



THE COURAGE TO SPEAK AND FIGHT AGAINST SUFFERING AT THE ALIEN LANDS AS THE MAJOR THEME OF THE COLOR PURPLE BY TONI MORRISON

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Abstract

*This paper aims at picturizing the fictional forte of Alice walker in portraying the struggle of black people through history and projecting walker as 'a feminist', 'a womanist' who bases his stories on the lives of black women, their battle with the society for their equal economical, political and sexual rights as one of the leading voices among the black American women writers gifted with the skill and power of depicting the often devastating circumstances of the "twin afflictions" of racism and sexism with special reference to *The Color Purple* proclaimed as "an American novel of permanent importance" which charts Celie's resistance to the oppression surrounding her and the liberation of her existence through positive and supportive relations with other women. This paper also brings home the point that the care of Alice walker's works in her focus on black women and her forms, themes, imegery and critique are marked by her belief in a coherent yet developing philosophy of life which has relationship to the external reality.*

Key Notes: Struggle, Feminist, Womanist, Racism, Oppression, Importance, Relationship, Black Women.

Modern men and women can enjoy a great number of the literary works written by many talents authors. There are a number of genres and themes even for the most refined reader to choose from: Fantasy, romance, horror, detectives and many others. Apart from these, the personal experience of the author is touched upon, giving the story more lively style. Alice Walker is one such writer who fills her works with her own experience, feelings, ideas and principles that make her works popular among readers. It is clearly explained by the fact that the origin of the writer comes from South. Many critics refers to Walker as a feminist, but she calls herself to be a "womanist" and her books have been created for women to the core. Thus, the major theme of Alice Walker's stories is based on the lives of black women, their battle with the society for their equal economic, political and sexual rights. In a nutshell, she is recognized as one of the leading voices among the black American women writers.

Generally speaking, Alice Walker's writings portray the struggle of black people throughout history and they are praised for their insightful and riveting portraits of black life, especially the experiences of black woman in sexist and racist society. Her most famous work, the award - winning and best-selling novel **The Color Purple** chronicles the life of a poor and abused southern black women who eventually triumphs over the oppression through affirming female relationships. In the words of Barbara T. Christian, "Walker admires the struggle of black women throughout history to maintain an essential spirituality and creativity in their lives and their achievements serve as an inspiration to others" (27). Walker's women characters display strength, endurance and resourcefulness in confronting and overcoming - oppression in their lives, yet Walker is front in depicting the often devastating circumstances of the "twin afflictions" of racism and sexism.



Alice Walker is said to be the one who gives insight into the intimate reaches of the inner lives of her characters and the landscape of her stories is the spiritual realm where the soul yearns for what it does not have. Walker's very first novel **The Third Life of Grange Copeland** depicts cycles of male violence in three generations of an impoverished southern black family (the Copelands) and displays Walker's interest in social conditions that affect family relationships, in addition to her recurring theme of the suffering of black women at the hands of men. Her novel **The Color Purple** was proclaimed as "an American novel of permanent importance" (Angelou 64). **The Color Purple** is a series of letters written by a Southern black woman Celie, reflecting history of oppression and abused suffered at the hands of the men. The book was resoundingly praised for its masterful recreation of black folk speech, in which, as Towers puts it, Walker converts Celie's "Subliterateveness, color and poignancy. Towers added:

"I find it impossible to imagine Celie
apart from her languages; through it,
not only a memorable and infinitely
touching character but a whole submerged
world is vividly called into being" (41)

The novel charts Celie's resistance to the oppression surrounding her, and the liberation of her existence through positive and supportive relations with other women. This novel completes the cycle Walker announced - the survival and liberation of black women through the strength and wisdom of others. The novel **The Color Purple** won both the Pulitzer prize and the American Book Award and was made into a popular motion picture which received several Academy Award nominations.

The novel **The Color Purple** published in 1982 as Walker's third novel brought fame and financial success to its author. It also won her considerable praise and much criticism for its controversial themes. Many reviewers were disturbed by her portrayal of black males, which they found unduly negative. While the novel was made into a film in 1985 by Steven Spielberg, Walker became even more successful and controversial. While she was criticized for negative portrayal of her male characters, Walker was admired for her powerful portraits of black women. As in her other writings, Walker focuses on the theme of double repression of black women in the American experience. Walker contends that women suffer from discrimination by the white community and from a second repression from black males, who impose the double standard of white society on women. As the Civil Rights Movement helped in shaping Walker's thinking regarding racial issues at home, it also shaped her interest in Africa. During the 1960's, a strong interest in ethnic and racial identity stimulated many African Americans to look for their roots in Africa. The primary theme of **The Color Purple** reflects Walker's desire to project a positive outcome in life, even under the hardest conditions. Her central character triumphs over adversity and forgives those who oppressed her. This central theme of the triumph of good over evil is, no doubt, the source of the book's great success.

In **The Color Purple**, the story is told through letters. The only sentence outside the letters are the first two:

"You better never tell anybody but God.
It'd kill your mammy" (TCP 25)



Silenced forever, the main character, fourteen year old Celie, encounters in her life to be recruited with her sister Nettie. Though they were found to be separated, their love was enduring and it proved itself against all odds. The story takes place in Macon of the twentieth century. Most of the story occurs in a black community but some parts are in mostly white dominate areas. There are various forms of conflict in the story. They are Man Vs Man, Man Vs Society and Man Vs other man. Celie plays both the main character and the narrator of the story. She is fourteen when the story begins and ages as the story progresses. Celie is a black girl who is raped and bears two children through the man she thought to be her father. Celie shares a bond and a love with her sister Nettie that drives her to survive through all of her hardships. She is married off to Mr. _____ who originally was interested in marrying Nettie. Their father however claimed that Celie would make the better wife and offered the man a cow along with Celie's hand in marriage. In desperation for a wife and a mammy to his horrible children, Mr. _____ accepts the offer. One they are married, he uses Celie to satisfy his sexual needs and beats her for no good reason. Often times simply because she is not the woman that he longs for, Shug Avery. Shug Avery soon becomes an appearance and becomes one of the main characters. Though he is initially cold and at times cruel to Celie, she becomes compassionate and plays a vital part in her survival. Celie writes letters to God, which indicates that she has not yet lost her faith. By the end of the story, Celie changes in that she becomes a person of loving nature. She does not bear hatred for all those who oppressed her or did her wrong. She became a woman that can stand up for her as well as those she loves. Shug Avery is another main character. She is a blues singer and also the woman that Mr. _____ who she calls Albert longs for. She is his lover. Shug Avery is free spirited. She is woman that knows what she wants and gets it. Albert describes her as manly. Even though Shug did not immediately take to Celie, she soon became compassionate of her and found herself not only being her friend but also her lover. She played a crucial role in the development of Celie as a person. Nettie is also another main character. She is Celie's younger sister. Nettie has very strong love for Celie. Soon after Celie is married off to Mr. _____ she runs away from home and goes to see Celie at her new husband's house. In her letters the thing that Nettie touches on the most is her reunion with Celie and how much she has wanted it. With this, she demonstrates that no amount of time or distance is going to tarnish her love for her sister. By the end of the story, Nettie changed for the better in that she grew up and matured. The story ends in Celie, her sister and their children being reunited in their own home. Celie has learned forgiveness and is now making friends with Albert. Shug returned home and they are all together at last. The author uses the main characters to show how oppressed women can come together and find their inner strength and prevail against all odds.

The Color Purple develops the issues as regards the suppression of women and the control of men all the time on the women folk on their body as well as their minds Celie's salvation depends on the recovery of the past. In the first passionate love with shag, her husband mistress, she returns to the feelings of her youth and the tenderness that she felt for her lost babies. Shag also reveals Nettie's letters in trunk. With these, Celie gains an audience and wholly new historical perspective, Nettie's tale of Africa, the sister's racial past. They reveal that the children of the missionaries Nettie has gone with are Celie's stolen boy and girl. These children modern Americans raised in timelessness of (TCP3) tribal Africa. They experience historical past. Moreover, Africa itself is a place of historical disjunction. The Western missionaries all blacks who have come 'home' to change that home Inreality, the effect is that alienated Africans from their heritage.

The Color Purple is a formula for black women's fiction including its themes aiming at the recovery of the African and black American past and its historical values. The sense that history changes through



the intimacy of women is the premise observed in women's writing. It also paves way for political revolution. The Courage to speak in a major theme of *The Color Purple*. As the subject treats repeated rapes and beatings in a realistic manner, it brings in a contrast to the great African past and the present social situation and its people migrating and suffering at the alien lands. Celie is seen as being victimized by men and by her own passive acceptance of their treatment of her. She accepts her role as a commodity meant for using sexual purpose. The example of strong women eventually changes her life.

In *The Color Purple*, one comes across the strong mind of the women characters and it is a self-actualized one. It is a testimony to the power of the book. It is Walker's vision of black feminism in a work that transcends ideology. She is searching for a basis for living and rejects dead orthodoxies and oppressive systems. Women get oppressed because of their own passivity. They can end the oppression when they bond together in affirming their own self-worth and refuse to participate in the in human male domination. Celie's development in a feminist pattern. She also rejects traditional religious expression. She thinks that she has skills that she can do things the way she wants or wishes to have. Her vision of the word becomes a source of power and insight. "In telling Celie's story, Walker is telling the story of many who have had no opportunity to speak for themselves" (Daniel 110).

To conclude, Walker's forms, themes, imagery and critique are marked by her belief in a coherent yet developing philosophy of life which has relationship to the external reality. The core of her works is her focus on black women. In looking at what it means to be a black woman in the world, one must confront - physical assault, racism and slavery. Alice Walker is conscious about revealing the relationship between oppressions of and slavery. No doubt, Walker's novels like *The Color Purple* are aiming at radical changes in the lives of the black people to bring in better life - style and living conditions.

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