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ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*: A STUDY OF THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

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Abstract:

*The majority of Afro-American feminist books primarily address issues of racism, sexism, gender bias, women's oppression, slavery, male-female relationships, black cultural preservation, the impacts of colonization, etc. 'Celie' is the main character in the novel. The novel received Pulitzer Prize. The paper focuses on the female character of Celie and her quest for identity in *The Color Purple* that embodies Afro-American feminism following MLA eighth edition of literary referencing and citation.*

Keywords: *Afro-American Feminism, Financial Freedom, Poverty, Existence, Quest for Identity, etc.*

Celie is a poor, illiterate Afro-American woman from the South who fights to free herself from the cruelty and dehumanization of the mistreatment she receives from males. The novel tells the story of an Afro-American woman who grows up in poverty and experiences abuse, but who ultimately overcomes oppression by finding a supportive female connection.

When we first meet Celie, she is a slave in her own house, having no power over her own body. She is forced into marriage to a guy who is at least twice her age at the age of fourteen after being sexually assaulted by her (step) father. Walker portrays the horrors of black male dominance in such a way. Bell hooks finds it difficult to believe that Celie could ever be a writer- finding the time being the least of her problems (Rosean, 22).

Writers of African American descent compose African American literature. It is the voice of the racial group that has been marginalized for many years. It is audible in the signs of agony and the signs of indignation and rage. The origins of Afro-American literature are inexorably brought up while studying black women. Early works of fiction are categorized as abolitionist works, with the exception of slave tales. Novels of accommodation and assimilation are those that were written between 1890 and 1920. Protest is an aspect that has been revolutionary in Afro-American writing since the beginning.

Among African American writers, quests for self-identity, independence, and literacy were prevalent. Ralph Elson's pursuit of literacy demonstrates to us that people are naturally intrigued to do things that are outside the rules. Compared to Adam and Eve, this is not as blasphemous. White southern writers, such as Gail Godwin, are particularly interested in the quest for self-identity.



The emergence of Afro-American novels coincided with the contentious discussions surrounding slavery and liberation in America throughout the mid-1800s. Actually, by the established criteria of the mainstream academia, the novel did not receive complete recognition as a literary genre until the 1920s. Gender and class also emerged at this period as significant societal concerns that needed to be addressed.

The women in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* are woven into a complex mosaic by their affection for one another, the men who mistreat them, and the kids they look after. In the first few letters, Celie informs God that her father has sexually assaulted her and that she is expecting his kid for the second time. With a severe illness, Celie's mother curses her before passing away, leaving Celie to confront her father alone herself.

After that, Celie focuses on defending Nettie, her sister, against her father's attempts on a sexual level. After her father forms a deal with the older widower, Celie quickly marries Mr. Albert. She finds herself in an unloving marriage, raising her husband's four children while experiencing frequent rapes and beatings. Celie develops an obsession with her husband's mistress, the glitzy blues singer Shug Avery. A few years later, Celie joyfully takes on the duty of recovering Shug's health, starting the two women's enduring relationship and affection.

Albert has concealed all of the several letters Nettie has sent to Celie since she went on to become a missionary in Africa. Despite her background, Nettie is a strong, self-assured, and devout lady. In addition to learning about her sister's life, Celie finds out via reading Nettie's letters that her own two children are still alive and residing with a missionary couple that Nettie works with. Celie grows stronger and more confident every day thanks to Nettie's messages about their common African ancestry. This self-assurance quickly gives way to rage over the beatings, the rapes she suffered, and the love and affection the men in her life withheld from her. The correspondence between Nettie and Celie also reveals similarities between the African and Celie's worlds: a man's great love for a woman, a strong relationship and affection between two women, and the unyielding rigidity of sex roles.

With her newfound courage, Celie faces her father. She has recently discovered that he is actually her stepfather rather than her biological father, which greatly relieves Celie because she can finally move on from the idea that her children are not her brother and sister. In addition, she confronts Albert, walks away from him, and relocates to Memphis to live with Shug—a choice that saddens and stuns Albert. After gaining strength and self-confidence, Celie started wearing trousers, and now she owns a pants manufacturing company in Memphis. Later on, after Shug has started dating a man, Celie pays Albert a visit and the two of them form a new friendship that gradually blossoms into love and respect.

After her sister's children were adopted, Nettie marries a widower guy who takes on the role of mother to her niece and nephew. The two ladies will have financial independence when Celie's father passes away and she and Nettie receive his house. Albert and Harpo have learnt to assume new responsibilities in the family and in their relationships by the time the story ends and the two sisters are reunited.

It is noteworthy that the title of the novel is alluded to in Letter 12, when Celie associates *The Color Purple* with royalty and longs for a purple dress. But the title undoubtedly comes from a passage near the end of the novel, in which Shug says that she



believes that it ‘pisses God off’ if you walk by The Color Purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.” The true extent of the awful ruin is made only too clear in a number of incidents. As Celie herself writes, “Bub in and out of jail. If his granddaddy wasn’t the coloured uncle of the sheriff who look just like Bub, Bub be lynch by now” (Walker, *The Color Purple*, 19).

The worst incident is the rape of Mary Agnes by her own white uncle, who is sent by Sofia's family to secure her release. Blackmail is basically the sole tool available to Celie’s family. The warden and other influential Southern whites can support one another in surviving if they remind one other of their family and sexual ties with black people. When Sofia is at last set free, not much of her soul is left.

Furthermore, Samuel’s last name is removed, suggesting that the editor has some sympathy for the book’s male protagonists. This might indicate that the narrator wished to free them from the names their white owners had given them. However, it might also mean that Shug Avery, a woman who goes by her own name even after being married, is the main symbol of the fictitious narrator’s extreme feminist views, which she is eager to deny to the male characters. But if everything were perfect, Celie would be the editor. Bell Hooks has also added to the discussion over the resolution of *The Color Purple*. For Celie, the debate ends far too happily. Alison Light explains how her all-female adult education class responded to it. What does it mean for a group of white students to see as ‘romantic’ the empowering of an impoverished, beaten, raped and abused Southern black woman? (Rosean38)

In a pivotal passage reminiscent of *Beloved*, *The Color Purple* saves Celie from this destiny. The most heart-breaking aspect of Celie’s tale is the way her stepfather initially sexually assaults her. She was passionate with hair cutting when she was younger. These barbershop visits became a pretext for her stepfather to start raping her. It is no coincidence that Celie stands behind his chair with his unsheathed blade at his throat in an instinctive reaction to learning that Mr. Albert had concealed Nettie’s letters from her. Henderson notes that Celie acts in the exact same manner as Sethe, “Like the historian, Sethe is able to ‘re-enact’ or ‘re-think’ a critical moment from the past and is consequently able to demonstrate her possession of rather than by the past and to alter her own life history” (Encyclopaedia of Black America, 42).

To conclude, the idea that black women in the South who have experienced abuse must live as victims for the rest of their lives is the most pernicious of the falsehoods and mistreatment that Walker depicts in *The Color Purple*. Walker has stated as such: “I liberated Celie from her own history. I wanted her to be happy.”

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