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Alice Walker's The Color Purple: Emerging Voice of Voiceless



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Research Paper :

The present paper discusses and attempts to explain how the female protagonist Celie gradually liberates herself from misery, oppression and fear. Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist has emerged both nationally and internationally, as one of the most versatile and controversial writers of African American Literature.

African-American literature is designed with a mission to make their consciousness known to the world. Its aim is to change social, political, economical aspects of society. Readers get acquainted with exploitation, oppression, persecution and consequent revolt of African-Americans. The revolt is dominant theme or motif in Afro-American literature. African-American has proceeded along with different paths and taken different turnings. However its moment is struggle for human rights and against exploitation of white people. Despite differences of country, religion, conditions, society and language, the lives and experiences of Afro-American community derives from the fact that subjected to injustice and slavery. Still it is to some or greater degree is the victim of this social evil.

The characters in Afro-American literature have been created through the chemistry of life, experiences, society and problems, pain and rebellion against the set order. We find there are numerous expressions of red and hot experiences and fighting in Afro-American Literature. The problem of twentieth century as the problem of color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter race of men in Africa and America. African-American Literature is in search of its respective identity. In its own country African people lived the life of others. They were not considered as human being though they have surfaced from social life based on inequality and was roasted alive. They could not live in the white locality. American culture allotted them the bottom place in society and even they could not raise their voice against exploitation. The life of African American

is largely mirrored in its literature. The totality of people's experiences has been well reflected in its literature. Nathan Huggins opines that,

"For most blacks, there has never been any doubt that their identity is embedded in the general American history, and that they will never know themselves until they mine and refine that history themselves" (Huggins VII)

Black literature made real progress after the First World War. Black writer like Alice Walker began to portray their life in their characteristic language. An outspoken advocate for social and political change, Alice Walker consistently speaks out when she sees injustice. She was part of a civil rights protest at the White House at the age eighteen. Walker's isolation made her a keen observer and lover of nature. Her lifelong commitment has been against injustices to all humankind as well as nature, but her primary goal has been to uplift women. Having witnessed so much suffering among women as she grew up, her writings constantly reflect their struggle. She recalls, in an essay, a most painful scene she witnessed at the age thirteen:

"....There she was, hardworking, large, and overweight. Black, somebody's cook lying on the slab with half her head shot off, and on her feet were the shoes.... With a hole in the bottom, and she had stuffed paper in their....we used to have....just such murders as there and it was always the life..." (Wilkinson 125)

She is probably best known for her novel, *The Color Purple*, the story of an oppressed woman. Alice Walker has portrayed sexism, racism, oppression and poverty. It deals with the struggle of women to gain recognition as individuals who have a self-identity of their own, thereby defying the exploitative and oppressive chains of society dominated and constructed by male.

Lindsey Tucker argues,

"For the black woman writer, the search for voice- the rescue of her subjectivity from the sometimes subtle, yet always pervasive, dictates the

dominant white male culture is more even problematic. Alice Walker, aware of black women as particularly muted group, has addressed herself in much of her work to the problem of the black woman as creator" (Tucker 81)

Walker has presented the experiences of a woman character, Celie who is oppressed by a male dominated society. She is sexually abused by her father and husband. She successfully comes up from submission and oppression to a self-realization and there by attain a total freedom. The major concern of walker is black women. Black women are ruthlessly exploited and considered as mere objects intended only for male sexual satisfaction. Celie's world was one of fear, despair, insecurity and loneliness, unspoken and unspeakable, suffering, colorless, dark and with no ray of any hope. Throughout the novel Walker depicts a world of oppression and abuse of black girls and women. Celie's attitude about herself and about god is clearly visible through the letters which she writes to God to help her to survive the spiritual, emotional and physical abuse she suffers at the hands of her step father. The experiences of the black female protagonist, Celie are presented through her letters to God. Through her letters to God, Celie narrates her first experience of sexism, her father sexually abusing her.

"First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of Wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my fitties. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying you better git used to it" (Walker 03)

Celie is made to suffer by the man who she had for long believed to be her father. Her father rapes her repeatedly. She is considered ugly and dump. She wants to protect her sister, Nettie from her father's clutches and wants her to study and escape from the world of abuse and oppression. She is defenseless and threatened and not in a position to share her feelings and trauma to another one other than God. Celie is considered as ugly and dull outwardly, she has an inner strength which allows her to protect her sister from evils that she has

experienced. She finds no other way out rather than recording her experiences as letters to God.

Though ill-treated by her step father and husband she always wished to be cared and loved. She is beaten, cursed beaten and humiliated simply because she is a woman. Celie lives in a surrounding to the male supremacy. Her husband is presented as Mr. in Celie's letters. Her continued exploitation increases her inner strength. Celie's relationship with Sofia, Harpo's wife brings about a huge change in her. Sofia is a constant reminder to Celie of the strength that she lacked. Sofia is able to escape gender discrimination by leaving her husband and her protest against sexual and racial exploitation is clearly depicted in the novel. Sofia acts as a medium in Celie's understanding of herself.

Celie's relationship with Shug Avery, a confident, glamorous, bold and beautiful woman and the lover of her husband enhances her and enabled her to have better faith in herself, and courage to face the atrocities and to express her feelings. Shug and Sofia are considered the strongest women who are ready to fight for their rights. Nettie has a strong desire within her to raise herself to a higher level. She goes to Africa with the team of a black missionary. She suffers racial and gender discrimination. But still works for the betterment of her people and dedicates herself fully to the work. Though women in *The Color Purple* oppressed and suffered but having the mental and moral support they are able to overcome the oppression leveled upon them.

With the help of other women Ceile starts stitching cloths and thus learns to manage her own life. She reasserts her own individuality. She regains her identity and latter addresses her letters to her sister Nettie, feeling that God whom she has been writing. Celie gradually discovers the power and joy of her own spirit, freeing her from her past, reuniting her with those she loves by voicing against patriarchal order and thereby attains an autonomous state. Despite everything women are able to raise their voice against injustices and regain their inner

strength and selfhood. Alice Walker, the novelist thus preoccupied with the survival whole of her people and in exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women. (Indu B. C. 2013)

Thus, we can sum up that *The Color Purple* represents a more explicit turning toward the question of the making identity of a black woman. It is an exploration in survival and growth of black women in a southern experience. Having the moral and kind support of Shug and Sofia, Celie gradually liberates herself from misery, oppression and fear. With this work, Walker has created a truly modernist text; that is, a text which is a manifestation of a new voice of black woman. She has created a text that shows as power has also demonstrated through what the nature of black women's discourse might be.

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