Changing Configurations of Spirituality: Mapping Ecofeminism in the Selected Novels of Alice Walker

Summary of the Thesis

My thesis has attempted to study Alice Walker under the spiritual strand of ecofeminism. While claiming her native American heritage or connection to all pagan peoples, Walker’s spiritual vision encompasses a wide and varied range of beliefs which undoubtedly stand outside orthodox Christian beliefs. Though critical of mainstream Christian beliefs, she does not denounce her religion altogether and tries to find liberating elements within this framework only most often expurgated from Christian preaching. At the same time, she has adopted pan-religious, pantheistic sensibilities, Buddhist thought as well as Goddess-based religions.

I have used a multi-disciplinary approach to analyze various facets of Walker’s understanding of spirituality, and also its social-cultural, ethical, and ecological underpinnings. Her religious and cultural syncretism has been examined through a close reading of her selected works - *The Color Purple*, *By the Light of my Father’s Smile*, *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *The Temple of My Familiar*. The thesis has examined the ways in which Walker’s indigenous spirituality can provide a holistic framework which integrates the personal, spiritual, cosmic, and political with the needs of the earth and all sentient life. I have tried to prove that ‘love’ and ‘sexuality’ are as much ‘spiritual’ for Walker as any theology is. Her deep engagement with understanding women’s epistemologies has allowed her to explore religion and spirituality in a fluid way, and encouraged critical engagement of deeper theological questions. The thesis examines Walker’s belief in circularity, reciprocity, and symbiosis of the cosmic whole. At the same time, she has questioned and challenged the hegemonic patriarchal structures which are responsible for subordination of women as well as devaluation of nature. I argue that her eco-womanist writings can prove to be a concrete ground for subverting the existing hierarchical paradigm present in much of Western thought and raising consciousness among people to preserve the sanctity of nature.