

## A Pathway Towards Transformation: Women in Alice Walker's Novel The Color Purple

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الطريق باتجاه التحول: النساء في رواية الس ولكر اللون البنفسجي

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المخلص:

الس ولكر مؤلفة امريكية من اصول افريقيا، ركزت في اعمالها على الانتهاكات التي تعرضت لها النساء الامريكيات ذات الاصول الافريقية. تعتقد الس ولكر ان النساء السود والبيض يجب ان يعاملوا بالتساوي. و تعتقد ايضا ان النساء يجب ان يتوحدن وان يساندن بعضهن البعض لرفض قيود المجتمع الذكوري وتحقيق قيمة المرأة الاجتماعية، من خلال معرفة نفسها والثقة بالنفس. في رواية اللون البنفسجي، شوك ساعدت سيلبي لمعرفة نفسها كمخلوق، كانسان وكامرأة سوداء. سوف تزود هذه الدراسة ومن خلال سيناريو التمييز العنصري والاضطهاد الذي واجهته الانثى الافريقية في الولايات المتحدة الامريكية كيفية و تغلبهن على كل المصاعب واثباتهن هويتهم الشخصية. الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية، الهوية النسائية، الحركة النسوية، اضطهاد المرأة.

### Abstract

Alice Walker is an African American author. In her works, she focused on the abuse against African American females. According to Walker, African American and white people ought to be treated equally. She also believes that women should unify and support each other to reject male dominance and fulfill self-value, self-recognition, and self-confidence. In the Color Purple, Shug helps Celie to identify herself as a creature, as a human being and as a black woman.

This study will provide a thorough scenario of discrimination and oppression that black women faced in America, and how they overcame all the difficulties and defined themselves.

**Key Words:** Feminist, Female Identity, Women movement, Women oppression.

### Introduction

Alice Walker was born in The United States of America in 1944 in the countryside of Georgia; she was the youngest daughter of a sharecropper. Walker was a universally praised writer, poet, and activist. Her works included seven books, four volumes of short stories, four books for children, and volumes of verse and essays.

Through her childhood, when she was only eight years old, she was playing with her brothers; unintentionally, her brothers fired a copper B.B. pellet, it hits her in her right eye. At that time, Alice did not receive any immediate medical care, because her family did not have access to a car, so she became permanently blind. The accident psychologically affected her. As a result, Walker lost her self-confidence and her interests in doing grown-up things, into a shy, solemn, and isolated female.

Walker drenched herself in her study, she was reliably brilliant and after graduation she won a grant to Spelman College, a little renowned black ladies' school in Atlanta, Georgia. Two years later, Walker left to go to Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. She studied literature and concentrated broadly on Latin verse and history.

In 1965 Alice Walker graduated from Sarah Lawrence College, and after three years she published some of her literary works which were a collection of poetry and Poems. In 1968, Alice got

married to the young Mel Leventhal. He worked as a human rights lawyer, after a while Alice gave birth to their daughter, Rebecca. Her marriage, however, was not successful, and it ended in divorce.

In 1970, Alice published her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. At the same time, she also held an editorial position at *Ms. Magazine*; Gloria Steinem, editor-in-chief at *Ms.*, that was extremely motivated, encouraged and supported Walker's efforts, ideas, and writing. Walker's second novel *Meridian* was published in 1976; the novel narrates the story of a woman who fights for civil rights in the American South.

Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature for her novel, *The Color Purple* In 1982. Later, this novel was adapted for Steven Spielberg's 1985 film and later for a stage, which opened at New York City's Broadway Theatre in 2005. In 2006; it also won a Tony Award for best leading actress in a musical.

In 1989, she published some of her literary works such as *the Temple of My Familiar*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), children's books and non-fiction works.

There are several volumes of poems in her credit which added so much to her career. Her literary works have been translated into many different languages. More than fifteen million copies of her books have been sold.

In Addition to the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, Walker's Awards and fellowships contain a Guggenheim Fellowship and residence at Yaddo and MacDowell. Moreover, in 2006, Walker was considered one of the Inductees in the California Hall of Fame. In Emory University in 2007, her archives were opened to the public.

She was awarded the Lennon/Ono Peace Grant in Reykjavik, Iceland in 2010, and she presented the keynote address at the 11th Annual Steve Biko Lecture at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She served advertisement Jurist two times of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine.

Some of her recent literary works were *A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda*, *Overcoming Speechlessness*, *Hard Times Requires Furious Dancing*; *Eastern Congo and Palestine /Israel*; *Conversations with Alice Walker*; *The World Has Changed*, and *The Chicken Chronicles*.

Walker occupied a very high position in African-American literature; she exceeds her other contemporary writers to deal with the same concern of liberalization of African-American in the culture of the white community. The social discrimination and oppression faced by African-American women are reflected by her with a minute observation of her characters in her novel *The color purple*. This presents the following question: does racial discrimination and oppression experienced by black women was by white people only or by both white and black men?

This paper will shed light on Alice Walker's novel from the feminist point of view. The article aims to provide the thorough scenario of discrimination rampant in America resulting from the oppression of black people, spiritually, economically, and ethically. It will also try to deal with various views of Alice Walker on religion, sex, community and the family. Finally, it will answer the question: does racial discrimination and oppression experienced by black women was by white people only or by both white and black men.

### **Literature Review**

It is obvious that Alice Walker enjoys a very substantial position in African-American literature; different researchers have written different ideas regarding Alice Walker's works. Ruth el Saffar In his Article "*Alice Walker's The Color purple*" discusses Alice Walker's techniques of characterization and focuses on the differences between the characterization of Celie and Sophia.

In 2013 Iman Hami published an article entitled "*Celie's Empowered Identity in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*". In her paper, she attempts to explain the interrelationships of gender, race, class, and their importance in the process of self-recognition in *The Color Purple*.

In 2014, Aakanksh Ramkumar in her work which its title "*Sexual Awareness and Identity*", she shed light on Celie's journey to achieve her own identity morally, physically, and sexually. Her paper focuses on how male and female in *The Color Purple* want different things from the act females desired

to be included when there is an emotional attachment, on another hand, males seek the physical experience and use it as a means of dictating over the opposite gender.

In 2014, Deepshi Arya published a paper entitled "Significance of the Title The Color Purple". Deepshi argues that The Color Purple seems to have a meaning much more profound than could be fathomed at first glance.

In 2015 an Article published entitled "Symbolic Significance of the Color Purple" in this paper, the writer mainly discusses the symbolic significance of The Color Purple.

In her essay entitled "Purple, Blue- Black and Blues: Womanist Discourses as Resistance Narrative in Alice Walker's The Color Purple" which published in 2016, Dr. Beena S. Nair examines the use of multiple discourses of women in The Color Purple to subvert and resist the Western, colonial text on Africa.

Another work by Dlnya Abdalla Mohammed published in 2017. Dlnya pays a close attention to the identity of the black women in the novel. Judith Butler's book Gender Trouble, analyses the sexual orientation and the argument by Judith on gender equality.

In 2017 a paper published by Dr.Harris entitled "The Varying Experiences of African American Women in Alice Walker's The Color Purple Applied to Feminist and Queer Literary Theory", argues that by applying the epistolary technique with Celie and Shug's female characters in The Color Purple, Walker can illustrate the African American lesbian experience in a conservative community.

### **Discussion**

Alice Walker is considered as great African-American author of powerfully oppressive fiction. She manages numerous issues, the majority of which concern historical and current race issues in America. In this way, however, she shed lights on the social discrimination such as injustice, cruelty and inhumane treatment that African Americans have faced in their lives. Alice mirrors her worries with racial and political issues, especially African-American female's battle for spiritual and political survival.

Walker's political point of views, her southern legacy and her feeling of the way of life and history of her kin frame extreme base of her material. This general point can be separated into numerous areas that she feels are necessary for individuals to know.

One of these issues is her differentiating treatment of the two genders. Regarding female. Harold Bloom says Walker feels that unwed mothers are "the most sacred and the most scared". In her novel The Color Purple, it is obvious through Celie's character. Patricia Holt says that Walker's work deals with "issues of domestic violence, incest, and female genital mutilation". Approximately, most of Walker's works reveal her concern for black women and the difficulties in their live. She is eligible for composing the biographies of African American females who have battled inside themselves to find their identity.

To explain racial discrimination and transformation, it is necessary to shed light on the feminist movement. Feminism alludes to a series of social and political actions to reform many issues, for example, females' suffrage, payment equality, maternity leave, reproductive rights, aggressive behavior at home, sexual violence, sexual molestation, all of which fall under the name of feminism. "Feminist movements promote gender equality and oppose the perpetuation of gender discrimination in economic, political, legal, and social structures." (Flanagan, The Encyclopedia of Chicago)

The liberation movement of bourgeois women and the liberation movement of proletarian women are both idioms relate to feminism, and there is no distinction between the two. Women rights in the western world have experienced three waves.

The real beginning of organized feminism started when the first Women's Conference held in 1848, Seneca Falls, America. The Women's Movement aimed to reform social issues, such as the abolition of slavery, the social purity and temperance movements. Females started to understand that to transform society, it is necessary for them to have their own organizations.

Women initiated a campaign claiming their rights, such as custody of infants, their rights of property, divorce, equality with men in education, their right to work in hospitals, their right get to equal payment and protective legislation for women workers, till today many women are still campaigning for women rights.

Walker is a well-known writer in the feminist movement; she was the first writer who uses the term "Womanism" to support black women in their struggle against discrimination. "A black feminist or feminist of color,(according to Alice Walker, who first publicly used the term) is someone who is committed to the wholeness and well-being of all of humanity, male and female."(Napikoski)

The color purple anticipates a brighter day for the African-American community and black women specifically. Among all the families of black people, Corrine's and Samuel is the most secure and adoring. The two kids of Celie's discover their way into the chest of that family and are secured by it.

Aunt Nettie enables them to pick at an early age the kind of life they might want to live. Realizing that she would not like to be a subservient spouse, Olivia (like Nettie before her) endeavors to guarantee that she can be free without a man controlling her life. Inside the family of Celie, we would already be able to notice a change in her kids, which paves the way for unlimited opportunities for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The preacher Doris Baines also ingrains us with hope. Teaching her purported spouses in England guarantees that another family will be taken care of and educated, equipped with the forces to challenge male strength and racial bias.

Additionally, there is a change in the white people at home. Eleanor Jane loves Sofia as she would be a mother, regardless of her race and give her care. When she gives birth, Sofia remarks that when Eleanor Jane becomes old, he will be an issue for her, however, we are not slanted to trust her.

Sofia believed that this pure, white, male child will turn out like the various white men. She has faced in her life, yet Eleanor Jane shows her expectation with her new point of view and with fresh, forward-situated reasoning that her child and people of the future generations will progress from numerous points of view after the suffering of prior and present people.

Toward the beginning of the novel, the youthful, black woman is portrayed as the most defenseless individual in the community. Celie embodies this female: she is mishandled and denied a voice by her (assumed) father and after that by Mr. ----- her husband. Alongside the racial Discrimination youthful, black ladies persist, they likewise tend to struggle against their black males or men of the same race.

Alice Walker focuses on showing to her readers "troubling ideas about race relations, man's relationship to God, African history, and human sexuality." (Gates, 219) it is believed that Walker wants everybody to leave her stories and sonnets with awareness of the struggle that African Americans women have experienced from both white cultures and black men as well. It extremely about survival counting the survival of the whole self.

Critics disagree with Walker because of her treatment of male gender so that they blame her for adopting "a feminist agenda at the expense of black men." (Winchell,132)

Her reply, however, is that she endeavors to make a meaningful story which permits for all of her characters to "come to recognize and acknowledge the divine both within themselves and in everything in the universe" (Bloom,90). Another argument shows that Walker makes up for herself by making a considerable change in the lives of her male characters which consequently makes them good.

All over Walker's works, we can see a variety of themes, and that is all through her fiction and also her verse. She generally harps on African American experience of slavery and its impacts thereof. However, she dives into the components of individuals' lives that make them amidst of hopelessness entirely.

Sofia recurrently quarrels with her brothers, and we notice how Sophia needs to fight Harpo to ensure her rights. Similarly, the Olinka clan didn't have confidence in teaching their females, and even though there are no reports of oppressing against women by men in Nettie's letters, female subservience is unchallenged, and the corrupting commencement ceremony proceeds without challenge - aside from Nettie and her family. Under such conditions, if they need to change status, as usual, these ladies must unify together and become one hand against male abuse.

At the same time Celie is excessively bothered, making it impossible to rest is the point at which she deceives Sofia by advising Harpo to beat her; the traitorosity to her fellow female is more than she can endure. Generally, there is a positive association of help between one lady and another, and this holding originates from a need to unbalance the male perspective of their selves that they have total power over females in their community.

Shug is the woman who figures out how to challenge male dominance; she asserts her independence by living according to her laws. It is unsurprising, given the circumstances, that Celie and Shug become engaged in a love relation. Shug is a powerful goddess who declines to be brought down or to be abused by males; she always maintains her self- respect.

Celie represents a sample of a male abuse victim; she loses her confidence in men and keeps herself away from them. When she comforts Harpo, who is crying in the yard, she regrets and feels that losing her self-value and no she is more than just a dog. These females free each other by their unity and supporting one another.

Shug teaches Mary Agnes to sing; Albert's sister takes Celie shopping when nobody else does, and Sofia's sisters care for her kids while she is in prison. Nettie keeps in touch with her sister Celie by sending her letters and taking care of her kids for a long time; Doris Baines sends her "spouses" to England for their studying. Eleanor Jane cooks sustaining nourishment for Henrietta, and Celie medical caretakers Shug back to health and inspires her songwriting.

Moreover, Shug and Celie adore each other with an excellent love conceived from seclusion, desire for something better, and acceptance of each other.

In the final scene of the novel, we noticed that the females are not any frailer; they have united and are forming their own lives. Shug is regularly portrayed in vivid terms: she is rouged in the photo Celie first observes of her and twice wears seductive brilliant red dresses over the course of Celie's records. Moreover, she gives Celie a yellow cloth to her knitting. These splendid, abundant colors are loaded with vitality.

Celie can select particular color when she goes to buy some stuff from the store with Kate, brown, maroon, or navy blue because Kate didn't think Mr. ----- will like to pay for her favorite red or purple since they look "too happy." When Mary Agnes first starts writing her songs, they are songs about color: "they call me yellow, like yellow be my name." Celie attempts to discover herself away from her skin color; Mary Agnes shows the shades of color that lie underneath identity skin, as a part of her identity - finding these colors motivated her and gave her the voice to sing.

Whenever Shug and Celie exchange their point of views of God, Shug clarifies that God is in all things and that God is the beauty of nature. Shug directs particularly toward The Color Purple (customarily a color of sublimity) and thinks about how such a color could develop naturally. Purple appears to be rare. It as if the color itself were an appearance of God.

In the final scene of the novel, Celie has encountered love, began her own business, and figured out how to mingle with her. Now her present is different than her past; she is a different girl from the fourteen-year-old at the beginning. She turns out to be closer to Mr. ----- through their shared love of Shug and after that by their listening to and identifying with each other.

The judgment that both Mr. ----- and Celie teach them about themselves, which helps both of them have confidence in themselves to mingle with each other without any strange ideas of the roles they each fit into. Friendship turns into a vehicle for human to change and become their unique selves.

Through the span of the novel, most of the relationships are disconnected, but after a period they unified again. For instance, Sofia after many years in the prison she comes back to her family and Harpo; Shug come back from her trips with Germaine; and Nettie arrives home with Celie's kids. Thus, Celie' kids return to their mother, and Nettie returns to her oldest sister again.

Through time, however, people usually change independently before coming back. Even though everybody travels his particular trip and experiences on their own, when the relationships are restored they are fortified by family and friendships that rise above the suffering of the past which was the reason behind their tension.

The matters of racial discriminations are the main subject of everyday use among people. For example, during her life, Mama's ethnic experience remained generally unchanged. The primary deviation from her status, as usual, comes as her eldest girl Dee. However, Dee never knows her place and her role in life as a ruined African-American lady in the countryside of Georgia.

Dee is of the idea that she is lighter skinned than other black girls so there was always in her mind that her status or her socio-cultural expectations should be "higher" than other females.

Walker's character Celie is about to free herself from other people around her and of her black sisters, Nettie, Sophie, and Shug, and able to influence the men of her race positively. Walker reminds her and also reminds us in her novel *The Color Purple*, 33% of which is set in Africa, that "black women have been the mule of the world there, and the mule of the world here."

Sexism thrives in Africa. In this novel, the passion and love affair which happens between Shug and Celie is of great importance, as it is at the center of the novel and is introduced as an appropriate, fortifying procedure through which the two ladies, as well as the general population around them, developed.

Thus, black women struggle against both white people in one hand and black males on the other. But by their unity and support of each other they could play an enormous role in social transformation and identifying, themselves. In the final scenes of the novel, Celie becomes independent, she frees herself from Mr. ----- with the help of Shug, and she opens her own shop and own her own house. Sophia became independent, with the help of other black women, as they took care of her children when she was in the jail. When she released from the prison, she wins her own family back.

Nettie also became independent, she joins her sister again, and she freed herself from her step farther.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, *The Color Purple* is a landmark in African American literature in which Alice Walker depicts the struggle of African American women against white culture and black male as well and how black women face the difficulties and identify themselves by their unity and solidarity. Walker reflects that transformation through most of her characters, for example, Celie suffers too much from her stepfather and her husband, but eventually, she becomes independent and starts a love relationship with Shug.

Nettie was also tortured too much by her stepfather, but finally, she got married, came back to her sister and built her own identity. Sophia suffers too much from her husband's father and white people as well, but after her imprisonment, she returns to her husband Harpo and her family and become independent.

Thus, black women struggle against white culture discrimination in one hand and the oppression of black men on the other, via their unity and solidarity, they could overcome all the difficulties they face in their lives and become independent.

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