

**Tribhuvan University**

**Female Resistance in Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile***

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Female Resistance in Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Ajaya Paudel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Ajaya Paudel has completed his thesis entitled “Female Resistance in Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2065/05/01 B.S. to 2066/05/28 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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## **Abstract**

This present research work attempts to study Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* from the feminist perspective as it examines the experience of female sexuality as a celebration of life. Walker's female characters in this text make a strong resistance to the hegemonizing interference of the male character father by ignoring not only his control but also the norms of the society as a whole. Much to the outrage of the father, Robinson Sir., the two daughters Susannah and Magdalena openly involve themselves in homosexual and heterosexual activities, thereby challenging and resisting the patriarchal normativity of heterosexuality. Even the mother stands by the side of the daughters, advocating for their freedom. So, all the women characters eulogize the female sexuality and pursue their own course of life ignoring the norms of the father figure and subvert the patriarchal norms and values.

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## I. Women's Search for Selfhood in Walker's Works

Patriarchy oppresses and suppresses the female characters especially Magdalena and Susannah as a result of which they live a very difficult and miserable life. Their identity and freedom comes under crisis. When the situation becomes unbearable, the female characters in Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* make a strong resistance to the hegemonizing interference of the male character father. They even ignore the norms of the patriarchal society as they involve themselves in lesbian relationship and random sexual encounters.

Alice Walker's works are noted for their insightful treatment of African American culture. Her writings portray the black women's tragic experiences in a racist and sexist society and their struggle for survival and wholeness. Her focus is on black women who grow to reside in a larger world and struggle to achieve independent identities beyond male dominion. In her writing, she explores the "issue of the spiritual survival of black people, in particular black women" (*In Search* 150). In her essay, she writes, "I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival whole of my people. [ . . . ] I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women" (192).

Walker emphasizes on the black women's self definition against the evil of sexism, classism and racism. Her writing portrays the struggle of black people throughout history and are praised for their insightful and riveting portraits of black life, in particular the tragic experiences of black women in a sexist and racist society, suffering of black women at the hands of men and their struggle for survival. In her novel, she examines the black women's search for selfhood through an analysis of the individual's relationship to the community. They struggle to claim their selves, in order to change their lives and secure a rightful

place within the social network of relationship they themselves constitute, usually absorb the psychic pain involved in such a struggle and shatter the iron bars of gender which limits self empowerment.

Alice Walker's novels are unique examples of Afro-American writing. The theme of double repression- discrimination by the White community and repression from black males- of the black women in American experience is common in all of her works. However, the repression that female protagonists resist grounds for their mental and emotional rebirth. Her female characters are on search of psychological health and wholeness and eventually achieve it when they become able to fight against oppression. They embody the struggle of being a double minority- both black and female. We find Alice Walker unfolding the oppression of Black Women in her fictions. In other words, Walker's works depict the emotional, spiritual and physical devastation that occurs when family trust is betrayed. Her focus is on black women who grow to reside in a larger world and struggle to achieve independent identity beyond male domination. Walker examines the black women's quest for selfhood through individual relationship to the community.

Walker takes writing as a way to correct wrong that she sees in the world and has dedicated herself to delineating the unique dual oppression from which black women suffer: racism and sexism. In confronting and overcoming oppressions in their lives her women characters display strength, endurance, creativity, resourcefulness, forgiveness and resistance. She is frank in depicting the often devastating circumstances of the "twin afflictions" of racism and sexism. She is aware that black women are under two layers of oppression that is the racial and the sexual. Walker admires the struggle of black women



throughout history to maintain an essential spirituality and creativity in their lives and their achievements serve as an inspiration to other. Thus, the main theme of her novels is the life of black women, their battle with the society for their equal economical, political and sexual rights, she shows black women trying to get their racial equality. She emphasizes the healing power of love and the possibility of change: change personal, change in society.

Walker's present novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998) tells the story of two daughters who overcome the sexual repression forced on them by their anthropologist father. Susannah and Magdalena are two sisters who become estranged from each other and their parents after Magdalena is beaten by their father for having sex with a local boy. As each woman expresses her loneliness, resistance and anger- Susannah through sexual exploration, Magdalena through food-they are observed by their father ghost, who seeks a reconciliation with them that comes only after their deaths.

A family from the United States goes to the remote Sierras in Mexico the writer to be Susannah; her sister, Magdalena; her father and mother. And there amid the endangered band of mixed race Black and Indians called the Mundo, they could ever dream. Moving back and forth in time and among unforgettable characters and their stories, Walker crosses conventional borders of all kind as she explores in this novel, the ways in which a woman's denied sexuality leads to the loss of the much prized and necessary original self and how she regains that self, even as her family's past of lies and love is transformed.

This novel has received much critical appraisals since its publication. Different critics have viewed it from different perspectives.

Nedhera Landers raises the issue of race in the novel in the passage below:

The one element of this novel that may actually have mounted to something more than disjointed scenes how the “Mundo” Indians got to be a mixed race tribe. There is very little about how these two disparate races got together and managed to endure by mixing their very difficult cultures into a unique whole. (30)

Francine Prose criticizes Walker for her over expression of sexuality in this novel. He says, “Walker’s apparent assumption [. . .] is to serve as a cheerleader for Eros [. . .]” (12). Likewise Trudy Palmer says, “Walker later gives more heat than light,” (6) though the novel given the name ‘light’ but in the novel sexual scenes are highlighted. The sexual relation of Susannah with her husband and partner, Pauline is narrated by the father character in the very beginning of the novel. He further says that “Walker describes her novel as a celebration of sexuality but in fact it is the opposite” (6).

Richard Bernstein says that Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is a strong indication that if she hasn't exhausted the subject, she is exhausting her readers. He further says that the colonialist attitude is also reflected in the novel: “Manuelito goes on to describe the source of Western Colonialist violence against the indigenous peoples” (np).

Alan Cheuse comments on the use of sexuality in the novel. He says that “this silly imagery is just a symptom of the novel's main problem” (1). Walker has evolved from a fiction writer to carefully constructed novels and short stories to a writer of tracks. And in this case she can't seem to focus on much else but the rectitude of her battle against sexual repression.

Ellen Flexman talks about the issue of sexuality in the novel which becomes the cause of suppression of female characters. He says, “Walker’s *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, the novel in six years is an exploration of sexuality and how society’s attitude toward it has damaged both men and women” (136). He further says that “in spite of a strong and poetic beginning the book is more like a Walker's essay than a novel” (136).

Donna Seaman says, “Walker conveys the message that sex brings us closer to God [. . .] spirituality resides in the groin, in the sexual organs” (167) He observes the novel as having the seductive but flimsy foundation. He further says that Walker has created romantic but propagandistic fairy tale that veers disconcertingly from the facile to the heartfelt.

Colleen Sell comments in the speech used in the novel, as he says, “Walker in this book occasionally lapses into almost didactic speech, which made feel as if we were being lectured to [. . .] [It] is a magical celebration . . .” (np). He further talks about the human spirit that speaks eloquently about the role of father in the sexual and spiritual well-being of their female children.

In the novel, spirituality is focus through the father, who narrates the many chapters. He is even given the job to narrate the sexual scene of his daughter with her husband and partner. In this context, Valentine Victoria says, “Alice Walker's novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is a celebration of sexuality and spirituality” (74).

Robert Plunket puts forth the issue of “Orgiastic Freedom” in the novel. He says that “Alice Walker seems to have sex on her mind” (90). He further says that the novel is full of it, including the woman-to-woman lovemaking of protagonist Susannah and her partner.

*By the Light of My Father's Smile* engenders passionate, often conflicting opinions. Some praise it as a long-overdue celebration of female sexuality; others are vehemently opposed to its basic tenets. Jean C Fulton says, “Alice Walker focuses on the nature of sexuality and spirituality, suggesting that in trying to disentangle the two, cultural and religious traditions do themselves – and their people – considerable harm” (13).

Alice Walker has written on diverse subject matters. Gayle Pemberton says, “Walker's work *By the Light of My Father's Smile* concerns itself with freedom, repression, sexual oppression, sexual fulfillment, memory, regret, loss, victory, love –thwarted, lost, found – and the necessity of forgiveness” (20). These subjects are part of a thoroughly elaborate fantasy. He further writes, “It is a brave attempt to traverse difficult ground to celebrate Eros shorn of vulgarity, shame or loathing, to light [. . .]” (20).

The present study, however, will concentrate on the female resistance against patriarchy. Especially the female characters Magdalena and Susannah are physically and psychologically destroyed by the hegemonizing interference of the male character, father. So, they resist not only by ignoring his control but also the norms of the society as a whole. Different literary critics have viewed this novel from different perspectives but none of the critics have explored the female's resistance against the patriarchal society. So, this research will attempt to show the female resistance to the patriarchy. It will purely depend on the textual analysis of *By the Light of My Father's Smile* on the basis of the theoretical tool feminism.

The present research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to Alice Walker, a brief outline of the present study and

a critical review of literature. The second chapter presents feminism as the theoretical tool to interpret the text. On the basis of theoretical discourse outlined in the second chapter third chapter will analyze the text. It will sort out some of the extracts from the text as the evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study. In this chapter, the novel will be textually analyzed and attempts will be made to explore the unprecedented issues. The issues related to how the female characters wages a psychological and social war against the patriarchy and tries to come of every bondage; familial, marital, social and cultural to demonstrate for female identity. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research. On the basis of the textual analysis in the chapter three, it will conclude the explanation and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters.

## **II.Feminism**

Feminism is a broad movement embracing numerous phases of women's emancipation aiming to understand women's oppression in terms of race, class, gender and sexual preferences and its efforts lies in changing it. It no longer seeks to abolish the systems, status and societies. It aims to realize the total self-actualization of the individual. It is against the inadequacy, injustices and violence which the males have created.

Feminisms refers to all those who seek to end women's subordination. It is an aggressive conscious feeling of women who began to reject their passivity. Feminism came into existence for the sake of women rights and human equality. The main aim of the feminist movement was to develop women's personalities. So, it studied women as people who were either oppressed or suppressed or rejected the freedom of personal expression. All women writers who struggle against patriarchy to contain their womanhood were generally considered feminist. Feminists stepped forward against male dominance in order to enhance women's rights and to secure women's emancipation. Women feminist writers take pride in their femaleness making it a vital tool of struggle for their rights and emancipation which makes feminism a political theory and practice to break the social bondage of patriarchy. In these aspects Troil Moi, a feminist says, "The word feminist and feminism are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement" (135). She further makes clear that "Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of political discourse, critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarch and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature" (204). Here, she focuses on the nature of feminist criticism which concerns gender differences and likewise its

development as theory and its application which are useful to learn social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes. In the same way Elaine Showalter focuses on not only the recognition of women's writing but also on rethinking the concept of literary study. She says: "Feminist criticism has demanded not just the recognition of women's writing but a radical rethinking of the concept of literary [. . .] Feminist criticism is international in its resources, and feminist critics, criss-cross national boundaries" (181).

Feminism is concerned with the marginalization of women, being relegated to a secondary position. It represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times. Feminism being political movement has become successful in giving due place to writing of non-canonical women writers. Feminism comes into practice as an attack against female marginalization as our society and civilization is pervasively patriarchal, that is it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains; "familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic" (Abrams 89). It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature-which is described as feminine. By this cultural process the masculine in our culture has come to be widely defined as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

Feminism literally means "womanism" a massive complaint against patriarchy. Feminists today have finally recognized that the world they have described is not the whole world because its central concern is social distinction

between men and women. That's why it is committed to eradicate the ideology of domination and discrimination.

Feminism conjures up various images and ideas regarding the women's issues. In spite of diversity feminism is often represented as a single entity and some how concerned with gender equality and freedom. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology defines "feminism as a doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women" (27)

Feminism, as a construct, has probably existed as long as there have been women, even if the word did not really enter the English language. If a broad concept of feminism includes women acting, speaking and writing on women's issues and rights, then we can see that these concerns go back as far as recorded history. Unfortunately many talented women's contributions to history have been forgotten or ignored but modern scholarship is redressing this imbalance. Many people consider that Mary Wollstonecraft, a British political thinker, was the first woman who raised her voice against the patriarchy and for the rights of women. In her essay, "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*" (1792), she says that "the neglected education of many fellow creatures is the grand source of the misery [. . .]" (Ruth 44). She also in the same essay argues that women are turned into weak and petty creatures by sheer neglect of proper education and by the moral and manners which are setup by the society. The issues for the rights women had been raised by some of male writers as well as women writers earlier John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller's, *Women in Nineteenth Century* (1845) are good examples. This writer, in their books, present very important lines of women's thought.



History of western society remained highly discriminative and biased in women's career advancement through all the ages. The great thinkers and philosophers from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine to Aquinas, Hobbes and Rousseau have also depicted women as immature and inferior in their intellectual potential. Plato went to the extent of disallowing women and servants to take part in politics and philosophy. The Greek critic Aristotle declares that, "the female was female by virtue of certain lack quantities" (Selden 134). He even declared that women have less teeth than men which shows the tendency of dehumanizing and demoralizing of a philosopher like him. He says the rational soul is not present at all in a slave, in a female it is imperative and in a child under developed. This statement has demonstrated that a significant philosopher blundered in reasoning owing to his prejudices toward male centrism. St. Augustine arrested that man was in the image of god and woman was a partial being. St. Thomas Aquinas thought woman to be an imperfect man. He said that form was masculine and matter feminine; the superior godlike male intellect impressed its form upon the malleable inert female matter. Rousseau considered that women should be educated to please and complement men. This opposition was not accidental. It contains a long history of gender discrimination since mythical and biblical ages. Most of the societies since the past have built upon the patriarchal foundation that therefore have invigorated and unduly authorized men folk to define the world and society. They defined every aspect of culture and society. They defined every aspect of culture and society from their own perspectives.

Men has studied and examined women as semi-human creatures who could not speak for themselves. They were directed, categorized, researched and

resolved for the study by male. It cannot be imagined today, Gerda Learner has reputed the anti-feminist notion of women's subculture. He argues, "Women live a duality as members of the general culture and as partakes of women's culture" (346). In the society, women have to go according to the norms and conventions but they are wise and active in their own culture.

The feminists reject the centuries of male dominated cultures in which women were only valued for the work they produced, they do not accept the cultural and traditional images of women as petty, irrational, silly or even weak. Rather they affirm their capacities to the capable, strong, intelligent, successful and ethical human beings. The feminists demand political, social, economic as well as personal independence for women. They have directly and indirectly started revolting against the patriarchy. They reject the attitudes that regard the traditional masculine characteristics of aggression, power and competition as good and desirable and the feminine characteristics of compassion, tenderness and compromise as weak and ridiculous. They also reject all those theories, which tend to separate human beings into two categories. They believe that the majority of attitudes and beliefs regarding women are false and wrong headed, based on ignorance and myth. It has now become necessary to replace ignorance with knowledge and myth with reality which is created about women and which should be first for women and then only for all people. The feminist further claim their equal right to vote and the right to substantive living which they have been denied down through centuries.

In 1960, with the advent of post modernism and post structuralism feminist study also found a significant place in literary theoretical front. Besides, its political and cultural alignment in several streams emerged to define women's

studies and it received a notable form of a theory named “feminism” which is such an elusive, elaborate and diversified field. Feminist criticism which enunciated as a movement in literacy criticism since 1960s emphasizes a different kind of reading to literature breaking the traditional monolithic way of examining literature. Feminist literacy criticism establishes its relation to the movement of political feminists for social, economic and cultural freedom and equality between male and female as it emerged. In the same way, feminist criticism sometimes raises the anger against the patriarchy to create a less oppressive environment for women writers and readers. Likewise feminist critics sometimes use wit to deconstruct the male dominated ways of behaving and seeing. Although numerous writers were raising question against patriarchy yet some of the outstanding feminist writers of the twentieth century are Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Marry Ellman, Julliet Mitchell, Helene Cixous, Troil Moi, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Feminine is a second and cultural constructive form of women. When women reach a certain age and understand their gender they are of cultural norms reversed for the female. Society considered anything unfeminine and unnatural, if she tried to disobey the social norm. The role of women in the society are cultural constructs because female infants don't know what they are, they are just like clay and it is the society which shapes them as a female. Power is an essential weapon in human society. Likewise Kate Millet has said in *Sexual Politics* (1969). Kate Millet has said that “The essence of politics is power” (205).

Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedman, Kate Millett, Germane Greer, Marry Ellman are the feminists who brought a new consciousness in women's mind generating new ideas in women's moment. They denied the belief,

assumption and values defined by patriarchal institution, which validate the vulnerability of male domination and female operation. Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics*, focuses on the idea of ideology in 'sexual politics.' "The unequal relation of domination and subordination is what Millett called sexual politics" (Sheldon 138). Millett opines that sex is biologically determined and gender is cultural concept. She used the term patriarchy to describe the course of women's operation. She says that even literature has served patriarchy. Feminists opposed the images of women produced by the male writers in the literature and they are involved in developing theories of sexual differences in reading, writing, critical and literary interpretation. They have derived ideas, methods and principles from different aspects of humanity; history, psychology, culture and anthropology from different philosophical and critical frameworks. Feminist literary theory derives its principles and tools.

The first blow on patriarchal structure was first given by Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* (1928). She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambition. She was also very conscious of the imposed limitations of her own education. In this book she explores deeper concerns- men's anger to women, misunderstanding between the sexes and above all psychological conditions under which women were brought up.

Looking at the conditions of women writers in the past Woolf portrays very pitiable condition of theirs. She says that to write anything at the time was considered a sin for their attempt was not only criticized and condemned but also at the same time they were disfigured and deformed. Society had prevented a woman writer from writing openly. So, she had to write surreptitiously: "She

must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps though her husband was of the kindest and their married life – perfection” (819). In the past, a woman writer was not taken positively and provided a separate room for literary creation. Her talent was not counted and valued; so it did not get ground to flourish. As a result, it ultimately turned dull and uncreative.

Simon de Beauvoir, an existentialist feminist critic and writer of France, strongly opposed the tendency of twitting women as second sex born to assist their male guardians. She believes that existence always precedes essence. Beauvoir objects to men's attitude of discriminating between sexes as ‘self’ and ‘other’ men being the former and women the latter. Men writers have described women as 'flesh' the one related to 'nature'. In the feminist world, a subtle and radical critical mood was launched by Simon de Beauvoir with her book entitled *The Second Sex* (1949). Through this book, Beauvoir established the principle of modern feminism. She focuses upon pitiable conditions of women in patriarchal society stating that where a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying “I am a woman; no man would do so...man defines the human, not women” (Selden 134). It reveals the fundamental asymmetry between the term masculine and feminine she argues that "men defines the human, not women. Woman is riveted into a lopsided relation with man, he is the one, she is the other” (Selden 135). According to her, all the male writers assume the female as negative. In the book, the problems Beauvoir emphasizes is that women perceive man as self (as subject) and themselves as other. And she explicitly exposes the condition of women so that they could realize their existence. She says:

Women have been essential as the one born. To be a wife or a mother. But she is stripped off motherly rights because motherly rights overpowered by fatherly rights. A wife's duty is to be in the bed to gratify the husband lost but he husband is not aware whether he is gratifying the lost of his wife. (145)

Therefore, the woman is inessential in the eyes of men who want to accept her as “other”. She vociferously refuges the notion of female essence prior to individual existence and attacks the patriarchal myths of women that presume the false essence.

Elaine Showalter, a prominent American feminist and literary critic, has formulated three categories to adjust British women writers in the past and present according to their intensity of female voice in her book, *A Literature of Their Own* (1986). They are feminine, feminist and female phase. The first phase dating from 1840 to 1880, in this phase writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Bronte sisters imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic standards. Their works dealt with the domestic and social background. Women wrote with an effort to equal those intellectual achievements of male culture. They were so curious that they imitated the masculine mode which they tried to perform it in feminine concern. The second phase dated from 1880 to 1920, it was a challenging period for women for self demand and to protest upon their cruelty. It includes the writers such as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner, who protested against male values. The third phase dated from 1920 onwards. Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson were the feminist writers of this period. In this period, women were more aware of their genders. They realized their importance in society and so, this phase is a phase of self

discovery in which women's experiences are their main purpose, they rejected both imitation and protest.

Elaine Showalter, in her essay "A Criticism of Our Own" analyzes the feminist movement since 1960 in these words:

Before the women's liberation movement, criticism of women's writing took the form of androgynist poetics, ending the uniqueness of female literary consciousness and advocating a singular or universal standard of critical judgment which women writers had to meet. The women's movement of the 1960s initiated a feminist critic of a male culture and a female celebration of women's culture. (177-78)

As there was a practice of looking at women's works from the male literary tradition, this passage underscores the development of a specifically female framework of writing for dealing with works written by women in all aspects of their production and analysis and in all literary forms and genres.

Helene Cixous is modern critic, like Showalter and Beauvoir she also gives importance to women's existence and her participation in society. According to her, "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible and her writing is wonderful like music and painting" (541). Elsewhere, she writes, "I write women, women must write women and man, man". She further expresses her experience of a woman who is a unique being. In her famous essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous calls for women to put their bodies into their writing. She says: "A woman's body with its thousand and one threshold of order [. . .] will make the old single grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (151).

Radical difference became the focus for feminist criticism in 1970s and 80s. Black feminists like Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Tony Morrison etc started voicing out their agonies as marginalized and double oppressed (as black women) in their works. A black woman is oppressed by patriarchy, black feminists observe, not just because she is a woman but because she a black woman, a category that has been defined historically in America as less valuable than the white woman. The Victorian ideals of the true women as submissive , fragile, and sexually pure which still influence patriarchal thinking today, excluded black women and poor women of all races, whose survival demanded hard physical labor and who were vulnerable to rape and to sexual exploitation in the work place. Being black and women they are double suppressed. They are victimized by black men as well as the white society. White mainstream feminism marginalize black women because of their race, nevertheless encourages them to prioritize gender issues over racial issues, arguing that black women are oppressed more by sexism than by racism. At the same time, the black male community marginalizes black women because of their gender; nevertheless encourage them to prioritize racial issues over gender issues, arguing that black women are oppressed more by racism than by sexism. Lorraine Bethel observes the double oppression in this manner:

Black feminist literary criticism offers a framework for identifying the common socio-aesthetic problems of authors who attempt to fashion a literature of cultural identity in the midst of racial/sexual oppression. It incorporated a political analysis that enables us to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievement Black women [. . .] made in establishing artistic and literary traditions of



any sort and to understand their qualities and sensibilities. Such understanding requires a consciousness of the oppression these artists faced daily in a society full of institutionalized and violent hatred for both their black skins and their female bodies.

Developing and maintaining this consciousness is a basic tenet of Black feminism. (178)

Various writers argue that historically black women have been stereotyped as sex objects and breeders. The White men were also oppressing black women. They view black women as sexual temptress of White men and prostitute. These stereotypes and myth have helped control black women's characters in the society from the time of slavery black women have always been exploited as the object of White male sexual assault. White man takes pride in seducing black women. They often become the victim of rape because sexism of white male was socially legitimized. Bell Hooks, in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Woman and Feminism* (1981), writes, "Rape was a method used to terrorize, dehumanized and [. . .] to trip the female slave of dignity" (36). As they are themselves in a dehumanized situation, black men can no longer protect them.

The black female experience is characterized by the interlocking oppressors of class, rape. These oppressors are interwoven into social structures and work together to define the history of the lives of black women of color. Bell Hooks says that, the history of these cultural oppressors can be traced back to slavery. Within her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, she asserts that "as far as black slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, though sometimes equal a black men who ranked third and black women last" (53).

Black women have been defined and categorized in dehumanizing term, term employed to attack the essence of black women's sense of personal integrity and self.

Several black female writers view feminism as a movement that is exclusively for women and dedicated to attacking or eliminating men. The author and theorist Alice Walker, rejects the term “feminist” and called herself a “womanist” because she works for the survival and wholeness of her people, both men and female and for the promotion of dialogue and community as well as for the valorization of women and of all the varieties of work women perform. Similarly, Carolyn Denard points out many African American women, “advocate what may be called ethnic cultural feminism” (172), which is “concerned more with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group rather than with those of women in general” (171). Denard explains that ethnic cultural feminism acknowledges the damaging effects of sexism on women of color, both inside and outside their ethnic community, but it “doesn't advocate as a solution to their oppression [ . . . ] political feminism that alienates black women from their ethnic group” (172).

Black female writers raised the issues of motherhood, celebration of black culture, native language, their battle with the society for their equal economical, political and sexual rights. Alice Walker universalizes what are typically seen as individual struggle while simultaneously allowing space for autonomous movement of self-determination. In her book, *In Search of Mother's Garden* she defines a womanist as a black feminist or feminist of color, an outrageous and audacious woman who loves other women both sexually and non-sexual, a woman who appreciates and prefers women's culture: strength and emotional

flexibility. In her novel, *Everyday Use* (1973), Walker identifies black female creativity from earlier generations in such folk arts as quilting, music and gardening. In *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, her second volume of short stories, Walker deals with the female issues like pornography, abortion and rape from blatantly womanist perspectives. In stories like “Porn”, “A letter of the Times,” and “Coming Apart”, Walker attacks pornography, sado-masochism and violence against the black women. Walker's faith in black women's strength and creative powers is further revealed in the story, “A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring” in which Sarah Davis like Celie in *The Color Purple* survives and triumphs over the oppression. Thus Walker demonstrates that black women were free to pursue their selfhood in a society permeated by sexism and racism.

Likewise, Ghanaian playwright and short story writer Ama Ata Aidoo in her semi-auto-biographical novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) dealt with the encounter between African and European cultures and the psychological impact of post-colonialism on women, the young heroine, Sissie, is disillusioned and alienated by her experience in England and in the heart of darkness of Bavaria, Germany. She feels uncomfortable about the use of language that “enslaved” her, as she experienced racism and ignorance about Africa throughout her journeys. The novel is almost inevitably a working out of her rage against white oppressors and their Ghanaian abettors.

African American women celebrate black culture, tradition and their-genealogy and believe that they possess rich cultural and sexual properties as black and as female. They try to situate the study of black women's writing in the context of black history and culture and explore its thematic and stylistic correspondence with the literature of black men as well as investigate its special

use of language and imagery. These feminist writers have revolutionized the role of women in society and forged the concept of “the emergent women”

(Washington 214)

Gwendolyn Brooks depicted the real black experience, day-by-day scene of black American life and defining Negro life in her works and also shows the realities of frustration, desire, and broken hope. Her poetry and autobiographical fiction also tells the tragedy of black life in America. In her poetry collection *Annie Allen* (1949), she tries to present Negroes (blacks) not as curios but as people. Later even when black anger began to enter her work, Brooks continued to express herself with great beauty. *Malcolm X* (1968), one of her most famous poems, uses sexual images to describe about the black revolutionary leader. She has emphasized her consciousness of race above sex but the content and feeling of her writing fall within the bounds of women's literature. Zora Neale Hurston, another black novelist and Harlem Renaissance figure and folklorist, insisted upon using authentic black dialect and folklore in her folktale book *Mules and Men* (1935) and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). In *Mule and Men*, Hurston writes about the Southern Negro's reactions to everyday events, their emotional life, their humor, and their passions. The title describes the black woman's place as a mule, a beast of burden. It is an invaluable piece of cultural history. The book contributes to the knowledge of the inner life of Southern blacks. Toni Morrison, the black feminist and novelist, in her novel, *The Bluest Eyes* (1970) shows the victimization, the heroine Pecola becomes the victim of incestuous victimization. She prays for her eyes to turn blue so that she will be as beautiful as beloved as all the blond, blue-eyed children in America. In the autumn of 1941, the year the marigold in the Breedlove's garden don't bloom.

Pecola's life does change in painful, devastating ways. She ultimately becomes a victim of man's insanity, wildness and cruelty. The novel also shows how gender issues intersect with race. Her novel *Beloved* reveals the impact of slavery and of the emancipation of slaves on individual black people.

*Belindra Kremer* (1991) raises the issue of gender which has inspired feminist researchers. She agrees with Sandra Gillbert's demand of sisterhood of 1976. Kremer asserts that woman's knowledge and experience are crucial to understand the socially constructed world and only women themselves have to face difficulties and dilemmas of patriarchal setting.

The following chapter analyzes Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* in a greater detail from the perspective of feminism.

### **III. Female Resistance in *By the Light of My Father's Smile***

Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is sharply different from her previous novels that predominantly revolve around the theme of racial injustice and oppression suffered by black women in the U.S. This novel seems to celebrate and revel in the happy subject of sex, which makes the novel a highly controversial work. Though controversial as it can be, *By the Light of My Father's Smile* reveals an acutely serious theme if we go beyond the controversial layer of the sexual description on the surface, and dig into the core message that the author is trying to convey. One of the messages is that it serves as the manifesto of black women's struggle in the highly complicated situation of the post-colonial world. As a member of the large black population that is marginalized in process of globalization, and as an acute thinker who strongly sympathizes with those that are caught in similar situations, Alice Walker presents her deep observation and analysis of the plight of black women in the postcolonial setting in terms of race issues, gender issues cultural issues and the colonial action of America. Alice Walker also suggests the possible ways to change the situation of black women, based on her observation and analysis. She utters the strongest voice demanding black women to fight for equality and reconciliation in the real sense. This thesis considers the ways in which the author defies the heterosexual normativity and instead calls attention to the fluid gender identities that also define modern feminist critical perspective.

The previous works of Alice Walker mainly reflect the cruel living situation and sufferings of the black women of the lowest class in the society. Thus the criticisms on her works center on it. Compared with her previous

novels, *By the Light of My Father's Smile* covers a larger ground in settings, characters and themes. The characters in this novel are not limited to black Americans, but include European immigrants to America Indians and Greek. The story of a family's trials, history, loves and tragedies is a vehicle for Walker's investigation of female sexuality, relationships and particularly the role of the father in shaping his daughters' emergent sexuality. The setting of the story is not confined to America, but also extends to Mexico and Greece. As for its contents of the theme, it not only describes the African American's predicament, but also exposes the miserable life of other minority races, such as Indians and Gypsies, and also introduces their cultures. However, to such a novel with a great breakthrough and realistic significance, critics did not give its themes a systematic and detailed analysis. Therefore, it is the author's intention in this thesis to explore the themes from the angle of feminism in general.

Gender itself is less a matter of sexual difference than an instance of that dominance, and the appeal to biology as determining the 'fact' of women's sexual specificity is an ideological by-product of the male's way of knowing, whose epistemological stance of objectivity reflects not only the Western subject's habit of control through objectification but also its eroticization of the act of control itself. In this sense, 'the eroticization of dominance and submission creates gender. The erotic is what defines sex as inequality, hence as a meaningful difference. Sexualized objectification is what defines women as sexual and as women under male supremacy.' So, society is irrevocably entwined with gender identity and sexual performativity. Contemporary fiction

demonstrates the individual need to establish identities that may not fit comfortably within society's ethnic and radicalized heterosexual "fictions."

The novel considered in this thesis disrupts traditional Western constructions of gender identity and sexuality. The author clearly approaches the matter of re-negotiating gender and sexual identity in a different way; however, she agrees that this renegotiation is necessary. Walker explores how phallic correction has been used to reassert heteronormativity. Walker requires her characters to confront their own socialized beliefs and, through considerations of the possibilities that alternative sexualities offer, destabilize community binary expectations of sexual desire, gender identity, and sexual performativity. Significantly, the text portrays the destabilizing effects of alternative sexual identities. It is evident that there is ample room for further explorations into the ramifications that various factors have on the destabilizing of gender identity binaries and sexual heteronormativity. Contemporary Western fiction, as represented Walker's novel, is aware of the prevailing social foundations of sexual heteronormativity and the male/female gender binary. This text clearly demonstrates the vulnerable foundations of social expectations in regard to identity. By confronting these expectations and offering alternative possibilities, Walker challenges institutionalized gendered and sexual constructions of identity.

The very first chapter probes the "Womanism" put forward by Alice Walker and its embodiment and deepening in the novel, which is its female theme. Walker, an African-American woman writer, focuses on various women issues with her special insight. In this novel, she expresses this theory by giving us a totally different story that involves the intersection of the living



and the dead. In addition, she even describes some details of the lesbian relationship to counter the patriarchal sexual values. Because heterosexuality is regarded as the only value system in the patriarchy, the lesbian relationship between the two female characters Susannah and Pauline forms the resistance against the sexual system in the patriarchy. Walker's female characters in *By the Light of My Father's Smile* make a strong resistance to the hegemonizing interference of the patriarchy by ignoring not only his control but also the norms of the society as a whole. Walker first describes Sr. Robinson's observation of the lesbian relationship between his younger daughter Susannah and another woman Pauline, who is gray-haired 55-year-old, extols the virtues of marijuana, of having contempt for men and of sensualist liberation. Susannah marries a Greek, and later divorces, becoming promiscuous in search of her authentic sexual self.

Robinson is observing Susannah from the afterlife. He describes her in the midst of a vigorous erotic encounter with her lover of the moment, Pauline:

Pauline permits my daughter free-roaming access to her heavy breasts, hot to the touch. [. . .] The woman rolls over and is suddenly the aggressor, on top of my daughter, straddling her. My daughter has wanted this. [. . .] She now sucks her fiercely, Susannah's breasts full and brown and somehow pleading against Pauline's white teeth and insistent mouth. She thrusts her long whining tongue into her mouth with such much force [. . .] (9)

Pauline is conscious of the slightest tremour of Susannah's body but she is also venting her lust for the Kalimasan boy. When she retrieves her tongue from Susannah's throat, she laps her armpits; she claims her body as she

wiggles expertly backward, toward the “slippery penis of the boy, whose heat she feels in her ‘cunt’ in her ass, in her ovaries and womb” (10). This is not the moment to recall her own grandsons half the age of the Kalimassan boy.

Walker stresses:

But she does. Sex is like a stew for her, everyone in it at once, she imagines the thrust of the penis of the boy. She feels her own clitoris huge against the body of the woman with whom she is so angry. She wants her grandson to know this kind of power over a woman, or over a boy. It is the only power over others she wants them to have. The power to give pleasure, ruthlessly, and to leisurely take it. (10)

This above passage shows that these women are sexually repressed as they have not been satisfied by men. In fact, they desire men but they are helpless. So, they opt for an alternative way to satisfy themselves. This is against the prevalent heterosexual norms.

Pauline is so immersed in lesbian relationship with Susannah that she is ready to burst. But she lifts her body off Susannah and rests on her knees, her hand busy between my daughter’s legs. Though the legs are wide she pushes them much wider which make Susannah moan and feels a wimp. Susannah feels a strange sensation with this woman. This is almost like a mystery as she feels Pauline’s fists, each knuckle distinct, raking her libia, sending heat waves to her womb. She feels fingers and then full warm lips on her breast. But there is a lessening of intensity, a flagging g of energy. As Walker writes, “Susannah peeks through her tangled hair to see what is happening with Pauline. It is as she suspects. Pauline waits for her to ask for it. To beg and

plead for it. To thrash against her hand and moan. Oh please, please, go down on me” (11). Then Pauline rubs her clitoris against Susannah’s. At this Susannah gets excited and urges Pauline to lick her. Walker again writes Robinson’s observation of his daughter’s lesbian relationship with Pauline:

My daughter hears the sharp intake of the woman’s breath. Still looking deep into her eyes, witnessing the lust and the victory, acknowledge it, she reaches up to touch Pauline’s clitoris. It is swollen and tremulous, her cunt dripping. Her hand is a dancer in the woman’s wet flames. Intoxicated, she raises her hand to her nose. The scent of a woman’s sex is like nothing in the world. (12).

This passage shows that females get emancipated from the lesbian relationship, which patriarchy would not accept it because males would lose their central position in the heterosexuality. The more profound meaning that Walker also wants to convey by advocating the lesbian relationship in the novel is that she expects this relationship may help to realize the women solidarity. This proves that heterosexuality is considered as the only value system in the patriarchal society, the lesbian relationship between Susannah and Pauline in the novel makes the strong resistance against the sexual system in the patriarchy.

Walker significantly discusses the lesbian relationship between Susannah and Pauline under the title “Angels,” which is also the title of first three sections. Here, the ‘angel’ is not any other person than Mr. Robinson, the dead father of Susannah and Magdalena. Walker relegates the father figure, the agent of patriarchy to the position of ‘angel.’ This shows how the role of

active patriarchy has been made passive and that of observer only because the father observes his daughter's activities from a distance. He can now no longer dictate and impose patriarchal rules and norms. He only sees these values being challenged and resisted. Robinson says:

She [Susannah] was not even aware at the time of my death that she missed me. She did not cry at my funeral. She was a stoic spectator. I watched her looking down at me, the father who gave her life, with the passivity of one who has borne all she intends to bear. She did not even bother to smirk as platitudes about me – most of them absurd –filled the church around her. (3)

This shows how patriarchy controls and stretches its palm over the realm of the women causing their life to live in subordination and misery. This situation, when it becomes unbearable, finally leads the female characters to resist the father hegemony.

Walker's "womanist" theory is permeated from the beginning to the end of the novel, through the relationship between the father Robinson and his two daughters, between Susannah and her two lovers Petros and Pauline, and between Magdalena and the Mundo young man, Manuelito. Walker uses a very poetic image, 'the light of my father's smile,' which is from the ancient belief of the Mundo culture, an imagined indigenous Mexican culture created in the novel to express her 'womanist' theory. She disintegrates the dualistic opposition between male and female in the Western patriarchy and claims the equality and harmony of male and female.

The patriarchal values are challenged and resisted by Robinson's wife Langley and his two daughters Susannah and Magdalena during his service as

a minister in the church in Mexico. While there, Langley studies pottery making with the local women. She learns the arduous work of digging the clay, cleaning it, wedging it, rolling the long coils. This shows that she no longer wants to become dependent upon her husband for livelihood. In course of making clay toys and statues, she recalls how people would assume God made men from clay. She cannot understand why people attributed God as male. Walker comments through Langley. Langley claims, "Though why, seeing their mothers' work, they'd think God male, she could not grasp" (17). This reflects Langley's questioning of male-centric worldview. Robinson is for preserving the male values as he does not want his daughters to involve in random sexual encounters. But his wife and daughters hold open sexual views. His daughter Magdalena is a very independent-minded person. She herself regards herself as "wild, disobedient, wayward and headstrong" (26). Robinson calls her "Maggie, Magdalena, Mad Dog, and Mac Doc" (19). She is later called by the name of June as well. June becomes an obese, lesbian academic who searches continually for trust and an authentic sexual identity throughout her life. Right from her child hood, she is a rebel. Robinson recalls: "When she was two and we tried out the notion of shoes on her feet, she rebelled. At five she had a final no, thank you, to oat meal" (30). He thinks it necessary to "tame her" (18). This shows women's resistance to male chauvinism. As she is sexually active from young age, Robinson objects to but his wife does "not see this as a problem" (15). This creates a serious conflict between them as Langley wants to give every freedom to their daughters. So, Robinson says, "This was one of the reasons Langley and I fought. She did not agree that Magdalena did anything wrong in expressing her

own nature” (18). It is to be noted that in matters of sexuality, Langley herself holds liberal and open views. Regarding his wife, he describes:

In Mexico she was a woman split in too. During the day, as the “pastor’s” wife, she wore dark colors, even in the midday heat. Or snowy white on feast days, as some of the Indians did. At night she wore nothing at all. Oh, what does God care about what I wear? She had asked the first night we slept together and I was stunned by her beauty, naked but also profoundly shocked. (16)

She no longer wants to treat the sex as taboo as her husband seem to do. She just takes it as a natural urge to be openly dealt with. So, she does not mind following her views. In this regard, when there is the argument about Magdalena, she jokingly but boldly says, “And the young men here are magnetic. She shrugged, come to bed yourself, and don’t forget the nightly rubber” (15). This is the testimony to how Langley and their daughters challenge and resist the prevailing male sexual ideology which does not allow women to express their views about sexuality.

Magdalena is really “as wild as Mac Doc. She really wants to be known as Mad Dog, but Robinson draws the line” (18). When the couple has an argument, Langley tells him that “you must talk to Mad Dog, she said, and explain to her why she cannot be both mad dog and your same daughter” (19). At this, Robinson tries to dictate his male position as he says that “she cannot be called mad dog, she is the daughter of a minister!” (19).

As Magdalena has a rebellions nature, she opposes to be treated as a beautiful object to be admired consumed by males. So, she dislikes her cousins, who are dressed “exactly like dolls, and sit and stare out unblinking,

also like dolls. She had always longed to put dirt on their dresses. And probably had” (20). Moreover, she kind of develops contempt for her father as she dryly responds to him “without returning his gaze” (21). Magdalena hums the song which advocates the equality regarding sexuality as men. The song is: “Anyone can see that the sky is naked/and if the sky is naked/then the earth must be naked also” (90). Here, the sky and the earth symbolically stand for male and female respectively.

The chapter in the novel, which begins with the title “Twigs”, tells the story from the point of view of Magdalena. She relates how her father has punished her for her unruly behaviour. As her father finds his 15-year-old daughter Magdalena having sex with a local boy, Manuelito, and beats her, in a scene witnessed by her younger sister, Susannah, she develops a hatred towards her father. Susannah, the docile and loving daughter, witnesses the beating and is pressured to choose between her sister's and her father's love, while Magdalena, reeling from his violence, eventually rejects both him and men in general.

She does not fully subscribe to the role of her father as a minister of the church. She has doubts about her father's real character as an impartial and unbiased man. So, she says, “I knew I had disobeyed him, but he was after all a minister, or at least putting up a mighty show of being one” (23). She relates how she has freed herself from the chain of patriarchal values by leaving her father when he objected to her bold and manlike activities, which also her sister Susannah supports. She comments:

But he did not understand my passion for riding horses, or my particular passion for riding Vado. He did not know where to

look when it was clear I had escaped the nest. That from the look of things I had escaped at will, even while the door was locked. That even Susannah, his adoring flunky, had been in cahoots with me, and had lied to him. Oh, Daddy dear, as she sweetly and sickeningly called him, our Magdalena is sleeping. Oh, Daddy dear, our Magdalena is in the water closet. (23-24)

Magdalena does not hesitate even to bear child before marriage though she knows very well that her father would not consent to such act. This is a strong resistance to the patriarchal values, which puts barrier to women's every right. As she is aware that her father has been "embarrassed" by her act of carrying Manuelito's child before marriage, for which her father severely beats her with the belt which has been gifted by Manuelito. Susannah and Langley cannot support Robinson for his domineering behaviour and decide to leave him. Langley expresses her solidarity with her daughters. Magdalena describes:

We flew along our favourite trail through the mountains, bluebells vibrant at our feet. Apparently Susannah sobbed for both of us. On her knees outside our bedroom, her eye to the keyhole; my mother behind her, packing with an air of righteous resignation. Once again, because of his stubborn behaviour, she said, she was going to leave my father. (26)

But Magdalena takes this incident as a normal male's prejudice shown towards women and female children. She comes to realize as she says, "This is not an unusual story, I know that now" (26). This leads to the cold relationship between the father and the rest of the family who are all women. Magdalena symbolically expresses her relationship with her father and her resistance:



With time, as I understood how severely the twig was bent in that moment of her horror and disbelief, my revenge against my father, a revenge so subtle Susannah would not realize its damage to her for another thirty years, was born. As for my father, he would never again be permitted to really know or enjoy his favourite little tree. (27)

Mr. Robinson himself accepts that his behaviour with his daughters makes his wife, Langley unhappy as he says, “My behaviour with our daughters exasperated her” (29). So, she leaves him to pursue her independent anthropological career to Mexico. Langley cannot agree with her husband about his views about their daughters as he considers Susannah ‘pure’ – until he discovers about her lesbian relationship – and Magdalena a ‘tramp’. Walker quotes Robinson as saying, “My assumption that Susannah was pure and Magdalena a tramp” (29). After all, both of the daughters challenge the patriarchal values by ignoring their father’s order. But his adherence to such hypocritical values “estranges and ostracize” him from his family. He himself confesses to being “a sinner, beast and a creature” to his wife and daughters at the end of the sub-chapter “Rituals” (34).

After Langley leaves, his little daughter Susannah suffers a lot. Though Mr. Robinson tries to take best care of her, Susannah only expresses contempt for her father. Robinson says, “I begged to let me take care of her. She laughed, a mean laugh. And tossed her hair, which since our return from Mexico she’d both straightened and bobbed” (33). He symbolically accepts that his daughters have grown physically and intellectually, and become much more aware of the father’s imposing patriarchal norms. He says:

By the time I really looked at the girls again, it seemed they had grown inches in all directions. As though harking back to some unknown ancestral Amazon, both girls were tall enough now to look down on both our heads. It was an unexpected state of affairs that at times puzzled and unnerved me. June, especially seemed to take perverse pleasure [. . .] over my protest, being able to hold whatever she was enjoying well above my reach. (41)

In addition to having lesbian relation, Susannah's sex life is something which remains an open book to her father. She has got a Greek husband Petro. He knows that she has adopted heterosexuality out of fear of father and society. Mr. Robinson observes their sexual intercourse just like the lesbian one. He describes:

By then he had climbed up into the bed, was on top of her, was inside her, was soaking in her scent of lemongrass and cloves. He floated on her, his penis a rod, a branch of the olive tree, no, the very tree itself, whose olives she loved. [. . .]And she had turned from him, finally, that sacred night, and had fallen asleep. Satiated. But incomprehensively empty. (45)

This description of his daughter's sexual intercourse is the projection of Robinson himself. Here, he eulogies the male power, the power of penis, but in reality it fails to 'satisfy' his daughter. Though he wants and imagines valorizing only male/female relationship as sacred and natural, his daughter's inclination towards lesbian relationship challenges and resists the heterosexual normativity.

Robinson also brings reference of his mother whom Walker describes as a most conscious woman as she asked him to take Langley to the Greek sites. She is described as questioning the male ideology which renders women 'adulterous' and executes them. He portrays her as "powerful, bold, opinionated woman who wore snug jeans, silk shirts, fringed leather vests, and cowboy boots; she had hair fake cigar and played pool with her butt to the door" (106). When Susannah asks curious questions, she suggests that Robinson should encourage her to become a tourist. She asks him about the killing of one of the adulterous women in *Zorba the Greek*. She asks about the truth. Thus he sees his mother begin to awaken, against her will as if from ancient sleep to shake herself, as "an animal after hibernation might do" (46). His mother has started to look down at herself as if for the first time since girlhood, over sixty years ago, and see all the difference. This shows how she becomes resistant to patriarchal society which dominates women.

Walker also talks about one of the miserable women, Irene, an ostracized dwarf whom Susannah meets while on a visit to a Greek island and who later in the novel turns out to have a lot of the same ideas about sexuality as Pauline. Irene's mother was raped and beaten badly as a result of which she died. She is now working as a caretaker of a church. Irene is a dwarf which is attributed to her mother's sin as Walker writes "God's punishment for her mother's sin" (52). She tells Susannah how people used to stone women to death. Irene scoffs, "Ah, women think they want to know what men talk about! You can be sure they stoned a great many, before they got their vaunted 'democracy' in these parts" (55). This testifies how patriarchal society oppresses poor and miserable women. Irene has a high sense of confidence.

She claims that she can speak “English, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, as well as Latin” (54). Susannah expresses her joy at the fact that Irene “rarely listened to men. Rarely believed, really, a word they said. No matter how much she might love them” (54). Irene tells Susannah how she lives independently in her small room. She prides herself in possessing the television set from which she can learn so many things and judge them. She even compares herself to the princess Diana who is supposed to get everything at her will. She says, “Diana was a huntress; she knew everything about getting what she wanted. But as goddess she maintained the freedom to toss back what didn’t please her” (56). This entire story about women’s misery makes Susannah very sad and restless.

To the relief of Mr. Robinson’s repentant ghost, both daughters find ways of fulfilling themselves despite the trauma of being punished and scolded by their father: after an encounter with a fortune-telling dwarf – the village outcast in the native home of Susannah's Greek husband. So, in order to resist the patriarchal ideology Susannah leaves her husband and enters into a loving lesbian relationship. Magdalena, now a hugely obese academic, bumps into Manuelito now an alcoholic, crippled, impotent Vietnam vet on an airplane and, against all odds in the book's one disappointingly reticent love scene re - consummates their love. This shows a conflict between the father and the daughters.

Through the female physical organs, Irene celebrates the female power. She says that as Pauline’s first name is Lily, which represents

the lily, the flower of Lilith, the first mother. The rough one who was bored by Adam and went off to have adventures elsewhere.

The one before Eve [. . .] It is really, the lily, an ancient symbol for the *yoni*. People used to think that with just a lily and her *yoni* a woman could impregnate herself. (178)

Irene is of the view that Lily is thus a powerful name. Perhaps it is the Lily that controls the men. She associates this power with the Greek Goddess Hathor who “squeezed milk from her breasts to form the Milky Way, the drops that fell to earth became calla lilies” (179).

Irene gives a very convincing explanation of how men have derived the concept of “ladies first”. She explains that in the early days if women were permitted to walk behind the man, women would run away. So, if women were kept in front, men could keep an eye on women. She further says that as women became “more tame, men hated to think a woman they desired would only think of running away, and so they invented chivalry. Gallantry” (63). This explains how patriarchy exercises hegemony on women in the name of protecting women. Susannah’s meeting with Irene makes her aware of women equality. She becomes bold and rebellious like Magdalena as she says, “I am going to be a sister to Magdalena, June, Mad Dog, MacDog, as she is submerged by another flood of pain” (87). Susannah boldly resists her father’s allegation that she is “a whore” as she claims that she has had only one man her “whole life; I never cheated on him” (126). Susannah says to one of the people she visits as a tourist: “So much beauty in a world indifferent to their ways, a green and gentle and supple world that was actually repelled by the mountainous thickness of the pale male body” (149), echoing the well-worn themes of Ms. Walker’s victim politics.

In her late works, as Walker magnifies the significance of the eye image by injecting into her metaphor of sight and damage the psychological and sexual blinding of women and girls in Africa and throughout the world, she avows that her own visual mutilation led her to write about these horrific forms of physical and sexual abuse. She was stunned by the “callous way that little girls are taken to be mutilated” and she likened it to her family’s treatment of her as a child, especially in their sending her away from her immediate family to live with her grandparents when she failed to adjust to her injury (*Warrior Marks* 266).

By exposing the violent, cultural rituals of “clitorectomy and infibulations” in Africa, Walker continues to voice her activism against violence toward women in general. She exposes genital mutilation as “a culturally specific form of violence against women” (275). While writing *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Warrior Marks* Walker faced a dilemma, that Westerners might see “genital mutilation as a way of describing Africa as being backward and savage and barbaric, and feeding into all those sorts of racist perceptions of Africa” (275). Her solution to this difficulty is to illustrate forcefully that while we may view traditions in the Middle East, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Africa as isolated assaults on women, in fact “the assault on women is worldwide [. . .] [varying] only by degree” (276). Pratibha Parmar concurs that violence generalizes across cultures: “[I]t seems there is a continuum of violence against women that takes specific forms in different cultures” (275). Walker notes that even in American culture women strive to be “very thin, very white, very blond, with very big breasts” (276), an image of beauty that encourages many women and girls to starve themselves, have

breast implants and liposuction, and bleach their skin and hair. While some of these activities may not necessarily be related to violence, per se, others are clearly life-threatening (eating disorders can lead to death, and women have died from liposuction), and they are clearly related to sexism. Walker convincingly argues that ‘clitorectomy,’ silicon breast implants, and the like are all “really about shaping a woman in the image that men think they want. And every country in the world is busily doing that” (276). So, Walker brings the reference of female violence in this novel.

Susannah is also a writer who writes about women, one of her books being *Going Home* in which she tells the story of a blond Scandinavian family who one day get into their car and drive south for freedom. The family drives through Europe and finally into North Africa. Walker writes:

And as they drive, they note the darkening of the skins of the people, the changes in the landscape. Eventually they reach central Africa. They drive until they come to the middle of a rain forest, or perhaps the middle of a desert. They get out. There are dark-skinned relatives around a fire who rise to greet them. They inform these relatives that they would like to start over. (72)

This shows how the marginalized black men and women strive for freedom from the racist patriarchal society. The power of women is further stressed by the poem taught by Manuelito to Robinson Sr. after the two of them have met up in the afterlife: “Anyone can see that woman is the mother/of the oldest man on earth/ is it not then a prayer/to bow before her?” (161). As a writer and a conscious woman, Susannah takes great interest in women’s problems and difficulties. When her mother tells her about the Nuer people in the unmapped

wilds of southwest Ethiopia, who forced women to wear “disks the size of dinner plates in their bottom lips,” Susannah is pained to hear and questions the male tradition of torturing women in different ways in the name of culture (164). Langley further explains:

[T]he women only had to wear them in the presence of the men, and that yes, eating was a problem. From the men’s perspective, however, the women’s condition assured that the women could barely speak in the men’s presence, so heavy was the ceramic disk, and this ensured their silence; also, the women could not eat as fast as men. Which meant the men ate most of the food. (164)

Magdalene is equally disturbed by the thought of women who were forced to wear “heavy iron collars around their necks with what appeared to be an iron penis sticking out in front” (164). This shows how penis symbolizes power over women. This makes Magdalene question the male ideology as she asks, “Why don’t the women revolt?” (165).

The Robinson family story is told by several narrators -- the father, Susannah, Magdalena and Langley, as well as Pauline and Manuelito, most of the time from the perspective of women. Alice Walker is known as the “spokesman” of African American women; for in her novels prior to *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, she tries her best to expose sexism so as to awaken the consciousness of those oppressed African American men and women to fight against social injustice. In this novel, she pays more attention to guiding both the oppressing and the oppressed to achieve survival and wholeness of the entire sex, so through the stories of Robinsons and Mundo people, she intends



to make each sex realize that we live in a universe in which one sex is interrelated with another, so survival and wholeness of entire sex are based on that of each sex. Moreover, after animosity has been removed, both the oppressed and the oppressing can make concerted efforts to build a society based on equality and love.

In this novel, on one side, to disintegrate the sex rule in the Western patriarchy, Walker chooses the lesbian relationship that is considered as abnormal by most people. Such an extreme topic is shocking and yet enlightening as it appeals directly to people's awareness of the sinful nature of the sex relations under the patriarchal rule. It is controversial and yet powerful in shaking and undermining the traditional view on what normal sex relation should be, that is, the male-dominated mode of sex. In this way, Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is a strong and powerful work which advocates the liberation of women from all forms of oppression which would deny them access to the knowledge and power of the body and the erotic. Walker challenges fathers to assume a prominent role in expansion of their daughters' knowledge and understanding of their sexuality.

#### IV. Conclusion

In Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* the female characters challenge and resist patriarchal rules by involving themselves in homosexual and heterosexual activities. They are more conscious about their situation with the demanding father figure. Mr. Robinson's two daughters Susannah and Magdalena overcome the sexual repression forced on them by their anthropologist father by keeping lesbian relationship and open sexual relationships. Walker mentions the lesbian relationship to counter the patriarchal sexual values. The very hot scene in which Susannah and her friend are engaged is observed and described by Susannah's father Robinson. This is a direct challenge to the patriarchal norms in society. Because heterosexuality is regarded as the only value system in the patriarchy, the lesbian relationship between the two female characters Susannah and Pauline forms the resistance against the sexual system in the patriarchy. So, Walker's female characters make a strong resistance to the hegemonizing interference of the patriarchy by ignoring not only his control but also the norms of the society as a whole.

In *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, Walker openly celebrates the liberated female sexuality, especially lesbian sexuality, and this has aroused a large amount of criticism. Many readers read it as an erotic book oriented in sexuality. But the real intention of Walker when she dwells so much on the description of sex is to foreground the issue of sexuality as the key to women's unfair treatment and their stigmatized position in a male-dominated society. The topic of sex is very much avoided by people for the controversial nature of it, but in order to address the problems that women are caught in, we will have to talk about it, since, according to Walker, sex relation is the major part of the male/female relationship which decides

the general pattern that other issues in the male/female relationship follow. Following this line of reasoning, we can dig into the core message that the author is trying to convey. Sex is only a venue that the author uses to usher in a very complicated and serious theme.

At the very beginning of the novel Robinson observes Susannah from the afterlife; he describes her in the midst of a vigorous erotic encounter with Pauline. When females get emancipated from the lesbian relationship, patriarchy would not accept it because males would lose their central position in the heterosexuality. The more profound meaning that Walker also wants to convey by advocating the lesbian relationship in the novel is that she expects this relationship may help to realize the women solidarity, which is shown by the wife of Robinson, Langley.

When Robinson beats his daughters, it becomes difficult to live with her husband; so, Langley leaves him, children and home. Her abandonment is not an escapement; rather it is a powerful means of resistance to the existing norms and values of the patriarchy. Therefore, her seeming silence is not an acceptance but a weapon of resistance. In this sense, she becomes a liberal feminist, who remaining within the status quo, seeks equality with men.

In the novel, Walker first presents Langley as a passive woman who is eclipsed by her powerful husband. As the story progresses, Walker portrays Langley as being gradually assertive about her rights by defining for herself the workings of her mind, which provides her with an acceptable degree of autonomy, but it happens to her at the cost of integrated family life. Her move reflects her resistance to the patriarchal values, though it is not a radical revolt.

Langley's recollection of her past suffering and struggle for securing her rights is a significant revelation of how she has borne the brunt of domination at the hands of her husband. She frankly speaks her heart and mind to her grown-up children who act as her close companions. She tells them about the circumstances under which she left her husband, who was very much demanding. Even though she returns home, she sleeps in the separate room. This shows her courage to revolt against her husband though it is not a radical one. She refuses to be treated as a secondary being by her husband. She wants to lead her life as an independent individual through her anthropological career. So, the all the female characters challenge and resist male domination as decline to conform to the patriarchal values.

Walker also talks about an ostracized woman Irene who is a dwarf whom Susannah meets while on a visit to a Greek island. She turns out to have a lot of the same ideas about sexuality as Pauline. Irene tells Susannah how she lives independently in her small room. She prides herself in possessing the television set from which she can learn so many things and judge them. She even compares herself to the princess Diana who got what she wanted at her will.

This shows Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is a manifesto demanding the liberation of women from all forms of oppression which would deny them access to the knowledge and power of the body and the erotic.

Further, Walker challenges fathers to assume a prominent role in expansion of their daughters' knowledge and understanding of their sexuality.

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