

posed on them and their community. India, has long been labeled the 'world's largest democracy', a progressive and protective constitution, law that proscribe and punish act of discrimination, still ironically seems hostile for its caste based oppressed environment. In *Joothan*, the protagonist Valmiki is an individual who continuously faces a clash between the negative identity imposed on his from the outside and his own positive self-ascribed identity. He faces personal discrimination and is also deeply sensitive to the pains of other oppressed Dalits as he seems to experience their pain himself. His tragedy is universal, trampling them down and disfiguring his humanity. This bitterness of his being an untouchable is totally understandable. Valmiki's story is a voice from the half of India that has been voiceless for centuries. India's untouchables have been forced to accept the long-silenced and long denied sufferings and the pain or poverty of a community forced to live at the bottom of India's social Pyramid.

Dalit writers criticize the brahmanical system and lashed out at the superstitions and inequality within the Dalit community. Mohandas Namisray shows the lack of mutuality and equal relationship among various Dalit castes in his famous novel "*Apne – Apne Pinjare*". He projected these broken and pushed out people who live outside in the low-lying areas and are socially and physically excluded from their own divided caste hierarchy. He clearly mentioned that during marriage ceremonies no Balmiki could dare to sit and have food with others. There was a clear lack of mutuality and equal relationship among various Dalit castes. Even they had jealousy and hate for each other and are fractured into several castes. They were subjected to cumulative neglect, humiliation, discrimination, exploitation and oppression, just to keep them suppressed as slaves and worse as bonded laborers. Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*" is the truthful portrayal of the plight of the women in society and of course their Marathon struggle for seeking the sense of '*identity*' in a male-dominated conservative framework. Roy makes a distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed in her third chapter which she entitled as "The Big Man Laltain (high class), Small Man the Mombatti (weaker section)". Velutha, the central character, was punished by the police for an unknown reason. He was trapped and accused of murdering and molesting. The police didn't listen to his plea because the Mombattis have never been allowed to raise their voice against Laltains, as they have been silenced to nothingness. When he tries to assert his constitutional rights to live as a human being, he was humiliated, beaten and eliminated. At last Velutha died in the police custody.

The phenomenal growth in Dalit writing is a part of a growing need of the Dalits themselves to articulate their experiences. Dalit literature is one such wing of Indian literature born out of pain and poverty. "*The Prisons We Broke*" is the first work written in Dalit Literature by a woman writer Baby Kamble. The book deals with two major problems of the society:

(1) oppression and exploitation of Dalits by upper class and (2) the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. Her work is a graphic revelation of the inner world of the Mahar community. She says that women there are just like animals without tails and are on papers depicted as lice-infested rags for saris, feasts comprising maggot-ridden innards of diseased carcasses, the tearing hunger of starving new mothers, babies cleaned with saliva instead of soap, and intestine-damaging cactus pods consumed to quell hunger. Some of the Dalit writings are replete with filthy abuses because the writers (especially autobiographers) have been abused several times over for intimidation. Dalit literature has truly blossomed in the Post-Independence era and reached its peak in the mid 70s. It lays bare another vital tendency that is expanding the scope and canvas of 'Dalitism' beyond one's own caste group. It not only covers multiple levels of personal and social experiences but also strives to '*construct*' and '*reconstruct*' the social reality based on experiences and perceptions.

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Textualizing the Body: Deconstructing the Female Body in the Novels of Alice Walker

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Abstract

This paper deals with a feminist practice of writing texts Walker exploits to highlight the female body. The features of 'human textuality' as propounded by G. C. Spivak and 'the theory of textualizing the feminine' as suggested by Sherry Ben stock can help us to see Walker's unique strategy of body as the text in these novels as. It is argued, on the bases of these theoretical positions, that Walker consciously highlights female body and its sexuality to make it intrinsic to text as a post modern practice in feminist writing. The reason which can be attributed to this kind of treatment is Walkers awareness that in the name of manifest male sexuality as the main driving force behind society patriarchy encodes female body with derogatory meanings. To change this practice, she tries to encode, the same bodies differently, through their 'textualization', feminist critical paradigm recognizes as 'body is the text.' In other words, the primordial concept of female body as 'lack', 'absence' and 'silence' is substituted by Alice Walker for the texts these female characters produce as a result of their transformation to become 'substance', 'presence' and 'speech.'

Keywords: violence, selfishness, egotism, patriarchy.

The human textuality can be seen not only as world and self, as the representation of a world in terms of a self at play with other selves and generating this representation but also in the world and self, all implicated in an intertextuality. (Spivak, 1987:78).

If patriarchy has been content with a reading of a text as the semiotic creation of and assigning women roles of stereotypes and the consequent use of them as univocal signs, the radical feminist critical paradigm has created a space in which the stereotypes can be rewritten as texts. These texts do not necessarily derive their meaning from the realm of binary opposites assigned to them by patriarchal social order. Walker's characters give up ample scope to analyze the process of textualization of individual female characters. In other words, we shall bring out the features of 'human textuality' as suggested by Spivak (1987,78) in the study of Walker's characters as texts. As we shall see this textualization has been rendered possible through the intricate

procedure of reading and rereading the characters in question by themselves and by the "author as the medium" (Walker, 1992).

All the major and even some minor female characters in Alice Walker's novels experience their lives as elaboration, extension and textualization of their bodies. A combination of psychosexual abuse and physical assault to which they are subjected to, in the regular basis, for a long period of time; results in their putting themselves as material for 'reading' in a new context specially 'foregrounded' to deconstruct the texts. In a way, such a reading depends upon 'signification' of already signified material in a new way, through which a new identity emerges. This new identity according to Griffin, is a "system of signification through which it finds its expression, the analysis of language and form in terms of difference and heterogeneity which are supposed to be rested in the female body, and which are meant to be celebratory as encountered in the text"(1993:20). In the novels of Alice Walker, such a signification takes place so far as their female characters are concerned. There is a strange congruence between the site of oppression, the body and the site of expression, the text which belong to the female characters. Thus, the female body is turned into a text.

All these characters remain anxious and hypertensive about their bodies in their conscious effort not to fall a prey to new traps of psychosexual assault. Because for them, the pain inflicted by the society gets encoded in the body and that becomes the blame in a sense. In other words, these accusations take the form of a physical encoding with a semantic pattern decided by the patriarchy.

My argument in this paper will depend on two postulates. First, if Walker's characters are signs, depending on Lewis' theory put in "The referential Act," these "signs can be analyzed as texts, and texts can be analyzed as signs (1987:162). Because the moment a sign is produced it is signified at the same time. This signification can be read as the text of the sign in question. Since the characters depicted by Walker and analyzed in this paper, are stereotypes and so univocal signs, they can be treated as texts in themselves. An attempt is made here to decode after putting them in a different foregrounded context. The blending of a theory of language and a theory of signs which diminishes the gap between signs and texts is presented here as a concept, that subsumes both the historical and political as a continuum of each other.

The second postulate deals with an analogy between text and society. For both of them deal with a semiotic structure in relation to the question of gender politics. It is indisputable fact that gender in the cultural domain is constructed. Similarly, a text is a semantic construction in its postmodern manifestation. Society as a construction has no defined and specific bases and, therefore, differs from society to society depending on the factors controlled and manipulated by human beings. Similarly, there is no fixed rule to construct a text for a given reading, which

depends on the reader's capacity to exquisitely frame the hermeneutic codes he or she wishes to utilize for the purpose. Since it is inevitable in any consideration of man and woman, Walker, as a womanist practitioner of writing structured her novels as a process of 'textualizing' the feminine. Because this method of 'écriture' helps to fabricate open ended texts. She is not in favour of 'the text' as it is fixed by the patriarchal model of writing, and any exception, even for the better is considered illegal and prohibited. This is implied at in the beginning of *The color Purple* in the form of an interdiction "you should never tell nobody but God" (1982,1), in the words of a barely literate protagonist Celie.

In this way, Walker has been able to induce the element of a historicity into the construction of her texts as well as her female characters who are supposed to embody these texts. As McNay has suggested: "the discipline of the feminine body is hard to locate in so far as it is institutionally unbound. The absence of a formal institutional structure creates the impression that the assumption of femininity by female subjects is either natural or voluntary" (1994: 198). The Female body is as illusive as an open ended text. Like text, the body, though available as an entity, is already imbued with meanings through different types of interpretations, among which patriarchy dominates as a principle of appropriation. But Walker as an author, through different types of distribution, foregrounding, classification and interpretation, wants to prove that female bodies can be illusive in nature and cannot be naturalized under any one classification which patriarchy approves of. Thus, we can find out how these female characters defy the sociological as well as generic principles of classification to initiate a number of readings as texts do. From this point of view, Walker's attitude to give 'body' a predominant role in all her novels is neither an exaggeration of fact nor a misuse of 'body' as a commodity to elude the grasp of the male critic. Walker has undertraken this task of textualization because:

Women often think of their bodies as turn or fragmented a pattern evident in Walker's Celie. Toi confront the body is to confront not only an individual's abuse of Women's bodies, throughout they represents for Women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status (Nadal,1988:70).

Confrontation with their body for these female characters makes them aware not only about the injustice done to them individually but also to the womenfolk in general. Before beginning this kind of a reading called 'textualizing' the feminine it is necessary to define the term feminine and how it is transformed into a semiotic discourse, which we have taken as the text in each of Walker's novels. To quote Sandra Lee Bartky from her essay "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal power."

Feminine bodily discipline has this dual character: on the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at gunpoint, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of

beauty. Nevertheless, in so far as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a 'subjected and practiced', an inferiorized, body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and in egalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men (1988:75).

So the understanding of the resistance is what textualizes the feminine, as Walker has put forth through her female characters. Out attempt here is, then, as Mitchell Foucault has pointed out, to show how "the sexed body is to be understood not only as the primary target of the techniques of disciplinary power, but also as the point where these techniques are resisted and thwarted. The sexed body may have been driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence" (1978:33).

Through the title is illusive, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* does not necessarily mean that the life of the female characters is marginalized, as suggested by a number of reviews published in the year 1971. First of all, they provide us with a semiotic construction of real women, not the archetype of women as either saints or sinners. By externalizing the complex and contradictory forces at work in their lives, Walker shows us how they subvert the semiotic web fabricated to make them invalids.

Margaret shows a good deal of independence even in the midst of bleak future. The reasons of her rebellion and the consequent infidelity have been dexterously textualized in Margaret being the wife of a Black working class man, Grange. She realized, to have her identity recognized, she must have some diversions from the drudgery of her life: pulling baits all day, cooking, cleaning, child tending, watching Grange ransack the house every night on week days and repent on Sundays. Grange's constant faithlessness and his increasing frustration all bear marks on the body of Margaret. His estrangement from his wife also makes Margaret pay in her out of home encounters.

Margaret's reason for adultery are not simple. There are her own intricate desires to be considered. This intricacy is what Margaret textualized in her being what she is as a woman, Apart from her personal reasons Walker hints at another reason which complicates Margaret's motivation; her sexual relation with Shapely may account for the payment of Grange's debt. That Grange does not mind indicates his helplessness, yet the guilt is encoded in the body of Margaret. Only when she bears the child it comes to light and the odd colored baby bears testimony to their relationship. The guilt encoded in her body is then approved when Grange himself shows resentment over the baby's (Star's) color.

When we look at the character of Mem, through the eyes of Brownfield, we find her apparently less rebellious. Both Mem and Margaret love their husbands, work hard in order to survive, and fight to improve the lives of their children. Mem, however, is willing to go much further than Margaret, especially when her children are concerned. Totally domestic, Mem never considers betraying her family for personal pleasure.