ABSTRACT

Literature is a mirror held onto the society that reflects the culture, history and socio-political issues of specific periods. Books have the uniqueness of transforming lives by weaving characters, to whom we are able to relate – their trials, tribulations and achievements become our own. Although confined to the Afro-American milieu, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye, Sula* and *Beloved* raises issues and concerns that are universal to women across the globe. These writers try to lend voice to an otherwise marginalized and suppressed group of women, who have been denied a dignified existence. This research, through the methodology of critical analysis and interpretation of texts, tries to understand the concept of self, from the western and eastern perspectives. In the due process, the various factors that contribute to the formation of an individual’s ‘self’ are also identified. Through an analysis of the female protagonists in the works of Morrison and Walker, this study examines how it is possible for a woman to progress from the margins to a position that is central, from object to subject.

Most often, women are not even conscious that they too have an individuality of their own and need to lead a dignified life. Having got so habituated to oppression, it has almost become a way of life for them. They need to be conscious and aware of the fact that they have to create a space of their own, without compromising on their individuality and dignity. When they fail to do this, they just stagnate and become mere pawns in the hands of men and tend to get exploited. Most of the female protagonists discussed in this study, go through this phase and are unable to extricate themselves from the traumatized conditions that engulf them. This study clearly focuses on how women need to be conscious of what is happening to them and realize that they are being deprived of their individuality and dignity. Once this awareness sets in, they can decide the path that they need to take for self-actualization. The primary factor that emerges through this research, is the need for women to strengthen their self-concept by focusing on their own intrinsic and inherent qualities, rather than rejecting themselves as weak and inferior. Solutions found to problems through one’s own effort, based on one’s circumstances and conditions, will have more permanency than solutions offered by others. Moreover, selfhood is not something that happens overnight. It is a process that evolves during the course of an individual’s life time. Being so, this gives women ample scope for redefining their selves, by adapting and learning from the ever changing experiences in life and the insights that they get from this.