

## **Feminism in Radwa Ashour's and Alice Walker's literary works: A comparative study.**

By

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses both of Alice Walker's and Radwa Ashour's feminist approach, as both of them are much concerned with women's liberation and emancipation. Walker and Ashour have a different way in presenting the concept of liberation. They are interested in portraying the subjective history of women in their intimate depictions of women's experiences. They intend to produce what Cixous calls the feminine practice of writings, by focusing on the sensual aspects of women's experiences. Ashour considers women's liberation should be within the concept of national liberation, while Walker sees women's liberation is quite essential in eradicating the racial discrimination. Both insist on women's rights and equality, as they present their female characters as intelligent, rational, and capable of getting things accomplished.

**Keywords:** - Feminism, Feminist Approaches, Emancipation, Identity, Women's writings.

### **1.Introduction**

Obviously feminist literature and women's literature are usually a cause of confusion and may seem misleading, especially to non-literary people. They sound similar, but they are quite different in context. Women's literature is a literary work that deals with the author's sex in a biological sense. This genre is specified for the literary works which are produced by women. On the other hand, feminist literature has much less to do with the biological sex of the author. Any written text by the male or female author has a feminist approach can be considered as a feminist text. This genre, with the deconstructive nature sheds lighter on female characters, their lives, and experiences to put an end to the patriarchal masculine gender role. The third term is *Ecriture Féminine* or women's writings. It is very relevant in this context and perhaps more inclined to the feminist writings but is still not synonymous with it.

The term *Ecriture Féminine* is coined by Helene Cixous, the French feminist author, philosopher, and literary critic. In her famous book *The laugh of the Medusa* (1975) Cixous wanted to create a new form of literary works different from the traditional patriarchal way of writing. The patriarchal modes of writing generally require rationalistic roles of logic and linear thinking. Therefore, *Ecriture Féminine* is freely organized and associative; Cixous in her new form of writing focuses more on the philosophical dimension of women's issues beyond the control of the patriarchy. She presents the importance of women's writing, where women can express themselves and their womanhood. Therefore, their writing will act in defiance. Thus, Cixous' freestyle mood of writing has a more feminine structure and tone, such as the stream of consciousness. This form of writing diverts from the traditional one, where women can write their thoughts, ideas and experiences.

#### ***1.Radwa Ashour's and Alice Walker's Feminist Approach***

Regarding the feminist issues, Radwa Ashour's literary works have much in common with Alice Walker, despite being racially, culturally, and ideologically different. Being an Arab

Egyptian author and critic Ashour's feminist approach to literary works is somewhat different from other Arab women feminist Authors. For example Nawal Al- Saadawi. She is also an Egyptian feminist doctor, author, and activist. Al- Saadawi believes that women in Arab countries are victims of the patriarchal norms. Her literary works shed light on the sexual domination and the abuse of women in Arab countries generally, and in Egyptian society especially. In her books such as *Women and Sex* (1972) and the others, Al -Saadawi discusses sexuality in large political and economic contexts. On the opposite side, Ashour is aware of women's causes, but she is more cautious to take it out of the context of national liberation. For her, feminist consciousness is one thread of rich mixture which cannot be taken out. Women in all Arab societies are deprived of their rights, Ashour tries to point out what hinders women and takes into consideration that she is an Egyptian woman and Arab. In her literary works, she targets what is threatening women's environment and addressing gender issues to explore new directions rather than debating feminism.

I'm not a fierce supporter of feminist literature, but I do not negate whoever brings it to play. What is important as far as I'm concerned is the application: would it be a smart discussion that takes into consideration the artistic and aesthetic values of the text? Or would it be a mere light discussion that categorized the women writer and believe women's writings should only be a burst of emotions or only be about the writer's relationship with men? What I mean is that we should widen the scope, not narrow it.(qtd.in.Seymour-Jorn.127).

For her, Feminist writings are probably targeting the women's sexuality, conservatism or the oppressive patriarchal societies, which would be a superficial and unreliable representation. Therefore, Ashour presents the experiences of Arab women within the varied social and cultural representation, where the national and international power structures are exposed. Ashour presents the essential counterculture figure, especially women, as intelligent, rational, and sympathetic even if they face tragic situations. These female characters challenge women's cultural stereotypical image as less rational and more emotional than their male counterparts. Her female characters have noble ambitions; whether they are an adult, mothers, housewives and women have formal or informal careers. Still, they are not perfect; they suffer from pride, stubbornness, and lack of self-confidence. Ashour wants to explore the suppressed potential in her female characters. She clarifies her stand that, she is not a feminist in the western sense. She valorises the importance of women within the society by examining different aspects of their lives, which have remained unexplored for different reasons.

In most of her literary works, Ashour uses the stream of consciousness technique to generate what Cixous calls the feminine practice of writing. It is an intimate portrait of feminine experiences. Ashour focuses on the maternal experiences to bring out the experiences, which are not usually discussed in patriarchal literature. She subverts the dominant patriarchal notions of women's body as a tool of reproduction. Furthermore, she valorizes women's thoughts, subjectivity, and feelings. Ashour criticizes certain social norms such as the case of marriage and education. She suggests the patriarchal control destroys the chances of promising young women who can contribute to society.

In her novels *The Woman from Tantoura* and *Granada*, Ashour focus on female subjectivity to the narrative structure. The two novels describe the time of invasion when everyone tries to keep their identities intact. Ashour explores the experiences of female characters, Saleema, and Ruqayya who are the most compelling characters. In her novel *Granada*, describe the Castilian's invasion on Granada, and the aftermath. Ashour invokes the Arabic literary tradition to rewrite the history of the city excursively from Saleema's point of view. After the death of her grandfather, Saleema carries his legacy. Saleema

inherits his love for books and knowledge. Despite being marginalized, she succeeds in maintaining her cultural heritage and identity. In her second novel *The Woman From Tantoura*, Ashour portrays the story of the Palestinian invasion through Ruqayya's character. The Palestinian teenager whose life is completely changed after her father's and two brothers' execution and forcefully left the country. Being in the diaspora, Ruqayya suffers the absence of her voice and everyday habits. In this novel, Ashour presents the act of storytelling as a survival mechanism, where women share their sufferings based on remembrance. The stories that Ruqayya shares with the women in diaspora create a shield for her, as they assure her that she is not alone, her story is not the only one, and her suffering is real.

Ashour in her novels focuses on the strength of female characters despite their sufferings, they are determined to carry on their lives, caring for family and maintaining their own culture and religious traditions. Through losing relatives and homeland, Ashour puts her female characters in an intense situation. These experiences work as a catalyst for them to maintain their lives and focus their creative energy on the future. In *Granada* (2003), Saleema's act of preserving books is a part of their cultural identity. That is why she keeps reading them secretly despite the ban on Arab books by the Castilian inquisition. Despite Saleema's execution, her voice and wisdom live on in the person of Maryama, her sister in law. Maryama's stories to Saleema's daughter at the time of Saleema's execution represent the continuous act of maternal neutrino and the family's continuous resistance. Maryama takes the role of protector of her legacy, by her insistence on speaking Arabic with her family and children, despite the ban of the Arabic language by Castilians. In her second novel *The Woman from Tantoura* (2014), Ashour uses a long process of internalizing memories and the skill of recollection as an act of survival. Memories hold the central position to the Ruqayya and other Palestinians. It represents the only means to assert their existence and to prevent the time from minimizing their suffering.

In *The Woman from Tantoura*, Ashour presents the concept of memory as equal to existence and a statement of self-affirmation. Ruqayya's uncle, who recites the same stories of the homeland to his grandchildren represents a political act. He is upholding to the only reality he knew which is the memory of the Palestinian catastrophe. The elements of hope do not only exist in the oral narration or the written records, but it extends to the daily repeated habits of unnoticed resistances. This kind of resistance contributes to building up a resilient future. Ashour looks upon memories as a fuel to continue fighting for justice and rehabilitation. Ashour in her novels brings her female characters to the fore to change both the family and society's expectations. Apart from it, she always tries to expose the hidden histories of women whose actions are important to society just like Saleema and Maryama in *Granada*, and Ruqayya in *The Woman From Tantoura*. These female characters face oppression and the moral deterioration of society. They challenge women's cultural stereotypical image of being more emotional and less rational than the male characters. Although her female characters are not perfect, she presents them as intelligent, rational, and sympathetic even if they face tragic separation from family members and friends. Ashour is not a feminist in a conventional sense, but she intends to show women taking things in hands and always dealing with life to get things accomplished.

On the other hand, Alice Walker is one of the greatest figures in African American literature. In the beginning, African American literature emerged in the form of oral narration and storytelling. The history of this genre among the Africans is as old as their history. African Americans used the genre of storytelling to affirm the black identity when they were rejected and stereotyped by the white authors. African Americans wrote about the aspiration and

deprivation of the African community in America. In their literary works, they present black women as victims of male domination, economic deprivation, and physical exploitation. African American women suffer the double oppression, the black males oppress them at the domestic level, and the whites marginalized them at the workplace. Therefore, they are victims of double marginalization and oppression, they are exploited physically and sexually by black and white alike.

Alice Walker, in her literary works, portrays the plight of Afro-American women in different periods of American history. Walker's central characters always belong to a downtrodden class, such as Celie in *The Color Purple*, Meridian in *Meridian*, and Zede and Carlota in *The Temple of my Familiar*. These black female characters suffer at the hands of their men. Walker uses the stream of consciousness technique in most of her literary works to probe into these characters' inner thoughts and how they are physically and mentally oppressed. Walker in her writings does not limit herself to the struggle of these female characters, but she presents their abilities to liberate themselves and change their lives. Furthermore, Walker connects her female protagonists with their cultural history. For Walker, understanding the cultural history is quite important to understand the present, since the past represents a source of nourishment. It is quite clear in Meridian's case, who understands the healing power of the past to change her present. Thus, she appoints herself as the keeper of her people's ancestral past. For her, cultural history is like the song of people which transformed the experiences of each generation. It will hold them together and if any part of it lost, the people would suffer and live without a soul.

Walker documents their struggle and efforts to get their rights. For Walker, black women's struggle represents the necessity to challenge the gendered roles, attitudes, behaviour in a patriarchal society. In her novel *The Color Purple*, Walker presents the life of Celie, who is raped by her stepfather and her children are taken away from her. Then she is forced to marry a widower; her life after marriage never improves but proves to be disastrous. In this novel, Walker highlights the oppressive role of the patriarchal men within the family. They are the main reason behind women's subjugation. Celie at the end of the novel succeeds in changing her life and liberates herself from male domination. With Sofia, Nettie, and Shug's help and encouragement, Celie starts a new life. Walker in this novel presents the importance of women solidarity and sisterhood as the key figure to fight racism, sexism and to step over the restriction of a patriarchal society. Alice Walker shows the importance of sisterhood as an essential element in women's self-affirmation. Women share their sufferings, miseries, love, and passion to understand themselves and change their lives for better.

In her second novel, *Meridian* is the protagonist of the novel. She is the victim of racism and sexism at multiple levels in her life. Through Meridian's character, Walker sheds light on the black women's sexual and racial assault. Furthermore, Walker criticizes the norms of the patriarchal society such as marriage. In a patriarchal society, women are accustomed to men's hegemony, the roles towards their father and brother in early life and a husband later. Meridian's grandmother suffers at the hands of her husband. He takes pleasure in punishing her for no reason. He considers her as his property, treats her as a slave, and for him, there is no difference between her and his mule. Walker presents how patriarchy restricts women in social and domestic life, by assigning stereotypical roles for women. These roles are strictly regulated by men who have a superior position in a patriarchal society. In this sense, Walker's female protagonists challenge women's stereotypical image by refusing to be submissive and obedient. Meridian decides to take up her own path, not the one which patriarchal society has assigned to her. She finds marriage not suiting her because it does not match with her strong



revolutionary ideas and beliefs. Walker focuses more on the individual progress of her character instead of giving voice to the political slogans used by patriarchy. It is very clear when Meridian refuses to be part of a violent revolution because it opposes her ideas and values. She succeeds in liberating herself from the traditional lifestyle. She follows her path, beliefs and ideas.

## ***2. Breaking the Stereotypical Image of Women***

Alice Walker and Radwa Ashour in their literary works discuss women's representation and struggle. They both give voice to their female characters, who are suppressed and marginalized. They put their female characters in complex web relations through which they can challenge the constraints that are imposed upon them. Despite the cultural and racial differences between these two authors, there are common things in their literary writings. Walker, in her writings, portrays the miseries of her community by depicting the effects of sexism, racism, and capitalism. The protagonists of her novels are mainly female characters who belong to the downtrodden class. Despite being victims of racism and sexism, these female characters defend themselves and challenge the norms of the patriarchal society. The pressure of multi-forces can work as a catalyst for them to change life and overcome all the barriers of oppression. That is so clear in the case of Celie in *The Color Purple* and Meridian in *Meridian*. Both of these female characters are victims of multi-oppression such as sexism, racism, slavery and capitalism. Celie and Meridian are victims of sexual assault at a very young age. Celie remains silent and fearful of the patriarchal man. She surrenders to the power of her patriarchal husband. Later on, with other women's help and support, Celie rises against the oppressor. Through the characters of Nettie, Sofia, and Shug Avery, Celie understands the importance of knowledge, strength and love in life, which she never experienced earlier. Through the bond of sisterhood, Walker depicts the strategies of liberating her character from the oppression of patriarchy.

In the second novel, Meridian is the protagonist's female character; she is the victim of sexism and racism. Walker portrays the life of Meridian who is a victim of male lust. At the age of seventeen, Meridian gets married to her first lover Eddie, who runs away leaving her deserted with a child. Later on, Meridian joins the Civil Rights Movement to protest and claim her rights like other black men and women. There, she meets Truman, another Civil Rights worker who falls in love with her and remains by her side during the revolution. Truman leaves her when he finds out she is not a virgin, but the mother of a child. He starts chasing other young girls in the college campus. Meridian is left broken since she believes Truman is to be her true lover. Finally, Truman regrets his decision and decides to reconcile with Meridian, but she openly rejects him. Meridian later on deserts the revolutionary protest, since it does not match with her ideas and beliefs. The revolutionary protest by the Black Art Movement turns violent which stands in opposition to Meridian's ideas and values. Meridian deviates from the popular slogans and proves her individuality by refusing to be part of the violent actions. Meridian finally leaves the Civil Rights Movement to engage in different creative activities "from being a teacher who published small broadside of poems, she had haired herself out as a gardener, as a waitress at middle class parties, and had occasionally worked as dishwasher and cook" (Walker.19). Meridian refuses to be a part of the violent revolution and does not hesitate to take any job for survival. Meridian believes in personal transformation, for her change will come with the self-first. Walker focuses more on women's individual progress rather than giving voice to the political slogans made by patriarchy. Meridian changes her life not by following the traditional route of the deserted mother. She chooses her path to liberate herself from all the traditional norms. She succeeds in changing her life and becomes an independent woman.

Radwa Ashour in her literary works, always discusses the women's life and their suppression and marginalization. Ashour finds women in Egypt, and Arab countries are suppressed and marginalized due to the patriarchal norms. Generally, women are not given the rights in Arab society. In this regard, she always tries to show that women have the potential and creativity to do better in life. Being an Arab and Egyptian author, Ashour believes the main challenge to the Arab women writers is not the patriarchal culture but the external factor that is represented by the colonization which had kicked out what remained of the small margin of freedom. In her literary works, she always details the subjective world of women, men and children as they face social and political oppression, personal loss, the cultural upheaval and contradictions. Ashour's protagonists are always female characters who suffer from the psychological effect of war and occupation. These female characters are capable of deconstructing the socio-political environment and the restrictions to which they are subjected. Ashour in her novel *Granada* portrays the invasion of Granada, the last Islamic city in Spain. She presents the people's struggle to maintain their Arabic Islamic identity in the wake of the invasion. Saleema represents the most compelling character. She tries her best to preserve her identity and cultural heritage by preserving the aspects of her cultural traditions.

Saleema inherits her grandfather's love for knowledge and books. She succeeds in changing her personal loss into a community sustaining element. Saleema's intellectual engagement with her loss is set to be productive. Her reflection makes her think about issues related to death and life. It paves the way to her new identity and a new role in life. Saleema's losses motivate her to seek and navigate different elements of Arab cultures. All these things collaborate to reshape her new identity as a physician. It is the transformation of her mental and emotional dilemma. Saleema's reflection on issues of life and death proves to be a community sustaining element. Despite the different books she reads, Saleema asks women savants for ancient remedies used to cure different kinds of pain. Despite the ban on Arab books and censorship, Saleema studies secretly to escape the oppressed situation in which she lives. Her study motivates her to develop an interest in herbs and ancient medicines. Her struggle to acquire knowledge and medicine integrates her into a community of adult women and earns her a social prestige and personal power.

In her second novel *The Woman from Tantoura*, Ashour looks upon the notion of suffering as a unifying force to preserve the identity. The novel discussed through the female character Ruqayya, a Palestinian teenager from the village of Tantoura. Ruqayya witnesses the execution of her father and two brothers, the destruction of her village and the forced exile of her people. When Ruqayya and her family moved to Lebanon, she witnesses the Lebanese civil war, the Zionists' invasion of Lebanon, the campus war, the death of her mother, her uncle and her mother-in-law, the disappearing of her husband and the kidnapping of her son. Ruqayya succeeds in dealing with all of these issues, but the only thing which she can't handle is the memories of her exile. Ruqayya's solo problem represents the problem of all the Palestinians who lives in exile. Thus, Ashour describes Ruqayya's struggles of internalizing memories and the skill of recollection as an act of survival to maintain an identity. The Palestinian catastrophe becomes the site of memory and inventible part of their identity. Each individual is a representation of the collective memory and a contributor to set up the collective identity.

Being in exile, Ruqayya usually visits other Palestinian women, shares her stories with them, listens to theirs and assures them their stories and suffering are real. Ruqayya's act of storytelling and sharing memories work as a survival mechanism. Sharing memories united them and made them refuse reality. Through the character of Ruqayya, Ashour presents the importance of sharing memories and tradition in preserving the Palestinian identity. The

collective memory is the base of the national identity. It plays a very important role in shaping the self-perception of people, who suffered historical trauma. The long term of suffering drives Ruqayya and other Palestinian people to find comfort in integrating and seeking a sense of unity. The identity formation needed to be sought not only at an individual level but on the collective one because it comes as a unifying factor.

In her novels, Ashour effectively intertwines the social and political context. She presents her female characters facing an oppressive and moral deterioration of social milieu. Her female characters challenge women's stereotypical image as less rational and more emotional, whether they are a mother, a housewife or an educated girl. They have a noble ambition despite being stubborn, lacking confidence and suffering from pride.

### ***3. The Woman as a Victim and a Preserver of Patriarchy***

Both Alice Walker and Radwa Ashour want to show the effects of the patriarchal society on the family generally and on the girl especially. Alice Walker always criticizes the patriarchal system in her literary works. African American women are double marginalized because they are oppressed by men, second they are racially dehumanized. Their opportunities for survival are seized by the patriarchy. Their main responsibility is the domestic duty. Despite properly doing their duties, they never get a proper respect, but they are beaten up by their husbands. Walker in her literary works highlights women's oppression within the family. She creates a traditional family, where men are the dominant figures, while women have to be obedient. According to the African American traditions and norms, good women have to be more obedient to their husbands. Therefore, Afro-American women's survival is extremely difficult. They remain slaves, while black men enjoy the privileges in both domestic and social life.

In her novel *The Color Purple*, Celie suffers at the hands of her stepfather. He rapes and oppresses her severely. He treats her like a slave or property.

He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he doesn't never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, get the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the crack. All I can do is not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree (Walker.23).

In her novel *Meridian*, Walker presents her protagonist Meridian as a victim of patriarchy. Meridian is sexually assaulted by Dexter, his assistance, and Mr. Reynolds due to her poverty and inferior position. Meridian's grandmother is beaten up by her husband, he considers her as his property "he beats his wife and children with more pleasure than he beats his mule"(Walker.122). Furthermore, Walker criticizes the issues of polygamy, which is another patriarchal norm. Where the man can have affairs with a number of women. The black men enjoy the privilege of being liberated from the restrictions which are imposed on their women. They are involved in polygamy and enforce monogamy on their wives. That is clear in Walker's novels *Meridian* and *The Colour Purple*. Meridian grandmother's husband beats his wife and enjoyed sex with any good-looking woman who came his way. Another example is Meridian's husband Eddie, who deserts her and runs away enjoying another affair. Her lover Truman, who left her seeking another relation with the white Marry Agens. In *The Color Purple*. On the other hand, Celie's husband is involved in an affair with a famous singer of the south, Shug Avery.

Women play an important role in subjecting themselves to patriarchal oppression. Being in a patriarchal family, women are accustomed to ways of homogeneity exercised by men, such as father or brother in early life and husband after marriage. Alice Walker criticized

women for extending the patriarchal homogeneity and strengthening the patriarchal domination. In her novel *Meridian*, Meridian's mother and grandmother expect Meridian to follow the patriarchal domestic roles, that assigned to her such as "washing or ironing or cooking or rousing her family from naps to go back to work in the fields"( Walker.49) . Furthermore, Meridian's mother fails to guide and teach her about men's approaches in a patriarchal society. That's why she becomes a victim of sexual abuse by men around her. Even after marriage, Meridian's life deteriorates and fails due to her lack of information. In *The Color Purple*, Celie is initially raped and abused by her stepfather. She suffers due to her misunderstandings "Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what" (Walker 44). Celie's life never improved, as she took silent resistance. When she is advised by other women to stand up, she says "I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is to stay alive"(Walker. 20). In this sense, Celie's decision to take the silent way helps in a way or another to preserve the dominance of patriarchal society.

Arab women writers always try to give voice to the oppressed and voiceless women in their literary works. Arab women are victims of a patriarchal society where women are deprived of their rights due to certain norms and social constraints. Arab women authors always criticize the patriarchal norms which generally affect the family members and women especially. For Arabs, the family constitutes the actual framework of life. It represents the most important feature of Arab social organization. It works as a unit of society and a source of identity. The traditional Arab family is more important than individuals. Family always have the dominant power over its members, particularly its female members. This is the most important theme which the Arab women writers criticized in their literary works. Women struggle to get autonomy to build their own lives, that puts them in direct opposition to the family norms. In the Arab traditional family, the father is the breadwinner of the family, that means he has the absolute authority over the family members. The family members have to submit to his role and obey his wishes. Women's position is restricted to household duties, childbearing, and child caring. Despite urbanization, women's education, median, and industrialization the traditional practices and attitudes are still strong, especially in the countryside. In this regard, Arab women writers always target the issue of women's oppression within the patriarchal family and society. Their literary works are always connected with the quest for freedom, the struggle for individuality and the need to establish personal identities. Radwa Ashour is among the others who criticize the patriarchal society, because it destroy the chance of promising young women to reach their full potential. In her literary works, she presents women's political oppression and their struggle to find gratification in work, personal life, and their role as a citizen. In her novel, *The Warm stone* (1985) Ashour presents different generations of women with different experiences and circumstances. She clarifies how women play a very important role in strengthening the patriarchy, by putting restrictions on younger women to justify the male privilege.

Bushra is a university-educated woman. She is involved in social work as a teacher in the countryside. She is badly shocked at the conditions of women. Women in the countryside are not allowed to get an education according to the patriarchal norms. Their lives are restricted to the works and domestic duties, otherwise they suffer from oppression and violence. "Their faces are compressed under the oppression of pain. Their features are like mulberries and their eyes protruding"( Ashour.92). Another character is Amina a university student. She represents the younger generation. Being a new generation empowered by knowledge. Amina comes out as an active woman, full of promises. She stands up against the patriarchal restrictions and control of her father. She violates her father and participates in the university demonstration. She is imprisoned along with other students. Despite that, her mother chooses a man for her regardless of love and age issues. Bushra is young and it is up to her mother to advise and direct



her"but what is she really loves him... We knock ourselves out for them until they grow up then strangers come and take them from us" (Ashour. 92).

In *Granada*, Abo Jaffar represents the Patriarchal figure in his family. He and his wife Um Hassan play a very important role in preserving the patriarchal elements in the family. Abou Jaafar decides to provide Saleema a private tutor. He always encourages her to possess a great personality like the poetess. They give her the nickname the Queen of Sheba. Saleema develops the patriarchal elements with the encouragement of her grandfather and the submissive attitude of her mother and grandmother. Saleema's character is totally affected and empowered by her patriarchal authority which is represented by her grandfather, her mother, and grandmother's indecisive position. That is very clear when both her grandmother and her mother are a bit scared about Saleema's lack of traditional femininity. Later on, her obsession with books of medicine and herbology distracts her from her husband Saad, her daughter, and household duties. In this regard, Saleema maintains the patriarchal elements due to her mother's and grandmother's indecisive position.

Another example in *The Woman from Tantoura* is represented by the Sri Lankan maid Sumana. She is Ruqayya's and her granddaughter Randa's housekeeper. Due to her work and position as a maid within the family, Sumana has a sense of inferiority. She submits to Randa's authority, who adopts the empires' culture by controlling Sri Lankan maid's attitudes and behaviour. Randa forces Sumana to cook the Palestinian food and rebukes her. Sumana's inferior position as a maid in a foreign country compels her to be submissive and preserve the patriarchal authority. Despite Ruqayya's efforts to eliminate the gap between the two of them. She advises Randa not to look down upon Sumana or any other human being. The cultural norms and traditions force women to be passive and obedient. In this sense, they preserve the patriarchal elements. While other characters are too inclined to adopt patriarchal elements due to their attachment to the patriarchal figure and their unconscious desire. Juliet Mitchell in her book *Psychoanalysis and feminism* (1974) explains that in Patriarchal society boys and girls try to find their place in the superior position. They desire to be like their father, who represents the ultimate authority in the family while women are always associated with an inferior position because of cultural norms and traditions.

#### **4. The Techniques of Narration.**

Hélène Cixous, in her book *The Laugh of The Medusa* (1976) creates the term of *Écriture Feminine* to challenge the male domination of historical literary discourse. Cixous argues that women can create a language of their own at both literary and metaphorical level. In this regard, feminine writings will be different from the male writings, because it presents women as active creators rather than passive bodies. Both Alice Walker and Radwa Ashour present it through their characters.

Being an Egyptian woman author, Ashour draws her own experience from a postcolonial society where she is grown up. Therefore, her literary writings explore the psychological effects of war and occupation from the female point of view. She explores the suppressed potential in her female characters, despite not being a feminist in the western sense. For her, women's problems are not given priority for social change in Egypt "I am very much preoccupied with women's liberation in the context of social liberation as part of national liberation"(qtd.in Badran.157).Therefore, she brings out the political repression with the concern of women's struggle to find gratification in work, personal relationships, and their role as a citizen. Ashour examines different aspects of women's experiences that have remained unexplored. According to Cixous' feminine aspects of writings, Ashour focuses on the sensual aspects of women's experiences which are not publicly discussed or treated in male's literature.

She presents various aspects of everyday life, clothes, language, house songs, and celebrations. She presents stories through what seems to be irrelevant to the grand narrative of history. She exposes women's hidden stories and daily activities which are equally important for the functioning of the society. Ashour valorizes women's personal subjectivity, mood, thoughts, and feelings, she subverts the dominant patriarchal idea of women's body as a tool of reproduction.

Ashour's literary narratives always take place in the context of losing the land, society, and culture. She uses the stream of consciousness and dream-narrative techniques to intertwine social and political context with the intimate psychological world of her characters. In her novel *Granada*, she uses the third person narrative technique to describe the life of Abo Jaffar and his family after the Castilian invasion. In *The Woman from Tantoura*, she uses the first-person narrative technique to describe the Palestinian catastrophe and its aftermath through the eyes of Ruqayya. Through these techniques, Ashour describes her character's fears, motivations, and rationalization to present the essential counterculture figure particularly women as intelligent, supremely rational, and sympathetic. Ashour uses the stream of consciousness technique to present the minute details of the women's world. These small details help readers to understand women's suffering and struggle simultaneously. She examines aspects of women experiences which have remained unexplored due to the socio-political environment. Furthermore, Ashour uses post-trauma narration as a way to create a connection based on the shared experiences of native communities that have been under colonial rule and still suffering from the continued neo-colonial conditions. She describes the relationship between past and present as a vital element in the process of decolonizing national identity. For her, history comprises cultural resistances that involve the protection of cultural conservation and collective memory in the face of the threat of cultural imposition and degeneration. Recording history gives more coherence and visibility. It presents the marginalized and silence domain in the present and the past, as in the case of *Granada* and *The Woman from Tantoura*. Ashour in her essay "My Experience with Writing" said

I don't Think that there is a clear demarcating line between the present and the past. To me, the two constitute an interplay of light and shadow like those 16th century Spanish painting or, better still, like Arabesque. The past is too much of present and the present is too imbued with the past to make any sense of it ( Ashour.90).

Alice Walker in her novels records the physical and psychological struggle of African American women. They suffer from slavery, patriarchy, and racial discrimination. African American women are cruelly marginalized and oppressed because of the white dominant system and black male's patriarchy. The central characters of her literary works are always females belonging to the downtrodden class. They are victims of racial, sexual, and economic oppression. Walker not only describes the sufferings of these female characters, but she depicts their struggle to liberate themselves. Her protagonists challenge African American women's stereotypical image. For this purpose, Walker uses the stream of consciousness techniques to bring out women's subjectivity, thoughts, feelings, and actions. Furthermore, Walker presents the mental state of her protagonist by using a different kind of narrative technique. In *The Color Purple*, she uses the first-person narrative along with the letters that Celie writes to her God and Nettie. In *Meridian*, the narrator speaks in the third person. On the other side, Walker's literary works are mostly viewed from the perspective of her biographical and racial background, that's why her novels contain autobiographical elements. She uses flashback technique, as the events shift from the present to the past. It is evident in her novel *Meridian* and others. Walker always gives credit to the past and its impact on the present and future life. She

presents the notion of how the past and the present are interconnected and constructed the future. For African American women, the past is always associated with the pain, suffering, misery, oppression and dehumanization. Therefore, the recollection of the past and ancestors help in their identity-formation. It connects the individuals with cultural community and community members who are oppressed and dehumanized. Walker does not only repeat the past, but she incorporates the present to serve the contemporary ideal of unity in diversity. Barbara Christian in her book *black feminist Criticism* (1985) clarified that:

Walker's poetry, fiction and essays always focus to some extent on the major character's perceptions of their past as crucial to their personal transformation in the present and the possibility of change in the future (Christian.72).

##### **5. The Notion of spirituality in the works of Radwa Ashour and Alice Walker.**

Basically, spiritual and religious values tend to play a significant role almost in all cultures. Furthermore, religious and spiritual devotion is rooted in a personal search for answers to the fundamental questions about existence, purpose, and relationships with the sacred or transcendent. Furthermore, a spiritual approach can also help in improving a positive perspective on issues such as justice, protection, and good. The individual is often forced to fully depend on themselves to reform unfortunate circumstances or overcome hardships. Such an approach to life can be frustrating in times of hardship or great loss, leading to elevated levels of anxiety. As a result, spirituality can be used to achieve a more balanced view of life by promoting a redefining perspective that decentralizes materialistic aspects and encourages mutual healing through communal actions. Religious affiliation is regarded as one of the most important social connections, providing members with supportive integrative societies. Generally, religious mechanisms refer to the act of performing religious activities such as additional prayer or attending religious services, in reaction to a traumatic event, while engaging with the stress by religious, spiritual activities and beliefs. These mechanisms' collective factor is what makes them so important in situations where group identity is challenged or severely impacted. Therefore, the notion of spirituality is presented in the works of Alice Walker and Radawa Ashour, but each one presented in a different way.

Being a part of a post-colonial country or generation, Ashour presents the notion of spirituality with different perspectives. For her people attempt to find a new sense of meaning and purpose for their life after the catastrophic event or trauma. Religious identity may function as a unifying force in the face of trauma and help modify memories of suffering to accommodate aspects of solidarity and compassion. That is what Radwa Ashour presents in both her novels. *The Woman from Tantoura* depicts the Palestinian's life after the catastrophic event, where lots of people are imprisoned, massacred, and forced to leave their country. As a daily reminder of the price paid for the Palestinian people's aspirations and the impossibility of letting go, pictures of martyrs are shown in the homes of their families, and constantly remembering those who suffer from injustice, imprisonment and different kind of oppression. They perform active forgetting in this way. In this sense, they continue to live their lives and maintain their existences as part of the struggle. The aim of such integration is to fuel a desire to remember and motivate an enthusiasm for a better life, rather than to move on and achieve happiness. In a deliberate method of building components of collective memory, memorials recur regularly in the lives of trauma groups. As time passes, these traumatic experiences become part of one's cultural identity, dictating those responses. Furthermore, Ashour reflects on the relationship between religious belief and spirituality in the aftermath of trauma and memories of suffering. In the second novel *Granada*, Ashour describes the circumstances after the Castilian invasion and prohibition of all the Muslim tradition. This disruption of religious

practices evoked a great deal of rage and tension, as people resorted to secret steps, some of which were life-threatening, in order to maintain their religious identity. People were relieved and joyful as they were able to openly express themselves and follow their values.

Alice Walker is also interested in the spiritual freedom of her characters; she has a different approach to the spirituality and spiritual freedom. In *The Color Purple* Alice Walker rises above the limits of gender and race in relation to religion. Her voice is also Celie's voice that represents the voice of a person who struggles with ideas of God and religion in order to allow an intervention of a higher power that inspires characters. Walker draws attention to what happens when someone is forced to live by established ideologies that exclude rather than include many people. The journey of self-discovery that Celie undergoes is accentuated by an internal understanding of God and the spiritual freedom. Initially, Celie used to write her suffering to God in the form of letters, hoping to get a sense of release and help. Later on, she redefines the notion of God as she interacts with people around her such as Nettie, Sofia and Shug Avery. The new vision of God that Celie developed enables her to survive and be happy, as she nurtures a spirituality that embraces her strength and weakness, while she grows and change as a person in an often brutal and perplexing world. In this novel, Walker traces Celie's journey from living in fear of a patriarchal God with whom she struggles to identify her ultimate joy and acceptance of herself, and the peacefulness found in everyday life. Celie finally is able to move on from a life of misery when she learns that life has so much more to give as she develops her desire to change and evolve. In this book, Walker introduces the concept of spirituality to everyone who has been perplexed by the role of God and faith in their lives and provides an alternate perspective. Celie's final letter brings the novel's spiritual structure to a close. She addresses her message, to universe, Stars, trees, sky, humans, and everything. Celie's happiness is expressed in a variety of ways.

In her second novel *Meridian*, Walker describes Meridian's journey to achieve spiritual liberation and self-affirmation as an attempt to express the totality of self and how that self is related to the world. It's a search for liberation, joy, and contentment, a quest for self-esteem, and a yearning for communal love. It is a quest for an escape from the body and salvation for the soul by finding the reality in the darkness, in keeping with black literary tradition. According to Walker, Meridian is finally free, her connections are not to a man, a family, or a particular neighbourhood. For her, motherhood entails not only the care of children, but also the nurturing of life, and the continuation of life. She sees herself as directly tied to all black people. Meridian used a mystical approach to change herself and her community, She neglects her personal and physical needs to meet her people at equal level. She is putting her life at risk to defend black people's rights. Meridian's ideologies are fundamentally opposed to conventional ideologies that abuse people of colour. As a result, for the sake of her country she offers herself as a martyr. Her people praise her and compare her to a divine figure in this way. Her spirituality and deep sacrificial desire are the foundation of this Godly aspect of her identity. Therefore, Meridian's personality is made up of several threads, including a black woman, an activist, a mystic, or a martyr, all of which are linked to her own vision of an idealist society. Her comprehension grooves are expanding, and she is becoming an epitome of human virtues, making her more human.

## **Conclusion**

This study is revolving around Alice walker's and Radwa Ashour's feminist approaches. Walker and Ashour are much concerned with women's liberation and emancipation, but each one has a different way in presenting the concept of feminism and



women's liberation. Basically, they are interested in portraying the subjective history of women in their intimate depictions of women's experiences. Walker and Ashour focus on the sensual aspects of women's experiences which are not publicly discussed or treated in male literature. They present various aspects of everyday life, clothes, language, house songs, and celebrations to presents stories through what seems to be irrelevant to the grand narrative of history. They intend to produce what Cixous calls the feminine practice of writings. In most of their writings, Ashour and Walker use the stream of consciousness technique to present the minute details of women's world. These small details help the readers to understand women's suffering and struggles simultaneously. Furthermore, they show the importance of past, as recollection of the past and ancestors help in identity formation. They are not only repeat the past but incorporate the present with present to serve the contemporary ideal of unity in diversity. Radwa Ashour and Alice Walker have different way in presenting the concept of feminism and women's liberation. Ashour considers women's liberation should be within the concept of national liberation. In her literary works, Ashour's female characters are compelling through their commitment to their nation, as are fully involved in family matters and middle-class concerns like modesty and family honour. They respond differently to the rapid change in culture. They are wholly alive in their surroundings undergoing a disrupting change. Therefore, her literary writings explore the psychological effects of war and occupation from the female point of view. She explores the suppressed potential in her female characters. Alice Walker sees women's liberation is quiet essential in eradicating the racial discrimination. In her works, Walker speaks on behalf of those who have been suppressed, silenced, and deprived of their rights. Therefore, her literary works represent as a quilt of compassion, because it is full of folklore, language, pain, spirit and memories of African Americans. In this regard, Ashour and Walker insist on women's rights and equality, as they are presenting their female characters as intelligent, rational, and capable of getting things accomplished. They bring to the front women's stories and experiences, that are not publicly discussed in male literature. Furthermore, they valorize women's thoughts, feeling, subjectivity, and their roles within the society. In doing that, they change women's stereotypical image which are presented in male's literature

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