

NURTURE NATURE: AN ECOFEMINIST EXPLORATION OF ALICE WALKER'S *NOW IS THE TIME TO OPEN YOUR HEART*

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Abstract

In an epoch of escalating environmental exploitation, the existence of humanity is in crisis. The prosaic and disillusioned reality is that humans are estranged from the non-human world leading to the exploitation of nature. Traditional ethical perspectives are however anthropocentric and the other tellurians are quite often uncared for and unwept over. A strong parallelism exists between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature. Patriarchy considers women and nature as objects to be subdued and controlled. *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* explores Alice Walker's perception neither strictly feminist nor environmentalist but a combination of these two aspects, namely the ecofeminist. This paper offers an ecofeminist reading of Alice Walker's *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*.

Keywords: environment, exploitation, patriarchy, non-humans, ecofeminism, interdependence

Ecofeminism is an active and academic movement that sees significant connections between the denigration of women and the degradation of the environment. The term ecofeminism coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, refers to an ecological revolution lead by women. Prominent ecofeminist, Ynestra King hails it as the third wave of feminism. Ecofeminism serves as an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism. Other ecofeminists who plead for the preservation of the unique ecosystem for the posterity are Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Sallie McFague, Luisah Teish, Sun Ai Lee-Park, Paula Gunn Allen, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren and Andy Smith. In one of the first ecofeminist books, *New Woman/New Earth*, Ruether (1975, p. 204) states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society.

The "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the Eighties" conference held at Amherst (1980) was the first in a series of conferences, followed by "Ecofeminist Perspectives: Culture, Nature, Theory" (1987) and a group called the "National Women's Studies Association" (1989) was formed. These inspired the growth of ecofeminism. Ecofeminists are in pursuit of a non-dualistic spirituality as panacea to ecological imperilment.

They insist on an earth-based spirituality which promotes the wholeness of body, interrelatedness of life forms and immanence of God in everything.

During the later half of the 20th century there emerged many thinkers trying to rediscover a new religion of the earth. Many of them emphasized on looking beyond God the father and insisted on religious precepts giving rebirth to the ancient religion. This principle accelerated the trend towards reclaiming of the goddess in religious practices that acknowledge earth as a conscious and spiritual being. Because, the goddess affirms "female power, the female body, the female will and women's bonds and their heritage" (Gaard 1993, p. 306). Many "religions [are] centered on the worship of a male god... keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority, while at the same time legitimating the *political* and *social* authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society" (Gaard 1993, p.306). Orenstein stresses the significance of Goddess spirituality as an important dimension of ecofeminism. She states that the "Goddess symbol also reminds women that our legitimate history has been buried, and that through its excavation we are learning how short the patriarchal period in human history has been in comparison with the 30,000 or more years of matristic history in which goddess-centered cultures flourished in central Europe, Anatolia and the Near Middle East" (Gaard1993, p. 306). While some thinkers believe that "ecofeminism is the bridge between political theory and the goddess spirituality movements" (Gaard 1993, p.306), Orenstein claims that "Goddess spirituality does not separate heaven and earth, spirit and matter, human and animal; [it is] a spirituality that images the earth as sacred, and the Goddess as the Great Mother of all life" (Gaard 1993, p.306).

Among the ecofeminist writers of the 20th century Alice Walker, born in a sharecropper family at Eatonton, Georgia, is a renowned spokesperson for the conservation and protection of the environment. The love for her native land has influenced a great deal of her writings. Enchanted by nature Walker observes in her introduction to "Anything We Love can be Saved" (1997, p.xxii), "My activism-cultural, political, spiritual-is rooted in my love of nature and my delight in human beings". Her involvement in the black freedom struggle serves as an impetus for her current global activism. In the chaotic ebb and flow of human affairs, Walker sees writing as a way to correct wrongs that she observes in the immediate world around her. In one of her interviews she admits "I realized how much I loved it, and how hard it would be not to see the sunrise every morning the snow, the sky, the trees, the rocks, the faces of people, all so different and it was during this period that all things began to flow together" (John O' Brien 1994, p.58). In the same interview she affirms, "I believe in listening-to a person, the sea, the wind, the trees, but especially to young black women whose rocky road I am still travelling". Her own titles like *The Color Purple*, *Revolutionary Petunias*, *In Search Of My Mothers' Garden*, *Horses Make A Landscape Beautiful*, *The Same River Twice*, reveal that she is an ardent lover of nature. She has never concealed her love of nature, which was one of the reasons why she did not commit suicide.

Walker's fiction is suffused with a concern for the environment. She suggests that a critique of patriarchy leads to the survival of the earth and black women. Walker questions and deconstructs the framework of patriarchal power in its various forms, including organized religion and cultural practices. Her goal is to reestablish older spiritual beliefs that embrace female sexuality and venerate nature. It is through Shug in *The Color Purple* Walker instigates a new understanding of ecofeminism. Shug

represents the African animism. She realizes and makes Celie, the protagonist, realize that God is omnipresent, inside everyone, and people come to church to share and not to find him. God, she tells Celie, "ain't a he or a she, but a It" (Walker 1982, p.202) and explains how this revelation came to her:

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet . . . 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 knew just what it was (Walker 1982, p.203).

The theme of retreat to nature that she exquisitely expresses in *By the Light of My Father's Smile* finds a continuum in her latest novel. "The cathedral of the future will be nature" says Manuelito in *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. Walker persists in writing about these panreligious and pantheistical ideas which find their culmination in her latest novel *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* published in the year 2004. The novel serves as a treatise on nature and shows Walker's anxiety in protecting the planet in peril. Walker dedicates this story to her murdered paternal grandmother, Kate Nelson. Citing the novel as a "memorial to the psychic explorer she might have become," Walker transcends the stereotypical representation of women by choosing to celebrate the perception that women are closer to nature. The novel deals with the story of a woman's spiritual adventure in search of a new life and a quest for self. Kate Talkingtree, the writer protagonist, has always been a wanderer. "Like Elizabeth Taylor, Kate had been married many times. Some of these marriages had been very short" (Walker 2005, p.83). These matrimonial discords make her feel that her life is meaningless.

Kate takes a cathartic trip, a journey down the Colorado River - a journey of identity that re-explores her past and her future, and her close connection to the natural world. On her travels she meets shamans and the mysterious spiritual world of the native Indians. This search leads her to a number of soul-searching journeys that ultimately lead to a truer understanding of herself and others around her. She develops a deep reverence for plants and animals including serpents, moths and bats. She perceives nature in its new dimension and begins to comprehend and appreciate the interconnection that exists between humans and non humans. Happiness comes only when you share and care. Kate learns this lesson and experiences bliss towards the end of the novel.

Kate, who has much in common with her creator, meditates in a hall surrounded by redwood trees. She thought of calling herself as Kate-Nelson-Fir because she loved fir trees. Her mind wanders when her spiritual guru talks about the failure of "hot revolutions" with guns and violence and its own shortcomings. He advises that people should adopt a "cool revolution" introduced by Lord Buddha, twenty five hundred years ago. Kate begins to think and feels that "she had reached an impasse on the Buddhist road" (Walker 2005, p.3). Kate understands that patriarchy is life-corroding. Bereft of unconditional love and marital bliss Kate is disillusioned. The men whom she has met, before Yolo, are self centered and they consider her as a mule. Even her lover Yolo eventually abandons her. Kate hates the patriarchal setup which binds her, and she wants to be a free person. Patriarchy considers women and nature as objects to be subdued and controlled.

In their introduction to "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism" Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (1998, p.2) delineate that "ecofeminism grew out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families and their communities. These struggles are waged against the "maldevelopment" and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations and global capitalism". It is this patriarchal power that is executed against nature and conceives nature as a thing to be devalued and destroyed. Her frustration curbs her creative impulses and she bangs the pen. One of her friends suggests that she should take a break from her mundane life. Totally disgusted with the material world she burns "several hundred-dollar bills just to demonstrate to herself that these items were not the God/Goddess of her life" (Walker 2005, p.12). She is no longer worried about her house and all the things about it that need fixing. In fact, she even contemplates selling it. She is unconvinced of the need to do anything further with her life. The recurring dream of a river signifies her decaying life and serves as a catalyst to go out and find enlightenment.

Kate joins an all-women's group rafting the Colorado. After dreaming of a dry river, she decides to take this as a spiritual clue, embarks on a journey and makes two river-centric spiritual quests. One is the Grand Canyon Colorado and the other is the Amazon. Kate's search for meaning begins here. She looks for enlightenment and yearns to find a way to save planet Earth from the humans who are killing it. River is used as a metaphor of life. "She began to dream each and every night that there was a river. But it was dry. There she'd be in the middle of an ancient forest searching for her life, i.e., the river, and she would find it after a long journey, and it would be sand" (Walker 2005, p. 12). Rivers always have a wider significance in cultural, economical, geographical as well as religious development. In India, rivers are considered god and goddess and are even worshiped among the Hindus. The 'Puranas' or ancient Hindu scriptures affirm that taking a dip in the holy rivers cleanses one of all sins and bestows heavenly blessings. Accelerated by spiritual impulses Kate tries to find answers to her life. She reckons that taking such a purging trip will ameliorate her from the wreckage of the past.

Most people are attracted to vast expanses of water. Similarly, Kate's spiritual quest is connected to water. With the fluidity of the river water, Kate feels a change in her life too. The water journey which Kate sets out removes her from the restraints of the civilized society and makes it feasible for her to explore the strange world of plants and animals and gives a new beginning and a hope for a better future. Water has a central place in many religious traditions and practices. According to the Christian belief, Baptism is a symbol of liberation from the oppression of sin. Even Hindu philosophy considers water as a medium to attain spiritual enlightenment. Reverence of water and the integration of it with the everyday life is revealed in most of the Hindu rituals. Water has cleansing power. Most of the holy places of the Hindus are centered or located on the banks of the rivers, seashores and mountains. Large Hindu temples still have temple tanks at the center. It is a conventional belief that one must take a dip in the temple tank before offering prayers to the presiding deities. Moreover, the Hindus have a firm conviction that water acts as a purifier, life-giver and destroyer of evil. Many Hindu rites and rituals bear standing testimony to this concept. The Hindus vehemently believe that taking bath early in the morning removes the external as well as internal contamination from the body. Even the deities in the temples are bathed everyday with pure water. This water is considered to be sacred. And it is called "Theertha" or blessed offering to the devotees. Many of the rituals that are conducted to bring prosperity

in one's life, starts with water and the water is collected in a small brass or silver pot called "Kalasa". Kalasa symbolizes the Universe and forms an indispensable element of many of the rituals. Again "Tarpana" is the act of pouring water through the hands with the use of sacred grass as a symbolic gesture of acknowledgement, thanking and pleasing Gods, sages, and forefathers.

In some significant ways, Kate's spiritual journey can be related to the Hindu way of life. According to Hinduism, there are four stages in an individual's life. They are the *brahmacharya* (student) or the period of training, *gaurhastya* (householder) or the phase as a householder, *vaanaprastya* (forest dweller) or the period of retreat for loosening social ties and *samnyaasa* (renoucement) or the period of renunciation and liberation (Radhakrishnan 1983, p.59). In the Vaanaprastya tradition, a person between 48 to 72 years, departs to the forest to prepare himself for a true life. Kate aged 54, is ready to take a Spartan existence, true to the Vaanaprastya tradition. She carries only a backpack. She pursues on this journey to understand her own inner self. Identifying oneself with sentient and non-sentient forms, the bio diversity of the primeval forest the narrow egoistic self expands and emerges as a new being. The retreat to the Colorado River and the Amazon forest makes Kate to reconceptualize herself. Now her journey is only with women. Walker expresses her ecological sensibility that only women dream of rivers and are distressed that they are dry. Walker strikes a chord when she states Yolo had no such dreams and he is not instigated by any inner impulse. The world of dreams which is experienced by Kate does not exist for him. Walker subtly echoes Karen Warren's conceptual connection that women are closer to nature. Oppressive patriarchal conceptual frameworks perpetuate the twin dominations of women and nature. Distressed by marriage and the patriarchal pangs Kate endeavours to find recluse in nature.

The moment Kate reaches the Grand Canyon, Colorado; she feels "her bird nature being activated" (Walker 2005, p.19). And she muses on "who would she be at the end of this journey?" (Walker 2005, p.20). As the boat moves, she feels herself slipping into the surrealness of a life lived. "The savage rushing of the river seemed to be inside her head, inside her body" (Walker 2005, p.22). Walker creates a conception of human subjectivity to nature and rejects the idea of objectivity. Kate experiences peace when she is amidst nature.

Kate regurgitates all the words from her life, her memories of past marriages especially bitter experience of her first marriage. She expresses her desire to live alone to her husband while hiking in the mountain. The moment he hears this he raises his hand to strike her. It is not out of the love he has for his wife but he will be bereft of a person to satiate his carnal desires. Just then Kate sees a couple "the man chubby and talking loudly, the woman slender and bit stooped" (Walker 2005, p.34). Walker vividly portrays the burden which a woman carries both physically and psychologically in the lines that "man was carrying just a notebook while the woman suffered the burden of carrying both their backpack" (Walker 2005, p.34). Kate now feels sympathetic not only for that lady but also for womenfolk in general. She feels her kinship with all women who initiated divorce. She envisages that she cannot lead a life of drudgery.

When Kate along with her friends Sally, Sue, Margery and Cheryl pass through the petroglyphs she remarks that "there were woman on the planet who were not allowed to show their faces. There were women being stoned, for showing legs or hair" (Walker 2005, p.47). The petroglyphs serve as archetypes of sexism that exhibits the fracturing

trials of the female self under patriarchal society. No sane man could doubt that human beings have to live in relationship; a relationship which is egalitarian and not that of dominance. Walker endeavours to see a society bereft of any kind of domination. Since all kinds of oppressions are interconnected the structure of oppression should be analysed in its totality. Ecofeminists are committed to a re-examination and rejection of all forms of domination. Starhawk asserts that "ecofeminism challenges all relation of domination; that its goal is not just to change who weilds power, but to transform the structure of power itself." (Walker 2005, p.77). Kate decides that it is time to give up her sexual life and enter another: the life of the virgin by sailing new seas and in a land inhabited by forests. Even after her return to her male lover, African-American artist Yolo she is determined to live as a virgin so that she can continue her spiritual explorations.

Kate navigates into a new world of non humans where she finds amity, all pervasive. Whether it be "wild chamomile" or "magic mushroom" Kate starts seeing them as friends. She decides not to worry about piranhas or crocodiles. One of the ecofeminist principles is reconceptualizing the human and their relation to the non human natural world in a non patriarchal way. Kate narrates her experience with magic mushroom which has helped her overcome the grief. Walker exposes the unforeseen repercussions of organized religion and redefines paganism that leads to a spiritual revisioning. Paganism encompasses a diverse community which includes Shamans, Wicca's and Heathens. But they all share an ecological vision in the spirituality of the natural world. The recognition of the divine in nature is at the heart of the pagan belief. A number of studies and research reveal that there is a rapid increase in the number of people trying to gain knowledge of the past and distant cultures. Pagan philosophies, which venerate nature is polytheistic and people begin to see them as sophisticated contributions to contemporary spirituality. Finding an ally in the ecological and feminist movements of the 1960s, these pagan philosophies appeal to eco-activists who also perceive Nature as sacred and recognize the Great Goddess as Mother Nature. Unlike the Judeo-Christian religion, paganism does not believe in any hierarchy or sect above and apart from nature. It recognizes divinity to be immanent, woven through every aspect of the living earth. Its approach is mainly mythopoeic and recognizes that spiritual truths are better understood by means of allusions and symbols rather than through doctrines.

Walker appeals to her readers to reimagine their faith and embrace a more tolerant view towards the world's fast growing fascination towards pagan practices. Again in *Anything We Love can be Saved* Walker defines pagan as a person "of the land, country dweller peasant whose primary spiritual relationship is with Nature and the Earth" (Walker 2005, p.17). Walker resurrects the ancient forms of spirituality as well as paganism as means to restore human bonds with nature. Pamela Smith (1998), in her article on ecospirituality addresses Walker's views that "true religion and vibrant spirituality require the renunciation of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the adoption of more panreligious and pantheist sensibilities".

Soon Kate is off on another quest, this time to the Amazon rain forest. This time she hopes to heal herself through trances induced by the grandmother's medicine *yage*, administered by a young Amazonian shaman, Armando Juarez. *Yage*, also known as "Ayahuasca" to the native people is a hallucinogenic beverage that has curative powers and engenders spiritual transformation and healing. The indigenous people consider it as a religious sacrament and faith. They believe that the poison in one's body comes

out when one throws up after drinking ayahuasca. The concept of indigenous medicine of Africa is similar to that of the Indian indigenous medicine, 'Ayurveda'. *Ayur* means duration or span of life and *Veda* means impeachable knowledge. Due to its divine origin it is also called the "medicine of God". This indigenous medicine not only cures illness and alleviates the pain but also preserve health thereby ensuring a happy long life. It is a holistic medicine which insists that if one needs to maintain good health one needs to nurture the *sarira* (body) *manas* (mind) and *atman* (self). As opposed to the conventional drugs the traditional medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani are based on natural foods and herbs and most importantly they are never tested on animals. They treat the entire body not its individual parts because they believe that the body parts are completely interrelated and interdependent. Naturopaths believe that human body has an innate healing ability to ward off and combat disease. As a holistic approach they emphasize health restoration as well as disease treatment without surgical procedures.

Walker's pantheist sensibilities utilize mythology as a means to introduce spiritual archetypes that bring in elements that have been disregarded and rejected by racist and patriarchal societies. The concept of the Grandmother, as a spiritual archetype, is employed to exemplify the interweaving of the natural world with the metaphysical. Grandmothers are ethno botanists because of their amazing knowledge about plants and their medicinal values. Probably, they must have learned about the healing powers of herbs by watching sick animals. The Grandmother is portrayed as the oldest being who ever lived, and her essence is "Primordial Female Human Being As Tree" (Walker 2005, p.53) and distinctly feminine. Walker voices her anxiety through Grandmother whom Kate meets during her journey across the Amazon "what you are destroying is your own happiness. Your comfort, which I put so much playful effort into creating. Your peace of mind. Your joy." (Walker 2005, p.80). Anunu states that "what is missing from the world is the Grandmother...there are plenty of grandmothers, little g, but Grandmother, big G, is impossible, some women feel, to find. That is the absence that makes us afraid" (Walker 2005, p.107). It is poignant when the Grandmother speaks to Kate and says, "Abandon any notion that anything you humans do will ultimately destroy me. That is because I am your mother. It is impossible to kill one's mother" (Walker 2005, p.80). Through the wisdom of this Elder Feminine, Walker warns that if she is not honored, violence and destruction will ensue, creating dry rivers and distancing of humans from their own Mother. Walker reclaims the Grandmother archetype as a tool for better living and healing the earth.

Walker explains the dethroning of the mother goddesses by retelling the Mahus myth. The Juedo-Christian traditions have "dethroned the mother goddesses and replaced them with male gods to whom the female deities became subservient" (Merchant 2005, p.202). Miss Lissie in *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989, p.63) explains this systematic dethroning of matriarchal society: "There were ,in the earliest days, raids on the women's temples, which existed in sacred groves of trees, with women and children forced to marry into male-dominated tribes". Walker points out that the sacred feminine has not destroyed "the spirit of Mothering, of Creating, of Blessing and Protecting All- lives within us , and is confined neither to shrines nor to any particular age" (Walker 1989, p.269). Walker reiterates through Aunt Pearlua, who narrates the story of mahus that there was a time when "Mother rule was the dominant way of life" not only in Hawaii but everywhere else. Even in Indian mythology, the sylvan

deity, Durga is considered the Earth Mother. Later, this supreme deity is dethroned and reinvented as the consort of Shiva, the male god.

Pre-Christian cult worshipped mother Goddess. They honored the sacred feminine with their rites and rituals. The Gaia hypothesis shows the sacred feminine as life force from which all other beings sprang. A prominent figure in Greek mythology, Gaia is also honored today by many Wiccans and Pagans as the earth mother. "But the advent of Christianity has overthrown this concept and enslaved women and resulted in the consequent ruination of their children" (Walker 2005, p.129). It is then the Mahus decide that until the women are restored to their rightful place they will live the life of women. So the men live as women by teaching, feeding and taking care of the children just like a mother.

During the journey Kate meets Lalika a black woman in her mid-thirties. She is no longer a plain black woman but a woman of extreme beauty for her skin resembles the earth, hair like trees and eyes look like the deep light of the brown river. Bobinsana, an earth-colored liquid helps Kate to have lucid dreams which connects her to her ancestors and through which she communicates with them frequently. Through the protagonist Kate, Walker perceives the minutiae of nature via the wisdom of the ancestry and their intimate relationship with nature. "We were one with our land and with our sea... We learned what the land and the waters loved: to be cared for, to be interacted with, to be sung to... but now we have lost the intimacy with our motherland" (Walker 2005, p.142). A true understanding of ecofeminism helps a person to value this earth and its manifold wisdom. Janis Birkeland in *Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice* (1993,p.19) defines ecofeminism as "a value system that explores the links between androcentricism and the environmental destruction".

Ancestors are 'timeless people' whom Kate calls as "enslaved ancestors who lived and died miserably" (Walker 2005, p.93). Lori Gruen while making an analysis of the connections between women and nature concludes that "making connections, between the various ways in which oppression operates and between those individuals who suffer such oppression, will allow all beings to live healthier, more fulfilling, and freer lives" (Gruen 1993, p.84). Ancestors provide a certain kind of wisdom, offer guidance and inspiration. Their lives are paradigms of ethical and moral standards. They function as bridges between history and myth because they join the present experience with those of the past. They play a vital role in making the characters understand the true meaning of life and helping them attain spiritual wholeness and regeneration.

Uncle Remus, the ancestor of Kate, illustrates the importance of ancestors and tells her that ancestors are like trees. When a tree dies its work is not over. "It then has the work of decomposing, of becoming soil in which other trees grow. If it is hauled off to a lumberyard and if nothing is left to decompose and nurture the young trees coming up... Disaster!" (Walker 2005, p.100). Man has lost the intimacy with the mother land. Walker resonates in "The Color Purple" this detrimental attitude of westerners towards the Olinka tribes and their worship of the roof leaf. The Wasichus starved the Indians into submissions and forced them to live an impoverished life in their own land. Walker reaffirms this genocidal danger of land deprivation: "The forests were completely exploited. No trees at all are left. They went to Asia, Europe, America. They were made into incense, matchboxes and doodads" (Walker 2005, p.79). Walker articulates her resentment through Hugh that the westerners deprived the Indians by taking their land and water. Infact, some of the first settlers died of dehydration. Man has destroyed

the forest leading to displacement of its indigenous inhabitants. The nonhumans are left homeless. Man sets off to conquer and eat up the earth. Walker poignantly states that devouring everything is in our genes (Walker 2005, p.168). Man starts living in the creature's home yet they are patient with us. Walker highlights the fact that the planet is in peril and the panacea for this pathetic condition is to live in harmony with nature and nurture it. Kate perceives that this journey is about emptying herself of her past. A lot of her past lives come up literally, in vomiting, and there in the depths of the Canyon and the Amazon she understands her real self. She starts concentrating on the inner peace. She begins to feel that it is "inner peace that attracted peace around her" (Walker 2005, p.109). With this approach she feels "sure no creature would bother her" (Walker 2005, p.109). The mission of ecofeminism is to envision a past, present and future proclaims Linda Vance. She firmly believes that an appreciation of the past is imperative to know where we've come from. Without the knowledge of the present, where we are is beyond cognizance and without a vision of the future, progress pauses (Vance 1993, p.126). Definitely Walker believes in the ancestral spirituality that aims at integration of the mind, body and spirit.

Disenchanted with the traditional religion the characters in the novel aspire for a new religion which is based on the religions of the past that insist on the relationship with nature. Through the shamans, kahunas, mahus and the healing rituals, they believe that divinity pervades the world around them and runs through the earth and all its beings. Happiness is doubled when it is shared as Yolo, the estranged husband encounters a transsexual Polynesian shaman, or Mahu, who teaches him the meaninglessness of independence and the value of interdependence just as Kate has realized the truth from the Grandmother. It is expedient to nurture a spiritual connection to maintain good health. Shamanism is often described as a spiritual practice of humanity. Shamanism has been found ever since the dawn of mankind. Its belief and practice can be efficacious in personal growth and healing. The basic tenet of shamanism is that everything has a significant spiritual component. With the advent of industrial revolution and the world being a corporate colony with toxic culture, Shamanism has been pushed to a corner. It is imperative to revive it in order to protect the planet from rapacious exploitation. Shamanism is not a religion but has been attributed a semi-divine status. It is a belief that everything, every person, animal, bird, tree and plant, exists as Spirit in its nature. The Shamans gain knowledge and insight from working with the spirits of nature such as rocks, land, trees and animals. They commune with nature to find plants that heal illness. Years later, these formed the basis for western medical practices.

The thirst for a new religion makes Yolo to rejoin Kate and live a life of meditation. Both Yolo and Kate realize and appreciate the feeling they have for one another and decide to stay together and paint their house blue. Blue is a colour that suggests a space of infinity. Yet the world is in such a bad state and humans have fouled the nest of nature so badly that it can no longer nurture them. Walker's words resound when she comments: "when you witness the peace talks that occur on a daily basis somewhere on earth and you see how far everyone is from peace, and how they get no nearer the longer they talk, well, this gives an indication of the problem" (Walker 2005, p.81). Yolo concludes that the world has never been in worse shape because of global warming and animal extinction. The civilized world has also produced a dehumanizing, superficial popular culture. And so Armando warns the participants of the group therapy to shift their sights onto their own lives and to stay out of popular culture and spend time in

connection with their own interior world. They have to focus on their own uniqueness and spiritual growth.

In *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, Alice Walker, as an ecofeminist and womanist, replicates how people view and worship God. She states: All people deserve to worship a God who also worships them. A God that made them, and likes them. That is why Nature, Mother Earth, is such a good choice (Walker 1997, p.25). Though the black people saw Nature with reverence, beautiful and inspiring, unfortunately, they were labeled pagans due to their connectedness with Mother Earth. Alice Walker shows, as ecofeminists contend, that to end oppression and establish a harmonious world, humans must put into practice the discipline of love, equal rights to existence, and cultivate a sense of place. She rejects an affiliation with the environment that is predicated by fear, domination and the negation of the sacred feminine. Her "Earthcentered, female-reverencing religions" stand in stark contrast to traditional religions that undermine women's rights. Walker expounds upon these aspects in the novel. The novel, replete with its spiritual searches, yoga and meditation, shamanism, medicinal and healing practices highlighted by a neopagan environmental ethic stands out as an ecofeminist novel. It expresses the moral depth of females who act as the "voice of nature" and who help us create a "new national community".

When the population clock ticks past seven billion, with mounting inequalities and growing uncertainty the biggest challenge that lies ahead of us is not a deficit of resources; it is a deficit of trust and love. People are losing faith in everything including religion. Amid this crisis and uncertainty; Walker's writing comes as a healing. According to Walker, love is the key to save the earth, is the way of preventing and solving problems and it binds people together. Walker insists on worshipping Earth as God and Nature as its spirit and this will save mankind from the catastrophe.

"Surely the world can be saved
by all the people
who insist
on love."

--*No One Can Watch the Wasichu*. (Walker 1991)

To live healthier, fulfilling and freer lives one must make connections between the various forms of life and try to live a life of interdependence rather than one of independence. Ecofeminism is a conceptual framework which calls for a new way of living-an essential and urgent call to strengthen the relationships-between humans and non humans. Ecofeminists like Starhawk and Spretnak appreciate nature-based religions, paganism, goddess worship, Native American traditions, and the Wiccan tradition and are drawn to goddess spirituality that appreciates the immanence of God on earth rather than being located in some distant place, i.e. heaven. Spretnak in *States of grace: The recovery of meaning in the postmodern age* (1991, p.2) defined spirituality as the "sense of the sacred -- our human perception of the larger reality, ultimate mystery, or creativity in the universe". She condemns modernism that has placed the survival of humanity at stake. She accuses the modernism which has led to ecocide, increase in nuclear arms, the raid on indigenous people's home, their tradition and culture and ultimately the loss of interconnectedness with the natural world. One can see a parallel philosophy expressed in Walker's novel *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* as

well. Hence it is imperative to alter our religious and cultural mode to the well being of the planet and its inhabitants. Walker insists that the cathedral of the future is nature.

Notes

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