whether black or white has been suffering continuously. The suffering of women is all-pervasive both in literature as well as in society. The very genesis of women's suffering is being found in the Bible where Eve is blamed by humankind for instigating Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. We have seen many instances of the suffering and domination of women for ages in the patriarchal society starting from the Veda-Upanishad to Ramayana-Mahabharata including almost all the religious scriptures. Women have been seen in a patriarchal society as sex dolls and medium of producing children. The worst sufferer of the patriarchal authority was black women. Black women have been badly treated for their color and darkness by both the black and white men. What we have to note here is that the suffering of black women is completely different from other women basically from that of white women. For instance, the black women have suffered sexism which the white women in some extent do not. The black women have suffered racism which the white women have not. They faced the reality of twofold violence, of race, sex and many societal restrictions. The black women were doubly burdened as well as jeopardized beings. Black women's experience is the relationship between sexism and racism since both are motivated by similar economic, social, and psychological forces, it is only logical that those who wanted to demoralize the Blacks were also the most virulent anti-feminists. The means of oppression differed across race and sex lines, but the spring of that oppression was the same.

The black women have been suffering for ages from various social ills and maladies like gender discrimination, religious tension, and communal disharmony, racism and child sex abuse and slavery. The queen of the Harlem renaissance by the name of Zora Neale Hurston who is a world-renowned writer and anthropologist popularized the picture of the black woman of an

earlier time as “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (Hurston, 14). This typological representation of the black woman is based on the hypothesis that the black woman has been the only human creature more helpless as well as hapless than a black man living in a white world.

Black women are not merely half of the Black race but also half of African American history. Black women in America are exploited by means of different ways. They are the victim of racism, classism, and sexism for being both Black and female. They have been keeping silence long in spite of being under the dominance of man. They have to abide by the hard and fast rules and regulations opted for them by society. Any woman who declines to follow these rules is instantaneously condemned. They suffer from racial, sexual and class prejudices and are forced to occupy a very nominal position in a society dominated by men. The worst thing is that both social and racial aggression exists contemporaneously in a harrowing alliance within the life of the black woman. For the black woman, racial inequity together with social sadism proves to be a lethal amalgamation. Black womanhood has been smashed, distorted, dismantled and mistreated with racial, sexual and callous practices by both black and white men and also white women since the times of slavery. As a result, in the process, black women have lost their true ‘self’. Their humanity and the black female self are ignored by white men. This fact made them think unimportant, trivial, anonymous, submissive and lacking of identity. A distinguished sociologist by the name of Calvin Hernton locates the predicament of the American woman thus:

From time to time in America, various individuals, and groups besides Negroes have been victims of prejudice, discrimination, injustice, persecution and outright murder.... But it has been Negro woman more than anyone else, who has born the constant agonies of racial barbarity in America from the very first day she was brought in chains to this soil. The Negro woman through the years has suffered (and endured) every sexual outrage. (Hernton, 123)

The main objective of the black womanist writers, therefore, is to give black women their own black women self, their magnificence, sexual and physical strength, motherhood, wifehood, sisterhood etc. Simultaneously, they have to recuperate from both psychological and mental traumas of inferiority. This is achievable only if their completeness and wholeness as women are restored. These writers can be recognized as black womanist writers. Alice Walker, Toni

Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Mariama Ba are those pioneers who believe in the black womanist tenets. They are the writers who dared to criticize and mock authority figures, with ever-increasing venom. Their narratives depict the personal worries, the plight of their family and community. They have also depicted the naked reality of the suffering of women. The writers through their narratives record their protest against their triple domination at the hands of the white males, the males from their own community and their domination merely on account of their being female. The incognito status given to the blacks in America especially black women by covert systematic oppression is brought into limelight by these women novelists. They scrutinize the hardships, sufferings and pain faced by black women right from their childhood. Besides this, their works also inspect Black marginalization, isolation and dreadful conditions particularly and also the tragic conditions of African-American women in America.

Perception of motherhood took a radical reversal in the hands of Black women. This reversal did not happen only within the context of patriarchy but also within the context of racism. For instance, with the elimination of the international slave trade, the white cotton-growing industry in collusion with the slave-holding class compelled Black women to give birth as many children as possible to create more hands to do the fieldwork. The Black woman was seen as a bearer of 12-14 children. The black women were treated as breeders rather than as mothers.

Walker repudiates the term 'feminist' for 'womanist'. She defines 'womanist' in her work *In Search of My Mother's Garden* as a 'feminist of color' and a woman who 'loves other women sexually or nonsexually' but is devoted to the 'survival' and 'wholeness' of people at large. This is made apparent when, in an interview with John O'Brien, she says,

I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of my people... but beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women... For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world. Next to them, I place the old people-male and female-who persist in their beauty in spite of everything. (Walker, 250)

The term womanist has been described by Walker in detail in her *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*. She defines her terms 'Womanists' in this way:

- i) From *womanish*. (Opp. of ‘girlish’, i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color.....
- ii) *Also*: A woman who loves other women sexually and /or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture women's emotional flexibility ... and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female....
- iii) Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
- iv) Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (Walker, xi-xii)

From the above passage, it is apparent that black womanism memorializes blackness, black people, and exhibits a vivid image of black womanhood. One of the prominent Nigerian literary critics by the name of Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi is of the opinion that the black womanist will recognize “along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy” (Ogunyemi, 64). Another eminent American social critic by the name of Sherley Anne Williams has also acknowledged and accepted this term forwarded by Alice Walker. Its premises and compulsions stipulate, evidently, that black women have belief in the unity of the community.

Black womanism rejects the notion of dividing black society based on sex lines, but stands for integration and has faith in the ‘wholeness’ of the black community. Black womanism also connotes a notion of sisterhood developed by Fran Sanders.

As far as the narratives of the white narrators are concerned, they are a kind of unreliable narrators. Because when they narrate about the life of black people, their narratives are always colored by their own prejudices. They misrepresent or distort the reality about them. The blacks were seen as beasts and depicted as barbarians in the press. Blacks had continuously to fight against the negative identities imposed on them by the whites that showed them as Mammies, aunt Jemimas, etc. In addition to this, they were designated by several other names such as Pan Africans, Black- American, African- American, Negroes etc. As the white narrators, they can’t be completely relied upon to project the black’s point of view. Many aspects of black people have been ignored in their writings. The voices of the black people have been completely toned down by the white narrators. In addition, from the beginning, the World of Black Literature in

America has been a world of black man's literature. The "fathers" and purveyors of black writing essentially were men. There was a dearth of recognized "mothers" of black literature. The male authors have delineated male protagonists almost entirely and the suffering and hardships of black female experiences have been utterly neglected. Instead of remaining voiceless and facing suffering in every sphere of life, black women writers have come out boldly and claimed their own space. They regarded themselves not only in relation to white females and black male but as a separate entity. The double marginalization makes their experience unmatched. So giving voice to the voiceless is one of the major aspects of the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. What attributes makes Morrison and Walker entirely different from their contemporaneous writers is their way of writing and their sincere *devoir* towards the voiceless class to bring their unheard voices to the mainstream society. Most African-American women novelists of the 20th century in their writings deal with the suffering of the black woman, her place within the family, in society and the world at large.

These women writers have had to wrestle against the boundaries of race and sex for both emancipations as well as selfhood. As the speaker in Langston Hughes's poem "Mother to Son", black women in real life have found it "kinder hard" to survive and life for them "ain't been no crystal stair" (Hughes, line 2). Black women which have traditionally been treated as inferiors by American society have been doubly neglected: as both blacks and as women. Their accomplishments are known only to a handful of individuals. Their testimony lies buried, unread, rarely observed and even more hardly ever interpreted. When they do appear in textbooks at all it is only as hapless and sufferers, as helpless circumstances imposed upon them by others. Black women have been constantly prejudiced and subjugated by racists. In the words of eminent American theologian, Katie Geneva Cannon:

II African American women share the common experience of being black woman in two "contradictory" worlds simultaneously, one, white, privileged, and oppressive the other black, exploited and oppressed. (Cannon, 30)

But the spirit of fighting of these black women writers withstands all sorts of wretchedness and they projected their suffering through their writing. This efficacious and persuasive stand has in due course brought these writers to the public limelight. Black women writer selects for a discourse of her own experiences.

The fiction of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paul Marshall, Maya Angelou, Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ntozake Shange, Gayl Jones, Audre Lorde, Margaret Walker, Sonia Sanchez and several others have celebrated the lives of forgotten as well as strong black women characters. Their novels protested against the sexist and racist attitudes in society. Not just Whites but the Blacks too had to change. The fiction of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1978), *Tar Baby* (1980), *Beloved* (1987) Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Street* (1980), Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Joyce Carol Thomas' *Marked By Fire*, Ntozake Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* (1982), Audre Lorde's *Zami* (1982) and Paule Marshall's *Praise Song for the Widow* (1983), all these writings give us a minute's details about how Black women's lives were affected by both sexism and racism. Each writer contributed to the Black female tradition in their own way. They appear to be involved in the quest of sisterhood among black women as a panacea to overcome the various sorts of struggle faced by them and to install a black female consciousness among women. Both the novel by the name of *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker is the heart-rendering saga of the black woman's suffering who have come out and become visible having a voice of their own and empowered after so much exploitation and hardships. These two novels also envelop the suffering of black women as a whole in America. These two novels depict diverse lifestyles, varied ways of meeting the challenging lives occasioned by deep poverty, racism, sexism, and convoluted relationship with both men and women. Both of these women writers manage to tell their story inhabited by several diverse characters, more women than men.

The two novels can be interpreted thematically in a varied manner. Firstly both the novels can be categorized as a historical novel because of both the novels deals with the American Independence, Period of Reconstruction and American Civil War; Christian novels dealing with the theme of resurrection and renunciation; Crime Fiction depicting bloodshed and violence, bildungsroman projecting the growth of the female characters and also the personal tale of both the novelists agonized soul. Slavery occupies an important part in both novels. In *Beloved*, slavery is shown as exiting phenomena but in the novel *The Color Purple*, the history of slavery is revealed. It is through the female characters like Sethe, Celie, Sophia etc. that the two writers bring not only a portrait of a gallery of characters of African-American writings but also brings

forth some major issues such as racism, sexism, discrimination, objectification, oppression, and stereotyping of women.

Both Morrison and Walker are remarkable for their depiction of bold women characters. Walker and Morrison have undergone so much of painstaking effort to portray their female characters. Unlike in most cultures, these two novels don't celebrate heroes but heroines. These two novels are female-centric novels. The two novels solely emphasize women's autonomy and independence. Woman's assertion of identity is undeniably central to the critical reception of both the novel. Each of the female characters here has been made to live and almost all the female characters divulge themselves through their doughty deeds and daring actions rather than through their dialogues. Almost all the female characters both major and minor metamorphosed to a certain degree and take part in the journey towards self-discovery. The female characters projected in both the novels are not imaginary. They are lifelike. Each of the female characters is endowed with life. Both the protagonist depicted in the novel is partly the alter ego of the two novelists. They themselves experienced many of the prejudices facing women. Their women characters are not mere fictional characters rather they are emblems of a racist society and they are drawn after real human beings. The characters projected by them demonstrate the dual suffering of women in general. How women suffer from the violence inflicted on them by their own society and how it is doubled by the racist society. So both the novels are autobiographical in nature and both the novelists tried their level best to excavate their past heritage. Both of these novelists were to wear the mantle of African American literature in ways that not even Ralph Ellison could equal. They strove to bring into their work the aspects from American and African past; from the farm and the juke joint; from women's spaces and men's stories. Below is given the brief biographical details of both the writers which will help us to understand the motives and influences of both the writers.

Toni Morrison



(18 February 1931- 5 August 2019)

Born in Lorain, Ohio, the USA on February 18, 1931, Chloe Ardelia Wofford was popularly known as Toni Morrison. She was the second oldest of four children born to parents namely George and Ramah Wofford. Morrison was her married name. Even if she was born in Ohio Morrison had Southern origins. Her father's origins are from Georgia, and her mother's family was from Alabama. The life of Wofford's family was full of hardships. They were living in extreme poverty and slavery, they didn't have the right to live and have pleasure. They are even deprived of the basic needs of life.

Chole's childhood was not a bed of roses. It was full of several ups and downs. When she was young she had not as much time for reading as she would like to have. Her father believed in hard work and was not in favor of idleness. When she was twelve years old, Morrison started working to help her family. She wanted to prove that she can be responsible. At the age of thirteen, she had to take a job after school to assist her family monetarily. She worked for a white family. She used to clean their house. It was an after-school job. Despite the fact that Chloe's childhood's times had been difficult she had pleasant infancy; their house was alive with music, her mother and grandfather adored singing, and this love was due to their life under the legacy of slave culture. As Barbara Kramer mentioned in her book *Toni Morrison: A Biography of a Nobel Prize Winning Writer*:

Although times were hard, Chloe's childhood was not bleak. The Wofford home was filled with music. Ramah Wofford was in the church choir, and she was always singing around the house- Jazz, Blues, Gospel music, and Opera. Chloe's grandfather, John Solomon Willis, played the violin and for a while had supported his family with his music. (Kramer, 11)

However, there were countless traditions that the family had, such as storytelling of all kinds, including ghost stories, animal tales, singing, and reading which gave them the chance to live like any person who put into practice these traditions. Similarly like Alice Walker's mother, Morrison's mother also motivated her children's imagination by telling tales about ghosts, magical happenings, powerful dreams or deceased relatives. Toni along with her sister and two brothers were often used to listening to those miraculous and colorful stories told by their mother. In this way, growing up in Ohio, there developed an extreme desire and love for literature and storytelling was there in Morrison's heart and mind since her childhood days.

Morrison was both a devoted reader and a fervent literary student from the start. She was a very excellent student at school and she graduated from Lorain High School with honours in 1949 where she was guided to the National Honor Society. She was very studious. She loved books and reading since she was a child. As Kramer said:

By then she was reading all the great Russian and French novels as well as novels by English writers Jane Austen and American novelists Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, and William Faulkner. (Kramer 16, 17)

She learnt English and classics at prestigious Howard University in Washington, D.C. and completed her master's program in 1955 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Morrison was the first woman in her family who went to college. She also went to the South and became an instructor in English at Texas Southern University. In 1958, she married the Jamaican architect, Howard Morrison. After that, she became known as Toni Morrison. They had two children namely Harold Ford Morrison and Slade Kevin Morrison. Their marriage ended in separation in 1964 due mostly to cultural distinctions. In 1959 she came back to Howard to teach English. There she taught for seven years.

Toni Morrison is one of the world's best-recognized and admired writers. She was an American novelist, essayist, librettist editor, teacher and children's book author. She was a professor at Princeton University. Her novels primarily focused on the lives of African Americans. Her family had a profound impact on her career as a writer. Eminent American writer namely Carmen Gillespie states in her book *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*:

Toni Morrison's family had a profound influence on her development as a writer. Morrison spent a great deal of time with her extended family, particularly with her maternal grandparents. (Gillespie, 3)

By means of both her black experience and the vivid narratives told by her family, Morrison wrote several novels which made her distinguished around the world. She was the voice for the unvoiced. Morrison as an author continued to transcend time and space. She is the towering novelist of the black experience. She primarily deals with her works on the experience of women in black society. She is one of the reasons that African Americans miseries and traditions are known in the world today.

Morrison authored several well-known novels, including *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *A Mercy* (2008) and *God Help the Child* (2015). Her novel *Beloved* novel was adapted into a film of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover in 1998. She has won innumerable prizes and important book awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In addition, she was the first African -American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. She was honoured with the 1996 National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. President Barack Obama presented Morrison with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She received the PEN/ Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction in 2016. She received Honorary Doctor of Letters Degree from Rutgers University in 2001.

Her first novel namely *The Bluest Eye*, after a number of rejections, was eventually published in 1970. There have even been efforts to ban it from schools in the States because of its apparent portrayal of child abuse. It centered on the story of a black American girl's dreams about golden hair and blue eyes. He we find a graphic portrayal of the endless sufferings and humiliation of

blacks. In 1975, her second novel *Sula* was published and it generated even more negative and positive critical attention than *The Bluest Eye* and is a story about a friendship between two black women with different upbringings and behaviour patterns: the conservative Nel, and the less conventional Sula, both of whom dwell in the small town of Bottom. This novel was nominated for the National Book Award. Her third novel *Song of Solomon*, which was originally published in 1977, spread her fame far and wide. It was her first work written from the perspective of a male. The story is centred on Macon Dead III. A number of critics, including some of the international reputation like Harold Bloom, regard *Song of Solomon* to be Morrison's most excellent novel. She also tried her hand at play writings. The name of the first play of Morrison was *Dreaming Emmett* which was first performed in 1986.

Her novels, particularly *Beloved* and *Jazz* are centered on specific historical moments. *Beloved* (1987) was inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African- American woman from Kentucky. It is a novel which is devastatingly beautiful. It was first published in 1987 and won Morrison the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Since then, it's been frequently eulogized for projecting the disgusts and pain of slavery. Set in post-Civil War Ohio, it follows an escaped slave Sethe who has experienced the most wrenching circumstances and is haunted by her past. It is a thought-provoking book and truly her best piece.

Morrison's novels can aptly be designated as historical novels. She has been an observer of the two-thirds of the twentieth century, who has seen the severe struggle of African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement and noteworthy changes for African American women writers. As Matus in the book *Toni Morrison* asserts:

Bearing witness to the past, Morrison's novels can also be seen as ceremonies of proper burial, an opportunity to put painful events of the past in a place where they no longer haunt successive generations. (Matus, 9)

The name of her first book of literary criticism was *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (1992). The book is all about an assessment of the African- American presence in white American literature. Her well-known novel *Home* was half completed when her second son Slade Kevin Morrison passed away. She later on completed this novel and dedicated it to her deceased son. The theme of persistence and resilience of African American community has been

frequently seen in her writings. Her books were both critical and commercial successes. Her writing is in a class by itself. The 44th president of the United States Barack Obama designated Morrison as a 'national treasure'. Her novels appeared recurrently on *The New York Times* bestseller list. Her work has been deciphered into various languages around the world such as German, French, and Japanese etc. In her writings and lectures, she directs her attention to African American history, the cruelty of slavery, as well as early twentieth-century Harlem. Her command over language is immaculate and she is very real so far as her characterization is concerned. So to speak she is a giant in the realm of African- American literature. She is a strong voice against color racism. She can aptly be considered as the mother of African- American literature. She breathed her last at the age of 88 after a short illness on 5th August 2019 at Montefiore Medical Centre. Her significant achievement has placed her in a permanent place in literary history.

Alice Walker



(Born: 9 February, 1944 -)

Born in Eatonton, Georgia in 9th February 1944 to a father (Willie Lee) who was a sharecropper and a mother (Minnie Grant) who worked as a maid and assisted her husband on a farm, Alice Malsenior Walker was sent to school at a young age, which was still quite rare for African American children in Georgia by that time, as their farm work for white landowners was believed not to require any formal education. Storytelling was significant to Walker's mother. Walker and her brother, as well as sisters, grew up listening to stories about ghosts, dreams as well as true stories about their grandparents and great-grandparents. Minnie Walker used to tell

her children about African-American customs, ethnicity, culture, different sorts of rituals and folklore. In this way, Walker and her siblings grew up listening to her mother's stories about ghosts, dreams as well as true stories about their grandparents as well as great-grandparents. Walker's mother taught them about African-American customs, rituals, culture and folklore. When she was eight years old, Walker was partially blinded in one eye by a pellet from her brother's BB gun that accidentally hit her. Although the scar was eradicated through an operation six years later, Walker suffered intense emotional and psychological isolation because of it. She lost her pleasure of life and was not as sociable as she used to be. She became a lone bird. She asserts about this incident in *In Search of my Mother's Garden*:

I believe...that it was from this period-from my solitary, lonely position, the position of an outcast- that I began really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out. I no longer felt like the little girl I was. I felt old, and because I felt I was unpleasant to look at, filled with shame. I retreated into solitude, and read stories and began to write poems. (Walker, 244 - 245).

Walker graduated initially in her high school class, and due to her excellent achievements, she won a scholarship to study at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia and finally completed her education at Sarah Lawrence College in 1966. She happened to realize two aspects while she was in college-

- (a) Firstly, there are distinct connections between art and politics.
- (b) Secondly, she must write to liberate black people.

Walker was the youngest of the eight children. She took an active part in the Civil Rights Movement, and later on helped revitalize interest in the works of Zora Neale Hurston, an African American writer from earlier in the twentieth century whom she referred as her literary progenitor. She was astonished by Hurston's sense of self. Like Toni Morrison's family, Walker's family also had a deep impact on her. Basically her mother continuously inspired her to write and made her choose literary pursuits over household tasks. She states that her mother was the sole basis of her 'surviving whole' from each vicious, racist encounter. Walker says, speaking of her mother in *In Search of my Mother's Garden*:

And this is how I came to know my mother: she seemed a large, soft, loving-eyed woman who was rarely impatient in our home. Her quick, violent temper was on view only a few times a year when she battled with the white landlord who had the misfortune to suggest to her that her children did not need to go to school. She made all the clothes we wore, even my brothers' overalls. She made all the towels and sheets we used. . . . There was never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts; never a time free from interruption-by work or the noisy inquiries of her many children. And yet, it is to my mother-and all our mothers who were not famous-that 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 that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day. (Walker, 239)

Walker wrote *The Color Purple* in the early 1980s, and it brought her a great deal of immediate attention and fame. When the book was published in 1982, it was in general believed to be a magnum opus, particularly among African Americans. In 1983, she became the first African-American woman to win both the Pulitzer Prize for fiction as well as the National Book Award for her path-breaking novel *The Color Purple* (1982). It was in *The New York Times* bestseller list for over six weeks and the book won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award and was made into a film by Stephen Spielberg (starring, among others, Whoopi Goldberg and Oprah Winfrey). Having read the novel *The Color Purple*, one of the prominent actresses by the name of Whoopi Goldberg was so mesmerized by this book, that she sent a letter to Walker making a request for a part if the novel would ever be made into a movie. Whoopi Goldberg played the role of Celie while Oprah Winfrey played the role of Sophia. The film was nominated for numerous academy awards. Her other bestselling novels include *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998). She has written in a variety of genres. So to speak, she is a multi-talented writer who during her long span of life achieved recognition as a short story writer, poet, essayist, orator, and speaker and so on. A good deal of her writings is inspired by her early life experiences growing up in rural Georgia. Many of Walker's short stories, poems and novels have the South as their setting. She also used to write children's books. Walker states that she was greatly influenced by Greek, Russian, Asian and African literature. Her books have sold over 15 million copies and her work has been translated into more than two

dozen languages. She is an internationally celebrated writer. In her public life and in her writings, she has raised her voice on the problems of injustice, violence, race, inequality, and poverty and cruelty of the South against the blacks and resilience of the blacks in hoping for change. She has always been committed to political and social change. In this case, Van Dyke says in *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*:

Walker's novels allow us visions of the possible. (Van Dyke, 42)

A textual analysis of her novels discloses numerous themes such as child sex abuse, homosexuality, women's oppression, educational backwardness, male domination, physical and mental torture, female voice, empowerment, female bonding and so on. She went back to African-American roots in her works. Her writings illustrate her intense sense of African-American history and her adoration to the Black traditions. For Walker, one genre is not enough to express her diverse experiences. She makes use of slave narrative, a spiritual autobiography, personal letters etc. to express herself. She is a spokesperson for the Black American community. She quilts a Black literary tradition and fills its gaps of silences and stereotypes of Black people with words and empowering notions of Black women.

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CHAPTER II

Metaphysics of Suffering and Unbearable Quandary of the Slave Black Mothers with Special Reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortification peculiarly their own. (Brent, 119)

The name of Toni Morrison shines as bright as that of Alice Walker and Maya Angelou in the galaxy of African American literature. She is, of course, an outstanding voice in African American literature. She rendered a good amount of service towards building the edifice of African American literature. Her works are primarily concerned about slavery, racial tensions, survival amid adversities, resilience and so on. Her fifth novel *Beloved* which was originally published in 1987 is an exceedingly admired text. The book is divided into three parts. As a genre, it "owes its distinctiveness to the slave narrative. (Graham, 20)

Set in Post-Civil War Ohio, the novel is a saga of the heart-wrenching experiences of both men and women under the brutal system of slavery. Like Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982), Morrison has projected the shocking nastiness of slavery in its intensity and veracity in her ground breaking novel *Beloved* (1987). She portrays here the desolation and degradation of the black woman under the system of slavery. However, some of the critics and academicians are of the opinion that it unable to exhibits the authentic picture of slavery. Resembling *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, it is a part of the oral folk history of the slave narrative as well.

The basis on which the novel is constructed is the history of slavery. Murdering of an innocent daughter by an innocent murderer mother is the central action of the narrative. The central story of the novel revolves around a Negro woman namely Sethe who killed her eldest daughter slitting her throat with a handsaw and wounded her other children. The rest of the story is

conglomerate around her. This story is inspired by the historical character of Margaret Garner who had actually killed her daughter rather than sees her children return to bondage in the South. The following picture demonstrates the murdering of the children by Margaret Garner.



Fig. 1. Illustration of Margaret Garner with the Slave hunters.

It is well known that slavery was the darkest period not only in the history of America but in the history of mankind as well. It had a different religion of its own. In it, there is recognition of a certain race of people as slaves, servant and inferior and the unkind treatment towards them by the master who are superior to them. It was maintained in the form of an institution. The institution of so-called slavery is as old as civilization. Many nations and empires were shaped by the muscles of slaves. The most remarkable thing of slavery as an institution is that it showed how when someone got absolute power over someone what happens thereafter. Here in the proposed novel, the absolute power is in the hands of white masters and how they treat the slaves within that institution. Almost three hundred years of slavery showed what men could do to other men.

Slavery is nothing but an institution of blemish. As institution slavery was anti-family. There was dearth of motherhood, love and family continuity under the system of slavery. The disintegration of the family is quite apparent in slavery. Under the system of slavery, no family could exist. It neither permits family nor family relationships. The slaves never had a constituent family. In this system, the husband and wife were separated, children were separated. Every mother lost their children. Children had no memory of their parents. Parents never meet their child. The children are isolated from their mother. These are the prominent driving forces of the

psychological trauma for the slave what happened in the family. This had a very dire influence on the psychology of the slaves. As we go through the story of the novel, we will find that the yearning for the family in the lives of the slaves is significant. Love is perilous in slavery. It is challenging for slaves to love anything or anyone. In addition, several paid a dreadful price for allowing themselves to experience love as we have seen in the proposed text. Morrison projects a stream of consciousness technique through the minds of the characters to renovate the past. The story unfolded itself through the ragged memory of the mind of the varied characters.

Slavery as an institution depicted very graphically in the text about what happens if absolute power falls in the hands of either a particular race of people or in a particular group of people. When the slaves disobeyed the orders of their masters, they will be either chained or beaten and tortured in several different ways. Besides they don't have a stable identity. They were in a sense not a given a chance to be educated. Education is denied to them. As far as the absolute power is concerned, the white had the absolute power to dehumanize the slaves. They are the one constantly speaking, scolding, and whipping the slave; 'grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken'. (Morrison, 212)

The white believed that the African American or the slaves were full of jungle inside of them. They have a dark forest inside of them. 'Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle.' (Morrison, 234)

The white characterized the slaves as somewhat debased and their culture as uncivilized and according to the whites; the African American are a primitive race of people. But the white themselves don't realize that the jungle is not inside them. But the jungle is within them. They have also power over the body and language of the slaves.

The slaves were in a sense displaced. They were unable to define any stable identity for themselves. The slave women were considered as breeders following the 1807 law halting the importation of slaves from Africa. A slave woman is believed to be the breeder in the sense that she has the ability to produce free future slaves by giving birth to children. A child that a slave woman bears automatically becomes future slaves. As Morrison says:

Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. (Morrison, 247)

There is a graphic depiction of the hollow mother-child relationship in the text. It is a recurring theme in many slave narratives. In the text, there are some feminine instances that we can make use of to see how this aspect is made to render this meaningless mother-child relationship for the slaves. Children had to grow without the proper care of her mother, children had no memory of their mother, and children are deprived of mother's milk, children are sold off, infanticide and so on. The maximum that a mother could feed her baby is just for three weeks. The baby was kept with a woman who was given the responsibility to feed the babies. And then the mother would go after work early in the morning to work and then come back and at night she would sleep like a log. Sometimes she has to sleep at a nearby farm when it is not easier to go back to home.

The slaves were considered not as human beings but as property and commodity like animals. The use of words such as 'slaves', 'niggers', 'beast', 'animals' – degraded the slaves comparing them with animals. There is a graphic depiction of a broken, humiliated, and dehumanized female slave body in the narrative. Women were being metamorphosed to animalized, exploitable commodity by the slave owners.

The text is multi-vocal which means we have narrative from the point of view of numerous characters such as Beloved, Sethe, Denver, Paul D, Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid. Besides, it is very hard to recognize the narrator, Author or Sethe? Morrison subverts the traditional Western form of narrative which is typically linear and coherent. The story of the novel is neither linear nor coherent. It keeps going back and forth. These are projected in her novels with a view to recouping African- American history and tradition. Memory, retelling, re-remembering is an exceptionally vital aspect of the narrative scheme of the text. It can be categorized as a historical novel in the sense that the story is based on the historical character of Margaret Garner. In the narrative strategy, we have the past, the future, and the present intermingling with each other. Simultaneously, the use of Coleridgean aspects of spirits is also worthy of notice. The novel can also be regarded as a postmodern text. Breaking of conventional rules, fragmentation etc. are all the postmodern schemes which we will find in the text. It also deals at length with the mind of the characters and certain activities that have happened eighteen years before the beginning of

the text to almost all the major as well as minor character in the novel. What is forgotten and buried is remembered and unburied again by the characters. The past is recollected, the memory is revisited. Many of the actions of the narratives take place in the mind of the characters and it is presented in a very realistic manner. So we can analyze the text from a psychological perspective. We go back to the past both through the memory as well as the exchange of the characters with each other. In addition, we headed to the past through the voice of the narrator. The text can also be discussed from the perspective of Marxist criticism. We will see the power structure here in the text. This power structure exists between the white and slaves where the whites represent the bourgeois and the slaves as proletariat.

When *Beloved* opens, Sethe, eighteen years out of Kentucky, has actually found a safe haven both for herself and for her daughter, Denver. They have a home to live in. Sethe is employed in a restaurant and able to sustain their life. But even after eighteen years of her coming to 124, she still experiences her past. And now something weird occurs in 124. The house at 124 Blue Stone Road in the outskirts of Cincinnati is haunted by the spirits of a murdered baby. Each and every individual residing in the house such as Sethe, her mother in law Baby Suggs, Denver and her two sons by the name of Howard and Buglar increasingly began to experience something ominous in 124. As whatsoever is happening in 124, that was something very spiteful and something malicious.

124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. (Morrison, 3)

As time went by, the spirit turned out to be very spiteful- starting pushing, pulling Buglar or Denver. They were very much afraid of that and at last, ran away from the house. Baby Suggs capitulates to depression, isolates herself and dies afterwards. It was only then Sethe and Denver left to live in the house.

1873 is the present timeline of the story. Sethe used to work in a restaurant to earn her daily bread. Paul D, the only surviving male member from Sweet Home comes eventually to 124 after long years of grief-stricken slave life and several months of a brutal trudge to the North. It was by chance Paul D came to 124. When he was just passing by 124 and he noticed Sethe. After eighteen years of separation from their Kentucky days of Sweet Home, they finally recognize

each other. Since Paul D is a wanderer with no house to live in, he makes his mind up that this is the house that he would like to settle for now. He is brought into the house and Sethe decides to make something for him. All of a sudden the table begins shaking which implies that there is something in the house which doesn't want Paul D to be in the house. Denver, Sethe's second daughter is the one who is able to build the connection with whatever was there in the house which they couldn't see but they can only feel. Denver is the one who knows that it is none other than her dead sister. But she is unaware of the history of it. She doesn't know the reason behind her mother's killing her sister. Following her brother's escape from the house, she becomes a lone bird.

In the beginning, 124 was a place teeming with people when Baby Suggs was alive. Any African American could come there and dwell and where Baby Suggs taught the blacks to love their lives and their 'flesh', that is, to embrace their violated, scarred bodies lovingly and acceptingly for the reason that white people derided it. She instilled in them a desire for life. Baby Suggs says:

No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. (Morrison, 104)

Initially, 124 was like a heaven for the downtrodden and depressed. Most of the time there were persons who were running away from slavery and they will be brought there, will be fed and they will be taken care of. But following the death of Baby Suggs, it gradually metamorphosed into hell. It becomes desolate. The worst aspect is that whilst the neighbours begin to comprehend that there is something eccentric going on in 124, they begin to avoid 124.

Sethe and other slaves like Halle, Paul D, Paul D's brother Paul A were the slaves of Sweet Home 18 years before the present of the story. All of them worked in a plantation in Kentucky. The setting of the story here in this part of the story is in Southern America. It was in Kentucky, the owner of the plantation was Mr Garner. He was a kind man who treats his slaves properly and he designated his slaves as 'men' not 'boys'. They never felt like slaves under Mr Garner. The neighbouring plantations owners would express disapproval over him telling him that he is giving too much autonomy to his slaves. But Mr. Garner is very proud of his slaves. He gave much liberty to his slaves. He fulfils all their wishes as well as desires. He treated them as a man.

He took their opinions. He asks for their suggestions when he got something to be done for them and which was unheard in many plantations where the masters just simply treat their slaves as animals, barbarous, primitive and uncivilized.

As the text unfolds, we learn through flashback that the home where these slaves lived is known as Sweet Home. But following the demise of Mr Garner, Sweet Home was getting soured under the new master's heartless strictness. All the happy life of the slaves was shattered. After her husband's death, Mrs Garner becomes sick and unwell. She is incapable of looking after the plantation. As a result, she brings her brother in law who is a school teacher. The Schoolteacher also brought with him one of his nephews. He doesn't have the trait of Mr Garner. He always carries with him a diary and a pen. One of his researches was to note the characteristics of African Americans and write it down in his notebook. In the left side of their notebook, he also told his students to write the animal characteristics and on the right side the human characteristics of the slaves. He used to take the measurement of their head. He describes their appearance, their nose, their lips and their physical features. The schoolteacher is of the opinion that they had the same physical features as the apps. So defining them in such a way, he has the power over the words. As Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu states in her book *The Toni Morrison Encyclopaedia*:

Beloved, as it depicts the emotional costs of enslavement, shows the psychic consequences of the slave owner's denial of the slave's status as a human subject. (Beaulieu, 36)

Lamenting over the atrocity of the schoolteacher, Paul D said that whereas Mr Garner brought them up as 'men', the Schoolteacher had broken them down into 'boys'. He mistreated the slaves. He broke them down in such a way that they eventually made their mind up to run off from Sweet Home. All of them including Sethe who was pregnant by that time plan to escape from Sweet Home. They finally make this plan and Sethe's husband Halle was also supposed to be there. In their planning of escaping from there, certain bad luck happened. Some of them are shot dead for the escape, some of them burnt alive. Halle was also caught. When Sethe is waiting for Halle to come and go with her, Halle never comes and she decides to run away on her own. But she is also caught on her way by the slave catcher. After she was caught, she was tied. The school teacher along with his nephew lashed her mercilessly leaving her with scars in the shape

of a tree. Having, nevertheless, previously learned to protect the economic worth of ‘the property that reproduce(s) itself without cost’ (Morrison, 281), they dig a hole in the ground for the pregnant Sethe’s puffy stomach before telling her to lie down for the whipping, with the intention of avoiding damaging the unborn baby. As Sethe laments:

They dug a hole for my stomach so as not to hurt the baby. (Morrison, 239)

Then the Schoolteacher and his nephew tied her and raped her and milking her as if she were a goat or a cow. When Sethe goes to Mrs Garner after she is raped, Mrs Garner doesn’t do anything though she is a legal owner of Sweet Home. She cries hearing Sethe’s rape. Sethe mourns:

...those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still. (Morrison, 19-20)

Black bodies are similar to texts; they are beset with signs left by the whites to tell the horrors of slavery. They were tortured in such a way that leaving no room to plan for the future. When slaves were beaten by their owners, those blows leave permanent scars on their bodies, such as the marks we have seen left on Sethe’s back. The given picture will illustrate the brutality of slavery on woman caused by whipping.



Fig. 2. Illustration of Sethe’s whipped back.

The tree behind Sethe's back with numerous branches is actually the lashing that Sethe is given by the schoolteacher and his nephew. It is an inclusive dehumanization of Sethe and a direct onslaught on her dignity as a human being. The Chokecherry tree behind Sethe's back is a symbol that represents the living testimony of the tribulations of slavery. Sethe had experienced so much of ruthless physical assault that none of us could ever imagine; having breast milk stolen from her own body, being whipped by to the point of leaving enduring scars on her back. Sethe's repeated use of the phrase "And they took my milk" implies both the physical as well as psychological pain inflicted on her. They take her breast milk, treating her as if she were a 'cow' or a 'goat'. They snatch away all the humanly quality from her and they treat her like a beast. This sort's objectification of human beings was an integral part of slavery's horrors. As Sethe express:

That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. (Morrison, 295)

Sethe loses her beauty following the brutal atrocity of the schoolteacher and his nephew. Sethe laments over the loss of her black- beauty, 'that Amy was scared to stay with her because her feet were ugly and her back looked so bad.' (Morrison, 321)

From the reading of the text, we come to know that despite countless difficulties Sethe arrives at Baby Suggs home in Cincinnati. When Sethe arrives at the house with the newly born baby tied to her chest, Baby Suggs welcomes her. Baby Suggs becomes a broken woman after seeing her daughter in law Sethe in a severe condition after she was molested by the schoolteacher and his nephews.

After her arrival, Sethe stays happily there for 28 days of 'unslaved life'. However, this short phrase of happiness ends unexpectedly when the four horse men-Schoolteacher, his nephew, slave catcher and a sheriff came to take her back to slavery which was legal after the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. These four horse men here are an reference to the Four Horse Men of the apocalypse namely- famine, war, pestilence and death- who herald the end of Sethe's 28 days of freedom- a truth of the Fugitive Slave act of 1850 which allocated slave owners to track for

escaped slaves even in free states and drag them back into slavery. Due to the arrival of them, Sethe not only killed one of her infant daughter the approximately two-year-old “crawling-already?” girl, but she also tried to kill her two sons and even Denver when she is overpowered and stopped. When she kills her child, schoolteacher designated her behaviour by saying that she had been behaving like an animal that had been mishandled.

Sethe’s action of infanticide is harsh indication to mother love. Trying to humanize Sethe’s inhuman act of killing her child, she said that in doing that she was trying to out-hurt the hurt. Sethe told that the suffering of slavery was much more than killing her children. In the book, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism*, Kenneth W. Warren also states:

... a mother could cut the throat of one of her children in an attempt to kill them all to avoid having them returned to slavery. (Warren, 79)

Sethe would rather see her children dead than enslaved. In this case, Johanna Wising also says:

Sethe is a woman of tremendous, inner strength who has survived the brutality which was a common aspect of slavery. As a result of having experienced the evils of slavery her greatest fear is that her children will suffer this as well. (Wising, 10-11)

Sethe’s this act of infanticide alienates her from the black community. Some of the critics are of the opinion that Sethe’s this inhuman act of infanticide doesn’t spring from her loss of humanity but from the slave hunters’ bestial behaviour. In the words of Mohit Kumar Ray and Rama Kundu:

Her humanity has been so violated by the slave master, and her entire experience as a slave woman, she kills her daughter to save her from psychic death. (Ray and Kundu, 93)

One of the reasons for her killing of her daughter she offers is that she doesn’t want her children to be characterized in the left side of the notebook. Owing to mother love, she makes the violent choice to murder them. When Sethe murders her baby, she thinks that nobody is going to put her baby and put her quality on the animal side. She was proud of what she did to protect her children. Sethe says,

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. (Morrison, 190)

Denver and her two brothers survive from the cruel clutches of death. Following the infanticide, Sethe is being accused of murder and she was taken to prison. Sethe prefers to go to prison to go back to Sweet Home.

Sethe lives the life of seclusion and is so stepped in guilt over the murdering of her daughter that she loses her sense of self. Having drawn deep into the narrative, it is quite difficult to judge Sethe's action of killing her own daughter. Adriana Zühlke in her book namely *Toni Morrison's Novel "Beloved" An Analysis* asserts:

Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved* fits into that scheme: she is a woman, she is a slave, she is black. These are the three circumstances which determines and nearly destroy her life. But there is still another fact, which determines her life-her motherhood. (Zühlke, 5)

Denver is afraid of her mother. Because at the back of her mind, she remembers certain things about her mother and she is made to confront that part of her mother by her friends also. She stayed in jail with her mother. Therefore, she knows that her mother did something wrong in the past. She also makes certain connections with her brothers Howard and Buglar that the author gives at the beginning is that Howard and Buglar run away from 124 after the spirit in the house was becoming more and more malicious and vengeful. The narrator also hints at certain things that Howard and Buglar are fearful of their mother. Because they still remember their mother attempting to kill them. But as children, they were unable to know the reason behind that.

Having drawn deeper into the text, we come to know that deceased people don't make their appearance unless they are brought upon by the livings. But it is a passion of the living that brings back the deceased. By incessant remembering, the dead are brought to life by the living themselves. This is what occurs in the narrative. After Sethe murders her daughter, what follows is that Sethe has to face the consequences of her action. She endeavours hard to repress and buried the remorse and the anguish emanating from it. But, it won't stay buried either literally or figuratively. The presence of *Beloved* compels Sethe to emerge from her repressed past and racist history. Though she tries to repress it, she can't forget her deceased daughter. In this case, Bhaskar A. Shukla argues:

Sethe eventually confronts the memory of her daughter's death. (Shukla, 89)

She is filled with the passion of memory and remembering and the possibilities of the future. So maybe this is one reason why *Beloved* comes back in human form. There may be other reasons for it such as *Beloved*'s craving for revenge following her mother's killing her. Caroline Rody says:

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) a murdered baby girl returns from death in passionate longing for the ex-slave mother who killed her, and in the ensuing drama nearly strangles her to death. (Rody, 3)

One can argue that *Beloved* couldn't bear what her mother did to her. She craved to drive her up to death. Her return was to take revenge from Sethe, she wanted to make her suffer; "She is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have. Her eyes stretched to the limits, black as the all night sky." (Morrison, 54)

Beloved is not just a ghost in the text, she is the emblem of all those traumatic histories that the slaves had tried to repress and leave in the past. In a broader sense, she represents the return of the painful past for African Americans: "the traumatic history of slavery which they struggle to come to terms with". (McDonald, 91)

It is too painful for them to visit again in their bygone days. *Beloved* is a symbol of that repressed as well as suppressed past. She represents also the legacy of slavery and the inescapable, horrible power of slavery's past:

Beloved represents the past and the slaves of the Middle Passage. (Bloom, 14)

She is the ghost of Sethe's murdered child. She is also an emanation of the millions of people who died in Middle Passage. *Beloved*'s individual tale, therefore, is the tale of all those millions who died in the Atlantic Slave trade. Through her return, *Beloved* is manifesting both her identity and existence. In this sense, June says:

Beloved's return first as a spirit and then as a body indicates the continuing physical presence of historical wounds, but it also emphasizes the body's role in identity and recognition. (June, 30)

The arrival of Paul D in 124 after 18 years is also very significant. His arrival alters the direction of the novel. He disrupts the female bond which was there between Sethe, Denver and the spirit of the dead child. Paul's driving away of Beloved's spirit is also very worth mentioning. It is in fact pushing away the painful past and an attempt to make a life of their own.

Paul D's relationship with his past occupies a major segment in the text. Unlike Sethe who tries to rememorize her past, it was Paul D who seems to have locked up his past in a tin box that he carries. The tin box is the emblem of painful past. Paul D is trying to keep his past hidden there. Coming of Paul D is also symbolic of certain events of the past that where Sethe herself wasn't present. He brings with him some painful memories filling in the gaps and forming a kind of narrative where there was an absence in between. He brings with him such information of the past that Sethe didn't know all through these years. He tells Sethe that when she was being raped and they were taking her milk from her, Halle was there and he could see what was happening. But he was not in a condition to prevent it. Sethe was unaware of what happened to Halle because he never comes. Paul D also tells her that the last time he saw Halle with butter smeared all over his face. Maybe it was emblematic of the fact that he couldn't stop the men from taking his babies milk from his wife. When Sethe comes to know about it, she is shaken. She was shaken by the fact that Halle was there and that she didn't know. On the other hand, he didn't do anything. Tiya Miles opines:

Sethe learns later that her husband, who disappeared, had witnessed her humiliation and could not survive the fact of it. (Miles, 62)

The unbearable suffering of Baby Suggs is also worthy of notice in the text. Through flashback we come to know that Baby Suggs is Halle's mother and Sethe's mother in law. She is one of the slaves in Sweet Home. She was brought back by Mr Garner along with her son Halle to Sweet Home. When she was a young girl, she was sold and brought by several different plantations owners. She had given birth to many children. She had eight children by six unknown fathers. She could reminisce neither their names nor their faces. When she tries to recollect the faces of her children, the only thing she can call to mind is that her firstborn, who was a girl, loved burned bread. She neither knows where her children were buried nor what they looked like if alive. Baby Suggs says:

I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil. (Morrison, 6)

This is because of the reason that when they grow up they will be sold off. Her two girls, neither of whom had their completely developed teeth, were sold and she had not been able to wave goodbye to them. So when she had Halle, she even decided not to remember his face. It means that there is no point to remember.

... in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her—only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. (Morrison, 27-28)

She even doesn't make an effort to call to mind the faces of her children. This is also an example of forced amnesia by the side of Baby Suggs. It is very painful to remember everyone's face. It is too painful to remember the love that she has for eight of her children whom she never saw in her life again. Whenever she could give birth to a child, she used to paint them in any part of their body so that if she would meet them anywhere she was able to recognize them. Morrison says about the character of Baby Suggs:

And no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive... (Morrison, 165)

The branding as well as lynching of Sethe's mother in a sense demonstrates the way how slavery sadistically denied black motherhood. If we go through the text and follow the patterns of memory and remembering of characters like Sethe we come to know that when Sethe tries to remember her mother, she can only be able to remember a few things about her mother. She never spent time with her mother or her mother didn't spend time with her. She can hardly remember her mother until *Beloved* begins asking for stories:

I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo.
(Morrison, 72)

Morrison projects Sethe's mother as a field slave having worn the bit so often that she, at last, seemed that the bit had done to her lips and mouth. As a child Sethe "never saw her [mother's] own smile" (Morrison, 240), she has seen only the artificial smile caused by the torture of slavery. By referring to the affected facial expression a "smile", Morrison projects the bodily harm symbolizing slavery's vicious grip over the unkindly abused black woman.

Sethe's mother was also sexually abused by many white men. Every time she gives birth, she throws them away. What Sethe's mother did was a remonstrance in the form of hate, hate for the unloved white father of her children. In the end, she kept only Sethe, maybe because her father was a black man.

Sethe's memory triggers several other diverse occurrences of the past. She recalls a particular incident concerning the funeral of her daughter murdered baby. When Sethe wants to bury her daughter and wants to put a headstone for her daughter, it was not an easy task for her. It comes at a great sacrifice. She wants to inscribe on the headstone of her daughter an epitaph bearing 'Beloved'. But to buy this, she has to sell her body. She has to make her body a commodity. The gravestone carver was in need of something in return. Hence, Sethe consents for ten minutes of sex with that man to buy one word for the headstone. Here we have seen that she has to lose the ownerships of her own body in doing that act. She almost becomes a dead woman for those ten minutes. These are the excruciating memories that she wants to suppress and not to recall.

The slave-like Sethe also tries to forget the history of slavery so that they can move on in life. They would like to put their past behind them, for it disgruntled them. But the past was making its appearance in diverse forms. *Beloved's* making of her physical appearance is nothing but the

appearance of the past in a physical form. So we have seen how when absolute power is given to a particular person, to a particular group or to a particular race of people and how they use it. They don't have ownership over their own body. Their body is determined by somebody else. They snatched away all that was individual on a slave. Rape is a very significant concern in the text. The rape of Sethe is the typological representation of all those black women and even the men who were raped by their masters. Therefore, the travesty of Sethe's individuality is the representation of travesty of all those slaves.

The travesty of women is also seen in the case of Ella. She is a minor character in the text. She is a slave lady who now lives in Cincinnati. She is the neighbour of Sethe and she is the most vocal critic of Sethe in the story. She is the one who leads the community at the end to drive away the ghost from 124. In her past, Ella also underwent intense suffering. She was otherized, neglected and tortured by the white ruler class. There is also a hint of infanticide in Ella's past. She is locked in a room by a white man in his girlhood and was raped mercilessly. She gives birth to many children and some of them dies because she refuses to nurse and feed those 'hairy white things.' (Morrison, 305)

Stamp Paid who ferried the fugitive slaves to freedom through the river Ohio had a wife by the name of Vashti. She reminds us of the sovereign queen of the Persian King, Ahaseurus who reigned about 627 BC. Stamp Paid was forced to give up his wife to the vicious lust of his white master's son. For a year his master's son slept with his wife. In this way, his wife is also a victim of racial hegemony. She was in a sense dehumanized like Sethe.

By reading the text, what we have come to know is that it is very difficult to comprehend the limits of inhumanity that a particular race could inflict on another race, the way they are dehumanized and the evil that comes with this institutionalized slavery. All that slaves were doing in their everyday life was controlled by the white masters:

At the same time, slavery was more than just a labor relationship. Slavery-as encoded in the laws and customs of the 19th century south-gave to one class of people absolute control over the lives of another. For slaves, marriage, family, friendship, home, labor, leisure-all depended upon the whims of the master. (Cement, 53)

But what makes Morrison more flabbergasted is that this inhumanity doesn't lead anything evil on the people who are doing this. In a sense, the novel is a retelling and rewriting of all those slaves who have been killed, dismembered, tortured, flogged, imprisoned, starved, sexually assaulted at the hands of slave masters and who never got that chance to narrate their stories. What Morrison found in many of the slave narratives was that a number of these narratives had in a sense toned down their voice for the sake of the white audience. Hence, Morrison's writing according to Raynor and Butler, aims to,

give voice to the voiceless and record a history of people, especially those she refers to as ordinary people, who have been ignored or purposely forgotten. (Raynor and Butler, 177)

So what we find in this popular slave narrative of the 19th century was gaps - gaps of things unsaid in between, of stories that are untold in between to suggest that we can only know the past through discourse. Her novels are an ardent pursuit to fill the gap neglected by historians. Morrison is of the view that she is just retelling and refilling those gaps that had been left on those slave narratives. She in an interview with Angels Carabi opines:

With *Beloved*, I am trying to insert this memory that was unbearable and unspeakable into the literature... There are certain things that are repressed because they are unthinkable and the only way to come free of that is to go back and deal with them...So it's kind of a healing experience. (Carabi, 1)

Morrison insists upon in recovering and giving voice to all these kinds of narrative. We have here the evocation of Sixty million victims of slavery in the novel's inscription. All the lives lost can never be accounted for because the access to history is always limited by words and by those who have control of textual production. Her paying tribute in this way to African Americans of previous generations has made her works really poignant.

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CHAPTER III

Modes of Subalternity: A Study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

The 'subaltern' is a technical coinage in the realm of postcolonial theory to connote a certain sort of marginalized person. In later medieval England, the term 'subaltern' was used to denote either a servant or a peasant. Afterwards, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it began to be used for soldiers of inferior rank in the army. It was the famous Italian Marxist by the name of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who first used the term in a very radical and novel manner. He used the term 'Subaltern' in his book namely *Prison Notebooks* written while he was in prison. And he used it to refer to the term 'class'. He found in the term a kind of theoretical validity which could deal with various sections of society who have been oppressed and subordinated. Subaltern by Antonio Gramsci is similar to that of 'oppressed' as used by Paulo Freire, 'Proletariat' by Karl Marx and 'Powerless' by Michael Foucault. Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak popularized this term. In her seminal work by the name of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1983), she addressed the issue of subalternity prominently. Spivak is of the opinion that the subaltern doesn't have a voice of their own. She further adds that the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. We will find different types of subaltern such as old subaltern, new subaltern, gendered subaltern, racial subaltern etc.

The word 'subalternity' particularly denotes a state of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of racial, political, economic, social, linguistic or cultural dominance. The proponents of Subaltern studies group projected Subalternity as an umbrella term to encompass all sorts of oppressed groups for instance peasantry, working class, women and tribal communities. Subalternity is frequently determined by 'dynamics of power' and hegemonization of the colonizer/oppressor over the colonized/oppressed. The marginalized and oppressed subalterns have little control over their lives and become stigmatized.

Walker's vision of subaltern consciousness can be suitably placed on the basis of her analysis of the dynamics of power, inequity and dispossession of the female in all aspects. These sorts of aspects of being socially, as well as racially marginalized power structure can be taken as an indication to examine *The Color Purple*. Walker's some fictional female creations can be

suitably analyzed with close emphasis on the theories of Old and New Subaltern. Spivak defines old subaltern as essentially speechless, fragile, who chose to be a silent victim counter to violence, horrible atrocities, discourses of colonial hegemony extorted upon the oppressed subjects by the dominant power discourse. On the other hand, new subaltern not only knows how to speak, but also learn how to offer united resistance against the oppressive agents of power.

The Color Purple which was published in 1982 is a classic in the galaxy of American literature by AW. The novel is in the style of epistolary form and it won both 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction. It is daring in its delineation of female sexual desirability, and touches on taboos of sexuality, class and race. It had in fact intended to evaluate the unfair practices of both racism and sexism. The novel is “an American novel of permanent importance” (Prescott, 67); who positioned the author “in the company of Faulkner” (Smith, 183).

In the novel *TCP*, Walker deals with varied modes of subalternity in all its manifestations—rape, incest, murder, violence, which were the dark consequences of the patriarchy. Women are being depicted as a voiceless subaltern at the periphery. Since time immemorial, women have been treated as fragile, timid and weak in the atrocious, vicious and patriarchal world. As Hamlet, the hero of Shakespeare’s masterpiece *Hamlet* utters, ‘Frailty, thy name is woman’ (Shakespeare, 22).

The position of women is determined from the male point of view. In other words, it is patriarchy that decides the position of women. Women were always discriminated against by patriarchal society. They are regarded as ‘Other’ and ‘Second sex’ in the male-dominated society and they have been enforced to live a subdued life. Aristotle’s declaration of female as inferior and male as superior and one rules and the other is ruled refers to the notion of female subalternity. They have been silenced by the patriarchal voice. Here, Walker unveils a range of oppression faced by the black women right from their childhood and discloses cruel atrocities that happened to children in the black community and she also pinpoints the various sorts of oppression of black women. Women were treated as ‘subaltern’ to men since their presence was recognized only for objectification and the gratification of male interest. The novel offers a look at the dilapidated circumstances of African-American women. The men projected in the novel shock with their horrifying brutality and hostility. They are entirely conscious of their wicked

behavior and take pleasure in inflicting pain on women. *TCP* emphasizes that domination is an, in fact, a masculine activity which emanates from the male's sadistic desire to subjugate.

If we go through the novel *TCP*, we will find that patriarchal control is everywhere in the novel. Patriarchy begins from the very beginning of the novel. Patriarchy is deciding what should be the position of women and also what should be the role of women. It is patriarchy who actually marginalized the women from the centre. The woman is removed from the centre. Here emerges the notion of the conflict between the margin and the centre and this is where the question of Subalternity comes. As Ranjit Das Gupta mentions:

The term 'subaltern' is not a substitute for peasantry or laboring poor or common people but a concept implying a dialectical relationship of superordination and subordination, a concept which is of importance in analyzing the interplay of this relationship. (Gupta, 109)

In the novel, *The Color Purple* by AW, the protagonist namely Celie's position is that of a subaltern. It is the passive Celie who constitutes the 'other' and holds the apparent perspective of objectified, marginalized female in the text. The entire story of the novel is woven around her who has to pass through several vicissitudes in her multi-pronged life and her sister Nettie. It is in an epistolary form, first written to God and later to her sister Nettie. There is no authoritarian voice in the novel. The voice is that of Celie. Celie is seen writing to God. This is because she had no one else whom she could share her feelings with and tell the awful events of her past that she was sexually abused by her stepfather namely Alphonso. Alphonso is an egotistical and frail man without having any ethics. He got married following the bereavement of Celie's mother but keeps on abusing Celie. Here Celie has been reduced to the state of a gendered subaltern who played to the hegemonic tune of patriarchy by constantly surrendering to the dictates of her father. The secret letters Celie writes to God indicate the miserable way in which she became the victim to the sexual advances and atrocities of her brutal step-father. In this regard, a prominent critic by the name Vineberg says:

All the virtues of the book its gumptions and directness and the potency of its private, vernacular vision of anguish are evident in the first half of this section. Walker hauls you in by serving up rape, incest and infanticide on the first two pages reported by a fourteen-

year-old girl who doesn't know what's happening to her. It's a shock the reader doesn't recover from until, sixty or seventy pages later, the bells of sisterhood begin to peal so loudly that they drown out everything else in the book. (Vineberg, 95)

TCP was a compendium of suffering. "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy," the book begins, introducing to us the fearful power of Celie's stepfather.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. ~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me. (Walker, 3)

She is repeatedly raped by her stepfather, whom she initially believes to be her father. He doesn't have any feelings of remorse for the unconscionable acts that he committed against this defenseless child. She is sexually abused by her stepfather uttering:

You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. (Walker, 3)

Celie was in a heartbreakingly sad situation. Celie's rape by her insensitive, beastly stepfather introduces us to the ugliness of child abuse. Celie laments thus:

He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my heep and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties...When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. (ibidem).

Celie's mother has resided in harsh and challenging surroundings, which has continued in Celie's life. Her mother preferred death over a life of continued wretchedness and frustration. She was unable to fight back and consequently, she became a victim of the black patriarchal hegemony. Celie's mother posits here a case of gendered subalternity. Celie's mother established past and a difficult present and future for Celie. As Nina Baym, an American literary critic put in plain words regarding the novel:

It is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she has rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world. (Baym, 11)

Celie's mother becomes extremely weak from childbearing to gratify her husband's carnal desire. Her mother's weakness impelled Alfonso to rape Celie over and over again and after that gives away the two children born of his sin. She became the mother of children she could not crave for, lover of children she could not have. In her unbearable suffering, she finds the twin self within herself as thousands of slave women. Alfonso warned her not to tell the truth of the rape to anybody. He warned Celie about rape in the following way:

You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy. (Walker, 3)

Besides raping her and impregnating her, her stepfather also beats her and forces her into a marriage with a widower named Albert, in the novel often referred to as Mr _____, who harshly beats and rapes her. As a subaltern her sole duty is to do all the drudgery of the household of Mr _____ Celie carries the traces of her several sexual abuse and incest through a wedding deal arranged between two men. Celie in this way is passed as a piece of property from one brutal and authoritarian black male into the hands of another. While introducing Celie to Albert, Alfonso says,

She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but I specs you know that. She spoiled.

Twice. But you don't need a fresh woman no how. (Walker, 9)

Hence what we have seen here is that father, as portrayed in Celie's letters, appears to be a virile and strong man who is like a walking phallus. Being a father, he functions as a manipulative man, and thus ignores his daughter's feelings or desire and sexually molested her. Like a colonial master, he reduces Celie to the state of 'old subaltern', who is typically portrayed as meek, muffled and speechless, devoid of protest and resistance. Celie was not allowed to love her own children as they were taken away by her stepfather. It is only towards the long run of the novel; Celie comes to know that Alfonso was actually her stepfather. The racial subaltern is also obvious in the novel where Celie's biological father is killed by the zealous white people. This sort of racial consciousness is also quite evident in the works of Maya Angelo and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Both Morrison and Alice Walker are also seen very graphically portraying the racial dichotomy between the black and the white.

Celie's life was like hell. Suffering for so many years had an immense impact on her mental equilibrium. She experienced several ups and downs in her life. She is an uneducated girl with no

self-esteem. She is broken. She barely goes to school. Neither her mother is interested in sending her to school nor Alphonso. She was robbed of a precious, irreplaceable childhood. She was denied of an education as well as medical care. Celie does her all the domestic work and so the words of the language that Celie speaks are that of illiterate. Celie's subalternity is also poignantly projected through her linguistic and intellectual deficiencies. There are scores of spelling errors in Celie's way of speaking. The way that Walker has written is that she intentionally wrote that spelling. The same thing we will see in *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Twain had written the colloquial English which was spoken by the protagonist of the novel, Huck Finn.

Celie's speech pattern and Celie's words reveal not only an intelligence that transforms illiterate speech into something that is, at times, very beautiful, as well as effective in conveying her sense of the world, but also what has been done to her by a racist and sexist system, and her intelligent blossoming as a human being despite her oppression demonstrates why her oppressors persist even today in trying to keep her down. For if and when Celie rises to her rightful, earned place in society across the planet, the world will be a different place, I can tell you. (Walker, 64)

Celie married Mr _____. After her marriage, Celie came to know that Mr _____ is converted to something malignant and deleterious at his touch. After her marriage, she was leading a cat and dog life with her husband. She suffers at the hands of Mr _____. The intensity of suffering that Mr _____ has done to Celie is beyond words. And she calls him as Mr _____. Mr _____ has an affair with Shug. Shug is an assertive woman. Being an assertive woman, Shug calls him by his first name Albert. This is also something shocking for Celie. This is because, as a subaltern women are not supposed to call their husband by their first name. As the story of novel unfolds, we come to know that Celie had been subdued in her entire life from childhood. She is at first a girl of total lack of individuality. She never thinks about herself and she never imagined that she can speak for herself. She doesn't have a voice of her own. Initially, this was her way of surviving. When her father beats her she endures it. Even he sexually abuses her. She usually accepted it as her fate. So to speak, she struggles against her entire life against many sorts of odds from poverty to racism, sexism, etc. Her stepfather married her to Mr _____. He married her with the sole intention of looking after four wild children by his previous wife (who was murdered), and he

needs someone to look after them. He not at all feels affection for her and doesn't treat her as a human being and even doesn't look her in the face. She laments thus:

My mama die ... My sister Nettie run away. Mr ____ come git me to take care of his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me ...even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me, I say. (Walker, 103)

In Mr____'s households, she has to do the whole monotonous, menial and exhausting work. In the novel , Celie's position is that of an old subaltern owing to the reason that she is speechless, fragile, timid who chose to be a silent victims. Celie reveals in one of her letters to God that she can only survive the way she is. Mr ____ keeps beatings her for no reason. He beats her black and blue as and when he likes. When Mr ____ beats her, she assumes herself as a wood. In this regard Celie says:

It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man. (Walker, 23)

The truth that Celie, in moments of intense physical pain, converts herself into a tree is an effective paradigm of a black woman's proximity to passive suffering. Celie in her extreme physical pain converts herself into wood, thereby surrendering her otherness as a subaltern figure. Albert's heartless act of concealing Nettie's letters from Celie also hints at the exploitation of Celie on the psychological level.

There are innumerable African American women like Celie who have suffered and have been suffering for long decades. Celie has to endure all these suffering since she is the victim of male supremacy. Mr ____ believes that beatings keep a woman in her place and he beats her like he beats his children. Celie in this way has been reduced to the state of a helpless subaltern. Walker's men are drunkard and immoral who are occupied with extramarital affairs and are not sympathetic to their suffering wives. What is important to note here is that it is a traditional practice of black men to emphasize his supremacy over women. These are mostly conservative men who believe that women are sub-human and thus occupy a lower position in terms of human worth. Albert's notion of women is seen in the following passage:

Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr _____ say, Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for—he don't finish. He just tuck his chin over the paper like he do. Remind me of Pa. (Walker, 23)

If we look at the novel *TCP*, we will find that Celie internalizes the fact that men are cruel to her. But she accepts it. It is a part of what she believes to be the norms i.e., what is normative to her. Celie's subalternity can be best illustrated from the way she makes herself a slave of this system and waits for God to aid her all the way through her life. She is powerless to let know anybody other than God and restrains her emotions. She addresses to Sofia in the following way:

I can't even remember the last time I felt mad... Couldn't be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy. Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what... sometime Mr _____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all way. (Walker, 40)

So in a way what Walker is trying to show through the assertiveness of female character is to break this normative belief that what the position of a woman should be in the social set up of the African- American.

Celie is a victim of patriarchy, racism, sexism, but she accepts this as her fate. Celie loses control of her life, fails to conquer the adversities enforced by patriarchy. Henceforth she is an 'Old Subaltern'. After her marriage, Albert exercises a tyrannical control over his wife's action and speech. Despite Celie conforming to the image of the perfect wife, she still is an abused victim of patriarchal authority. She is nothing more than an 'object to be used and disregarded' at Albert's own pleasure. She is of the view that this is how she has to survive. She with such low esteem and lack of individuality of her own is completely dependent on others and her only means of survival is to submit or to surrender before her fate. Being hapless, helpless, voiceless and dejected, Celie seems to be tormented by her own marital troubles and stands for mute subaltern who rarely speaks. Emancipation is next to impossible on her part. The thoughts of emancipation are indeed like a dream for her. She can't even imagine her emancipation. Because of years of exploitation, she regarded herself as a person of low esteem, a person without a voice and a person without any confidence. Celie can also be categorized as an aggrieved subaltern. To speak of aggrieved subaltern, it is the exact opposite of the other group of subalterns. Aggrieved

subalterns are well aware of their oppression, but they do not take a stand for themselves and due to constant oppression, their heart and mind clots with anger. If we go through the novel, this aspect is quite apparent in case of Celie and Squeek.

Celie's conversion from a girl with such low esteem who didn't have a personality of her own to that of a confident woman is the central part of the novel. Towards the end of the novel, she had her own enterprise. She became bold enough to face the music. She breaks her past bondage. She even threatened Albert to murder him. What is utmost important to note here is that Celie tends to establish herself as a new subaltern. Celie at the end of the novel smashes the cycle of spousal abuse and takes a stand for dignity by emerging triumphant- a new subaltern who not only 'sings' but also protest with what Edward Said calls 'a spirit of resistance' rather than a sheer passive outlook of tolerating oppression and trauma.

Another significant character that comes under subaltern discourse is Sophia. Sofia is dead against patriarchy. She is a dare devil in her nature. She is the wife of Harpo. Harpo tries to bring his wife to his heel the way his father, Albert, to Celie and hits her for not being obedient to him. Sophia is an independent and she is the first woman who declines to agree to both the patriarchal and the racist demand. Walker represents Sofia as entirely dissimilar in comparison with the other women's representation in the novel. We have seen that she gets married to Harpo in spite of their parents' disagreement. In the beginning, she was truthful and loyal to her husband Harpo but with the passage of time, Harpo's various sorts of abuses compelled her to be valorous and fought back when she was beaten by him. She commits certain judgmental blunders. There lies the catastrophe of her. We have seen that husband-wife relationship getting broken. Sophia being the kind of assertive woman and her husband Harpo who is brought up in a system where patriarchal authority always considers women of the house as someone to be used anytime they want, so Harpo finds it very hard to make his marriage worth with Sophia. So finally their marriage comes to utter failure.

Sophia is not one of those black women who would like to become a white man's housemaid. There is an incident in the text. One day when she goes to the market and there is Mayer's wife, Miss Millie with her husband. They see Sophia and are dumbfounded to see her so healthy and strong woman and her children so clean. She tells Sophia whether she will work in their home as a maid. Sophia being a strong woman in temperament replied, 'Hell no' (Walker, 81). Then the

Mayor's wife gets angry. The Mayor feels that how dare she respond to her like that. He then physically assaults Sophia. Sophia being a strong-willed lady she quickly retaliate the mayor back. Then the police turn up and harshly beat her at random, leaving her with a fractured skull, broken ribs, her face rendered nearly unrecognizable, and blind in one eye. She was being captured for beating the Mayor. She was sentenced to twelve years. She is seen throughout the course of the novel as she fought against her father, against her brother, against her husband Harpo. She said:

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. (Walker, 39)

Sofia's retaliation is nothing but a protest and rebellion, a way of getting out of the patriarchal order. She rejected the phallogocentric system. The concept of new subaltern can be applied to Sofia, when she boldly challenges the gender and racial hegemony of the Mayor. To Spivak, the new subaltern implies the one who gets destroyed but not defeated. They remonstrate with a resolute spirit of resistance against the discourse of colonial historiography. They even dream of a utopian society free of dominant hegemony, economic exploitation and political victimization. The new subalterns stand firm against all sorts of dominance by voicing their opinions valiantly as we have seen in the case of Sofia. Sofia and Nettie stand out as the best example of a new subaltern who valiantly fought their battle, unlike Celie who initially surrendered before the male hegemony. Sofia also appears as a gendered subaltern who defied her husband's command and exercised her boldness by hitting the mayor back thus rejecting both gender and racial hegemony. Apparently, then, she can also be appropriately called a triumphant new subaltern endowed with, what Edward Said called, 'a spirit of resistance' rather than bearing injustice and oppression with a passive outlook and embarrassing reticence.

When Celie goes to meet Sophia in jail, she saw that she is all bruised. Her face is swollen. She is bewildered by the appearance of Sophia. Sophia is made to do difficult task in prison. And what happens to Sophia is that the social value system that she believed in it would not function in the society of the South America where slavery was there many years ago, where slaves were not human. They were property. And she could dare to say "Hell no" to the Mayor's wife. Her family thought that Sophia would not last long in the jail because of the way she was tortured in the jail, the way she was made to hard labor.

Meanwhile, Harpo remarries. His second's wife's name is Mary Agnes. But Harpo calls her Squeak. His wife is like a squeaking wife. Squeak is also significant from the subaltern discourse. Her place in the text is also that of a subaltern. Her whole individuality was snatched away and as a result she was in quest of a selfhood. But she goes onto become a great singer under Shug Avery's guidance and help. When they discussed that Sophia has to be brought back from jail or she will not last long. They come to know that the jailer is somehow uncle to Mary Agnes. When she goes and requests him, actually they have planned, they tell Mary Agnes to go and tell the guard that Sophia looks much better inside the jail. She is happier. If she is outside, she would be suffering more. It was entitled to her to make them see her free and when she came back home they came to know that something happened to her. And what we come to know is that Mary Agnes since she has approached the guard, he has taken advantage of her and he raped her. She has also been in a sense victimized. But she able to emerges as a new subaltern in the long run of the text. Squeak experienced a change from old subaltern to new subaltern imbining reaction and resistance against injustice.

Later on, Sophia was set free from the prison with the principal condition of working as a maid to Miss Millie. In this case, she was reduced to the state of old subaltern and situational subaltern. So we have seen that a bold and tough woman like Sophia also has to genuflect under the white authority. There she has to leave all her children behind and she has to look after the children of Miss Millie. There are incidents where Sophia wants to go back and meet her children but she was hardly allowed even for one day to meet her children. This is also a history of part of social institutions of African American where they have to leave their own baby behind and go and take care of the children of the white people. TM in her groundbreaking novel namely *The Bluest Eye* (1970) also gives us a minute account about this. As the story of the novel progress, we come to know that the heroine of the novel, a young girl by the name of Pecola Breedlove, she yearns for her mother's affection but her mother is engaged as a maid in a white women's house and she loves looking after the children of the white's masters. Because they were white, neat and clean. And she hates looking at her own daughter.

In case of Nettie, she struggles to develop a space of her own and trying to get out of her subaltern position. Albert's effort to rape Nettie has led to his failure. He cautions Nettie to open her mouth to anyone or else; he would stop her from communicating with her sister, Celie.

Albert conceals Nettie's letters sent to Celie because of his failure to rape. With reference to Nettie's letters, Wendy Wall examines:

Albert intercepts them because he fails to seduce her, and that he rapes her language because he fails to rape her body. (Times).

Through Nettie's voice, we learn of the many problems of African villagers, and what Walker has high regard for in Africa.

Over the mud walls I have hung Olinka platters and mats and pieces of tribal cloth. The Olinka are known for their beautiful cotton fabrics which they hand-weave and dye with berries, clay, indigo and tree bark... Some wonderful rush mats on the floor. It is all colorful and warm and homey. (Walker, 143)

Now the part of the narrative where Nettie talks about the Olinka tribe is also worthy of notice. Walker has sometimes been criticized for the fact that she might have given some historical inaccuracies regarding Africa and especially about how colonialism was chewing into the primitive community like the Olinkas. Nettie talks in her letters about the position of the women in the Olinka community and she, for the most part, writes about the girl. Both the African-Americans and Africans confine women to look after children, and among the Olinka, the husband has the supremacy over the wife. Nettie writes to Celie that in Africa, education is denied to the native Olinka girls. Women are forced to take a minor role, never looking directly into a man's face. Nettie comes to know a girl named Tashi, a native African girl from the Olinka community. Olivia had an intense craving to learn, to be educated but her mother, Catherine, does not approve of Tashi being educated in the Western manner. Tashi's parents get angry with Mr. and Mrs. Samuel saying that girls from Olinka community neither learn nor educate themselves. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel was told that they will not embrace the western values that Mr. and Mrs. Samuel trying to impose on them their western values and says them that if the girls from Olinka community learn the western values as well as internalize the western values, they will not be able to adjust in Olinka community. And the women said that they send Olivia instead to their community and let her see how Olinka woman and girl live. Nettie is told by one of the Olinka women,

A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something”, and is told, “the mother of his children.” (Walker, 140)

Following an African custom, Tashi undergoes the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring. It is seen that women were being culturally hegemonized by men by forcing them to facial scarring. What is here worthy of notice is that women suffered from different forms of exploitation everywhere in the world whether it is in America or whether it is in a society in Africa like Olinka society.

Since Nettie has been staying there for many years, by this time Mrs. Samuel also breathes her last. There is also a particular incident connected with the bereavement of Mrs. Samuel. When Mrs. Samuel (Corrine) fell sick, Nettie had extra duty now, to nurse her; while Nettie “was changing her as she lay in bed, she gave me a long, mean, but somehow pitiful look. Why do my children look like you? She asked”. She accused Nettie by saying, “You could have spit them out”. And she went so far in anger that she asked, “When did you first meet my husband? (Walker, 155). She begins to become suspicious of Nettie and Mr. Samuel. Because Olivia and Adam who are actually the children of Celie, there are so much of semblance with Nettie and that the Olinka tribe people, they would speak among themselves that the children (Olivia and Adam), they are of Mr. Samuel and Nettie. When Nettie tries to elucidate this with Mrs. Samuels, she is not ready to hear any reasonable explanation. She harasses Nettie in every possible way, got her to sway by the Bible, even Samuel too. As soon as Samuel left the sick room, she made her raise her dress and she sat up in her sickbed to examine her stomach. Nettie felt so sorry for her, and so humiliated. But when she keeps trying frequently to remind her of that particular incident which Celie had once told Nettie that in the marketplace where she had met Mrs. Samuel when she was carrying Olivia in her arms. Mrs. Samuel initially refuses to acknowledge that. But before her death, she tells that she does remember that. But she didn’t want to reminisce about that moment in the shop because the way the shopkeeper who was a white man was mistreating her when she was looking at some pieces of cloth. The white shopkeeper was impolitely speaking to her whether she should buy or not. It is important to note here is that Mrs. Samuel is reduced to a racial subaltern in that she was badly treated by the white shopkeeper. This white man didn’t like to serve Mrs. Samuel. This is because she was a black woman. So she tells that she had deliberately subdued the incident in her mind. But she dies

acknowledging that her mind is clear now. She doesn't die with suspicion. Soon after, Nettie and Mr. Samuel get married.

Shug Avery even though she is an extremely strong character, she has also experienced rejection. So she can also be discussed within the purview of subaltern discourse. She has been a blues singer. She has been rejected by her family members. She has been rejected by her own children who called her immoral. Albert's father also didn't like her. She has relationships with multiple men. Shug tells us that after her third child through Albert, she was thrown out and went to stay with her mother's sister in Memphis. Through her narration, we come to know that she was very upset when Albert married Annie Julia who was in fact her school mate. She explains to her as "she was pretty, man. Black as anything, and skin ust as smooth. Big black eyes look like moons" (Walker, 112). Regardless, Shug declares that she continued to sleep with Albert even after his marriage with her school friend in a very obvious way. She would keep him away from Annie for weeks and she would come and beg Albert for grocery money to buy food for the children. Annie too neglected by her husband as she began to have an affair with another man who finally shot her. Shug sheds a few tears and after that informs Celie that she feels bad about the way she treated her too when she moved in with Albert treating her like a servant. Despite the oppression and cruelty inflicted upon by the male authority, she, through her spirited resistance, voiced out her resent. In this case, she is a new subaltern.

The implication of the title of the novel (*The Color Purple*) is also very remarkable so far as the subalternity of the black women are concerned. In her collection of feminist essays, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1983, she talks about this color Purple and this color purple is also used frequently in some of her poems also. Purple, as we all know, is considered as a royal color in ancient days. Even in some societies like Chinese, we can see that all the kings and queens and all the royal people would wear the color purple. But this is not the primary association of the word. The color Purple is very rare in nature. The significance of the color is that this color is a sign of individuality. It is the emblem of liberty for African American women. It is a color that Walker thinks well describes them. So there is not much difference between the word the purple and lavender. Lavender is also the same color. But what is lavender for white women is the purple color for the black women. Black women are not much poles apart from white women. So why do they have to go through all this subalternity?

Most of the writings of Walker are awash with subalternity of all sorts. Celie, Nettie, Squeak are not the one who underwent transformation from one state of subalternity to another but they boldly challenges racial oppression and colonial hegemony. They try their level best to come out of their position of muted subalterns. Walker's marginalized voices in this way metamorphosed into a certain degree. They are seen trying their level best for their rights, liberty, equality, dignity and identity in the society. By raising their voices, they are seen moving from the margins to the centre, and thus they are seen recovering from their subaltern position.

Walker's vision of womanism brings out the fact that not only the whites but also even black males are responsible for the state of the black women. Both Alphonso and Albert are a representation of a class from amongst the colored who resemble the tyrannous masters of white society. Both of them are slave owners of their own, both of the same kinds. Some of the critics are of the opinion that it is not a matter of color or racial specification; it is humanity's run rot. Walker intends to point to that fundamental fact.

It is a common practice of black men to blame black women for anything that goes wrong. We have seen that the presence of authority is everywhere in the novel. It is there in the form of patriarchy, it is there in the form of capital, it is there in the form of the institution of marriage and colonial machinery. All these are authorities. Walker is of the opinion that black people, particularly black men, are by their very nature aggressive and they heartlessly inflict so much pain on their own blood without any hesitation. This aspect finds well expression in *TCP*. Black men folk makes their wives their slaves like they themselves are slaves to their loveless brutal body-possession, body-ownership, Celie told Harpo, not simply for projected harmony and peace :

Mr ____ marry me to take care of his children. I marry him cause my daddy made me. I don't love Mr ____ and he don't love me. (Walker, 61)

Although the novel *TCP* was a huge success, it ignited great controversy. Debates and disagreement have centered on the portrayal of male characters by the author. By 1986, in an essay, published in the *New York Times Book Review* entitled "Sexism, Racism, and Black Women Writers", Mel Watkins, an American critic and author concisely delineated the problem that black men had with both the novel and the film. He condemned Walker along with other

several black women writers who have shown what he characterizes as negative narratives about black men for trespassing outside the conventional rules of image-making in fiction. Watkins opines:

Those Black women writers who have chosen Black men as a target have set themselves outside a tradition that is nearly as old as Black American literature itself. They have, in effect, put themselves at odds with what seems to be an unspoken but almost universally accepted covenant among Black writers. (Watkins, 1)

Some black men, who felt that her projections of them as mean, wicked, immoral, abusive towards the Black women reinforced animalistic and malicious stereotypes about black masculinity, criticized Walker for her complexly drawn male characters. She depicts various black men who physically and emotionally abuse their wives and children. This unjust condemnation happens together with the premiere of the movie by the same name 'The Color Purple', which didn't illustrate domestic violence in the complicated ways the book did. This unfair condemnation obscured the importance of the novel, which depicted sides of black female struggle unknown to a mainstream readership. Hitherto long before *TCP* drew the attention of popular audiences, Walker's work had already established her as a proficient artist and activist. Her work investigates gender, sexuality, and class, building on Walker's observations and experiences as a child and young adult in the rural south.

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CHAPTER IV

Black Women's Voices for Redemption and Resilience in the Face of Death and Disaster

We are not white. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves. And that we and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere.

(Walker, 122)

Life is not a bed of roses. It is full of ups and downs. The other name of life is struggle. Those who are fit are able to survive and those who are unfit are subject to decay and death. Both Walker and Morrison have delineated the sense of hope even in misery and metaphysics of suffering through their novels. A black girl enthroned into a cruel and harsh environment right from her birth. The only way to survive in the hostile world around her is to develop self-resilience and self-reliance. The parents and other black men are after unable to protect these young girls and the girls learn either very early or lately to protect themselves by developing a high level of tolerance and will to survive. An American literary scholar, Mary Helen Washington, mentions of these girls, 'they exhibit an unusual degree of emotional stability and strength. (Washington, 6) The black women delineated in both the novels are not only the sufferer but also they were trying to emerge from that excruciating suffering.

Resistance is read on every line of their novels and poems and art becomes therapy to survival. The need for resistance is there in their novels because of the desire for self expression. This desire for self expression can be individual or group. The moment we get 'self expression' here means that there is something subdued. If something is not subdued or suppressed, there is no need for the desire to come out of that suppression. The desire for self expression means the expression of the self is not being permitted. So the desire is there. It is not merely desire; it is packed by a will to power. And will to power requires action. This action taken boldly by the black female characters projected in both the novels. This resistance comes from characters like Sethe, Amy Denver, and Ella from the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and Celie, Sofia, Nettie and Squeak from the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. This resistance is against both the

white and black male authority. Here in these novels, all existing notions of patriarchy are questioned. We have seen here women's efforts to support and rescue their victimized sister.

As far as *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is concerned, it is another glaring instance of resilience and triumph of black woman over the brutal atrocity of the white hegemony. It eulogizes those who handle to maintain their humanity notwithstanding being subjected to dehumanizing and animalizing treatment in slavery. Like in *TCP* by AW, Morrison also brings out here the experiences of women and how they understand each other's pain and assisted each other to survive through female bonding. It also testifies how female network is part and parcel in their daily life to conquer the mountain of unbearable suffering.

Morrison derived the name of the principal character 'Sethe' from Biblical Seth, who was the child of Adam and Eve with a view to add the masculinity of Sethe's character. Sethe's capability to conquer the irresistible tragedies and difficulties for example her running off from slavery from Sweet Home and the frightening murder of her child recognizes her with this quality. On that very day after doing the travesty on Sethe's body, the Schoolteacher and his nephew untie her and leave her thinking that in this severe state of her extreme physical and psychological pain, she can't even dream of escaping. But Sethe fixes her mind that she has to run away by hook or by crook from them whether there will be Halle with her or not. She manages to escape finally. It testifies the indomitable as well as unconquerable courage of Sethe.

We know that in the history of slavery before the Civil War between North with that of South; North of Ohio was the place where the slaves were regarded as free. But in South of Ohio, the slaves were not regarded as free and they are still slaves and most of the plantations were there in South of America. In order to escape from slavery the slaves crossed the river Ohio. It is, therefore, seems a journey from bondage to freedom. As we go through the novel, we will see that Sethe also crossed the river to escape from bondage.

When Sethe experiences the physical brutality of the schoolteacher, she decides to run away. Body molested, heart oppressed, Sethe fled Kentucky to Cincinnati across the river Ohio on that rigorous condition. She headed her way through the forest and plantations. In the forest she happens to come across a white girl. The girl is also running away to Boston. The white girl is also poorly treated. But the reason for her running away is something different from that of

Sethe. She flees in quest of a better life. Nevertheless, on her way, she notices Sethe lying half dead in the wood. She aids Sethe who was too weak to move. She takes Sethe and they try to escape through a small abandon old boat. It is in the boat that Sethe struck having her labour. Amy Denver helps Sethe to deliver the baby. Amy's kindness saves both the life Sethe's and her baby. She names the new born daughter as Denver after this white girl who helps her. Naming her daughter as Denver, she preserves the memory of a white who assisted her.

We have seen here the female bond between a black and a white woman. If she was not there, Sethe would have certainly died. As we have seen Sethe had her leg swollen. She had already beaten and raped. Therefore, giving birth alone is not possible. It is not that Morrison is only preoccupied with the brutal behavior of the whites. She also displays in a sense certain humanitarian traits of the whites also. There are some other white characters in the text that are good and ready to help anyone in need. Mr. Garner and Bodwin are such kind of character we come across in the text.

Sethe escape from Sweet home with the assistance of the white girl is not the ending of her journey. From there she again carried by another man by the name of Stamp Paid. She finally comes to the house 124 at Bluestone Road. Baby Suggs cleans her part by part beginning from her face to her hand, to her body, to her legs and put on a new dress on her. When she looks at the back of Sethe, she holds her mouth to prevent herself from screaming after seeing so much of lash mark. Baby Suggs broken having seen her on that severe health condition.

After the demise of Baby Suggs and her brothers' elopement from 124 due to the malignant existence of the spirit, Denver was the only one who resided with her mother. Denver becomes a lonely child. She doesn't have any friend to play with. No one is ready to play with her. These surroundings caused her a massive psychological harm; she suffered from loneliness. As Larrick explains:

Because their house is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, before she returns, no children have ever dared to seek closeness with Denver. Such solitude can cause severe psychological damage, and Denver struggles to find a sense of meaning and purpose in her life. (Larrick, 3)

Since Denver has no other person to play with, she longs for this other person in the house with whom she can make her connection. As Gillespie states:

Since she is so lonely after her grandmother, Baby Suggs, dies and her brothers run away, Denver actually enjoys the company of the ghost who haunts the house. (Gillespie, 38)

She wants to develop this relationship with the spirit. She knows that it is her sister's spirit. After the death of Baby Suggs, she and her mother Sethe try to call forth the ghost.

Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on. (Morrison, 4)

Following the arrival of Paul D in the house, its presence in the house was becoming more and more malicious. Paul D apprehends that there is something strange dwelling in the house. He decided that it has to be driven out. So he picks up the table, quashed it and shouts at whatever is there in the house and finally becomes successful to drive it away. The house becomes tranquil again. Denver is deeply shattered and saddened by this incident. But what take place next is that one day unexpectedly an eccentric, troubling woman makes an appearance as if a Nymph from the river flowing by. That was the time when Paul D, Sethe and Denver went to carnival and they were headed back to home. As soon as Sethe had seen the girl, her water broke feeling the need to urinate. She can't wait even to greet that girl whoever has come to 124. They took her inside the house. The girl who arrives at 124, she was very thirsty. When she offered water to drink, she drinks cup after cup of water as if she was coming through a desert. When Paul D gazes at her, he becomes astonished. There is something about her we can't explain. Nevertheless, Denver instantaneously falls in love with her. Denver accepts Beloved's arrival in physical form as a heart-warming event. Denver thought that since Beloved is there with her now, she will never feel lonely again. She takes care of her with an overprotective fidelity. She gives her everything. When they offer her to eat something, she is unable to eat. But when they offer her sweet, she can eat. Sethe doesn't make that connection instantly that the girl is her long dead daughter coming to her in physical form after Paul D driven away the spirit. Nobody can imagine that their deceased daughter is coming to the house. We as readers know that it is Beloved who comes there as in human form.

Although Baby Suggs pass away, but her preaching still resonates in the life of the blacks. Sethe along with Denver and Beloved reached Baby Suggs's preaching platform with the hope of

if any voice could assist her out of the present ordeal. There she felt Suggs's spirit gripping her throat tight as if to strangle her breath leaving finger print thereon. Both Denver and Beloved tried their hands to undo the marks left there.

Baby Suggs was introduced in the text as Sethe's mother in law and the mother of Halle. Though Baby Suggs is a minor character in the text, she plays a vital role in the text. Through flashback, we come to know that when she became crippled later in her life, her son Halle worked day and night to buy her freedom. Finally, she was given freedom. She represents those individual who didn't know what to do with the freedom. Because all her lives she was in captives and when she was eventually given her freedom, she doesn't know what to do with that freedom. So it is a kind of reminder by Morrison on those who take freedom for granted. Halle buys her freedom with the great cost. On the very day she gets her freedom, she asks Mr. Garner why he calls her Jenny Whitlow all through these years. To her query, he replies that it is because of the name that was written in the slip that he got when he brought her. The moment she gets her freedom, she changes her name to Baby Suggs. This is also a form of reclamation of identity.

After the departure of Baby Suggs from Sweet Home, through flashback we come to know that Mrs. Garner is in need of another maid. There it is Sethe who is brought as a fourteen-year-old girl. She was very young when she was brought to Sweet Home. The men of Sweet Home namely Paul D, Paul A, Sixo, Halle - all of them were grown-up men by that time. They have this gentlemanly as well as tacit understanding among them that they will let Sethe prefer one of them. Otherwise living in such an environment populated by so many unkind white masters will not be so easy for her. Consequently, Sethe chooses to get married to Halle. When Sethe chooses Halle, Paul D and other men still fantasizes about her.

Denver keeps asking her mother Sethe for many things that had happened in the past. Since she was a little girl, she is unaware of what exactly happened in the past. But she hears here and there about the past from the mouth of others. Because the incident of Sethe's murdering her child has spread far and wide and consequently the community began avoiding them. For eighteen years no one came to 124. This was the reason why no one would play with Denver. Denver knew that there was something awkward to do with her mother. But she doesn't know exactly what. Whenever she asks something about it to her mother, Sethe would cut her short.

Sethe's affection and her way of protecting of her two daughters-Beloved and Denver are ambiguous in a sense. For instance, by hiding the past, she attempts to protect Denver. On the contrary, in order to fulfill her query, she reveals her past to Beloved.

As the story of the novel unfolded, we will come to know that Beloved comes as an eighteen years old woman and stayed in 124. Through her return Beloved is manifesting her identity and her existence;

Beloved's return first as a spirit and then as a body indicates the continuing physical presence of historical wounds, but it also emphasizes the body's role in identity and recognition. (June, 30)

Beloved's return is so welcome to Sethe. Sethe becomes extremely obsessed with Beloved whereas Beloved was all the time asking Sethe about the past:

Beloved has a craving for sugar and loves to ask Sethe questions about the past, like what happened to Sethe's earrings, which she thinks are diamonds. (Gillespie, 37)

Sethe replies to all her strange questions that bring up painful memories of the past. Stories became a way to feed Beloved and Sethe unhesitatingly enjoys speaking the unspeakable and telling Beloved about the untold. Sethe had been feeding the past which she had previously buried to fulfill Beloved's own needs and desires. She fulfills all of her demand. She provided everything she wanted. She starts to spend much of her time with Beloved that even she begins to ignore Denver.

I won't never let her go. I'll explain to her, even though I don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. (Morrison, 236)

Sethe's affection and her way of protecting of her two daughters - Beloved and Denver are ambiguous in a sense. For instance, by hiding the past, she attempts to protect Denver. On the contrary, in order to fulfill her query, she reveals her past to Beloved. So what we have here in the text is this tension between remembering of the past as well as forgetting of the past.

Paul D's relationship with Beloved is very difficult and a complicated one. Since he finds himself unable to dwell in the same atmosphere of 124 where Beloved lives, he wants Beloved to leave the house. As the story progresses, Paul D gradually finds himself almost incapable to live and sleep inside 124. He starts living in the shed outside. Besides, Paul D's discovery of Sethe's infanticide generates a major catastrophe in their relationship. He compares Sethe with animal saying,

You got two feet, Sethe, not four. (Morrison, 194)

Denver doesn't leave Beloved's side. She has a constant fear in her mind that Beloved will leave her. On the other hand, Beloved can't let go her eyes from Sethe. She is occupied with Sethe so much that she follows Sethe everywhere wherever she goes. When Sethe wakes up early in the morning, Beloved is already there in the kitchen waiting for her. When Sethe comes back from her work, Beloved is eagerly waiting for her. Beloved was obsessed with her mother. She was all the time trying to spend all her time with her. Similarly, Sethe also obsessed with her long lost daughter.

Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?

Yes. I was on the other side.

You came back because of me?

Yes.

You rememory me?

Yes. I remember you.

You never forgot me?

Your face is mine. (Morrison, 254)

Initially, Sethe was flattered with the love of this girl. She gradually came to know that this is her dead daughter Beloved. Beloved becomes more and more demanding. Sethe spent all her savings in order to fulfill the needs of Beloved. Sethe and Beloved becomes obsessed with each other in such a way that they even didn't pay any attention to Denver and going to work later and

later each day until she was fired from the job. Following this accident, everyone in the house is starving. She has spent her scanty savings on ribbons and colorful clothes that amuse Beloved. Denver gradually apprehends that she is deprived of her mother's love. Initially, she was worried that it was her mother Sethe who will harm Beloved. Afterward she begins to realize that it is actually Beloved who has the power over her mother. Sethe can't think of anything else except pleasing Beloved leading to all her needs and demand. What we see here at the end is that Sethe gets lost in the past. Sethe in a sense was so much caught with her past that she had even forgotten about her present. She even forgot her second daughter Denver. Sethe strives in fulfilling all her needs. She strives in a way to undo what she feels. As Larrick explains:

Sethe brings Beloved into her home, believing she is the daughter killed out of love and protection so many years before. Beloved becomes a haunting figure that feeds off of the lives of those around her. (Larrick, 2)

Beloved is the victim of her mother's thick love. Beloved as a child can't understand the reason that drove her mother to commit that action. Denver also couldn't understand the reason behind that action. This understanding has come to Denver gradually. But what Beloved believed is that injustice is done to her and that she was not given a chance to retaliate. Now she was given a chance now and she wants that now. She wants Sethe for herself. On the contrary, Sethe wants in some of the other way to undo what she feels -the lost possibilities of life with her daughter. Sethe was lost so much into that cause trying to pacify her daughter why she did that infanticide. In trying to pacify her, Sethe is losing herself and it is Denver who finally recognizes that. Denver is faced with the dilemma of choosing Beloved and Sethe. It is actually the choosing of the past and choosing of the present. Denver has to take the responsibility of deciding of which one to nurture. She apprehends that she has to choose and to protect her mother, Sethe from Beloved. So Denver has to take this final decision of seeking help. In order to seek help, she has to go to the community. When Denver decides to go out of 124 after so many years she doesn't have the courage to take a step forward. Denver had never gone outside the house. She was preoccupied by the notion that all the community's people neglect them and do not want them there. She was also obsessed by the thought that her mother will kill her if she went out and the slave catchers came to take her.

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (Morrison, 242)

The transformation of Denver is very significant in the text. We will see in this case the gradual metamorphosis of Denver from that of a disturbed, timid, meek child to a confident girl as we have seen in the case of Celie in *TCP*. Denver did not have an identity. She was all the time at home, no friends, no family rather than her mother who was most of the time silent. By the end of the novel, Denver decided to go out and ask for help; "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help." (Morrison, 286) Denver learns to go outside into the world and communicate with her community's people. In this case, Gillespie comments:

Denver breaks free from the trance that Beloved has cast over 124 Bluestone Road. (Gillespie, 38)

She is the one who has to leave since there is no other person in their house. She never left 124. But the situation was so severe that Denver makes her mind up to leave the house to ask for help from neighbors. She has decided that she will step out from 124 and go and seek help from the community. Denver wanted to make a new beginning, starting from keeping her mother away from danger. It is clear that she wants to make a new starting and to build a new identity far from fear and loneliness.

She ventures out into the world and learns to get along and communicate with her community. She becomes a more confident and strong woman. (Gillespie, 38)

Denver recognizes eventually the suffering of her family, the suffering of her mother and the reason behind killing her daughter. It is this three hundred twenty years of slavery that leaves no option for a woman like Sethe than to murder her children because it is better to die than to go back to slavery. She begins to understand why Sethe did what she did. Denver begins to

understand that Beloved can no longer be allowed to stay and her mother has to be rescued. Denver connects her mother's history to the history of the community. So it is then that she goes out of 124 and goes to the community and seeks help not only for Sethe but also for Beloved.

The role of the community is very significant in the text due to the reasons that they provided some amount of food both to Sethe and Denver when they were isolated by the society and it is these thirty women of the community led by Ella that came muster strong to exorcise the ghost of Beloved as well as driven out from 124 at the end of the text.

Many of them are seen blaming themselves for what is happening in 124 and the way Sethe is now suffering owing to the reason that when the white men along with the slave catcher come to take her back to slavery, none of the community members prevents them to take Sethe back. As news spread of Beloved's presence at 124 and she is making Sethe suffer, Ella made a practical assessment that the spirit of Beloved has to be driven out. She thinks that this is something unacceptable. She also feels responsible as community members in not helping Sethe initially when they had come to take her. Besides, they also feel guilty due to the fact that after Sethe's imprisonment the community was not ready to accept her back in the community. They ostracized her. So she feels it her responsibility to help Sethe now in the time of need and so they go and drives out the ghost.

Beloved has come and she has in a sense given that space among living beings in 124 and she has also in a way understood several things. Now it is time for the past to go back. It will not be allowed to continue to remain in the present. It should not thwart the present and the future of the living. So once Denver recognizes this, it becomes a very important part of recovery of both of the individual as well as the community. At the long run of the novel, after the exorcism of Beloved, Sethe loses her mind and lie down to die but Paul D has come again. But this time he has not come to Sethe to 'count' her feet, but to 'rub' them- that is to take care of her. Gradually Sethe comes into the community, and as the years passed gradually Beloved is forgotten. In the resolution of the novel, they forgot her like a bad dream.

In her path-breaking novel by the name of *TCP*, AW endeavors her best to give voice to the voicelessness, bringing the marginalized from the periphery to the centre. All the female characters in the novel try their level best to come out of their position of muted subalterns and

became bold in their speech and action. The novel maps out the rise of the protagonist, Celie from her mental and physical pain to her capabilities and interior wealth. Initially, the heroine of the novel is a timid and submissive character. But as the story progresses, she appears as a bold personality with a voice of her own. She became bold enough to face the music. It is all about the account of the victory of women's struggle against racism, sexism, and social determinism to eventually flourish into the completeness of her being. The heroine gets empowered with the help of the other women projected in the novel. The novel is almost like bildungsroman. Because there is an endeavor to project the psychological and moral escalation of the protagonist in the passage from childhood through varied experiences. The novel is, in fact, a minute account of the youthful development of the heroine, Celie. It depicts the various processes by which the maturity of Celie is acquired through the manifold ups and downs of life. It portrays the dilapidated circumstances of Afro-American women in rural Georgia. It is, in fact, a heart-wrenching saga of the transformation of a girl with such low esteem who didn't have her own personality to that of a self-assured and empowered woman. It is also the story of the African-American women who have resurrected from the inhuman bondage of domestic slavery and empowered after so much of exploitation and oppression. Women are seen self-empowering by fighting external factors that strive to silence them. What Walker is trying to expose here is assertiveness and voice of the oppressed and suppressed woman. Here Walker is seen undertaking an enormous painstaking effort to project the female characters. She celebrates women like Shug Avery, Nettie, and Sofia who are not only valorous but also helpful. They helped in finding value in women's lives such as Celie, Squeak. In this case, female bonding occupies a significant position in the novel.

Celie, the protagonist of the novel *TCP, struggled* approximately her entire life against various sorts of predicaments starting from poverty and racism to patriarchy since her childhood. She has lost the spring of her childhood as she was the victim of racism, sexism and so on. Her life was a mess. But she has given voice towards the end of the novel. Finding a voice is equal to making a space for her. The most attention and the most transformation that AW makes in the character of Celie is that Shug opens a new world to her. Then only she begins to admire and loves herself. She towards the end celebrates her authentic and real black womanist self by freeing herself from the bondage of patriarchal suppression. Celie is seen smashing the iron bars of gender which

limit her self-empowerment. She dared to go beyond the laxman rekha of gender defined laws. Various sources really stopped her in her tracks of life. But they couldn't break her spirit.

If we go through the novel, we will find that Albert has kept all the letters secretly which Nettie had sent to her sister Celie. When Celie gets the letters, she stops writing letters to God and addresses her letters to Nettie. Celie says, 'I don't write to God no more, I write to you.' (Walker, 173) It becomes a means of forming her identity. She decides to create a new identity by leaving her husband, which is considered as a further step to wholeness. Celie goes ahead and leaves the house, to Memphis, where she starts a pants-making business and earns a living without any assistance, and not depending on any man. It is due to Shug Avery's tremendous impact that Celie leaves Mr____, her husband, and becomes an empowered woman. Celie establishes her own business and is now economically independent. Celie in her letters tells that she has begun making pants for a livelihood. Shug has assisted her economically for the material and also the orders from her band and afterwards she is swamped with orders from far and wide. Shug provides her dining room as a factory space for Celie and tells her 'You making your living, Celie' (Walker, 193) Celie signs her letter as Celie, Folkpants Unlimited/Sugar Avery Drive/Memphis, Tennessee. In one of the letters, Celie tells Nettie,

I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. (Walker, 194)

She informs us that Jerene and Dalene who are twins come and assist her with her business. They are unmarried. Darlene is trying to teach Celie how to talk accurately. Her business provides her with both inventive expression and financial independence that ascertains her knowledge and artistic splendor and recognizes her self-assurance. It constructs up her life's meaning and bestows a place in society.

In this case, towards the long run of the novel; it could be interpreted exclusively within the purview of feminist ideology in which, Celie is seen fighting boldly back against her husband by saying,

You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all.
(Walker, 187)

Here we come to know that the female voice is an important aspect of the text. It is about finding one's own voice. Celie's renovation from a girl with such low self-esteem who didn't have her own personality to that of a confident woman is the core of the text. She had her own enterprise towards the end of the text. Towards the end, she is able to create a room for herself in which everything is purple and red. She is seen teaching facts. She is able to find her own source of income. In this case, we can mention Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) where she opines,

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. (Woolf, 1)

By the end of the novel, thirty years after her first entry, Celie has changed her address of the letters from "Dear God" to "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God." (Walker, 259) She has learned to accept the world and her place in it and has learned about her own faith and religious beliefs-uniquely hers; they are not the images of God she was taught to accept.

Celie revolts against every sort of stereotypical role that is given to her in a patriarchal society. Her revolt harms no one but her own self and it is through this suffering that she comes out as a strong woman as well as a rebel with a cause. There is a particular incident in the story where she has the guts to murder her husband, is explicatory of her bold spirit. Celie begins her journey from powerlessness to the rank of full empowerment and from self-abnegation to self-discovery. She succeeds in the process of survival both at the level of self and community eloquently in the context of the sexist, racist and classist society of America. In the long run of the novel, she is exposed as an enlightened being. Her interior darkness resolves. Over this, Walker remarks in a poem,

My struggle was always against
an inner darkness: I carry within myself
the only key to my death – to unlock life, or close it shut
forever. (Walker, lines 1-26)

Women like Nettie, Sofia and Shug give Celie mental, material, spiritual and financial support. They all enlarge her horizons and facilitate her to develop as a holistic woman. Through Shug Avery, she learns to fight for herself and gets the skill of inner voice. Shug is a role model for

Celie. Shug helps her to find her own self-esteem. Shug changes her from a demoralized, timid and hopeless girl, bullied and crushed by every male interest, and incapable of resistance, into a woman with self-respect and self-reliance, resisting tyranny, and capable of united action for a larger cause. That was an amazing psychological change. Shug released many of the bonds that imprisoned and disabled Celie's mind. Eminent critic namely Marcellus Blount in her essay, "A Woman Speaks" is of the opinion that Shug Avery is a kind of "the color purple in the field" for Celie, who helps her to become courageous, free and proud of herself. Shug's preferred color appears to be red which implies sensuality and Celie envisions Avery in a royal color, the color purple. Besides, Celie learns from her dear sister Nettie that for survival, resistance and struggle is part and parcel in life. She writes,

...I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive. (Walker, 18)

Both Alice Walker and Toni Morrison state that their work is influenced by African-American music. Walker, in an interview with John O'Brien, talks about the connection of her writing to the musical tradition: "[T]he most I would say about where I am trying to go is this: I am trying to arrive at that place where music already is: to arrive at that unselfconscious sense of collective oneness; that naturalness, that (even when anguished) grace." This reactions elucidates the magnitude of music in *TCP* in which Shug, a blues singer renovates the squalid lives of the Black people with whom she intermingles. She gives off life and lightens up the world around her. Hernton remarks about Shug:

She is a representative of the genre of black blues/jazz women who emerged during the beginning of the twentieth century. Similar to Bessie Smith, Mammy Yancey, Billie Holiday and uncounted others along city streets, in nightclubs and joints and in our prisons and graveyards, Shug Avery is the blues/jazz singer articulating the sorrows, brutalities, endurances and love-fleeting moments of all those women who, like Celie, are shackled down and render inarticulate in this woman-hating world. (Hernton, 19)

Shug Avery is one of the boldest characters we will encounter in the novel. She is very self-assured. She is the epitome of feminist existential freedom. She gives off life and lightens up the world around her.

She inspires Celie to celebrate her existence. She is the one who, like Sofia speaks her mind. Celie is astonished to see Shug as such an independent as well as psychologically and physically

strong woman. Shug's furs and hair denote her bestial force and sensuality that she is the most outrageous female character in the novel. Walker mentions about Shug's candidness who enjoys Albert's companionship without getting married to him:

He say he love her style. He say to tell the truth, Shug act more manly than most men. I mean she upright, honest. Speak her mind and the devil take the hindmost, he say. You know Shug will fight, he say. Just like Sofia. She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what. (Walker, 244)

She is very open in her sexual preference. Her relationship with Celie is not an intricate one. We can't define it in one word like friendships. It is a relationship of a multifaceted kind. Their relationship is that of a lover, of friends, of a patient and of caretaker. Celie-Shug's relationship is very crucial in the novel as it facilitates Celie to constitute her "essential womanist consciousness" and thereby to survive through every oddity. They can be called lovers because Shug introduces her to explore her own body. She introduces Celie to mysteries of the body and sexual experience. She inspires Celie to discover her body and feel its different parts when Shug asks the way her body looks, she retorts immediately as if she has found something beautiful and valuable. It mine, I say. (Walker, 75) Celie is astonished to see that she is beautiful. Celie conveys her authentic affection and feelings for Shug in the following words:

I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia - or like she mama. (Walker, 51)

What we have found here is that the theme lesbianism becomes an important aspect of 'womanist' theory and praxis, touched upon in the text through the bonding between Shug and Celie. As a matter of fact, lesbianism is seen in Black writings as bulwarks against sexism as well as racism. But this theme is not directly explored in the text. So this text can not be regarded as a lesbian text. Initially, Celie doesn't have a body of her own. She is not the master of her own body. Her body was owned by someone else. Her body was firstly owned by her stepfather and then by her abusive husband Albert. Now she is the master of her own body. Celie enjoyed the company of Shug Avery, recovers from her psychological trauma and blossoms from the unaccustomed kindness.

It is Shug who teaches several lessons about life to Celie. Celie has seen her photograph, before meeting Shug. The moment she looks at her photograph she utters,

Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge... An now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing. (Walker, 8)

Hence Shug becomes a role model for Celie and a maternal figure that she never had. Shug changes the entire direction of the novel when she comes to live with Albert and develops an intimate relationship with Celie. Carmen Gillespie mentions about the womanist view of Shug in the following way:

Shug's occupation as a blues singer foregrounds the ways in which she fulfils this role in Celie's life. She provides Celie with the means, the vocabulary and the methodology with which to find and sing her own song, her truth, her self-worth and her desires. (Gillespie, 63)

Shug is a singer and she is a fiercely independent woman. The reason behind her independence is that she earns lots of money through her singing and she goes to places like Tennessee where Celie could never dream of going. Shug is the kind of woman who travels by car. Another woman Sophie is the kind of woman who goes anywhere she wants by the train. They could travel unaccompanied. They are the kind of independent women. Celie since she lacks that courage and confidence, she doesn't think it is possible that she could travel so far. When Shug dedicates a song to Celie she feels proud and elated. Celie says that for the first time somebody made something and named it after her. Actually, Celie doesn't have an identity. It is Shug who stimulates Celie's yearning for identity by singing a song just written for her. As Celie appreciatively remarks:

First time somebody made something and name it after me. (Walker, 70)

There is a particular part of the story when Celie comes to know from Shug that Mr _____, her husband has been hiding for years, the letters Nettie has been sending to Celie. When Celie comes to know that Albert is hiding the letters sent by her sister, she even wants to murder him. It is only Shug Avery who tells her not to do so. Shug tells her she should think of Nettie and also of her (Shug). Shug states,

Me, Celie, think about me a little bit. Miss Celie, if you kill Albert, Grady be all I got left. I can't even stand the thought of that. (Walker, 130)

Shug gives Celie a very special notion of God. In this regard, we can say that the role of religion in the life of the African American woman is also very significant and how it helped them to go through this drudgery and hardships of life. It is Shug who reverses the pre-conceived notion of Celie about God. Once Shug wants to know from Celie about what she thinks of God. Celie's description of God is that he is a benevolent god but her description is that of a white man with flowing long hair, with blue eyes etc. Shug tells her that she doesn't have to accept God as it is given to her. She can visualize him in any way that she wishes for. So God may be a black man. Christ may be a black man for her. She can believe him as such. In this way, Celie's eyes open to this sort of notion by Shug. She tries to lessen both the physical and psychological suffering of Celie. In one of the letters to Nettie, Celie mentions her conversation with Shug in the following way:

She say, My first step from the old white man [God] was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it. It sort of like you know what, she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh.

Shug! I say.

Oh, she say. God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves'em you enjoys'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like. God don't think it dirty? I ast.

Naw, she say. God made it. Listen, God love everything you love - and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration.

You saying God vain? I ast.

Naw, she say. Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. (Walker, 176-177)

Celie's 2nd letter to Nettie informs her how she has now turned away from the White, patriarchal notion of God. She describes to us how this change happened in her. She informs how after hearing the story of her biological parents, she realized that there was no God. She told Shug,

...the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And acts just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown. (Walker, 173)

She then goes on to say that Shug told her to break out of the male, White notion of God and in its place think of God as neither "he" nor "she" but "it." Shug elucidated to her that God is all in all and all-pervasive. He is there in most of the things we have. Shug says to Celie,

God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it. (Walker, 176)

Shug further tells her that the trees, environment, everything is part of God and enjoying it and feeling connected with the cosmos is the best way she can pray to God. So all through the years, their relationship maintains. And for Celie, it is this woman, women like Sofia; they have become very strong at the end. Shug Avery, Nettie, they are the backbone for Celie. And she is able to find her individuality. And she becomes a much-empowered woman at the end because of such strong female relationships around her. In the end, she leaves Albert and goes. In the novel, we will see when Shug Avery, after she is taken care of by Celie, decides to go back to her own home in Tennessee and it was on the fourth of July. And the reason behind the importance of 4th July here is that 4th of July is Independence Day for America. The reason behind its significance in the novel is that it is the day when Celie finally breaks her past inhibition. She breaks all her past bondage and she emerges as an assertive woman. It is on the day that she tells Albert directly that on his way that she is leaving him and she would have murdered him for hiding the letters. Everyone is surprised to see the change in Celie's character. It is on that day that Shug also announces that Celie is coming with her. She takes Celie with her.

Celie's newly found apprehension of the interconnectedness of the whole lot in the world enlightens her to speak up for herself, usurping her vindictive husband's vocal and corporeal authority over her. In this case, Annette Van Dyke points out:

It is the responsibility of individuals to use carefully the power of words to activate selectively the power in everything using their understanding of relationships.
(Van Dyke, 44)

Walker puts lots of stress in all her novels about how her woman characters have suffered and have emerged and empowered after so much exploitation. So female assertiveness is one of the predominant portions of the text. Because of her years of exploitation, Celie regarded herself as a person of low esteem, a person without a voice of her own. Celie who is silent all through her life, who talks only to god, by and by her transformation took place with another woman namely Sofia Butler, an indomitable, amazon-like woman. Celie gains a new perspective on life in her relationship with Sofia. When we talk about female assertiveness in the text, the first person that comes to our mind is that of Sofia. Celie is envious of her because Sophia could do which Celie never can imagine doing. Sophie has a mind of her own. She doesn't listen to Harpo. She doesn't stop talking. She doesn't jump every time, she is ordered to do something. Sophia has grown up fighting with her brother, with her uncle, with her cousin. She reacts that she has had to fight all her life. Sofia tells Celie, 'All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight cousins and my uncles.' (Walker, 39) and very importantly she says that she is strong today because of the bond she has with her sisters. Walker creates Sofia's sisters "all big strong healthy girls, [and who] look like amazons" (Walker 64). She creates this deliberately to make us apprehend that physical might is also essential in women contrary to stereotypes floated by the patriarchy that affirms that women should be delicate. Here we have seen that not only female voices; female relationships also occupy a significant position in the text.

Sofia embodies the black woman who wishes to struggle for her own self-esteem in America. She rebels against the established custom of the society. She breaks the tradition. Since she broke that tradition; she is now seen as rebellious. Sofia's struggle for self-esteem as an individual who is both black and female left a great influence on Celie's psyche. Mr_____ rejects straightforwardly Sofia and Harpo's appeal for their wedding where Sofia does not submit to him and pronounces courageously to Harpo in the following way:

Naw, Harpo, you stay here. When you free, me and the baby be waiting.
(Walker, 32)

In this way, Celie gets lessons about the ways of using militant resistance against any sorts of discrimination in life throughout the course of her life.

The nonconformist behaviour of Sofia is apparent in each and every action taken by her. What we have seen in her character is that she is the woman who had dared to cross her boundaries as a woman, by cuckolding her husband as well as hitting the Mayor back, for which she was sentenced to prison. Sofia is, of course, serves as a warning to other women, who may want to deviate from the position preferred for them by the patriarchal society. She is depicted by the novelist as the kind of woman who is unable to bear beating. She is the kind of woman who hits back when attacked. She is assertive, aggressive and would never allow anyone, not even her husband to step on her toe. This kind of bold, confident, willful, courageous and brave woman is being celebrated by AW.

Another strong and dedicated female character we will come across in the novel is Celie's sister Nettie. She is strong in the sense that she is able to fight for herself against various sorts of hardships. Nettie flees from the difficulties of life that her sister Celie is going through. Nettie is projected as forthright, sincere and opens about her life who fights to assist the African people. After she runs away from Celie's home, Nettie goes to the house of a black missionary who was actually the Samuels. Through Celie, she comes to know that they are the only blacks that they know who are in a sense educated and they really want something good for the black people. We come to know that Nettie goes to their house and begins to stay with them and she educates herself and when she gets the opportunity, she goes to Africa with them for missionary work. Celie's letters are generally focused on self-narration and representation, while Nettie's are largely ethnographic readings of African culture. Nettie's letters to Celie are mostly about what happens in Africa but also her letters are very important because they inform Celie what is happening with the rest of the world. It was Nettie who taught Celie learning and she rejected the sexual advantages of Mr Albert. Nettie is the most educated woman we will come across in the novel. Staying with the Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine, whom Celie once met briefly, she takes the chance to educate herself and takes complete advantage of it in the harsh surroundings of Africa. Whilst Celie comes to know that Nettie is alive, she and Shug, ransacked

all Albert's things and they finally find the trunk where he had hidden Nettie's letters under the trunk. After getting all the letters, Celie halts writing to God. Celie's decision to discontinue her writing to God after learning about Nettie's letters is the begging of her autonomy, a feminist sense of self. She starts corresponding directly with Nettie.

Nettie's arc is also one of self-discovery. Nettie got more years of schooling than did Celie, and Nettie working as a missionary in Africa has seen the world and eventually marrying a kind and intelligent man. Nevertheless, Nettie also realizes that she can balance her independence, and her desire to work, with a loving married life that also includes two stepchildren—Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. The next generation has brought hope for Celie's superior and better future. The arrival of Celie's long lost daughter brings a ray of hope in the novel. It depicts an optimistic and positive event in the novel. In fact, it is the arrival of this extended family on Celie's land at the end of the novel that signals the last stage in both Celie and Nettie's journey of self-discovery. The two sisters have found themselves, and now, as the novel ends, they have found each other.

Sofia has been released from the jail after so much cruelty being inflicted upon her. She comes to have lunch with the family. She and Squeak become good friends. We see how here women like Sofia not complaining about Squeak being Harpo's woman in her absence and we have also seen those women's efforts to support and rescue their victimized sister. Because Sofia has been in prison most of the time and Squeak has brought up her children. Now Squeak wants to go away. She also wants to go with Shug to begin her career as a singer. Sofia tells Squeak that since she has come now, she will be able to take care of her babies from now on. What we have seen here is that women are ready to lend their hand in supporting each other, in whatever dreams that they want to achieve. These female networks are important in strengthening self-assurance in the women leading to self-awareness. Individuals in Walker's novels are alienated from each other till the woman sees the way to end this by sharing, talking, loving and finding manipulative work. In *TCP*, she brings the black women together in a shared sisterhood to memorialize black womanhood in all its richness and grandeur. The bondage between women is also made by the collective experience of women. So they sit together and make the quilt, pattern quilt. This is a repetition kind of action in the novel where women collect together and then make something. This indicates the starting of female bonding that Walker emphasizes in her novels. If

we read books of Chinua Achebe and other writers, we will see even in *Things Fall Apart*, activities like the gathering of the crops, community festivals are all-pervasive. It is more of a kind of communal activity. That is how bondage is made and how women share their experience, shares their stories which they may not be able to do with the man. So making the quilt, making a pattern is another custom. It has a slave history behind it where the slaves are not able to buy good dresses for themselves.

Walker's projection of quilts and quilting play a vital role in *TCP* as both the product and the process to provide a passage for thwarted energies. It outlines a family's history by counting its forsaken garments and effect meeting between characters. The pieces of a quilt, like individuals in a society, uphold their authentic identities while working as parts of something else. In her interview with Claudia Dreifus, Walker speaks:

What I'm doing is literally trying to reconnect us to our ancestors. All of us. I'm really trying to do that because I see that ancient past as the future, that the connection that was original is a connection; if we can affirm it in the present, it will make a different future.

In an instance, Celie tells Squeak that she should ask Harpo to call her by her actual name Mary Agnes. Later on, we see Harpo calling her by that name. In the incident following Squeak's visit to the prison, when Harpo tries to tell the family about what happened to Squeak in the prison, she tells him to "shut up" confirming that she would intend to tell her own story. It is on the very day, Squeak also in a way finds her voice. She tells Harpo that she is not Squeak, she is Mary Agnes. So her name is her identity. She asserts that by refusing to listen to her derogatory name Squeak, by refusing to answer to the name Squeak. So that incident in the novel is also very important which alters the life of the characters.

These are a few of the very important female characters that we will see. Each of the female characters in a sense challenging the existing system, challenging patriarchy, challenging dehumanization, challenging sexual assault, challenging even the existing system in the South that of white authority like Sophia has done. And each comes out at the end with a voice of their own. So voice as we know someone hears us, we are visible. Unless someone acknowledges us, we are invisible. So the absence of voice until now for Celie was as equal as Celie being invisible. Nobody acknowledged her. No one asks her what she wants; no one asks her how she is. When she finds her voice, she is visible. And she is able to fulfill her own needs. So finally the voice is equal to making a space for herself and this is what Walker thinks very important

and it has to be told in stories. Otherwise, these kinds of characters are also absent in the history of American literary tradition. Particularly if we read African narrative about the slaves these kinds of characters are absent for her. So what Walker does is she is breaking the canon, she is breaking the traditional space of woman. She is delimiting the space of women and is opening up different spaces for women.

The text is also Afro-centric and a very important part of any African society because what Walker is trying to do here is she is not only trying to dig out her African heritage or her African past. But she is also trying to give voice to all those history that has still not been narrativised. She is trying to give voice to that. In a sense, this book also Walker's own experience of finding her voice.

True novels, even when most pessimistic and bitter, arise out of an impulse to celebrate human life. (Ellison, 161)

Beloved by TM and *TCP* by AW are undoubtedly 'true novels' in the sense proposed by Ralph Ellison. From the forgoing discussion, it is to be admitted that by giving such close attention to the harrowing life of all the characters projected in the novels, Morrison and Walker's novels point to the necessary recovering and creativity of black women in trying to make lives for themselves and their families amid damage and disaster.

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CHAPTER V

Conclusion

It's in literature that true life can be found. It's under the mask of fiction that you can tell the truth. (Xingjian)

When it comes to the writings of both Morrison and Walker, the above-mentioned quotation is quite apt as they are seen telling the untold as well as unspeakable tale through the medium of fiction. *Beloved* by Morrison and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker are all about the unpleasant African- American women's experience. When these novels came out, they came out with vigour for advocacy of the emancipation, liberation and empowerment of women. These novelists try to give a voice to the long historically silenced men and women. Besides Morrison and Walker, other writers such as Maya Angelou, Zora Neale Hurston also highlighted this aspect in their writings. Along with female voice and emancipation of women, two sub-themes such as female assertiveness and female relationships are seen run parallel in both the novels. With the publications of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, we are introduced to another major aspect of Charles Darwin's theory – 'survival of fittest'. We have seen in both the novels the survival of women through years of racism, sexism, mistreatment, psychological repression etc. By raising their voices, they are seen moving from the margins to the centre, and thus they are seen recovering from their subaltern position. Most of the Black women writers including Morrison and Walker focus on predicaments happening from the intersections of race and gender and how women endeavour hard to gain respect and dignity amidst the flashpoints of this intersection. "Surviving whole" also, therefore, becomes a corollary to this.

When published, *Beloved* aroused storms of protest and reactions. The novel is in the genre of the slave narrative. The slave narrative is all about an account of the life of a fugitive slave, either written or orally related by the slave personally. Until the 19th century, there was not much publication of slave narrative. But today we will find numerous slave narratives either in the form of books or in the form of movies. These are the voices that have been historically silenced. If we go through some of the earliest slave narratives like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, we will find that these slave narratives are written

from the standpoints of the white. Since they are written from white's point of view, they failed to portray the true picture of slavery.

The title entitled *Beloved* though suggests the significant role of Beloved; it signifies much more than that. *Beloved* is not just about Beloved. *Beloved* is about Denver also. In some insensibility Morrison wants to project Denver as the central character. Beloved is the typological representation of all those children that mother's had to part from and the children who are forced to part away from. Beloved is also symbolic of the past. In this case, Morrison has made the projection of the theme of resurrection here. Beloved is the resurrected past. She is the past that has been brought back to life. Beloved also corresponds to that past that the African American has voluntarily forgotten. As a symbol of the past, Beloved represents all those anonymous, unknown and unidentified victims of slavery.

We see that in the opening of the novel, *Beloved* doesn't emerge physically. It was the spirit of the child that emerges in the starting part of the novel. Paul D chased away the spirit later on. Afterwards, she is described as having been coming out from the water as an eighteen-year-old woman. Her physical manifestation is both a kind of rebirth and a past that is called back to life by the passion of the living. Sethe ad infinitum makes the presence of the past felt in the text through her remembrance. She negotiated with Beloved. She tries to explain to Beloved the reason for what she has done in her past.

Beloved is in a tradition of the African American folk narrative where we have the spirit of the dead child coming back to haunt the present. Morrison here in this novel follows the African American tradition of oral narrative where we mostly found shared stories. In the text itself we will see that after the arrival of Paul D by chance in the house 124 where Sethe and Denver are staying, they talked about their life in Sweet Home. They also talked about the stories related to Sweet Home. These kinds of stories were a part of their tradition where women sit together and share their stories.

Walker's novel *The Color Purple* tells the story of the young African American Celie's abuse. What was so fascinating about Walker's *TCP* is the degraded language that Celie used in her letters to her sister. As the novel unwound through her frustrating and frustrated letters to her sister, readers followed the same process in untangling the narrative. By the end of the horrendous story, Celie had experienced a gratifying lesbian relationship, had learnt to stand on

her own feet. In her almost uneducated English, Celie had found her own version of the American dream.

If we go through the novel *TCP*, we will find that both violence and suffering in *TCP* are typically shown as part of a greater cycle of the tragedy taking place both on the family level and on a broader social scale. Celie is raped by her stepfather and beaten by her husband, only to have Shug Avery interfere on her behalf. Sophia is severely beaten to death by white police officers after hitting the Mayor back. Nettie is almost raped by her stepfather and by Mr _____, and she escapes with the purpose of defending herself. Harpo tries to have dominance over Sofia, his first wife, and he beats Squeak until she leaves him for another man Grady. These cycles of violence are repeated across the South: Celie's biological father and uncles were assassinated by whites envious of their successful business, and there is always the threat that, if black people disturb too much for their privileges, they will be struck down by the white people who have control over both the local and state government.

In the case of Africa, also, this violence happens within the local culture as we have seen in the Olinka tribe and in the relation between whites and blacks. Men in the Olinka village have complete control over their wives, and a scarring practice takes place for all women going through eternally, leaving their faces permanently marked. The white British rubber traders who take over the Olinka land finish up butchering many innocent people in the village, with no concern for the humanity or traditions of the Olinka, who have lived there for several years. But in spite of all this violence and suffering, there is a ray of hope in the novel: the hope that Celie and Nettie might be reunited. It is this hope that, ultimately, prevents the cycle of violence, at least within Celie's family, and facilitates the reunion of several of the family members in Georgia at the novel's end.

Walker concludes the novel *TCP* with "I thank everybody in this book for coming" (A.W., author and medium). With this ending note to the novel, Walker generates a literary tradition in which several black women who were unable to express themselves through writings because of the historical moment of slavery in which they lived, are acknowledged. This is one way she brings together her ancestors who were denied the right to read and write. In *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* she writes:

Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories"
(Walker, 240)

Besides, by associating her writing with magic, Walker is also reaching out to her African-American root which according to Walker goes deeper than any politics, race, or geographical locations. She, therefore, in this case, resembles other women writers such as Bronte sisters, Kate Chopin, Simone De Beauvoir and Doris Lessing. Walker's women characters are resplendent with human feelings and weakness. But what is impressive about them is their striving for a dignified survival against various sorts of suffering. AW initially projects her female character as a sufferer, then she endeavours to assert her status in society and eventually, she gets the victory over various sorts of suffering. This is the peculiarity of Walker's novels. Barbara Christian in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspective on Black Women Writers* pinpoints:

Walker's poetry, fiction, and essays always focus to some extent on the major character's perceptions of their past as crucial to their personal transformation in the present and the possibility of change in the future. (Christian, 72)

By the end, her female characters realize the need for self and have the identification with the present American society. What predominantly differentiates Walker in her role as supporter and chronicler for black women; that is she sees the experiences of black women as a series of movements from the man in their lives to the growing women whose consciousness allows them to have control over their lives. The social conditions thwart them from liberating themselves out of the impossible and cruel situation. Walker's early women are both hapless and helpless, but not the new women who are as aware of themselves as their changed social environment. The vigour gives them the momentum needed to survive. Bettye Parker Smith notes down about Walker's women,

The distinctive feature of these women is the tremendous quality with which they carry their suffering. (Smith, 481)

After developing womanist awareness about their being as marginalized women, they conquer their own differences, resolve differences in their both personal and social lives and come out as strong women competent enough to lead whole lives and encourage wholeness in other women.

If we go through the writings of AW, we will find that the association between her activism and her art is apparent in her writings, as she persistently examines and exposes subjugation. She is an exceedingly fine paradigm of writer-activist. She has voiced particularly against racism as well as sexism. She was dynamically involved in her youth also for the cause of the blacks. So finding a female voice is as much political as it is personal for AW. Walker doesn't simply draw back the curtain of discrimination; she also envisions the transcendence of that discrimination in her writings. This is the reason why it is to be admitted that all of her novels have "happy endings". What this implies about Walker is not that she is unrealistic but rather that she is interested in ways people who have been marginalized can overcome oppression and go to the centre from the peripheral position. By exposing the aspect of violence against women in the African-American society AW has endeavoured to gain the forefront in American fiction. In her works, she has portrayed her woman as a victim of violence; however, she brings off a triumphant transformation from a victim to a fully responsible protagonist. In spite of being a sufferer, her women characters try to assert their status in society.

Walker, like Morrison, tries to dig out her African history in her writings. Hence the text *TCP* in a sense is also Afro-centric. She is trying to write the oral history of her people. Walker can also be defined as a writer of the conventional traditional form of novel writing. And she has excelled in that. This aspect of writings is particularly associated with writers like Walter Scott or E. M. Forster. When she is digging up her Afro-centric past, she is actually using this style of oral literary history. If we go through the masterpiece of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), we will find this sort of culture of oral history.

Walker concludes the novel *TCP* with "I thank everybody in this book for coming" (A.W., author and medium). With this ending note to the novel, Walker generates a literary tradition in which several black women who were unable to express themselves through writings because of the historical moment of slavery in which they lived, are acknowledged. This is one way she brings together her ancestors who were denied the right to read and write. In *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* she writes:

Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories"
(Walker, 240)

Walker is of the estimation that principally three kinds of individuals are missing from American literary tradition. These kinds of people can be classified under the following heads-

- a) Firstly, women who have been either subjugated or marginalized and who live a lonesome and desolate life.
- b) Secondly, the women who are psychologically disturbed, especially because of the cultural hostility as we have seen in Tashi's case from the Olinka community in Africa in *TCP*.
- c) Thirdly, women who have undergone a great deal of suffering and emerge as empowered towards the end.

Patriarchal supremacy is the root cause of the subjugation of women. For that reason, the oppression, suppression and subjugation of black women should be stopped. In order to conquer the mountain of both sexism and racism the women must come collectively as a group, this fact is powerfully promoted by the entire black feminists, mostly by TM and AW in their novels. If not a woman assists another woman, men will take a distinct advantage. As a lonely suffering woman, the black woman would be compelled to give in one way or the other, to the pressure.

In their writings, Morrison and Walker strongly recommend female bonding as a means of conquering the mountain of sufferings. If not men, at least women can comprehend the dilemma of their own sisters. They ought to be the ones to assist each other and identify their own difficulty and dilemma.

The next initiative which AW and TM put forward through their writings is that once women take up the step against violence towards them man will automatically follow and be afraid of her as we have seen in the case of Mr. ___ in *TCP* and the schoolteacher in *Beloved*.

Having drawn deeper into both the novels we will find that both the novels open up a new visit for the black woman. The black woman, who had been leading her life on bended knees and back, stands up straight in opposition to the violence and takes up the challenges of forming her life according to her own wish and convictions. In this novel, women cover universal issues like self-awareness and self-realization. Her female protagonist rises up phoenix, like from the ashes of self-pity and deprivation to become a rebel and a fighter. The black woman is seen fighting against all the severe conditions for the welfare of herself and her family.

As a matter of fact, in a patriarchal world man is considered as the provider for the family as well as the chief of the households. But a close reading of both the texts shows that women are reversing this notion. All the patriarchal notions are in fact questioned in the novels. The women are seen reversing the power relations, they are seen reversing the rules determined by the patriarchal society, they are seen challenging patriarchy, as well as they are seen even challenging the existing notion of patriarchy. They are seen placing their views which is a very big thing in patriarchy. Earlier they had no place to place their views. These two novels are all about the women who have come out and empowered after so much exploitation. Morrison and Walker's marginalized voices in this way metamorphosed into a certain degree. They are seen trying their level best for their rights, liberty, equality, dignity and identity in the society. In the long run of both the novels, women are seen as independent, who like to make their own decision and who like to have a room of their own.

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