

**Quest for Moral Ecstasy: A Study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*****DR. SANTOSH KUMARI**Professor, Department of English & Foreign Languages  
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**ABSTRACT:** *Walker's celestial vision is subtly weaved through an artistic elaboration of rebellious responses, and the presence of the author is often felt through an undercurrent of an outrageous struggle against antihuman forces. As an artist, Walker does not dictate moral verdict, and her aversion for escapist attitude is aesthetically conveyed through real life situations. A state of moral ecstasy emerges when cosmic dynamism and image of God is transmitted through the constructive thinking of mutual trust and endurance.*

**Keywords:** *Ecstasy, Spiritual Regeneration, elevation, transformation*

**SPIRITUAL REGENERATION**

Walker's fiction seems committed to creativity, mutuality, freedom and harmony. The artistic perspective and human values cannot be torn apart as moral ecstasy emerges only when instruction and delight are intermingled. Motivated by an unimaginable trust in the power of resistance and persistence of love, Walker repeatedly expressed reverence for the caring hands of earthly mother that nurture emotional harmony, universality and oneness. Walker questions the validity of our outdated dedication to conventional concept of God, and also warns that if Christianity does not communicate solidarity, spirituality and morality, there may be a dead end of the boons of Holy Grace. Her neopagan spirit of Christianity indeed, dares to confront hypocrisy and treachery, and signals a new era of tolerance and human bonding. Though most of Walker's famous novels like *The Third Life of Grange Copland*, *Meridian*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, reveal the darkest moments of utter frustration and oppression, but the ethical tones of spiritual regeneration always seem bubbling and enlightening the reader. As Townes states, "The hope that Walker presents us with is that we may well, if we chose to seek the spirit, have the will to dare the injustices and stereotypes co-created ourselves in a liberative image of God" (103).

Traditional Christianity, in which Walker was raised, is no more relevant and desirous. Spirituality as Walker defined, is rooted to her organic relationship to the earth and elevation of human mind. In “The Only Reason You Want to go to Heaven is that You have been Divine Out of Your Mind, ” Walker writes, “In day to day life I worship Earth as a God, representing everything and Nature as its spirit” (ALS 9). Similarly in *The Same River Twice*, her book on the writing of *The Color Purple*, Walker asserts, “It is my asserted habit as a born again pagan to lie on the earth in worship. In this; I imagine I am like my pagan African and Native American ancestors” (25). Walker seems committed to “four irrevocable directives” of World-Spirit. In 1993, the parliament of the World’s Religions pledged itself to remain committed to non-violence and respect to all life; solidarity and tolerance in all spheres of life; truthfulness and integrity in all engagements; and equal participation of both sexes of male and female on all fronts. Walker’s unflinching faith in benevolent humanity inspired her “consciously embracing every glowing soul who wanders within our reach” (ALS, 146). Walker joyously writes “We have a beautiful mother. Her green lap immense. Her brown embrace eternal. Her blue body every thing we know.”(HBB, 460). However, what we urgently require is the manifestation of a diligent introspection of ‘inner self’ that must be kept secure of vicious thoughts and satanic actions as inner transformation and positive upgradation of ethical values is not possible without reverence for humanistic tenets. Dedicated to the welfare of human society, Walker strongly rejects the misleading codes of institutionalized religion that restrict human growth. She fearlessly assails the derogatory religious dictates, and reinforces the need of compassion, forgiveness, righteousness and moral ecstasy.

## RESISTANCE

Walker’s commitment to the principles of justice and enlightened participation in life imparts depth and complexity even to those characters who appear to be passive and simple. She condemns the state of self-denial particularly observed in juxtaposition with the norms of humanitarian outlook. The spirit to fight back brutality is always bubbling under the current of silent suffering. Walker’s treatment of such natural reaction to the ordeals of life, reveals her determination to resist the degradation of marginalized sections of society. Her concept of spiritual regeneration and moral ecstasy seems best illustrated in her Pulitzer Prize winning

epistolary novel *The Color Purple*. Celie, the protagonist in the novel emerges truly heroic, courageous and enviable only when she kicks back her oppressors and struggles to honour her integrity and wholeness. Her predicament has to be ended. She is strikingly transformed and looks a self-reliant challenging woman. Celie, who remained non-existent and vulnerable to sexual and emotional assault and is forced to bear injustice, is resolved to fight back. Her silent submission to her sexist and racist victimizers, may never endorse a correct answer to hostile forces. Walker is highly critical of the patriarchal system that valorizes the subject-object disharmony and dichotomy in human relationships. Violence directed towards women is prefigured, well calculated and institutionalized. Walker's incisive demonstration of the horrible molestation of women's body and soul deeply disturbs the reader's mind. Celie, in the novel *The Color Purple* is repeatedly raped, and twice impregnated by Alphonso, her father. Her children are forcibly taken away and sold somewhere by Alphonso. Her tearing state is so heart-rending that she writes :

*Dear God, He act like he can't stand me no more. Say I'm evil an always up to no good. He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kilt it. I think he sold it to a man and his wife over Monticello. I got breasts full of milk running down myself. He say Why don't you look decent. Put on something. But what I'm supposed to put on? I don't have nothing. .... He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got something in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them. Maybe cause my mama cuss me you think I kept mad at her. But I ain't. I felt sorry for mama (5,7).*

## TRANSFORMATION

However, reading the novel seems visiting the intimate domain of heroic women who gradually discover the innate wisdom that propels them to seek a life of honour beyond willful servitude. *The Color Purple* unravels the seemingly mundane events of Celie's world through her letters to God. Celie sent away Nettie from the reach of voluptuous Alphonso and Albert, and the only communication between the two sisters is letter writing. But Nettie's letters are slipped by Albert and Celie is torn with the apprehension of losing her sister forever and ever. The novel

reaches at an important juncture when Celie first recovers the missing letters of Nettie. Nettie writes :

*I know you think I am dead. But I am not. I been writing to you too, over the years, but Albert said you'd never hear from me again and since I never heard from you all this time, I guess he was right. Now I only write at Christmas and Easter hoping my letter get lost among the Christmas and Easter greetings, or that Albert get the holiday spirit and have pity on us. .... But if this do get through, one thing I want you to know, I love you, and I am not dead..There is so much to tell you that I do not know, hardly, where to begin- and anyway, you probably won't get this letter, either. I am sure Albert is still the only one to take mail out of the box (107).*

The discovery signals a new narrative and introduces Celie from writer to an alert and enthusiastic reader. She resolves to reach at a concrete conclusion and marches for independence and self-possession. Walker vehemently opposes discrimination against women. Her major characters display moral courage, resolute will and confidence, and resist social and economic disparities. Moral ecstasy in Walker's novels evidently celebrates humanistic values. The devilish modes of domestic violence, sexism, racism and imperialism which are realistically projected on the canvas of Walker's literary caliber, can not be alienated from the values of higher concern which are inherently imbibed in human nature, and must be nourished to encounter and defeat the devilish tendencies of disharmony. To keep secure her newly constructed independence and integrity, Celie leaves Albert with the parting words, "You low down dog is what's wrong, I say. It is time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome that I need. You took my sister Nattie away from me, I say and she was the only person love me in the world. ...Mr\_\_\_\_\_startup from his feet, look at Shug, plopp back down again. He look over at me. I thought you was finally happy, he say. What wrong now?" ( 180). Celie's careful nursing of Shug who had been ailing from a womanly disease, wins her Shug's love and friendship. The two grow intimate and share their miseries.

Celie's body is now her own asset and Celie is to derive abundance of pleasure and complete fulfillment out of it. The new experience initiates her to the most confident and cultivated state. No more scared of the sexual onslaughts of Alphonso and Albert, Celie firmly asserts, "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook... But I'm not here it...It's mine, I say"(187). Celie leaves Albert and secures financial independence by earning money through sewing pants. By and by she becomes a business tycoon and her company is branded as the most desirous one.

Walker's spiritualist vision is most fully realized in *The Colour Purple*. Albert who surpasses all extremities of ignominious lechery and derives sadistic pleasure by tormenting his wife, is emotionally regenerated. Celie was cursed by Albert as "being evil and always up to no good...You ugly, you skinny, your shape funny, you too scared to open your mouth...you black, you pore....you a woman, Goddam.., you nothing at all" (187). By and by Albert is awakened towards higher thinking and moral discipline. From a complex and hardened individual, Albert is astonishingly transferred to a caring husband. He assumes to share a platonic reconciliation with Celie when Shug Avery temporarily leaves him. He seems to perceive a world anew where decency and delicacy dominate. True spirituality as Sam Keen stated "defined the ultimate reality\_\_\_\_\_God as love\_\_\_\_\_an erotic vision" (26). Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* also discovers new dimensions of human relationships. Through her creativity as an artist, Shug celebrates freedom of her body and spirit. This free play and realization of self-dignity is experienced through body language and music. "Shug develops the holistic consciousness of the Christian mystics\_\_\_she realizes that God is inside each person, people come to Church to share, not find God"(Bush 103).Walker clearly suggests that to be in tune with the inner rhythms, and inner harmony, physical freedom has to be acquired as it is inextricably related to the realization of one's potentials and wholeness.

## PLATONIC LOVE

Walker's spiritualist concerns would not exist without her belief that love, both platonic and physical, is an act of beautiful intervention and resistance. Celie reflects in finite capacity to suffer. Walker appears to feel sympathy for Celie's sufferings but at the same time she is critical

of her lack of vision and strength, and also evokes critical reactions from her readers. This presentation imparts her characters profound complexity. Walker's portrayal of even those characters that are not articulate and sensitively responsive to their humiliation, leaves a haunting impression on the mind of readers. Walker probes into the causes of pains and pathos in the lives of such characters. Walker also investigates the importance of platonic love through male and female friendship like enjoyed between Hal and Lissie in the Temple of My Familiar. Many of Walker's poems such as "Did This Happen To Your Mother?" "Johann and Forbidden Things," articulate the romantic relationships that have to undergo brutal and revolutionary struggle. Love exists prominently in her poems and fiction, and also defines the themes of brutality and forgiveness, loss and triumph. All her novels interrogate the scope of regeneration and redemption within a love relationship that longs to revive the quest for growth. Loving and forgiveness is prominent in Walker's writings, indicates a struggling self passing through the hazardous journey of establishing identity. Sharing a platonic reconciliation with the regenerated and caring husband Albert, Celie writes to Nettie, "I mean when you talk to him now he really listens and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said, Celie I am satisfied this time I ever lived on Earth as natural man. I feel like a new experience" (221). Thus the affirmation of the self in Walker's novels is not restricted to female existence or to the African American Community, it extends by all means to the well being of both male and female. Her perception and presentation both leave a stirring effect

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