



THE INDIAN REVIEW OF WORLD LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

A PEER REVIEWED AND INDEXED BI-ANNUAL ONLINE LITERARY JOURNAL

<http://www.worldlitenet.net>

ISSN: 0974 - 097X VOL. 15 NO. I January - June, 2019



Equality and Worldly Unification: Locating the Leitmotif of Modern Society in Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Introduction

It is not a matter of saying that the world is one, or the world is many; for it is possible that the world may be one in a given sense, and many in another sense...there are various meanings, respects and even degrees of unity.(Raphael Demos qtd. in Levine 25).

The Pulitzer Prize winning, Alice Walker is one of the distinguished African-American authors. In her novel, *The Color Purple*, she talks about gender inequality which is regarded as a major contemporary social problem. Gender is predictable through the difference of men and women. It is observed as sex role in society. Men always keep restrictions on women's political, social and cultural rights. Since the ancient time, all the decisions in the family have been dependant on the men and, consequently, women were given secondary position. Hence, male enjoyed all the privileges allotted to them by the patriarchal society despite the fact women were always given ancillary position. Walker raised the concept of inequality between male and female. To Walker, equality represents a state that everyone is created equal at birth and this notion of equality promotes that all should have the same end result and reimbursements regardless of race, gender, religion etc. She opposes various injustices such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. In the novel, Walker raises a question for the liberation of women from certain forms of gender-based discriminations that deprived women of the opportunities for self-promotion and equality with men simply because they were women. In this regard Ranveer Kashinath states, "Walker creates such a world of black men and women based on equality and mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence which is full of happiness and prosperity" (134). Allocating the theme of equality in the novel, Walker also focuses on the influence of spiritual involvement on the main protagonist, Celie and her ideology of divinity, spirituality and God, which paves the way for the natural law of unification. In the novel, the words uttered by Shug that, "God is inside you and inside everybody else", "God is everything", and "Everything that is or ever was or ever will be" (Walker 98), show that pantheism and spiritual transformation are linked with the universal laws of unification and that one should be equally treated by the other in this world. Through the character of Celie, Walker represents that spiritual quest is applicable to the general conditions in human life, as the notion of God or faith or spirituality has always been an important matter to humans.

The Color Purple is the protest march of Walker's views of God, spirituality, equality and unification. The protagonist of the novel, Celie is fourteen years old girl. Her mother goes to the doctor, then her step-father, Alphonso rapes her to satiate his lust and says: "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't" (Walker8). Thus her father impregnates her twice. She gives birth of two children, named- Olivia and Adam. Her father takes away the children after their birth. He convinced Celie that he has killed them. To

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get rid of Celie, Alphonso makes her marry to a widower, Albert whom Celie addresses Mr. . One day Albert brings his beloved Shug Avery at his home. When Shug comes to know that Albert abuses Celie, she stays at their house for a long time. One day Shug and Celie find some letters sent by Nettie in the trunk of Albert. They come to know about the missionary life of Nettie and Celie's children, namely- Olivia and Adam, who are supposed to be dead. In the novel Shug plays the role of a catalyst in Celie's life. She teaches Celie that all human beings either men or women are equal in this world. Celie is represented as the highly spiritual girl and a staunch believer of God. Shug helps her to understand the reality of God that God is neither male nor female. He does not leave in a particular place instead he exists in each and every single object or being in this universe. Walker throws light on the emancipation process of the protagonist, Celie by delineating her story with moral values, spiritual growth and a sense of unification for this she gives the term pantheism.

Pantheism

The word Pantheism is the combination of two Greek words; the 'Pan' and the 'Theos'. Pan represents 'all' and 'theos' means 'God'. The term Pantheism is defined as "God is everything and everything is God....the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of His nature" (Owen 1971; 74 qtd. in Levine 1). In the words of Owen, "Pantheism signifies the belief that every existing entity is only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it" (qtd. in Levine 1). Similarly, it is the view that everything that exists constitutes a "unity" and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine (A. MacIntyre qtd. in Levine 1). Pantheistic point of view represents that there is no any specific God and it denies the concept of a personal God. It believes that everything that exists in this world is God. Pantheists believe that God and the world are not "ontologically distinct" (Levine 2), and claim that God is radically immanent. To quote from Levine, "pantheists need not claim that there are no transcendent aspects to the divine Unity" in this way Pantheists preserve "the divine Unity's immanence without denying" that "the divine Unity and finite entities are ontologically distinct or that there are transcendent aspects to the pantheistic Unity" (Levine2). It shows that in some extent, pantheism paves the way for the universal laws of unification. All existing things in this world are naturally interconnected with one another. This connectivity leads them to divinity. Sometimes this divinity plays the role of pantheistic faith which interlinks all the things to God. According to this, the universal laws of unification bring human closer to the law that they all are interconnected. All the things in this world- visible or non-visible, living and non-living, dark and light including the animal kingdoms, the fairy realms, and natural objects, star, sun, moon and the celestial realms etc., are incorporated through the laws of unification. This link represents that all beings and things have their roles to play in this universe for the sake of the divine law of God or Universal Law.

God is an emblem of the Universal Laws of Unification

Talking about the Universal laws of unification, in an article, Sanat Kumara, Raj states, "the Law of Unification is especially relevant to our experience now as we transition away from duality and into unity consciousness, understanding at a core level that we're all connected" (qtd. in Dillon), and "that connection includes those we perceive as having done dark things with an understanding that we all have our roles to play in divine service" (Dillon). Walker advocates that all the things and all human beings are unified in this world like a family. There is no sense of valedictory, in fact, all the people have deep recognition, and particularly they identify one another from other different lives. In this way they recognize each other in a really soul level that is called the divine soul of God. Everything in this world is the resemblance of god itself. As everything is a part of God so everything in this world is equal. Nothing is more important than the other. And to come together in this common purpose of reviving the tapestry of humanity, everybody is an inevitable part of this universe. Walker represents the universal laws of unification and equality through the conversation between Shug and Celie in which Shug stresses the idea that everyone has an equal chance to achieve affluence, social esteem, and authority because the rules of God are the same for everyone. This concept can be smeared to society by saying that no one has a head start. It represents that, for any social equality issue dealing with prosperity, social status, supremacy, or

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any of that sort, the equality of opportunity can defend the idea that everyone had the same beginning. Everyone is created equal at birth. Everything has equal right to exist and develop by its nature and ability.

Celie's Preset Notion of God

In the novel, Walker also tries to present the dogmatic belief about God and religion through the character of Celie, who fully believes in such an existence and cognizance of God, defined in the Bible. For Celie, God is a white old man who has tall and gray beard. However, Celie is indisputably submissive to this biblical God and she accomplishes the entire task what the biblical God supposes her to do. Perhaps for this reason she could not revolt against her step-father's sexual exploitation and physical violence towards her, even she does not tell anybody about her problems as she believes that God says to "honor father and mother no matter what" (Walker 32). The western or biblical concept of God, whom Celie believes, is the resemblance of a male who possesses the soul of the patriarchal society. Unluckily, for Celie, this white God in whom she has had so much faith seems indifferent to her pain and sufferings. She believes that if one wants to please God, one has to work for Him and carry the other work like to feed the preacher and to take regular visit to the church. When she shares her ideas with Shug, than Shug introduces her with the real image of God (pantheistic outlook), which was quite different from the image of God (monotheistic view of god), whom Celie used to worship.

God is neither Male nor Female

Walker believes that God is the only entity in this universe. He has created the whole universe and all the creatures equally. God loves all his creations equally without giving any preference to anyone. To God everything is equal in the world. Walker uses the word God in a wide range and by using it she tries to remove the gender system as it has discriminatory effects on women in the society. God is considered as the supreme power and the principal object of faith in the whole universe. God is often held to be insubstantial, though many religions describe Him by using manly terms such as Him or He. All the people of the world from varied religions are in fact worshipping God, through different, meeting perceptions or spiritual images. Walker's view regarding God is pantheistic. In *the Color Purple*, Walker seems to condemn the preconceived image of God. She believes that God is neither male nor female, nor black nor white. It has no gender. Walker's view of god is what the pantheists believe, that is 'everything is god and god is everything'. All the same, Walker's believe towards God has fallen within the text in a broad sense of pantheism which paves the way of unity and equality but it cannot be possible without a tinge of spirituality.

Spirituality leads to Unity and Equality

Spirituality can be defined as "the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence" in which "the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred... the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution..." and "shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices" (Benson, et al. 205–206 qtd. in Pamela 12). In the novel, *the Color Purple* spirituality becomes the noticeable concern that ultimately has influenced one of the main characters like Celie, who transforms from being a low-down woman to become a self-governing woman physically, economically and socially. Alice Walker herself writes about the novel that *the Color Purple* is the book in which she was able to express a new spiritual awareness, a rebirth into strong feelings of oneness. Conversation between Celie and Shug is also has its significance from the point of view of spirituality. In this connection, Gerri Bates aptly remarks, "conversations between characters focus on spiritual connections, past and present and a plea for people of African heritage to discover a lost spirituality and recognise its value" (103). In this way, Walker has funded to the foundation of women's rights and equality. She discusses a woman's culture, family and spirituality in *The Color Purple*. Walker's ideology of spirituality is interconnected with pantheism, an idea that God is in all living and non-living things within nature including people, animals, stars, trees etc., thus all the worldly things are

the resemblance of God this concept unifies the whole universe into a thread of humanity, unity and equality.

Pantheistic Views and the Universal Laws of Unification

The Universal Law of Unification signifies the ways of the higher realms and the interconnectedness of all beings and things and embodies that how every feeling, thought and action affects the whole. In *The Color Purple*, Shug plays an important role in Celie's emancipation process and in her realization that the whole world is united. It is only Shug's preaching that helps Celie to transform her life and she makes herself free both physically and spiritually and learns that the whole world is unified by the universal law of unification. Shug plays the role of a catalytic agent in the spiritual development of Celie as she teaches her that all the things in this world are integrated with one another. Talking about the greatness of God, she says, that God loves all. He does not live in a particular place like church as Celie thinks so that God is "big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear[s] white robes and go[es] barefooted" (Walker 97). She tells her that God does not look like a big male having gray bearded on white skin as the people use to say. Hence Walker seems to attack on the racial system and gender based discrimination. For the surety of her thing Shug asks Celie that, "have you ever found God in church?" (Walker 97) and Celie replies, "I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God" (Walker 97). After that she asks Celie that "Tell me what your God look like, Celie?" (157), and this was the question that nobody asked Celie before. When Celie says, that God is "big and old and tall and gray bearded and white" (97) then Shug laughs and says, "I don't think it so funny. What you expect him to look like, Mr. ___?" (Walker 97). Further, talking about the dwelling of God Shug says,

God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit. (Walker 98)

Here, Shug's vision of God seems fantastically pantheistic. She again says that to please God, people should not need, "go to church, sing in the choir, feed the preacher" (97). She tells Celie that it is always God who pleases the human being back. Broadening the greatness of God, she also tells her that, if someone wants to please God, he/she should admire each and every aspect of nature similarly without neglecting anything. Shug also suggests Celie that, "just admire stuff. Be happy. Have a good Time" (97). She tells Celie that God loves admiration and it hurts God if you go forward without admiring or noticing his creation. She tells Celie that she should find joy in all experiences without making a judgement.

Shug teaches Celie that she should feel the presence of God in all the aspects and things in this world. Since Celie has suffered a lot in her life, so she asks Shug desperately that what God has done for her, then Shug replies that; "He gave you life, good health and good woman that love you to death" (Walker 97). She says that God loves all his creations and she (Celie) is one of the loveliest creations of God. She teaches her that she should not condemn the others. She tells Celie that everything created by God wants to be loved so she should love and appreciate all the things reflected in this universe. Shug also discloses that nothing is separated from the God, by saying that, "It [god] ain't a picture show. It [God] ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself" (Walker 98). In this way Shug tries to understand Celie that women also deserve happiness and they are not less important than men. She also tells her that she should not feel inferior in this patriarchal society. Shug's ideas can be compared with that of Vera Nazarian, expressed in *The Perpetual Calendar of Inspiration* "a woman is human. She is not better, wiser, stronger, more intelligent, more creative, or more responsible than a man. Likewise, she is never less. Equality is a given. A woman is human." She says to Celie that she should imagine herself as a part of everything that is God. She should never imagine herself apart from the nature. Shug further says that, "I believe God is everything" and "Everything that is or ever was or ever will be" and

“now that ain’t it” “us worry about God a lot but once as feel loved by god us do best us can to please Him with what us like” (Walker 97). She also tells her that, everything in this world is created by God and He loves all his creations equally. It seems that, Shug’s God wants people to appreciate all worldly things including sexual pleasure, music, dancing, the wonders of nature and the color purple in the field, “God loves 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” (Walker 98). She tells Celie to feel loved by God by making herself a part of God because everything in this world is the image of God. Speaking about the greatness of God Shug says that love plays a vital role in the law of unification; it rushes to people to help break down their old false ideas of separation and isolation and to restore and kindle their hearts, to bring them back to unity. In this regard, she expresses her personal experience:

My first step from the old white man was tree, then air, the bird then other people. But one day when I was sitting quite feeling like a motherless child which I was it come to me that feeling of being part of everything not separate at all. I know if I cut a tree my arms would bleed and I laughed and I cried and run all around the house I know just wait it was. In fact when it happens you can’t miss it. In sort like you know what she says, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh (Walker 98).

Here, pantheism is reflected in her speech as she believes that a universal soul circulates in all objects and she also realizes that she is not separated from this universal soul. This universal soul is God which exists in all the worldly things .Being aware of Shug’s pantheistic view, Celie realizes that the most important thing in life is love, admiration and enjoyment of the beauty and the thing to be happy .When Celie writes her last letter, she dedicates it to all like, “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God” (Walker 131).This succession of addresses reveals that the notion of God in her mind has changed. Celie has a new conception of God and that is, God is everything and everything is God and this opens her eyes to the whole world. She realizes that the new God exists in her, as a spiritual power and as an inner supporter to her. When Celie discovers that she is a part of godly creation and that she fits into the natural order of the world, actual redemption occurs. She finally has self-reckoning and importance. Since Celie can love herself, she can love everything.

After hearing Shug’s idea and interpretation, pertaining to God Celie’s internal spiritual development begins which demolishes Celie’s old notion of God that He is a big, tall, white skin man as described by in the Bible. Shug’s conception of spiritual truth includes a God who is neither man nor woman, neither black nor white, but God is in everything. Now Celie gives up the structured concept of God and this helps her to believe in pantheistic ideology which teaches her the lesson of unity and equality. Her way of perceiving things is changed now and it is the first time in her life that Celie feels a native like other men and being noticed as a part of God is a majestic composition. Now Celie sees the soul of God in every object of nature. She realizes His presence in all the objects like- the sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the flowers, and in every act and feeling of a man. Celie is motivated by Shug’s emotional comfort or support. She starts believing that there is no need to prove in any rational way that God exists as his existence is self-evident in his creation. It shows that Shug’s preaching regarding God, develops a sense of equality and unification in Celie due to which she realizes that the whole world is united into a divine law of nature.

Celie’s achieved Nous regarding Equality

Before her meeting with Shug, Celie used to think of herself as an ugly and poor black woman. She was suffering from the inferiority complex because she was a non-white. But, after having a fine conversation with Shug about the concept of God, she got a new sense of equality that being a black woman she deserves all the equal rights and opportunities just as the men have in the society. She enjoys equality in every walk of her life with men. She starts working according to her own intellect and rejects the male dominance. She decides to walk frequently in the society and determines to be self-depend for this

purpose she starts her own business of pants making with the help of Shug. Addressing her sister in a letter she expresses her feelings:

Nettie, I am making some pants for you to beat the heat in Africa. Soft, white, thin. Drawstring waist. You won't ever have to feel too hot and overdress again. I plan to make them by hand. Every stitch I sew will be a kiss.

Amen,

Your sister,

Celie Folks pants,

Unlimited.

Sugar Avery Drive

Memphis, Tennessee.(Walker 104)

It is suggestive other personal identity, financial security and social participation of Celie which develops a sense of equality in patriarchal society. Celie was alone until she got this financial security but now when she is independent, she has everything, as she accepts, "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (Walker 105). The story of Celie, embodies that socio-economic or religious discrimination are extremely powerful obstacles in society that become the cause of inequality for women. Shug tells Celie that how people are equals and in respect of what features they are so. Shug pays particular attention to the notion of love, kindness, appreciation, respect and draws out implications on the basis of equality for the women's empowerment. The conversation between Shug and Celie throws light on a number of common ways of understanding the ideal of equality and some problems with it which shows that equality is not an ideal to be attained but a course of action and its pursuit brings about valuable effects. A brief analysis, of *the Color Purple* shows that Celie's first spiritual identity, where she devoted herself to a particular God (Christian God), does not transport happiness in her life. Her happiness comes when she attains spiritual identity through personal exploration of the highest divine power after having a fine conversation with Shug. It is because of her new understanding regarding the concept of God, taught by Shug that God loves every single being, including her, and frees its admirers to do whatever they love to do. It represents that happiness of being spiritual cannot be obtained through distinctive religious doctrine or being separated from the whole, yet it can be achieved through personal understanding and spiritual exploration by becoming the part of the whole universe. Furthermore Celie's spiritual transformation enables her to see the God from the pantheistic point of view. In this achieved spiritual state, Celie defines God in no particular sex and appearance; instead, she finds God as the highest divine who exists in everything and He is full of love to the mankind and to the worldly things.

Conclusion

To sum up Celie learns that peace, kindness, gentleness, joy, truth, the love, desires of heart and feelings play significant role in making unification with the God. Since God is everything and everything is God, so all the things in this world are united with one another by the divine law of God. After hearing Shug's thing, Celie realizes that all the people are united with holy purpose and contend by love, peace, joy, in the balance of giving and receiving, including understanding and knowing which binds them into the universal laws of unification where no one is left separated from the whole. The Universal Law of Unification, in the novel represents unity for deeper understanding and knowing of the interconnectedness of all, pure love, unalloyed vitality, unanimity, admiration, connectedness, equilibrium and natural aspects. Similarly in this novel, Walker makes it clear that God advocates the helpful perception of oneself, of women, of people, of colour and at large as a cherished expression of the universe. Celie comes to close this law of unification through the concept of god and spirituality. She learns that the law of unification involves the recognition of a sentiment or sense or trust that there is something greater than herself, something more to being human than corporeal experience, and that the greater whole of which she is a part- is cosmic or divine in nature. Through the concept of God and spirituality, Walker delineates

that there is the divine law of Unification, which helps all the people to understand and to know that they are interwoven to everything in the universe. Finally, Celie learns that no one is separate – the land, the constructions, the actions, the feelings, the people, the celestial, the star, the natural aspects that are present – all are united or interconnected with one another by the laws of unification. It awakens a new spiritual awareness in Celie which provides her a strong feeling of oneness, equality and unification. Thus the basic and predominant aim of Walker is to bring equality in man-woman relationship and to strengthen women to gain equality and liberty by making them conscious of their rights. She lays emphasis that to achieve equality and to be the part of this unified world women have to develop her personal identity, they should be financially strong and should have active participation in society.

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