

FEMINISM IN ALICE WALKER'S -THE COLOR PURPLE

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ABSTRACT

Feminism as a concept seeks to better the lot of women who are perceived to be sidelined by men in the prevailing scheme of things in the society. Alice walker was a gifted writer and she won prizes and scholarships. Alice walker was the first Afro-American women writer who received the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, The color purple (1982).

The present study analyses the important theme of walker's well-known novel the color purple; abuse of women in terms of feminism. As in the case in walker's prize winning novel, women are forced to line under the dominance of their rules, until one between them realizes her value, stands against the abuses and declares her identity as powerful women in the society.

Keywords: Abuse of Women, Feminism, Discrimination, Male Dominance, Afro-American, Patriarchy, Society.

The Color Purple, the well-known novel by Alice Walker will be analysed in terms of Feminism. In the very opening of the novel, the reader is presented with a small girl who is abused and raped by her step-father. In her lonely world, she cannot find anybody to trust in and share her despair. Since her step-father Alphonso says "You better not ever to tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy." (Walker, 11), she finds the only solution to express her hopelessness in writing letters to God. Too insecure to even give her name, we soon learn through the mouth of another that her name is Celie. While her mother is away Alphonso, presumed to be her 'Pa' rapes Celie saying, "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. (Walker, 11).

Feminists from western countries were mostly interested in issues of contraception and abortion, while women from ethnic minority groups and economically undeveloped countries were more interested in issues of racial discrimination, poverty and family and community violence. In Bryson's opinion, more developed and systematic analysis of the ways gender, class and race discriminations overlap, influenced various movements of colored women, including womanism, to move beyond mere critique of white feminism to develop original theory which has serious implications not just for white feminism, but for all women (Bryson 2003:226).

The novel is an epistolary novel which consists of her, Celie, letters addressed to God, and then to her sister Nettie. Letters becomes the only way for Celie to express herself, and only key for reader to have a better and deeper understanding for Celie, the protagonist. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader becomes familiar with a fourteen year old poor girl who is used to do the works of her husband. In the novel, Celie is just a servant who is responsible of looking after her husband, Albert, and his four children and to meet the sexual desires of him. He always abuses Celie until she declares her identity as an independent woman.

The popularity of Black feminism in the Western countries became common in the 1960s and 1970s, where it was motivated by the need to fight for equality between men and women (Darmawanti, 2012). In the United States, the most popular black feminist movement was abolitionist movement. The primary aim of the movement was to end slavery in the country and ensure the equality of all citizens regardless of their social status, race and gender. Black feminism does not only aim at dismantling the social constructions of the dominant communities, but also promote the economic and social development of black women. The concept of black feminism is evident in Walker's novel through the dilemma of the black women characters. In *The Color Purple*, Walker shows the adverse impacts that oppression of black women has on their development. Black women suffer from discrimination and oppression from black men and the white men and women.

From her novel, the color purple Celie's experiences some changes, and as a result of these changes the novel turns out to be not only a story about pain and despair but also a story of ultimate triumph. Novel begins in the early 1900's and ends in the mid 1940's and, between these time spaces, the readers witness Celie's changing from a small girl who is abused continuously in to a mature, young woman, realized herself. She frees herself from her husband's repressive control, and her conditions improved dramatically. Improved by her friendships with other women, especially Shug Avery, Albert's mistress, and by her

fondness for her younger sister, Nettie-who went to Africa with a missionary group with the help of Celie, Celie decides to leave Albert and moves to Memphis. She starts a business designing and making clothes, and becomes a business woman and earns her own money.

The protagonist Celie symbolizes a good house wife who tries to look after her husband and his children. Simone de Beauvoir, in his book *The Second Sex* says that "one is not born a woman; rather one becomes a woman", and Celie is the most suitable example to prove this thesis. She tries to do her best to provide a better life for them and even her husband's sisters realizes this. Albert's two sisters, Kate and Carrie, comes to visit them. They say "Celie, one thing is for sure. You keep a clean house. Good housekeeper, good with children, good cook. Brother couldn't have done better if he tried." (Walker,27-28) She is suitable for the social norms which support the idea of a woman being a good housewife, a good wife and a good mother. With the development Celie experienced, Celie adds something more to the idea of woman who just sits in the house and look after the children, she also becomes a working woman and gain her own money which gives her the self-confidence and the power to remain standing by herself.

Black women are in the lowest position of humanity. As Celie's life progresses, she is forced to marry an older man in the neighborhood. Being a widower, one would expect that he needs a wife to be his companion and to look after his four children. However, this is not the case with the widower, who rejects marrying Celie at first until he is offered cattle; an indication of the worthlessness of black women (Walker, 1985). Walker links black oppression against women to racism. The cruelty of black men presented in the story results from their frustration on being male in a white-dominated region (Sattar, 2014). The African-American men struggle to be accepted in the society due to racial bias, and hence release their frustration on the colored female (Jinke,2006). Explaining the predicament the double victimization of black women in the society, Walker explains that they have no place in such a society. She describes how the black women are regarded as slaves although the country is said to be free. Furthermore, the black women experience gender bias in a male-dominated world.

Walker, in her novel describes a community that is characterized by social organizations that are oppressive. Social organizations refer to relations that guide interactions of people in the social setting. They are formed through the interaction of people in the community. Among the aspects that describe social organizations in a given society is gender, because people of the same gender interact differently. The other aspect that influences social organization of the society is the structure of division of labor, as indicated by discrimination in the recruitment agencies. Sexual orientation is the other aspect that determines the social organization of the community. In the novel, it is clear that social organizations in the society promote the oppression of black women.

In the novel, black feminism is unsuccessful at first because women are unaware of the existence of their problems. They suffer in silence as each one of them feels that the problems are unique to their lives. For example, Celie is reluctant to report Pa, even as he rapes her repeatedly for the fear of losing her mother (Harris, 1986). Instead of confiding in another person in the society, she prefers to suffer in silence and written her letters to God. As time passes, Celie gets used to the brutality and chooses to remain passive instead of acting on it. By refusing to share her experience with other women, Celia lives a miserable life. However, her ability to open up the issue leads to her realization that her problems are not unique and she makes a conscious decision to end the oppression. She shares her experience with Shug after realizing that black women do not have to tolerate oppression in the society. In the conversation below, Celie expresses her realization that there is a better life, indicating success of black feminism.

To conclude, Walker's award-winning novel *The Color Purple* presents that women are forced to live under the dominance of a man, either father or husband. In the course of time, if one is really courageous enough and have the belief to make a better life for her, then it can be possible for her to start a brand-new story. Celie is one of the good example of these brave women to build a new life for herself and to declare her identity as a working and self-confident woman and it becomes "a story about finding and being reconciled with God" (Walker-Barnes, 3). In this sense, Feminist Literary Criticism sheds light to make the unseen details to be apparent. Starting with great wounds on the heart, Celie becomes one of the leading voices to show the woman the possibility of a new, better life, without the pressure of the men and without their help. Thus, from this article, we see male domination over the women in every part of life, but in the course of time , women want to release themselves from the abuses of man and be independent

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