

## ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE* : STRUGGLE OF BLACK WOMEN FOR GENDER EQUALITY

**Shalini**

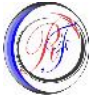
Research Scholar  
Department of English and MEL  
Lucknow University,  
Lucknow

### ABSTRACT

*The present paper discuss about the existence of black Women in Alice Walker's The Color Purple. In this way they maintain their identity. Black women are also known as Afro- American women. They want to get gender equality in society. In this paper we can see, how black women get inequality in society after facing many struggle. The aim of this paper is to create forms of knowledge built upon the experience of black women. This paper deals not only the problems of being black women, but also with the possibility of change and progression, even through if is a slow process. Through this paper we want to focus they never think, they are weak and hopeless, they wants to treat equal as white. This paper gives message to all women; they should always help to each other. They don't want to live under the pressure of men. It is the blue violence. Afro-American women faces double oppression firstly they are blacks and secondly they are women. In this paper we can observe that black women represent a women trying to find her place in the world through different events and setting. It is the experience of black women community. It is the struggle of women rights. In this paper we can see, how black women survive in hard condition and become strong. We can say that here black women become masculine. So, this paper tries to focus struggle of black women for their own identity and get independence and gender equality in society.*

**Key words:** Gender Equality, Black Women, Back Feminism, Women Empowerment, Patriarchy.

Firstly, we discuss about Gender Equality. Gender Equality is located of events attitudes and assumptions that make available opportunity and generate potential persons. Gender Equality is achieve while men take pleasure in the same human rights and opportunities crosswise all sectors of the world, as well as trade and industry participation and decision- making, and when the diverse behaviors, aspirations and wants of women and men are just as appreciated and favored. We can say that gender equality is not a woman's issues, it is a human issue. As a author Abigail Adams wrote about gender equality:

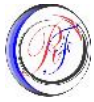


... remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation. (Google Search)

Color discrimination is the greatest problem of this world; especially for women. If a woman is black, she does not get full respect from the society in comparison to a white one. A white woman holds the highest post due to four. There are many problems related to color discrimination. African Americans also referred to as Black Americans or Afro – Americans, and formerly as American Negroes are citizens or residents of the United States who have at least partial ancestry from any of native populations of sub-Saharan from Africa. Most African Americans are of West African Women of African origin in the United States having always been keenly aware of the impact of race, class gender and oppression upon their lives. Since slavery, they should have struggled individually and in groups, spontaneously and in formal organizations to eradicate the multiple injustices that they and their communities face. It is only the memories of the painful and agonizing activities experienced by their people in American which make us accept the violence and bitterness that has characterized blacks of recent past. The black writers are now speaking for the people as never before. About the black person W. E. B. Du Bois calls them “double consciousness” from which he describes as follows, “[A black person] ever feels his two ness,- an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled Strivings; two waring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du. Bois, quoted in : Byerman, 1995).

Black women want themselves in the part of literature. They remained other; they are not inferior gender and passive object. Women don't want to deny their dignity and worse their identity. They want their basic rights, and totally include in social, political and economic life. They include in social, political and economic life. They include many black women in literature. Some authors are Maya Angelou, Deborah Gray- White, Harriet Jacobs, Maria Stewart, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neala Hurston. These black women writers want to remind or save their dignity and regaining their feminine entity, self esteem, self- realization and save their sexual awareness. Alice Walker's intention not only gives voice to black women but also provide their freedom.

Afro- American or black women are treated as animals, losing their human right and inequality in society from Afro- American men. They want to break the shackle of patriarchy. They want to stop white and domestic violence from Afro- American men. Afro- American

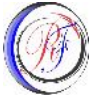


men take heavy responsibility for their women to maintain household running such as cooking, washing cloths and utensils. In *History of Afro-American* :

Southern society in the nineteenth and early- twentieth century was divided in many ways : wealthy and poor, black and white, male and female. This created incredible tension at every level of society. The South's population was primarily rural. Extended families had to stay together since a lot of work required to keep any household running. The family structure was patriarchal; it means that men were considered to be the heads of the household. Men did the majority of the farm work, took care of family finances, the building of the family home, and defending the family property, if necessary. The women were expected to care for the children, prepare family meals, wash clothes, clean house, chop wood, and carry water. Women often bore children every year, leaving them weaker and more frequently marry twice or three times, because a woman was needed to care for his children. Large families were valued because the mortality rate was high. Children as they were able to. If family members survived to old age, they were kept as part of the extended family, helping to care for young children and assisting with running the household. (3)

Afro- American women try to reject the power of patriarchy. They want to established women empowerment against men. These women try to identify themselves and want to play the role of masculine.

Alice walker is one of the most famous, Afro –American women. She was born on 9 Feb, 1944 in Eatonton. Georgia. She is the eight and youngest child of Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker and Willie Lee Walker. Both were poor sharecroppers. Her family faces poverty and she grew up in an environment of violent racism. She was always an activist and participated in the civil rights movement. Alice walker won many Awards like Pulitzen Prize and American Book Award. In her novel she examines the connections between sexuality and spirituality. Her novel powerfully articulates contemporary issues and involving gender and race in the united state. She writes *The Color Purple* full of Afro- American women or black women's experiences. Alice walker found that African Americans were shown as being complete and complex individuals undiminished by the negative stero-type or characterization depicted by society. She was discarded by the black writing movement of the nineteen and forties for picturing the African – American as whole instead of down trodden oppressed people. Alice Walker believes that strangeness is only a thing which gives us ability to change the old thought and establish new rules and regulation against male community.

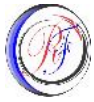


Alice Walker is most recognized and celebrated contemporary black women novelists. For her black feministic approach, gender issue and women empowerment her works widely read over the world. Alice Walker who is recognized as one of the leading voice among the black American writers. She has produced an acclaimed and varied body of work, including poetry, novels, short stories, essays, criticism. Her works are praised for their insightful of black life in particular the experience of black women in a sexist and racist society. According to Babara Christian, "Walker is concerned with 'heritage which to walker is not so much the ground sweep of history or artifacts created as it is the relations of people to each other; young to old, parent to child, man to women'"(Ms. Shahid, Dr. Mohini Chakrorayana,2005:12).

Walker admires the struggle of black women throughout history to maintain an essential religion and creativity in their lives, and the achievements serve as an inspiration to others as Alice Walker says. "We must fearlessly pull out ourselves and look at and We our great grandmother were not allowed to know" (12). Her works deal not only with the problems of being black women, but also with the possibility of change and progression, even through if is a slow process. Alice Walker show the bipartite identity of black women and says, "it is the black women's word that have the most meaning for us her daughters, because she, like us, has experienced life not only as a black person, but as a woman" (Walker, 275). Alice Walker says that black women famous for their double identity, because they are victim of both racism and sexism. She says "oppressed almost beyond recognition- oppressed by everyone" (Walker, 149).

*The Color Purple* is one of the most significant black women's novel of the 1980's from which we can see firstly women lost their identity but after facing many problem they found their identity. M. Dubey States, "Black women's novel, in the 70's do not simply oppose to contemporary nationalist discourse on black identity. They imagine black femininity as an absence, and draw attention to the textual effects of this absence"(30). Celie is the protagonist of the novel. She is a fourteen years old girl and she is poor, ugly and uneducated girl. She is a moving figure in the novel and fully novel depends on her struggle for getting gender equality. In the novel Celie is only the subject of repeated rapes and beating. She raped or torture by her father physically, mentally and emotionally. She is only a female body. The importance of regaining the control of one's own body for asserting one's self is outlined by Daniel Ross in these terms:

One of the primary projects of modern feminism has been to restore women's bodies. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, women have learned to fear or even hate their bodies. Consequently, women often think of their bodies as torn or fragmented, a



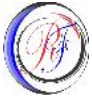
pattern evident in Alice Walker's *Celie*. To confront the body is to confront not only an individual's abuse but also the abuse of women's bodies throughout history, as the external symbol of women's enslavement, this abuse represents for women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status. (70)

The gender base oppression of women emerges as a powerful thing of the novel as the powerless women are being suppressed by equally powerless men. The device men use to control women is rape such is *Celie's* case she is strongly with the team of a black missionary and has an opportunity to understand the African culture and her own people. Alice Walker use many theme and motifs in the *Color Purple*,

One of the most interesting is the concept of gender roles. Although there are stereotypical elements for both men and women, it is within the multi-dimensional main characters that Walker destroys traditional roles and replaces them with more complex concepts. The abusive husband, Albert, who eventually has a change of heart, or his son's inability to "beat" his wife into submission, this eventually taking up the house work himself while his worked in the field- these are just a few example of the transforming and untraditional gender roles displayed in the book. (*The Color Purple*)

In *The Color Purple* *Celie* is a gender role because in the beginning of her childhood, she was treated as a second class citizen. In the novel *Celie's* mother was very sick, so, she was unable to protect her from her father's rapes. For her father's rape, from which two children were produced. Her father made it clear "you better never tell anybody by God. It'd kill your mammy" (1). *Celie* is uneducated and sexually abused by her step father.

You better not never tell nobody but God.  
It'd kill your mammy.  
Dear God,  
I am fourteen year old. I am I have always  
been a good girl. May be you can give me a  
sign letting me  
Know what is happening to me.  
Last spring [...] alone. A week go by he  
Pulling on her arm again. She say  
Now. Iain't gonna. (3)

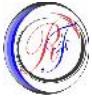


Alice Walker wants to show the male- female relationships within her community. The male of Afro- American community is physically and mentally strong whereas the women usually conform to the role of a passive victim. But in *The Color Purple* Alice Walker break this old tradition and make strong identity of black women. In the novel Walker break the traditional boundaries of masculinity as a signifier of male power. Alice Walker very warily expresses her apprehension about gender roles and gender dynamics in her characterization and plot development. In the novel Alice Walker wants to say that power is not only in the hand of patriarchy, while it is also in the hands of women by showing gender equality. They want to say that they are not weak, marginalized and not depend on men. She says that hegemony of man make the women to feel insecure and discouraged. In the novel male has employed the woman is like a instrument of oppression. We see the picture of female gender in the novel :

Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful women I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She about ten thousand times more prettier then me. I see her tere in furs. He face rouge. Her hair like something tail she grinning with her foot upon somebody like motorcar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some. Iast her to give me the picture. An all night long I store at it. An now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dressed to to kill, whirling and laughing. (16)

Alice Walker very carefully express women's problems and suffering in the novel. *The Color Purple* emphasizes the plight of black women. The novels suffer dual oppression of racism and sexism. In her novel Alice Walker mostly depict the inner strengths of black women for getting gender equality. In *Color Purple* women is like a masculine. Celie wants to save her sister Nettie in male dominated society. She wants to prevent her step father's rape. At the beginning, however, Celie can't make too much sense of her experiences; she is rather the passive victim of her environment, "But I don't know how to fight. All know how to do is stay alive"(26). I don't say nothing. I stay where I'm told. But I am alive" (29). The novel is about the struggle between salvation and revenge. In the novel Sofia is a danger to the long-established paradigm not more than only for gender, but also for race. She has the conventional individuality of the male gender which source her probleins in own race, but because "she is bound to live her life and be herself no matter what" (276).

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* be going to accomplish the goals of full amount liberty and equality between men and women, implementation all aspects in life such as economical, social, political and sexual aspects, both in the household and community areas. More importantly, the most important objective that the female characters would like to arrive at by performing out their views is to deconstruct the constraining patriarchal thought



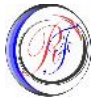
that hinders women from on the increase themselves. In *The Color Purple* Celie and Shug are two most strong characters, always try to remain their identity and want to say three things. First, we are as a creature. Second, we are as a human being. Third, we are as a black female. *The Color Purple* is the story of personal empowerment which is open with a protagonist Celie, and she is the bottom of America's social caste. Celie is victim of constant rape, violence and verbal abuse. She can't conceive this thing and wants to change the present condition in life. In the novel we can see that relationship of female characters is motherly and sisterly. And this relationship gives energy for fight against men for getting gender equality.

In *The Color Purple* Celie has lot of courage and she is able to change her status of sexually abuse and free herself physically, economically and spiritually and become financially – independent in the end of the novel. Celie assert her female body after facing many difficulties and problem and achieve spiritual and economic freedom. In this novel we can see Celie's three role, firstly, she is a sexually abused child, secondly, a passive wife and finally, to an emancipated women. In the novel Celie writes letters of God, from which she writes her thoughts, ideas and expresses her emotions. It is the women's struggle for gender equality.

At last, women should always try to get gender equality in society. And it is very important for all women. They should be always aware for their rights. We can see Afro-American women face different types of problem. They face many difficulty, physically and mentally abuse by men of their own community and other communities. At last they get independent on patriarchy. All women whether they are Afro- American or not always try to get equality in society. It is necessary for all. We can says that the situation of black women in Walker's *The Color Purple* go for beyond that either male or women. Black women find themselves socially, politically and emotionally situated in no man's land. Alice Walker is one of the advocates of black woman and presents their own point of view for getting gender equality in male dominating society. In the novel Alice Walker be successful in displaying the suffer of colored women. The black characters in the novel try to bear gender discrimination, violence, racial attitudes and sexual abuse. Alice Walker still deals with the forbidden issues, like incest, given that she wants to demonstrate the truth of life's women's life.

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