

THE CONCEPT OF EVOLVING SELF AND WOMEN BONDING IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the assertion of “self” by the protagonist named Celie in The Color Purple. The color in the title itself suggests that Afro-American literature is the product of the different history of racial conflict. As a consequence of that, we also observe distinctive literary tradition which also sheds light upon the cultural diversity. It is a well-known fact that women writers strongly favor writing a novel than any other literary form probably because novel readers are mostly Women according to the survey.

Alice Walker has always tried to raise voice against humiliation meted out to women. She has tried to conceptualize the marginalized psyche of women enriching her literary tradition. The Color Purple is very interesting as it offers multiple interpretations being a novel of violence, a tale of domestic tragedy, the story of black women in the quest of “self” and most importantly it evokes Afro-American slavery not to forget the fact that it is also epistolary novel. Walker voices all the above-said issues collectively in the novel.

KEYWORDS: *Inter-Relationship of Racism, Sexism, Self-Realization, Sisterhood*

INTRODUCTION

Afro-American writing is the elucidation of lived experiences. Writing provides the platform to correct wrongs of the society to a certain extent and hence black women writers get an opportunity to bring out women's traits and predicaments. Black writers write against the double constraints of race and gender. They have portrayed women not as meek and sorry figures but as an individual of substance. This comes after the realization of their “self” through the fair amount of awareness and that is got through getting an education. Women writers do stress on getting the education which paves the way for women's liberation. They also write against the erosion and repression of female sexuality. This novel focuses on the assertion of “self” by the protagonist named Celie in *The Color Purple*. The color in the title itself suggests that Afro-American literature is the product of the different history of racial conflict. As a consequence of that, we also observe distinctive literary tradition which also sheds light upon the cultural diversity. According to Walker, She is of the opinion that “Black was not a color on my mother; it was a shield that mad her invisible (p.g. no. 124. ISOMG).

Alice Walker – an Afro-American writer questions the patriarchal and sexist society in her fictions. Therefore, *The Color Purple* is a liberative text that forces black people to situate themselves within the world. According to Erin Huskey, he says that, through the form, language, and content of the novel, Walker transforms historically oppressive dominant literary forms and asserts voice as represented by the tangible object of the novel. This is an object or text that

symbolizes Walker's personal transformation and envisions the possibility of transformation in the reader.¹ Her writing enjoys a large audience that comprises of a heterogeneous readership of both Blacks and Whites, women and men. She never fails to raise her voice against the imbalance of power between male and female besides protesting against the colonization of women. According to history, Whites in American Society have denied blacks existence treating them like aliens. The black race is the one which has suffered oppression to a larger extent than any other race as a result of that they lost their identities and hence they became almost invisible. In one of her interview, she was told that "I'm preoccupied with the spiritual survivor, the survival of the whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women." (Walker 192)

Walker's protagonist Celie, age of fourteen years, considering herself as ugly, expresses her state of the condition through writing letters to the God in her broken sentences yet one could realize her power of vehemence in her language. Celie writes in folk dialect to narrate her harsh experiences. She tells the tragic tale of sexual abuse and the way she was victimized. She had tried hard to survive at the hands of her own stepfather though getting a lot of warnings to remain silence. Somehow she chose to take up writing letters not only to God but also to her younger sister Nettie who is forcibly separated from Celie by her Pa.

Celie was able to gain confidence through the process of writing. Walker through the epistolary form provided a platform for Celie to regain her lost individuality. Shug Avery is as important in the novel as the protagonist because she is like a supportive aid for Celie. She is a Blues singer and mistress of Celie's husband. Shug Avery teaches her to love her own body and to learn to respect it. This is how we get to observe a kind of bonding between both of them. Besides

this, Sophia is one more female character who connects to Celie by tying the relationship of daughter-in-law who was bold enough to take up arguments with a white woman. When Sophia met Miss Millie, the mayor's wife she was asked to work as her maid. Sophia rejects that offer replying on her face "Hell no". She was slapped by Mayor's wife very next moment. Sophia was sent to jail and also punished for twelve years to work as a servant maid in mayor's house. It is not just an incident from the story but Walker has tried to show how this capitalism dismantles the social construction. She also sheds light upon problems of domestic labor under capitalism. Sophia also becomes medium for Celie to learn the language of protest and revolt against all such odds of her life and becomes part of the sisterhood. Women's collective performance is visible in the novel as if they are searching for the wholeness.

Women writers' novel focus towards the reconstruction of psychological, emotional and socio-cultural experiences that helps them to find the self-expression and try to give the voice to the voiceless in the marginalized society. Walker, through the medium of her protagonist's writing process, shows that writing can help in the creation of "self". In the novel, Sophia, Shug, Celie, and Nettie everyone tries to retain their selfhood after realizing their inner strength. Walker insists through her literary work that women should try to nurture their innate qualities so that they shall empower themselves owing strongly to ancestral culture. She strongly believes in women's culture and the same thing is evident most of her fictions. On the other hand, Nettie has helped Celie to build her sense of "self". Sometimes we observe in the novel that Celie lacks self-understanding process of writing letter has helped her to strengthen not only her voice but also her "self" which she recognizes later. The story of the novel is very self-reflective.

In *The Color Purple* Shug takes Celie along with her to Memphis and becomes a teacher who teaches Celie to stitch pants. Protagonist finds solace in her friendship as if she has got refuge in her love hinting the strong bond between

two of them. Celie has learned to do away with the traditional roles of a woman. Shug has helped her to recognize her hidden talents and Sophia's boldness in confronting violence against her has strengthened Celie's selfhood. It seems that Walker becomes a crusader for black women rebelling against their victimization. No doubt that her writing is just like extending helping hand to make them realize their powers.

Earlier, ignorant of her inner strength, Celie failed to give back answers to her cruel husband but writing helps to gather lost faith as well as confidence and she could talk back to Albert with certain gusto for his shock. New kind of attitude is seen in her character that suggests the fact that she has got enough awareness regarding her surroundings. Celie is enlightened in the company of Shug and other women folks suggests metaphors of togetherness. This also goes well with the art of quilting which is also done collectively in their leisure. Alice Walker, in her fictions, talk about collective performance to a certain extent to propagate humanity. No doubt it is very thoughtful because being a social activist she inspires everyone to become rationale and to move on progressive path questioning disparities acknowledging one's knowledge.

A person is liberated only when his mind is free to think about changes whatever he comes across. Celie has liberated her mind as well as "herself" by transforming her stitching hobby to business which has boosted her confidence and her financial security has given power to her. She is no more a powerless object of desire. Alice Walker Sheds light on women coming together for a purpose. As we see in *The Color Purple* when Sophia, Celie, and Shug get together sharing and caring for each other we could see a kind of sisterhood. This inclusive nature of black women is as if articulating their special knowledge which goes far beyond the established social order. As it is understood that collective performance yields good results no doubt. Similarly, when women come collectively they can try to come out of their passivity. For E.g. Sofia's tight-knit relationships with her five-strong sister lets us know that deep ties with proper understanding among women are a powerful means to combat sexism and abuse. They become assertive and start feeling independent. Alice Walker feels that when a woman finds someone to listen and respond patiently to it she feels it as a crucial step toward self-empowerment and autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

Alice Walker focuses on the issues of blacks' exploitation and disturbed relationship followed by infidelity and also forbidden relationships etc. all these things are the results of being docile, without awareness and that's because of illiteracy. In all ways, women struggled for their survival. They are forced to bear the burden of moral responsibility. Women were victimized inside and outside under the compulsion of patriarchy. She also suggests through her novel that women's liberation will start with financial independence, awareness, and self-employment.

Realizing one's existence is very important. For blacks, it was somewhat difficult because their color denied them from getting access to certain things in the white world. It is necessary that before existing in others mind one should always feel the existence of their own. When we get awareness from the education we could be real than a shadow. While examining her fictions we observe that she deals with the ground reality rather than imaginations whatever it is. It is very challenging to probe the socio-economic conditions of blacks in general and black women in specific though it is based on clear realistic factor it would be wrong if something is judged by just analyzing with external factors because it is matter of woman who is vulnerable, incompetent, cornered in domestic sphere as if she is made for caring and shouldering male assertions and their dimensions. Women should learn to explore and accept their "true self".

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