

# Liberation of Black women: Reading “*The Color Purple*”

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## Abstract

Following World War I, black literature made significant strides. Black writers, such as Alice Walker, began to write about their lives in their own language. Alice Walker is a vocal proponent of social and political reform who continuously speaks up when she perceives injustice. This article examines Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, as a response to the politics of black pride that dominated African American literature in the 1960s and 1970s. According to *The Color Purple*, black women's open and loud expression of same-sex sexual encounters can foster a freeing sense of black lesbian shamelessness. This sensibility stands in opposition to the politics of pride that defined the Black Arts Movement as well as the politics of silence that has silenced black women's displays and explorations of queer sexuality since the nineteenth century. Black lesbian shamelessness is defined in the novel as an approach to racial, gender, and sexual identity that recognizes the mutually constitutive, inter-subjective conditions of these categories, as well as the history of black transgression in the United States.

**Keyword:** black literature, vocal proponent, black lesbian, queer sexuality, shamelessness

Beauty of women is till date signified through an amalgamation of lot of things ranging from blue eyes, fair skin, apple cheeks and hour glass body shape. It is a way of thought process for a group of people which is passed on to the coming generation like hereditary. Fair skin becomes a multivalent symbol in context of beauty. The purpose of this research is to examine and describe how Celie, the female protagonist, eventually frees herself from suffering, tyranny, and dread. Alice Walker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, has established herself as one of the most varied and contentious writers of African American literature, both domestically and internationally. Alice Walker's writing reflects the connection she had with her own life experience as a black woman in white patriarchal society. The plot of her writing represents her culture and heritage, her suffering as black women in her own homeland. She presented the pain given by man to their wives and daughters and above all the fight of women to overcome their submissive situation and bring change in their engendered role to have a better and dignified life in future. Walker made the most highlighted statement in an interview conducted by John O' Brian in 1973, she says "I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women". [94]

Intense debate among scholars, politicians and women political activists has undoubtedly evoked the subject of women liberation and gender equality. With the release of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker went from being an undeniably serious black writer whose literature belonged to a tradition of gritty, though occasionally "magical," realism to a popular author, along with all the benefits and drawbacks that entails. *The Color Purple*, unlike *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) or *Meridian* (1976), received quick and widespread public acclaim, receiving the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for 1982-1983. At the same time, though, it sparked widespread criticism due to what appeared to be obvious defects in its construction.

Walker explains the life of her major female protagonist through her own experience as a growing child of segregated Georgia where violence and abuse were the major part of women's life. In Georgia almost every week a man would beat his wife as well as his children. These events have left a deep scar in the mind and soul of Walker's. In Walker's writing reader can find the way she vents out her dissatisfaction and protest against all kinds of violence taking place around the world against black women.

The epistolary novel "Color Purple" is a story of remarkable transformation and resilience in which the author discusses friendship connections, oppressive dominance, courage, and the struggle for freedom. In it, she tells the narrative of Celie, a woman who has gone from being oppressed and dependent to becoming emancipated at the end of the book. Readers learn about African-American exploitation, tyranny, persecution, and subsequent resistance. In Afro-American literature, the insurrection is a common theme or motif. African-Americans have travelled down a variety of pathways and taken a variety of detours. However, it is currently engaged in a struggle for human rights and against white people's exploitation. Despite disparities in location, religion, conditions, society, and language, the Afro-American community's lives and experiences are shaped by the fact that they were exposed to injustice and slavery. It is still, to some extent or another, a victim of this social evil. Life, experiences, society, and difficulties, as well as anguish and revolt against the established order, have all shaped the characters in Afro-American literature. In this novel, we find many expressions of red and passionate experiences, as well as conflict. The problem of color line, the relationship between the darker and lighter races of males in Africa and America, was a major issue in the twentieth century. In twenty-first century also time and again we get to hear some or the other story of lynching because of the existence of racism. African-Americans are still looking for a safe place in this very world. Africans lived as if they were from another world. They were not considered human beings despite the fact that they had emerged from a society founded on inequity and had been burnt alive. They wouldn't be able to survive in the predominantly white neighborhood. They are still given the lowest social status in American culture.

In novel "The Color Purple" the life of blacks is largely mirrored. The experience of blacks is very well presented by Walker. Nathan Huggins opines that

"For most blacks, there has never been any doubt that their identity is embedded in the general American history, and that they will never know themselves until they mine and refine that history themselves" (Huggins VII)

Sexism, racism, oppression, and poverty have all been depicted in Alice Walker's work. It is about women's battle to be recognized as individuals with their own self-identity, therefore opposing the exploitative and repressive shackles of society that are governed and established by men.

Lindsey Tucker argues,

"For the black woman writer, the search for voice- the rescue of her subjectivity from the sometimes subtle, yet always pervasive, dictates the dominant white male culture is more even problematic. Alice Walker, aware of black women as particularly muted group, has addressed herself in much of her work to the problem of the black woman as creator" (Tucker 81)

As readers, we see things through the eyes of the sisters Celie and Netie as they recount the young lady's disastrous existence and her struggles with physical and emotional abuse. She gets raped by her stepfather as a child and has two children. These encounters have made her more open to a bisexual existence.

Characters in Afro-American literature are shaped by the chemistry of life, experiences, society, and challenges, as well as pain and defiance of the established order. In Afro-American literature, we discover many expressions of red and fiery experiences and conflicts. The problem of color line in the twentieth century, the relationship between the darker and lighter races of men in Africa and America. African-American literature is looking for its place in the world. Africans lived the lives of others in their own nation. They were not considered human beings despite the fact that they emerged from a society founded on inequality and were burnt alive. They couldn't live in the white neighborhood. They were relegated to the bottom of society in American culture.

It should be noted, however, that lesbianism is mentioned in the book, although it is not depicted graphically in book. In the book, there are two perspectives on lesbianism. To begin, this term could be interpreted in the classic sense, as a romantic or sexual relationship or attraction between two girls who live together. It could also refer to a female's displeasure with male dominance or institutions such as patriarchy or capitalism that led to female gender alienation. It can also be a partnership in

which the female partners reject the traditional married life and actively resist male domination.

Many characters' lives are also vivid with the second lesbian partnership of resistance against oppression. To combat male chauvinism, the ladies provide emotional support to one another. The contrast that once existed between them has faded. Despite being mistreated by her stepfather and husband, she desired to be cared for and loved. Simply because she is a woman, she is beaten, cursed, and humiliated. Celie lives in an environment dominated by men. In Celie's letters, her spouse is addressed as Mister. Her inner strength grows as a result of her continued victimization. Celie undergoes a significant transformation as a result of her relationship with Shug, Harpo's wife.

Celie's relationship with Shug who is very confident, glamorous, assertive, and gorgeous lady who is also her husband's lover, strengthens her and gives her the courage to confront the crimes and express her thoughts. Shug and Sofia are regarded as the most powerful women willing to fight for their rights. Nettie is driven by a strong desire to achieve greater success. She travels to Africa with a group of black missionaries. She is subjected to racial and gender prejudice. However, she continues to labor for the benefit of her people and devotes herself entirely to the task. Despite the fact that women in *The Color Purple* were repressed and suffered, they were able to overcome these obstacles with the help of mental and moral assistance.

Racism is defined in *The Color Purple* as a white antagonist attacking a helpless black victim. It's worth noting that none of the novel's opponents are genuinely evil beings. Those who perpetrate the violence are frequently victims of abuse themselves. After Mr. implies that he is less of a man as a result of Sofia's resistance, Harpo, Mr. 's son, strikes his wife Sofia, saying, "Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating". (16)

In the narrative, racism is portrayed as a cage through which whites oppress black people. Sofia's confinement is a metaphor for black people who are enslaved by racism and forced to live in slavery and domesticity in their own houses. Bigotry has made the novel's characters believe that "bright skin" is more attractive. (17)

Sofia is able to escape gender discrimination by leaving her husband, and the narrative vividly depicts her struggle against sexual and racial exploitation. Celie's comprehension of herself is aided by Sofia. Sofia advises Celie to slam Mister's head against the wall. 44 (Walker) This might be a method to nudge Celie away from her complacency. Shug, on the other hand, inspires Celie to see love and God in a new light. We see her transform from a timid, young, and vulnerable lady to a confident woman who has learned what it means to love and be loved, and who succeeds as a result of the opportunities she seizes.

### Conclusion

The significance of beauty for women is her financial independence, confidence, right of choosing and expressing. Traditionally beautiful word was confined in the boundaries of fair skin, perfect height and body figure. Women role was confined within the boundaries of household chores. For a healthy and developed society women liberation is an utmost important criterion. In novel we see Celie is reborn into oneness with herself and others, as well as the world's sense of what is beyond comprehension and love. It brings the women together as comrades on a spiritual quest of self-discovery and status challenge. As a result, they struggle for their own and their families' survival. Celie has been able to start her own business and now she works in the same house where her father used to work.

Celie discovers, through her quest for the truth, that the patriarchal world she has lived in is oppressive to all women. She learns that women may be equal to men in terms of strength and intelligence when she meets Shug and flees Albert. When Celie returns to Georgia near the end of the story, she is no longer weak and submissive; instead, she has grown into a capable, self-assured woman who understands she can be happy without relying on anyone except herself. This is feminism's ultimate lesson. She indicates her admission into "masculinity" when she includes trousers, a sign of masculinity, into her wardrobe. As a result, she becomes not only self-assured but also self-sufficient. When Shugs helps her financially, she gains independence. Her subservient demeanor

vanishes by the end of the story, replaced by audacious remarks she had never spoken before. For example, she claims to be pore, black, possibly unattractive, and unable to cook, but she is present! The metamorphosis and emancipation she hadendured, as well as the achievement of a sense of self-respect, can only be marveled by the readers.

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