
UNIT 5 ANALYSIS OF CELIE'S LETTERS-II

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Letters 59-61 (Celie's letters 52-54 to God after she reads Nettie's letters)
- 5.2 Critical issues arising from the above letters
- 5.3 Letters 62-73 (Nettie's letters 8-14 to Celie; Celie's letter 55th letter to God (the 69th letter in the novel) and Celie's 1st letter to Nettie (letter 70 in the novel); Nettie's letters 15-17 to Celie (letters 71-73 in the novel))
- 5.4 Critical issues that emerge from these letters
- 5.5 Letters 74-80 (Celie's letters 2-8 to Nettie)
- 5.6 Critical issues arising from letters 74-80
- 5.7 Black Womanist Fiction
- 5.8 *The Color Purple* as a Womanist Text
- 5.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.10 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will continue with the analysis of Celie's letters. Also, we will discuss Black Womanist Fiction.

5.1 LETTERS 59-61

These three letters are written by Celie to God after she reads Nettie's letters. In the 59th letter Celie is very shocked and upset with Mr.—for having hid the letters from her. She writes that both she and Shug found it difficult to “puzzle out words us don't know” (p. 150). Walker here is showing us Celie's education. Nettie, through her letters is teaching Celie about new words, ideas and different cultures. Celie wants to kill Mr.— but Shug tells her that if she tries to do so she will probably meet the same fate and will be in the condition Sofia was in at the jail. Shug tells her that even Christ found it hard to deal with the people around him. To this Celie states that she is no Christ. When she continues thinking about taking vengeance on Mr.— for hiding Nettie's letters from her Shug tells her she should think of Nettie and also of her, Shug. Shug says, “Me, Celie, think about me a little bit. Miss Celie, if you kill Albert, Grady be all I got left. I can't even stand the thought of that” (p.151). Here we see Shug declaring her feelings for Celie. In the following letter Celie says that she feels no sexual excitement sleeping with Shug because she is so upset by Mr.— hiding the letters. Shug tells her that in times like this “us ought to do something different”(p. 152). She tells Celie that they should make pants for Celie. Celie protests saying Mr.— would not like it. To which Shug replies Celie is the one working in the fields doing all the ‘manly’ jobs Mr.— has no right to prevent her from wearing pants. Shug finally convinces Celie that they should make pants together and Celie agrees to it saying “everyday we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand” (p.153). The shift from a razor to a needle indicates the growth in Celie and Shug is instrumental in it. In her 61st letter, Celie says that she has started feeling a little bolder now because she knows Nettie is alive and that one day the two of them along with Celie's two children will get away and live happily somewhere else. Celie also tells us that she feels ashamed when she thinks of the two children. Shame rather than love because Shug has told her that children born from incest belong to the devil.

5.2 CRITICAL ISSUES ARISING FROM CELIE'S LETTERS 59-61

- In these letters we see Celie in a mood for revenge. She is angry with Mr.— for hiding the letters from her. She tells Shug that she is no Christ.
- Through Nettie's letters we see Celie learns about new things. These letters further educate Celie about the world.
- We see Shug and Celie getting closer to each other. Shug openly tells Celie that she needs her.
- The effect of the Bible on the characters is seen when Shug tells Celie about the devil and children born from incest. Celie feels ashamed
- Shug is important in making Celie leave angry emotions against Mr.—behind and move on to more positive things like sewing. In short, the razor is replaced by a needle.
- Celie has hope that one day Nettie and her along with her two children will go somewhere and live happily.

5.3 LETTERS 62-73 : NETTIE'S LETTERS TO CELIE

In the 62nd letter (which is Nettie's 8th letter) she tells us that Samuel and the rest of the family including her were met by an African, Joseph when they reached the port close to the African village of Olinka. He spoke "pidgin English" which is different from the English they were used to in the American South. She states that unlike the Seneghalese who were very black, Joseph and the others were a "chocolate brown." She refers to the strong, white teeth of the Africans and compares it to the bad teeth of the English "so crooked, usually, and blackish with decay" (p. 155). Walker is showing us how Nettie is slowly becoming aware of beauty in Black people. Nettie tells us further that most of the place is run by a white man "but some of the stalls that sell produce are rented out to Africans" (p.156). In order to reach the Olinka village they had to walk through the jungle for four days. She adds that the village people love meat and that they remind her of "folks at home" (p. 156). All the huts have rootleaf as the roof. She says that it is part of the woman's job to pick these leaves and dry them. "Menfolks drive the stakes for the hut and sometimes help build the walls with mud and rock from the streams" (p.157). When they reached the Olinka village, Nettie says that everybody crowded around them. One of the villager asked Samuel if the children belonged to her [Nettie] or Corrine. Another woman asked Samuel if she was his wife. When he responded by saying that she was a missionary, he remarked that he never knew that missionaries could be Black. In this letter we are also told about the history and significance of the rootleaf by one of the villagers. His story is interpreted by Joseph to Samuel and the rest of the family members (pp.158-159). Rootleaf is like God to them. Here we see Walker re-defining God to us which is a theme picked up later on in the novel by Shug.

In Nettie's 9th letter, she gives us some details about her routine in the village and the kind of work that she does in the school. She also tells us about the sexist approach that the Olinka people have. The Olinka "do not believe girls should be educated" p. 61). When Nettie questioned a mother who said this, she replied, "A girl is nothing to herself, only to her husband can she become something" (p.162). When questioned further by Nettie, the mother stated the "something" referred to being the

mother of his children. To this Nettie replied that she was not the mother of children and yet she was something. Nettie was alarmed by what she said, "you are not much, the missionary's drudge" (p. 162). Tashi, an important character in the novel, is the daughter of this lady with whom Nettie has a conversation. Nettie tells Celie, that Tashi is the friend of Olivia and that in school only Adam ever speaks to Olivia. Usually the boys and the girls do their own things. Nettie then says something very important. She writes, "But never fear, Celie, Olivia has your stubbornness and clear-sightedness, and she is smarter than all of them, including Adam, put together" (p. 162). It is in this same letter that Corrine tells Nettie that they should refer to each other as brother and sister because the villagers are getting a wrong idea about them. Nettie says that since Corrine has come to Africa she seems changed as if her "spirit is being tested and that something in her is not at rest" (p. 164). She also tells Nettie to tell the children not to call her [Nettie] mama. This disturbs Nettie because she does treat them like her children without taking Corrine's place. The notion of motherhood is brought out here again. The rest of the letter describes Nettie's hut and its structure.

In the 10th letter, Tashi's parents come to complain about Tashi's changed ways after hanging around with Olivia in Nettie's hut. Tashi's father tells Nettie that the Olinka women are well looked after—unlike the American women—by their father, brother and husband. When Nettie tells them that the world is changing and that Tashi is a bright girl who can study and become a teacher or a nurse, the father replies that in the Olinka community "there is no place for women to do those things" (p. 168). Nettie ends her letter by saying that the way Olinka men speak to their women reminds her of Pa. (p. 168). In the 11th letter, Nettie tells us some important things: 1) that a road is being built in the village and the workers are from the north of Africa. The Olinkas feed them and look after these road builders very well. 2) Nettie and the rest have been living in Africa for five years now. 3) Corrine and she are not very close now. In fact, Corrine has asked her not to let Samuel visit her hut when Corrine is not around. 3) Tashi comes over and tells Olivia and her stories "popular among the Olinka children." The stories that Olivia knows, Tashi has the original version of it. 4) Tashi's father has died of malaria and Tashi's mother, whose name is Catherine, has decided not to marry again because she has become an "honorary man" by virtue of the fact that she has had five sons. 5) Olinka women often share a bonding having married the same man. There is a community that they build up looking after each other's children and feeding them etc. But if one of the wife's falls sick then the bonding snaps because sorcery and witchcraft by the other women is suspected. In fact the Olinka man has "life and death power over his wife" (p. 175). Samuel finds it difficult to teach the Olinkas about the Biblical notion of one man one wife.

In the 12th letter, Nettie tells us that the road that was being built in the village of Olinka was not for them and that now the road was being extended cutting through the Olinka fields—including Catherine's yam fields. Apparently, when the Olinka chief went to find out from the coast what was going on, he returned with more disturbing news that the English owned the place and that they were planting rubber trees there. Nettie further states that the Chief tells them that since the Olinka people no longer owned the land or the water in the village, they had to pay a house tax and a water tax. Fighting the White man was of no use because they had guns and a trained army. Nettie ends her letter by saying that Corrine is very sick and that the women in the village are slowly educating their daughters. In the next letter, Nettie says that Corrine questioned her very closely about Olivia and Adam and if she knew Samuel earlier on. Nettie says that she has become suspicious unnecessarily and this is reflecting on her treatment of the children. She also states because of the new road coming up the women have to go further and further away to work. The 14th letter is very important because it tells us that Samuel himself thought that the children were Nettie's which is why he made her come to Africa to look after the children. When Nettie asked Samuel how he got the children he told her a story that was very unsettling (pp. 181-182). Embedded in this story is the information about Celie and

Nettie's biological father's background and the most important news that Pa. is not their father, only their stepfather.

Letter 69-70: Celie's letters

Letter 69 which is Celie's 55th letter to God is a short but a very crucial letter. In this letter we are informed that Shug has asked Celie to go with her to Tennessee. But Celie states that she is still in a daze after hearing about the violent history about her biological family. She now knows that her father was lynched by the Whites for being a successful businessman. She also knows that Pa. is not her biological father. She is shaken up by all these facts and makes the most important statement directly to god saying "you must be sleep" (p. 183). Letter 70 is the first letter that Celie writes to Nettie. In this letter she tells us that she feels a desire to meet Pa. So she and Shug head towards her childhood home. While they are driving, Celie tells us that after she left home she visited Pa. once. At that time he was still with May Ellen (his second wife) and she recalls a little scene of May trying to bend down and fix her stocking and Pa. "was standing over her tap-tap-tapping on the gravel with his cane. Look like he was thinking bout hitting her with it" (p. 184). Walker, through such scenes shows us the misogyny in the men. An important difference that we see in Celie as she drives down with Shug to visit Pa. the second time is the way she observes the beauty in nature. She says that the first thing the two (Shug and she) notice is "how green everything is" (p. 184). In this letter we also come to know that Pa. is now living in a big house which has a domestic named Hetty. He has re-married for the third time to a girl not more than 15 years of age by the name of Daisy. She is the daughter of one of his workers. We learn that May Ellen went away with the children because as Pa. says "Got too old for me" (p. 187). Celie tells him that she got a letter from Nettie in Africa stating that Pa. is not their biological father. He knows that Shug is aware of what he has done to Celie but he does not care. Daisy is impressed by the fact that Pa. never really told Celie and Nettie about their biological father being lynched. She believes the story that Pa. has told her regarding how selfless he was etc in raising the children. In this letter, Pa. also tells Shug and Celie how to be a successful businessman. He says that Blacks don't know how to run businesses and he give us his theory of including the Whites by giving them part of the profits in any business for it to be successful (p. 188). When Shug and Celie leave searching for Celie's parents graves, once again the beautiful landscape is described with birds in the air etc. Walker is showing us how the ugly childhood episodes are now being replaced by more positive aspects of life.

Letters 71-73: Nettie's Letters to Celie (15-17)

Letter 71 in the novel is Nettie's 15th letter to Celie. In this letter, Nettie says that she went to Corrine to tell her the truth about Olivia and Adam but that she is too sick and does not believe her or Samuel. The notion of motherhood is picked up again here by Walker when Nettie tells Corrine that she had shown evidence to her by showing her her stomach which did not have any stretch marks from pregnancy. To this Corrine says, "What do I know about pregnancy, I never experienced it myself" (p. 190). Nettie then tells Corrine about the time when Celie met her shopping. But Corrine, she says, cannot recall the incident. Letter 16 from Nettie to Celie states that Nettie in an attempt to make Corrine recall the episode of Celie meeting her in town shopping for cloth, she pulled out the quilts which Corrine made with the cloth from the clothes that the children had outgrown. Nettie also tells us that Olinka men make beautiful quilts. Finally, Corrine remembers when Nettie points out a piece from the dress material that Olivia wore in her early years. Corrine admits that Celie looked a lot like Olivia and she was worried if Celie would take the child away. She also remembers the humiliation that she faced in the store by the clerk there who treated her like any "nigger" (p. 193). Corrine dies after remembering the event and realizing that the children were not Nettie and Samuel's as she had suspected. Nettie's 17th letter reports about the funeral that they had for Corrine which was conducted the Olinka way. She also tells us about the taboo surrounding menstruation in the

village. Menstruating women should not be seen around. She also tells us of the friendship between Olivia and Tashi and the family that she has in Samuel, Catherine and the children. Nettie redefines family and community here (p.196).

5.4 CRITICAL ISSUES ARISING FROM LETTERS 62-73

- Through the above letters we learn more about Africa and African culture particularly of the Olinka people
- The theme of imperialism is developed further expanding the scope of the novel
- Patriarchal rituals and customs of the Olinka people are shown to demonstrate that patriarchy cuts across class and culture.
- God is replaced by Nettie in Celie's letters
- We get through flashbacks, details about Celie's parents and her visit to Pa.
- Nettie, like Celie, is building up her own community in Africa.
- The tension between Corrine and Nettie is important in the novel. It tests the slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful."

5.5 LETTERS 74-80 (CELIE'S LETTERS 2-8 TO NETTIE)

Celie's 2nd letter to Nettie tells her how she has now moved away from the White, patriarchal notion of God. She narrates to us how this change happened in her. She states how after hearing the story of her biological parents, she realized that there was no God. She told Shug, "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And acts like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (p.199). Sh then goes on to say that Shug told her to break out of the male, White notion of God and instead think of God as neither "he" nor "she" but "it." Shug explained to her that God is everywhere and present most in the things we enjoy. "God is everything. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it" (p.203). Shug further tells her that the trees, environment everything is part of God and enjoying it and feeling connected with the cosmos is the best way you can pray to God. Celie admits to Shug that "this hard work, let me tell you. He been there so long, he don't want to budge. He threaten lightning, floods and earthquakes. Us fight. I hardly pray at all" (p.204). In the next letter, Celie says that Shug is amused by the fact that God has been replaced by Nettie in Celie's letters. In this letter, Celie explains to Nettie that the woman that she saw with the Mayor's wife was Sofia and how she was in jail for three years and was later placed as a maid in the Mayor's house. There she worked for eleven and a half years and was sent six months early for good behaviour. When Sofia returns home her older children are married and gone and the younger ones do not recognise her and are puzzled by her affection for the little White girl, Eleanor Jane (the daughter of the Mayor). When Sofia sits for dinner the children act as if she is not there. "Children call Odessa mama. Call Squeak little mama. Call Sofia 'miss'" (p.206). Notion of motherhood is played upon again over here. Later on we are told that Sofia is willing to look after Suzie Q (Jolentha, the child of Squeak and Harpo). It is in this letter that Celie confronts Mr.—about the way he has treated her. She is ready to leave with Shug for Memphis when Shug makes the offer to her. Squeak on her own says that she wants to go north. She says, that since Suzie Q was born she has not been able to sing which is what she wants to do. Harpo is surprised to hear this

because he felt that he had provided for her. All that Mr.— is worried about is what will people say. Both him and Harpo begin to stammer and stutter. They are slowly being silenced by the women. When Grady tries to tell Celie that no man will consider a woman if people talk negatively about her for leaving house and family, Celie, and Shug giggle and the other women join in as well. “Shug look at me and us giggle. Then us laugh sure nuff. Then Squeak start to laugh. Then Sofia. All us laugh and laugh” (p.208). Sofia also implies to Harpo that he is not the father of her sixth child. The letter ends with Celie telling Nettie that Eleanor Jane came to talk to Sofia because their family was having a hard time “A lot of drinking in that family, say Jack. Plus, they can't keep that boy of theirs in college. He got drunk, aggravate his sister, chase women, hunt niggers, and that ain't all”(p.211). Walker is deliberately using Black stereotypes to describe a White family. In the 4th letter to Nettie, Celie describes her parting with Mr.— she says that he acted as if she was not there. He also told her “You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all” (p.213). Celie, however, also tells him what she feels about him. She curses him and leaves.

In Celie's 5th letter to Nettie she describes to her Shug's big house in which she is living. Celie informs us that Shug is working very hard on a road show and is not looking after herself properly. When Celie offers to travel with her in order to take care of her she says “You not my maid. I didn't bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet” (p.218). Celie tells in this letter that she has started making pants for a living. Shug has helped her with the money for the material and also the orders from her band and later she is swamped with orders from everywhere. Shug gives her dining room as a factory space for Celie and tells her “You making your living, Celie” (p.221). Celie signs her letter as Celie, Folkspants Unlimited/Sugar Avery Drive/Memphis, Tennessee. In the next letter Celie tells Nettie “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time” (p.222). She also tells us that Jerene and Dalene who are twins come and help her with her business. They are unmarried. Darlene tries to teach Celie how to talk correctly. In the 7th letter, Celie goes to visit Harpo and Sofia because Sofia has lost her mother. She tells us that Harpo has built a big house just below the juke-joint. When she goes to Harpo's place she passes Mr.— who does not recognise Celie with her different look. Celie tells us “Got on some dark blue pants and a white silk shire that look righteous. Little red flat-heel slippers, and a flower in my hair” (p.224). Before she reaches Harpo's house she hears an argument between Harpo and Sofia. Harpo objects to Sofia saying that she wants to be a pallbearer for her mother's funeral. Harpo tells her that men do such jobs but Sofia says that she and her sister will be the pallbearers. (p.225). Here again we see role reversal which is crucial to the Womanist text. In this letter we are also told that Squeak is now doing well in Memphi, she and Grady are a twosome (a sexual relationship is implied) and they all smoke Reefers. In the 8th letter, Celie tells us that when she met Mr.— at Sofia's mothers funeral he looked clean and good. But he seemed somehow scared of her. Celie says “Well good, I think, Let his feel what I felt” (p.230). Sofia tells Celie that the man has changed over a new leaf and now talks of religion, does house work like cooking and cleaning. When Celie asks her what made his change like this. She says that he went through a very bad phase and started living badly, neglecting his house and himself. He was scared of everything finally when things got bad Harpo started nursing his back to health. But what made him really pull through was the fact that Harpo made him send Celie” the rest of [Nettie's] letters. Right after that he start to improve” (p.231). Sofia then adds “You know meanness kill” (p.231). It is in this letter that we are also told that Sofia is still looking after Eleanor Jane (the Mayor's daughter) whose mother is no more and who is herself is not too well. Sofia's daughter, Henrietta, we are told is also very sick with some blood disease. This reminds Celie of what Nettie had written to her about children in Africa dying of some blood disease. Walker is clearly making connections here between Africans and African-Americans, pointing to their common history.

5.6 CRITICAL ISSUES ARISING FROM LETTERS 74-80

Critical Issues arising from the above Letters

- Celie moves away from the notion of a White God. Shug is instrumental in this. (p.199). Shug teaches her about God in nature etc.(p.203).
- Celie confronts Mr. - about the way he has treated her and is ready to leave for Memphis with Shug.
- Squeak decides to go north so that she can start singing again. She tells Harpo that ever since Jolentha was born she has not been able to work.
- The men in the novel are slowly being silenced.
- Reversal and change in the men folk too can be noticed. (p.225).
- Celie starts her own business and is now economically independent.

5.7 BLACK WOMANIST FICTION

Black women in America are triply burdened. They suffer from racial, sexual and class prejudices and are forced to occupy a very marginal place in male dominated America. As a result, their humanity and the black female self are denied by white men. This made them feel insignificant, faceless, subservient and devoid of identity. The responsibility of giving them back their rejected humanity and their womanhood falls on the shoulders of black women writers. These writers can be labeled as black womanist writers. Alice Walker is one of those pioneers who believes in the black womanist tenets.

The term womanist has been described by Alice Walker in detail in *In Search of our Mother's Garden*. She writes that the word 'womanist' means (Walker 1938: xi-xii):

- i) **From womanish (opposite of "girlish", i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color.....**
- ii) **Also: A woman who loves other women sexually and /or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture women's emotional flexibility ...and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female....**
- iii) **Loves music. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit, loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.**
- iv) **Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.**

It is obvious, from the passage quoted above, that black womanism celebrates blackness, black people, and presents a balanced picture of black womanhood. Chikhenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985-64) thinks that the black womanist will recognize "along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations.....".

Sherley Anne Williams (1986:304) has also approved and accepted this term propounded by Alice Walker. Its premises and compulsions demand, of course, that black women must believe in the wholeness of community.

Black womanism does not believe dividing black society from within on sex lines, but stands for integration and has faith in the "wholeness" of black society. Black womanism also indicates a notion of sisterhood developed by Fran Sanders (1970-78).

I am not and never have been a sister to any man except my brother, Danny, and I feel that the whole thing is about to go too far. It seems positively incestuous. I mean, how does one make the transition from brother to lover if need be? Do I suddenly see this man who has previously been addressing me as sister as a potential lover? Not hardly? ... Better to see the woman as a woman and treat her accordingly while at the same time trying to upgrade the quality of the relationship.

Since times of slavery, black womanhood has been destroyed, distorted, dismantled and abused with racial, sexual and inhuman practices by blackmen and white men and also white women. In the process, they have lost their genuine "self" and have developed a triple consciousness - white, black, and female. They see themselves with the eyes of white men and women and black men. This has ultimately been responsible for the destruction of their self-confidence and the feeling of being human. They looked upon themselves as chattel. The task of the black womanist writers, therefore, is to give back to black women their own black woman self, their beauty, physical and sexual strength, motherhood, sisterhood, wifehood, etc. At the same time, they need to recover from psychological and mental traumas of inferiority. This is possible only if their wholeness and roundness as women are restored.

5.8 THE COLOR PURPLE AS A WOMANIST TEXT

At one level *The Color Purple* is a typically Radical American text because it speaks about female bonding and lesbian relationships. Yet Walker does not call herself a feminist but a womanist. Walker's womanism is her brand of feminism (for a brief history of Black Feminism see Unit 2.3). She started writing at a time when the feminist movement was at its height. But she rejects the term feminist for womanist. She defines "womanist" as a "feminist of color" and a woman who "loves other women sexually or nonsexually" but is committed to the "survival" and "wholeness" of people at large. In an interview she says "I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of my people... but beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women... For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world. Next to them, I place the old people-male and female-who persist in their beauty in spite of everything."

In her novel, *The Color Purple*, Walker through two women-Celie and Nettie—challenges several patriarchal notions about family, women's identity and role and community. Each women character in the novel occupies a conflictual space between demands of father and husband. All of them suffer some form of violence. Sofia survives mutilation, brute labour, unjust imprisonment due to racist attitudes. Squeak is raped by a White male. Celie is raped by a man she consider to be her father. But through all this degradation these women find a place for themselves in life. Walker makes her character achieve this through female bonding and nurturing. The womanist perspective is what bonds people in love and caring. The quilt metaphor (discussed in Unit 6.4) picks up Walker's womanism, in that, a quilt is associated with bits of pieces sewn together women too pull themselves out of their fragmented lives and piece their stories together and gain and identity and a self confidence

which is empowering. For example, Celie does not die in this world in order to be born blessed in the next. She is reborn in this world which enables her to enjoy life and life it to its full. Just as Celie tries to link herself with other women so does Alice Walker link herself with her literary maternal ancestors and her African-American roots. In fact, the very form of the novel is evolutionary and points to Walker's womanism. Letters and diary entries were the only forms traditionally available to women. Through letters, Walker shows us the growth of her characters. The very inception of the story line of the novel was inspired by a sisterly chat between Walker and her sister Ruth (for details see Unit 3.1)

The reversal of roles that we see in the novel where women dress like men (as in the case of Sofia), and where men cook and clean (as in the case of Harpo), and where women love women as men love women, sexually, is part of Walker's womanist agenda. She believes that womanism must include women as men. But women will be the centre in building up family and community. We see this in the novel through the impact that Shug has on Mr. -, Celie and the others: It is her love that brings about radical changes in the lives of the characters in the novel. It is interesting that even God is replaced in the novel by Walker's womanism to mean beauty in nature and the universe. Her pantheism is an offshoot of her womanism. Celie best represents this when she addresses her last letter to "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God." This including "peoples" and "everything" is for Walker womanism. In her prose work *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* she says, "so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this; that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life. I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories -like her life- must be recorded"(p.240).

5.9 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we discussed the following issues:

- Lesbianism is an important issue with Black women writers
- Life and culture of African particularly the Olinka people is shown
- To redefine God from being a white male to an all encompassing energy is crucial for the Blacks to relate to him
- Life in South of America during slavery is exposed

5.10 QUESTIONS

1. What are the details that we get of Celie's childhood in letters 62-63?
2. Comment on the significance of the Shug/Celie relationship
3. What are some of the patriarchal rituals of the Olinka people that you see?
4. Discuss the change attitudes of the men in the novel