

Emerging Womanhood: Power and Gender in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

M. Kishware Sulthana

Assistant professor, PG & Research Department of English, Jamal Mohammed College, (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu

Author e-mail id: kkishwaree@gmail.com

Abstract

The Color Purple by Alice Walker is a fascinating novel that speaks about the complex themes of power and gender. The novel was written in early 20th century south and tell the story of Celie who is a young 14 years girl, ugly, black African girl who faced various hardships from her childhood and at last found empowerment and self-discovery. The aim of this novel is to explore the representation of gender and sexuality focusing in the themes of domestic violence sexual abuse and about the lesbian relationship. This novel highlights the struggles focused by women of color in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: God, Violence, Feminism, Race, Sexuality, Oppression

Through the exploration of gender identity, Walker focuses on power and identity in this story. Celie relationship with other women, such as her sister Nettie and the strong-willed Sofia, becomes a source of support, empowerment, and resistance against patriarchal oppression. These women provide each other with emotional strength, a shared understanding of their struggles, and a collective voice against injustice.

Alice known for her impactful novel. Her first novel "Once" was published in 1983. She was the first to become an African American woman to win Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1982. Alice was a American novelist and social activist, writer, poet. The author of this book *Color purple*, has long been regarded as a masterpiece of African-American literature.

The novel explores a range of themes, such as gender identity, royalty, power and gender, and sisterhood. This story is related to full range of human experience. Various people have different experience like hardship and success, happiness and sadness, Emotion and suffering and pain and joy & happiness. Purple refers to complexities and richness of life, particularly for the main character Celie, happiness behind pain.

The Color Purple is essential for a comprehensive analysis of the novel's exploration of power and gender. The story follows the life of Celie, a young African American woman who undergoes a transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment. One of the central themes of the novel is the fluidity of power and gender identity. Celie endures physical and emotional abuse from men.

The novel *The Color Purple* is based on a girl named Celie who writes letter to god about the struggles faced by her. Celie was a young 14 year ugly rural Georgian and she lived with her violent father, sick mother and beautiful younger sister Nettie. She was tortured by her father from her childhood. He used to rape her, beat her and even made her impregnate once. He made celie pregnant and took away the kids each time. Celie's mother died and after that Celie's father bought home his new girlfriend but even after that he didn't stop disturbing Celie .Celie felt uncomfortable with her father during her childhood. Her father didn't support or stand by Celie side.

Mr wants to marry Netti but Alphonso (Celie's father) didn't approve that and he told Mr to marry Celie because she was the only who was ugly. Mr also married to Celie but they both didn't lead a happy life. Celie was not happy even after her marriage. Nettie ran out from her father's house and lived with Celie because her father starts to abuse Nettie also.

Dear God, It took him the whole spring, from March to June, to make up his mind to take me. All I thought about was Nettie. How she could come to me if I marry him and he be so love stuck with her I could figure out a way for us to run away. Us both be hitting Nettie's schoolbooks pretty hard, cause us know we got to be smart to git away. I know I'm not as pretty or as smart as Nettie, but she say I ain't dumb. (Walker 1982)

When Nettie lives in Celie's house Mr starts approaching Nettie in a wrong manner because of his desire by using his power. Then Nettie again ran out from celie's house and told to celie that she will update her thought letter. Then Mr has a girlfriend her name is Shug a very. One day Shug became ill and Mr brought her home. First and all Shug was being rude to Celie but later they became close friends because of Celie was the one who took care of Shug. The relationship between Celie and Shug became intimate but Celie was not sure about her feelings. Shug realized that when she was not home Mr was abusing Celie so, Shug decided to stay with Celie. Her author told about lesbian relationship.

Mr's son fell in love with a girl Sofia. Sofia became pregnant and married Harpo who was Mr's son. When Sofia came home after marriage Celie was amused by Sofia's dependence. Each time when Harpo tried to slap or harass Sofia she failed. One day Sofia was called by mayor's wife and she asked Sofia to be her mate but Sofia replied with a swag "Hell no". Mayor's wife slapped Sofia for her savage slang but Sofia return's the same to mayor's wife and knock out her. For that Sofia was arrested and she was in jail even if she returned Sofia had worked for that mayor's wife as a maid for 12 years but squeak take Sofia out before 6 months.

Shug got married to another man but still Shug and Celie shared the bed often. By getting tired of Harpo's torture Sofia went out from the house with her children. Harpo has a new girlfriend squeak. When Sofia returned to visit Harpo she saw Squeak and fought with her, after few months Harpo started a juke joint. Celie assumed that Nettie was died because there was no letter or emails from her. But Shug told Celie that she saw many mysterious emails that was in Mr's email.

And yet, it is within this emptiness, this absence of love, that she musters the will to survive. In that respect, it is interesting to note that Celie's quest started with her original "hatred" for Sophia. When she tells Harpo, Mr. - 's son, to beat his wife Sophia like she so often is beaten by Mr. - , she does so not out of meanness or simple evilness but because she envies Sophia's will and freedom. (Walker 1982) When Celie and Shug checked Mr's trunk they found not their years. Celie started read the email in order in that Nettie informed that when she ran out from the house she meet one missionary couple with whom she did ministry work and she became close with Nettie. Nettie told that she learnt something that there was the couple with whom she was living the couple were Samuel and Corrine and they have adopted 2 kids they were Olivia and Adam. The biological mother of the kids was Celie and their father Alphonso was not their real father. After reading this Celie went to meet Alphonso and he confirmed that whatever Nettie said was true. Corrine notice that her adopted kids and Nettie were little similar. So she doubted whether Nettie and Samuel have any past together and decided to keep Nettie in her limits, not to allow her to be close with her family. Nettie told Samuel to tell how he adopted the kids to Corrine. Corrine fell ill and she was not ready to accept what Nettie was saying she kept on doubting them. Just before Corrine's death only Corrine believed that whatever Nettie said was true and she also died.

In one family dinner Celie decided to pour out her feelings whatever she dumped inside her all these years and she cursed Mr and left from there with Shug and Squeak and Tennessee. There

celie started to design and stitching she turned her hobbies into her business. Here author showed how Celie overcome the male domination all over these years.

After many years Celie returned to Georgia and she came to know that Alphonso died, and she was his child so all his properties were belonged to her. So, she came back to her house and she found that Mr rebound his way. She started her business there and Shug also not bothering Celie. Now Mr and Celie genuinely started to enjoy each other company Sofia and Harpo become together again and lead their life. Nettie married to Samuel and she moved to America with her family. Before moving her son Adam fell in love with a native girl named Tashi and married to her and they all moved to America. After many years of emotionally drenched now Nettie and Celie become old but celie realizes that they never had been young since their childhood they had faced lots of struggles and abuse. If Celie defended herself at first itself then it would not come this far.

The story *The Color Purple* not only highlights the difficulties experienced by women, but also highlights the significance of identity. The relationships between Celie and other female characters, such Sofia and Shug Avery, showcase the transformative power of female bonds and the ability to overcome adversity together. Celie believes herself to have been ugly in the past because she has dark skin. Everyday women are facing suffering from men. Nothing is so unprotected that it cannot be liberated and self– realization of Celie. Celie overcome oppression and abuse to achieve fulfilment and independence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, our exploration of power, identity in the book *The Color Purple* has shed light on the profound themes and messages conveyed in this influential novel. Through the analysis, one can witness the transformative power of identity as characters navigate the complexities of their gender identities and embrace their authentic selves. Walker’s masterful storytelling not only challenges societal norms but also highlights the intersectionality of race and gender, emphasizing the importance of power and identity in the fight against abuse. *The Color Purple* is set up as a poignant reminder of enduring strength, resilience of marginalized communities and leaves a lasting impact on readers, inspiring conversations and fostering a deeper understanding of the intricacies of identity.

References

- 1) Walker, Alice *The Colour Purple*,(1982) Open Road Media.