

## Inner Cognizance in Alice Walker's *Now it is the time to open the heart*

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### ABSTRACT

Walker is viewed to be the forerunner of Womanism. It includes Spiritual Wholeness to her protagonist. *Now it is the time to open the heart* is one such novel which reveals the Spiritual Wholeness of the protagonist Kate Walkingtree. The Spiritual Awakening has been attained by her in the form of sermon given to her by her grandmother. "Open her heart" is nothing but allowing the world to flow into her to attain Spiritual Realization. Walker's idea of Spiritual Wholeness goes in tune with the concept of Advita, which talks about oneness with the divine.

*Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* is a novel about the Spiritual Awareness of the protagonist Kate Walkingtree. Spiritual growth is evident in walker's writings. She invokes the *devas*, angels and *bodhisattvas* to fulfil her mission. The Protagonist Kate Walkingtree is a Black woman who has enrolled in a meditation programme and finds herself to be a misfit in a group which undermines the struggle of the third world countries, calling them 'hot' revolutions. Kate's teacher makes a passing judgment on the absolute truths of poverty, starvation, violence and annihilation that is a living reality for a majority of these countries. In putting forward his understanding of the 'cool' revolutions introduced by the Lord Buddha; he dismisses all those people who fight for their survival:

Today he is talking about the misguided notion that as "hot" revolution, with guns and violence, such as the ones attempted in Africa, Cuba, and the Caribbean, could ever succeed.... The only revolution that could possibly succeed.... Was the "cool" one introduced....By the Lord Buddha (NOH 04).

Walker, through her characters, moves ahead on the evolutionary ladder of Spirituality. Kate's experience of the subtle racism leads her to newer pastures of Spiritual quest. After attempting to detach herself from all her things, memories and even money - which she burns one by one - she moves on to a Spiritual journey up the river Colorado with a bunch of nine other women. In her dreams she has regularly been searching for some river, which once she finds runs dry. This dry river is symbolic of the dryness of Kate, the deep-rooted desire to flow with the river of life and wholeness forces her to look for the source of the inner dryness and make it whole through a conscious Spiritual effort:

She begins to dream each and every night that there is a river. But it was dry. There she'd be in the middle of an ancient forest searching for her life, i.e. the river, and she would find it after a long journey, and it would be sand (NOH 14).

Like many of Walker's protagonists, Kate also needs to make peace with the ghosts from her past, especially coming

to terms with the violent death of her parents. In her attempt to detach herself from her present, she begins to feel a dissolution occurring all around her. Dissolve the old and create the newer, fresher and better life for herself, seems to have become her goal now, "She could feel her house dissolving around her, as her parents dissolved when she daydreamed them, and there was a feeling of relaxing, of letting go "that was welcome" (NOH 13).

At the time of these events she is with a man who cannot understand her predicament because it is more psychological than physical. Kate's knees have begun to creak, but he is absolutely unaware of the sound. She wants him to kiss her knees, but he just forgets to do so, and so even without wishing it Kate begins to think of her lover before him, a woman closer to her in age, would kiss even the slightest bruise or cut:

He was so inexperienced he could not hear her creakiness....She wanted kisses on her knees that he could not remember to offer; nor could he understand, exactly, why kisses should be needed. It boded ill for them. The lover before him would have understood perfectly. A woman closer to her own age (NOH 12).

Finally, when she decides to undertake a journey down the Colorado River, she does it with other women. Kate has felt more comfortable with women and also because women have seemed to be the only ones has concerned about the dryness of the river beds. Men have long ago cut off their connection with the wholeness-rendering nature. Environmental concerns have always been a very vital issue for Womanists. They have always connected with nature in more than one ways. Kate is a Walking-tree whose inner river has dried out. Walker has always appreciated and acknowledged connection between women and nature:

Her journey now was to be with women. Only women. Because of women. And partly because she had seemed to feel, and to wonder aloud, about the possibility that only women, these days, dreamed of rivers, and were alarmed that they were dry. (NOH 16).

Kate's journey on the river Colorado begins with the purification of her internal system, and "eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it"( ART 23)"Her body begins to cleanse itself by throwing out all those unnecessary goods which are like unwanted burden on the spiritual journey up ahead. She begins to puke out all those unspoken and spoken words, which had accumulated over years. She has to free herself completely of this burden before she can begin to take in the knowledge that the river and its canyon to offer. Over the roar of the river she hears the roar of all those words trying to leave her body all at once:

.. ..an internal roar as of the sound of a massive accumulation of words, spoken all at once, but collected over a lifetime, now trying to leave her body.... All the words from decades of her life filled her throats. Words she had said or had imagined saying or had swallowed before saying to her father, dead these many years. All the words to her mother. To her husband's. Children. Lovers. The words shouted back at the television set, spreading its virus of mental confusion (NOH 23).

On her tenth day on the river, Kate has dreamt about her mother who has told her that she is supposed to understand without being told that women of her mother's generation are crippled by the societal norms, but the next generation is free to fish with both their hands and live a life of fulfillment:

The tenth night on the river she dreamed of her mother.... They were sitting beside the ocean, and her mother gazed out on it as she spoke: It puzzled me that you did not understand, she said. But how could I understand? Kate asked. I was never told anything. The secret is, you do not have to be told.... We do not need a boat for this (NOH 39).

Kate pens a story of a mother-daughter after this encounter with her mother in her dreams. The story is about three sisters comforting their father on the event of their mother's death. The protagonist of the story is more close to their father, than the other two. This fact is resented by the other sisters. Kate is unable to write more on the small post-it. Kate and the other women experience the physical struggle of survival during their final days on the river. The rapids grow extremely fierce and one of the boats overturns throwing all the passengers in the river. These women swim to the safety of the shore on their own strength and courage. This is quite satisfying and encouraging not only for these particular women but for the entire group, "To know they had depended on their own strength and courage to pull themselves to shore" (NOH 43). Kate undertakes is in South America, where she goes to join a group of spiritual seekers who have come to cleanse their bodies and souls with the help of a shaman and his medicine, very interestingly called the 'Grandmother'. As soon as the group reaches the shaman, the first thing that he says is:

.... no sex....Making love is something we enjoy, of course. But it has its place and time that is not the same

place and time as the Grandmother medicine. This medicine, you will see, is from the Grandmother. That is its spirit Grandmothers are not sexy....It is to pay respect, he said finally, reflectively. It is to have an experience of the soul that is undistracted by desire.(NOH 49-50).

Before beginning their medication the *shaman*, whose name is Armando Juarez, has made them drink a lot of a frothy liquid, which has begun a spell of vomiting and loose motions. This is done in order to cleanse then-bodies, as the bodies which would receive the grandmother medicine would have to be pure and clear:

They'd been asked to drink half a gallon of a frothy liquid that tasted like soapsuds. This was to provoke the vomiting and the diarrhea that would clean them out. You could never put a sacred medicine into a polluted body (NOH 51-2).

When she has taken the decision to come to South America Kate decided to know everything about the treatment that she could know in America itself. She visited a local shaman who has given her the purifying drink. She has been introduced to the teacher who has been unique because she has been the Grandmother - a spirit who is there to pass on the wisdom of centuries together, "The teacher however was unique. She was Grandmother. The oldest Being who ever lived. Her essence was that of Primordial Female Human Being as Tree" (NOH 52).

Kate has always felt a kinship with the plant world. This is similar to Leo Buscaglia who observes, "the fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive the smile in return, are to me continual Spiritual exercises." She is instinctively eaten a yellow flower on the banks of the Colorado River when she is vomiting out her past miseries, she has felt immediate relief. She wishes to know the name of the flower, but then has found it better to call it a friend rather than refer to it with a man-given name, "She did not need to know the name humans had given the flower. To herself she called it friend and from then on looked for it along the banks of the river and felt concern for its health" (NOH 31).Kate is surprised to know that there are a group of people; known as 'ethnobotanists' who study people's relationship with their plants. Kate has always felt instinctively that plants and people are relatives - a hard-core womanist that she is. Even as a child, she would talk to, caress and kiss trees. She tries to communicate with the plant world without consciously understanding what she is actually doing:

People and their plants. Plants and their people. She had an instinctive understanding, perhaps from birth, that people and plants were relatives. As a child she had spent hours talking to, caressing, sitting in, kissing, and otherwise trying to communicate with trees (NOH 69).

Thus Alice Walker, through Kate, has brought out how Nature like rivers and plants have healing effect on human

beings, especially African-American women. Amidst racism and sexism, Nature like rivers and plants play a vital role to dress the spirit of oppressed South African women. Alice Walker works for women of all ethnicity and race in her journey

towards fulfillment in the form of Spiritual awakening, which is definitely be a part of Womanism. A theory is not only applicable to one race of women but also truly universal in its true sense.

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