



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English Literature**

**OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN'S BODY IN ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE**

**KEY WORDS:**

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Alice Walker discusses issues that are relevant to her personal experiences as a black woman in a white patriarchal culture. The notion of patriarchal oppression has made the novel's dominant gender structure more equitable. Because no attention has been paid to the persecution, abuse, and oppression of black women during slavery, the subjugation of black women by black males has been referred to as demasculinization. Men are better at asserting themselves because their experiences are more valuable than women's. Walker offers several answers to these difficulties in *The Colour Purple*, in addition to describing the injustice and suffering of black women. The black woman Celie experienced extreme patriarchy, oppression, and suffering before she was able to free herself from being a wife and victim of sexual assault. In *The Colour Purple*, Celie's body tells her story. Her relationship with her body provides insight into both her past and present problems. In addition, Celie's body illustrates her journey from oppression to freedom and empowerment. The beginning of *The Colour Purple* begins with Celie being warned, or rather threatened, by her stepfather, who silences her and denies her the right to even speak about herself. Even sharing her joy or sadness with anyone other than God is forbidden. "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy." (3) As a result of this, Celie writes letters to God. She needs somebody to share her rape experience with. Even though she feels the desire to express herself, she can only do it by means of writing. She writes letters to God in which she conveys all of her thoughts, anxieties, perceptions of other people, and desires in plain broken English. Celie is not the only female character in the book who gets silenced. In the book, all the female characters are muted, but Celie is the only one who is directly silenced. Walker picks a black, illiterate girl from the south as her protagonist. Because they experience both physical and mental tyranny every day, women in the south have a greater understanding of injustice. Every man Celie has ever met has caused her pain. Her father rapes her and takes her babies away from her. Even worse, he forbids her from sharing her sorrow with anybody. Her language is vulgar, and it reflects how traumatised, miserable, and emotionally unstable she is. Walker writes of Celie, "She has not accepted an alien description of who she is; neither has she accepted completely an alien tongue to tell us about it. Her being is affirmed by the language in which she is revealed, and like everything about her it is characteristic, hard-won and authentic." (64). Her early experiences with her body reveal her estrangement from the body while she was being raped by her father when she was only fourteen years old: "He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He starts to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it." (3). The protagonist experiences both sexual and psychological torture. She discusses the challenges and discrimination she encounters as a young black woman. She has lost control over her body and her privacy from an early age. Her stepfather assaults her in addition to raping and impregnating her, forcing her to wed a widower called Albert who is truly in love

with blues artist Miss Shug Avery. Albert is sometimes referred to as Mr. \_ in the book. Celie is seen by Albert as a servant and "an occasional sexual convenience". (Gates & Appiah, 1993:16). Mr. Albert has received an extremely unflattering portrait of Celie from her stepfather. When Mr. visits Celie's father to discuss marrying Nettie, her father trades Celie instead of Nettie. *The Colour Purple* makes clear how black women's bodies are controlled, like when Celie's stepfather effectively sells her to Albert. They discuss Celie's ugly appearance and also how hard she can work. She is treated like a piece of property or a slave. Furthermore, they discuss how Nettie is more attractive and smarter than Celie.

At the very beginning of the book, Celie is a victim of a power system that pushes her to the periphery or the bottom of the social pyramid. Towards the end of the book, Celie transcends, making her body-Other into a body that is her lover, friend, companion, her way out of victimhood, and most crucially, her own. This transformation is symbolised by her sensual connection with Shug, the woman she falls in love with. Shug has transformed the protagonist's body into her "hope for a radical renovation" (Eliade 90). Celie was much attracted to Shug's confident personality. She never bothered about her husband's friendship with Shug or how Shug first treated her. Even Celie found it amusing how Shug treated Albert with disrespect. Even though Celie and Shug weren't very close at first, they eventually became very good friends. Before she met Shug Avery, Celie had never experienced affection or recognition from anyone. Shug taught Celie to have self-confidence, to accept herself and her body, and to smile without covering her mouth. She became conscious of her physical beauty because to Shug as well. Celie believed that she was not as attractive as other ladies. Shug kissed and touched Celie gently, making her recognize that she had an impressive figure. Celie had never before felt such a strong physical affection from another person, and it was the first time she ever did. Celie never had any genuine physical gratification from her spouse. She used to just lay under him all the time so he could do his "business". For her, it was something of a daily routine. It was a horrible behavior for her and she never enjoyed her spouse touching all over her body. Unfortunately, she had never known her mother's kind touch and had only ever been exposed to her violent father's rough, drunken breath. Consequently, Celie's negative recollections of physical contact were connected to it. When Celie sleeps with Mr. \_ Shug understands that she is not experiencing any sexual sensations. Additionally, she notices that Celie doesn't know her own body, so Shug chooses to introduce Celie to it. Walker's female characters are known for their ability to patiently overcome every storm in their lives and for knowing how to bear grief, sorrow, and burden to an unlimited time. Some of them have patience and compassion even to the individuals who disrespect and abuse them. But some are aggressive and know how to fight for their self-respect. One of those characters is Sophia. With the exception of Shug, she is a physical, psychological, and even linguistic contrast to the other typical female characters in *The Colour Purple*. A misfit in Mr. Albert's household, she is a strong lady and the wife of Harpo, the son of Mr. \_ from his first marriage. Sofia exhibits

traits that are often associated with men; she dresses, speaks, works, and eats like a guy. For her right to be heard, she used to fight with anybody. She says: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles". (39). She fights Harpo. Celie says that they fight "like two mens". (39) She is powerful, in contrast to the other female characters in the book, and exhibits traits that society perceives as masculine, such as "repairing the roof and cutting the wood", which are often associated with men. In spite of difficult family dynamics, Sophia loves Harpo and gives birth to his children. Harpo does not fit in the usual image of a Black man, assisted Sophia with home works like dishwashing and looking after the hearth. The issue arose because of Harpo's excessive eating and bad temper, which were sparked by his father's instruction that the best way to control a woman is to beat her, as he did to Celie. The Mr. \_ suggests Harpo to beat Sofia. He says that "Wives is like Children,... You have to let'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a sound beating" (42). Harpo followed the bad advice and started hitting his wife, which caused Sophia to retaliate against him since she does not accept misdeeds. Sofia is a courageous lady who stands up to her husband and hit him back. She says: "I'm getting tired of Harpo. All he think about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife, he want a dog" (67). Sofia strangely learns that she also needs to fight with women as well. To turn her into a lady, Celie tells Harpo to beat her. Celie believes that beating is a common problem in the husband-wife relationship. When she realises that Sofia refuses to be thrashed, she is shocked. Celie understands how different she is from her. "I like Sofia, but she don't act like me at all. Is she talking when Harpo and Mr.\_ come in the room, she keep right on. If they ast her where something at, she say she don't know" (38). Celie is not the only woman with whom Sofia fights in the novel. When the mayor's wife tries to hire her as a maid, she resists her. Because she refused to be a maid, she was assaulted, locked up, and forced to work. The whites beat her to become a slave for them in the same way as Harpo beats her to be quiet.

Feminism, womanism, racism, sexism, slavery, and conventional gender norms are some of the major problems that *The Colour Purple* addresses. Making our planet a better place to live is a theme that Walker emphasises through her novel. Although she acknowledges that people differ from one another, she also thinks that these differences cannot be a cause of oppression or humiliation. She exhorts black people to have confidence in both themselves and their skin tone. She exhorts people to challenge conventional gender norms, particularly those that pertain to women. She disputes the notion that because we were raised in a patriarchal culture, we must conform to traditional gender norms or else we would be seen negatively by our fellow citizens. Celie's life is chronicled throughout the book, from her innocent childhood to her independent adulthood. Walker uses Celie's development from a submissive, obedient girl to a confident woman as an illustration of womanism in this way. Celie's internal transforming journey to discover her identity is similar to the journey she travels from one place to another. Celie first introduced as being illiterate and subservient. She is unresponsive to the assault, and in order to cope with the tyranny, she pretends as a tree. However, she creates a distinct persona once she eventually discovers it. Most importantly, she learns how to feel like a true woman. She also learns how to love and appreciate life. She decides not to submit to a man's demands anymore; instead, she is prepared to defend herself. She is no longer destined to put up with the male's mistreatment and humiliation since she is free.

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