



CELIE- SUBJUGATED OR STRENGTHENED? – A SHARP INSIGHT INTO ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Somasree Santra

Assistant Professor Of English,
Amity University, Kolkata, India

ABSTRACT

*Prior to the emergence of rightist literary texts by black female writers, African American Literature has primarily been male in recounting the practice of slavery and its antiquity of belittlement. According to the contrivance of societal existence, men are contemplated as the authoritative component of the macrocosm while the women are considered to be debilitated and vulnerable. As late as one of them cognizes her true worth, erects as inimical to the exploitation and promulgates her individuality as a dynamic and potential woman, Alice Walker's women are obligated to sustain under the ascendancy of their monarchs. Walker encourages the women to pursue a trail of selfhood to liberate themselves from the venomous and malign influence of patriarchy and sexism without restraining herself by delineating the enduring agony of African-American women. Through the nurturing bond of sisterhood with Nettie, stepdaughter Sophia and close friend Shug Avery, Celie, the leading light in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, amends her stature from a molested and maltreated slave woman to an unshackled soul who crosses the corporeal, aesthetic and pecuniary limitations and attains the unfettered liberation and realizes to predicate her body. In the ablaze of her excruciating strive for existence concerning feminist criticism, the article intends to contextualize Celie's fight as an infant, adolescent and matured*

woman apropos molestation, sexism, racism, subjugation by male authoritative coercion, narrative command and a robust bond between women in the context of *The Color Purple*.

Keywords: patriarchy, sexism, racism, exploitation, power, liberation

INTRODUCTION

A profoundly lauded novelist, essayist and poet, Alice Walker, born to sharecropper parents in Eatonton, Georgia in 1944, was a political activist who toiled for civil rights in Georgia, Liberty County and Mississippi. She won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1983 for her distinguished and captivating novel, *The Color Purple* (1982) which was promptly revamped by Steven Spielberg for the silver screen. One of the best literary works depicting the torments of African-American women from patriarchy, sexism and racism is Alice Walker's epistolary novel, *The Color Purple*. Walker not only contemplates to pave the path of the black women that guides them to liberation and exemption but also provides them a voice. From being a sexually maltreated child to a indifferent wife who acutely endures the effects of sexism and racism and lastly to an disencumbered soul- the novel details the evolvement of the primary character, the black, impoverished, underprivileged and ignorant Celie. At the edge of the novel Celie conquests and grows corporeal, psychological and pecuniary autonomy by demolishing the shackles of patriarchy. Walker's fictional work emanates expectation and optimism even in distress and preaches righteousness and scrupulous growth vigorously and dynamically through the character of Celie. The significance of womanly essence, morale, conforming recognition and attaining venereal consciousness are the terrains which are accentuated by the black women writers who surmounted in literature such as Maya Angelou, Deborah Gray- white, Harriet Jacobs, Maria Stewart, Melto McLaurin, Jaeda De Walt, Lyn Mikel Brown, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and many others. Through the female characters in their fictional works, these writers rendered the effect of racism and sexism on black women and their potentiality to transform and advance in life. Walker sights the probability of capacitating the black women and highlights the paramountcy of sisterhood in their liberation that can transform the unusual description of man and woman that survives currently. It is the solidarity, companionship, adoration, mutual hardships that isolates the black women from the former

servitude and promotes an unbounded and equivalent survival and consolidates the nexus between them.

Celie is capable of reconstructing her existence and liberate her body and soul with the support of her sister, Nettie, daughter-in-law, Sofia and her husband's mistress, Shug. Celie procures reclamation, individuality and conviction through her relation with Shug, progressively. In the motherly and sisterly form as well as guide, sexual companion and confidant, the cord between women depicts a substantial part in Celie's unbridling. Celie affixes herself throughout the years in the foreign mores of Africa due to her correspondence with Nettie while Sofia avows that because of her intense kinship with her sisters she is competent to brawl, which fully concurs with Samuel's perception concerning Olinka women. Residing in a family with complete dearth of endearment, Nettie and Celie exhibit the protuberant symbol of sisterhood. Nettie imparts moralistic aid to Celie as she agonizes because of a brutal rapist father and an ailing mother and suggests Celie to combat her cruel husband. Nettie has consistently been Celie's tutor and succours her with reading, spelling and all that is necessary for her. Nettie observes the unenlightened savageness while living in Albert's place and endeavours to apprise Celie and cease her from being compliant. Celie experiences solace in the grave situation through writing when in Nettie's absence. As Nettie pens to her sister that the first human being who existed in the world is black and even in the Biblical reference the God is black having crimped hair, Celie's intuition widens. Nettie also notifies Celie about her two missing children who are living with her and obtaining appropriate education. Celie acquires her divine vigour and preserves herself after reaping the gracious information. Nettie is viewed by Celie as a flawless exemplary girl and the abundant optimistic ray in her life. Celie acknowledges tranquility in the strident universe with her sister beside her and adores the desire that Nettie is animate and she will reconcile with her eventually. In reciprocation, Celie is the sister as well as alternate mother of Nettie in the void of maternal tenderness and aids and braces her by prohibiting her from getting molested by her stepfather and in lieu proffers herself. The endearing sisterhood dispenses a promise of continuance and binds both the sisters during the crudest surviving situations of their life even when they are detached from one other. Sofia, who is the wife of Celie's step-son also emerges to be a perfect idol for Celie. Celie is the one who deteriorates due to household assault yet continues to be speechless and trusts the conception that

men are of higher calibre than women. Sprouting in a lineage of men, the bulky woman with thunderous legs realizes that she can exist only by contending with her father, brothers, uncle and cousins. Sofia is completely antagonistic and incongruous to Celie's recognizable appearance of a woman. She meets Sofia initially when she solicits Albert's consent for her wedding to Harpo. Sofia deploys a scathing upshot on Celie's arousing with her turbulent ethos. Notwithstanding their parents' remonstrance Sofia marries Harpo. The couple amicably allocates the homely chores and relishes their kindred contentment towards the very inception of their marital life. Albert provokes Harpo to strike Sophia as she is very much engrossed with herself. Analogously Celie complies with Harpo on thrashing her to make her submissive as she herself is comatosed about coercion and brutality as she matures in agony and injustice. Sofia senses abhorrent treachery when she grasps that Celie has incited Harpo to blow her. Celie's unveils the very fact that she genuinely adores the recalcitrant vitality of Sofia. Subsequently, the cord between them develops tenaciously as they count on each other and Celie evolves to be self-sufficient, vigorous and valiant. Celie is rescued from her mortifying spot and discovers her authentic individuality. We confront an absolutely disparate womanly connection between Celie and the blues singer, Shug Avery who assists her in achieving salvation. While Sofia is the defiant energy and Nettie is the belief, Shug is recognized as the sympathetic mother and passionate sexual advisor for Celie who has always been bereaved of parental warmth. Shug Avery behaves like an admirer and companion to Celie and empowers Celie to unfold into a self-reliant and accomplished woman, who is no more chained and imprisoned by the circumstances by escorting her through her nurturing sway like a motherly figure. Shug alike a mother safeguards Celie from Albert and confides that he does not protrudes his atrocity again. According to Celie, Shug is the utmost alluring woman whom her husband sincerely admires. Shug nurtures Celie to pave her preliminary footsteps towards self-reliance and proves to be the archangel beside her. Though there has been a paucity of female idol in Celie's life who could escort her to proclaim her individuality, we observe subsequently that the two women fasten their relationship by partaking a protracted cuddle and a kiss. Celie revamps her existent individuality and comprehends her toughness through her acquittance of Shug.

Celie crushes the shell of male dictatorship and with her newfangled integrity as she anatomically sights herself in the mirror and uncloses the gate of potentialities to welcome her by

agglutinating an association of women for abutment. The misery and coercion that benumbs Celie all through her infancy and adolescence is permanently discharged by her as she unfastens herself passionately with Shug's assistance. All through her strifes with both Mr. ____ as well as with the reminiscence of her juvenile misfortunes, Celie is consoled by Shug with whom she savours an enduring amalgamation and attachment. Celie possesses the notion in her mind that she has a grotesque physique and has no fascination to recognize her body after being dominated through continuous rapes and strikes. A woman should apprehend herself passionately and materially to liberate and Celie had to eliminate her body and soul to safeguard herself. One should proclaim the persona and the shape to retrieve authority as according to Daniel Ross, the order of the feminine rumination to consider their physicality as disintegrated or ruptured and to detest themselves as they are the ones who are the vehemently abused by masculine encroachment, is conspicuous through the character of Celie as she accentuates the emblematic glimpse of servitude and misconduct of female which accords to her subordinate and depraved condition. Celie grows physical attentiveness and appreciates the grace after she glimpses her sexual organ in mirror for the very first time. Celie's reflection with Shug ushers her indication to be the other female and demonstrates that she is inept in experiencing erotic ejaculation even if she reproduces two children. By determining oneself with a person, notably with a mother, an individual becomes apprehensive of the individuality. Celie was introduced to the carnal delights and passion by Shug who contends her body by retaining rapid sexual pleasures and exists in the frontal pathway without any prohibition. The following morning, Celie experiences a metamorphosis after copulating with Shug as it is the first moment she senses the genuine love. As Celie has always been afflicted and impaired by the men, her lesbian relationship with Shug emerges to be innate and warm and not immoral. The homosexual conciliation between Shug and Avery appears to be instinctive and favoured rather than an organic or hereditary adaptation as it unhooks and concludes their love for each other. Celie accomplishes her psychic and spiritual expedition to individuality after undergoing the actual gratification of sex with Shug. Celie discerns security as she accepts the definitive present of unconditional love. Celie is capable of triggering her eagerness for integrity by exploring and acquiring her body in the manner Shug inaugurates and marshals her to the final release.

Celie divulges that she had never been adored or treasured by any soul as she recounts her horrid anecdote to Shug, who is appalled by her antiquity of physical molestation. Shug assuages Celie by encasing her in her arms with motherly affection and nurturance. Celie counters instinctually through the tears as she is deserted enough and both of them slumbers together in Grady's bed in his unavailability and jabbars about their venereal involvements like school girls. They cultivate a warm, affectionate and sustaining connection as Shug arrives to Mr. ___'s house with her new husband, Grady. The inherent and innocent Celie's conviction undergoes various transformations and emendation as the novel advances and Walker evinces that individuality can be procured through psychological independence. Celie's notion of God as a tall, white and old gray bearded man adorning robes and appearing barefooted in compliance to the white expositions for Bible is entirely transfigured. Celie is ineffectual to narrate anybody about her stepfather's coital maltreatment and corporeal ferocity. She is compliant to God and permitted herself to be a slave by perpetrating God's orders and anticipating him to support her always through promulgation with the assistance of the omnipotent being. While sustaining with her father and husband, Celie aches the most and has excruciating involvement and her white God insinuate to operate in the similar manner grievously. Celie is dissatisfied with the patriarchal Christian God shaped as a white male who symbolizes the vitality of patriarchal institution that exploited her for such an elongated stretch of time, and inclines to attain metaphysical autonomy. Certainly, her consciousness about God and his intention are transformed by Shug's clarifications as she construes the significance of emotion, tenderness, endearment, warmth and contentment in life. Celie envisages the new God as a divine faculty and intramural solace that prevails in her as she embarks on her hindmost letter with "Dear God". Celie experiences her own estimation and conceives her emphasis and she relinquishes the patriarchal God and befits into the innate structure of the cosmos. As Celie directs her temperament to adore creation and existence, she encounters concrete reconstruction. Financial liberation is the essential predicament for a woman's enfranchisement as it empowers her to perform actions in accordance to her personal choice, as Virginia Woolf puts forth in her work, *A Room of One's Own* that if a female wishes to compose works on her own, she must have financial ability and a sphere of her own existence. Celie holds a menial status in the family as she languishes due to privation and is almost undraped as an adolescent girl, occupied with

laborious devotion in the house and fields for many following decades. As her husband is reluctant to meet her necessities, she is even proscribed to wear her most desired colour, purple or red. Irrevocably, Celie steals the initial stride towards emancipation by welcoming Shug's suggestions and launching her new clothing company, Folkspants Unlimited Company as she harbours the skill in making pants even though she is an illiterate black woman. Celie ascertains her sagacity, creative strength, aplomb and economic freedom by absorbing herself in the aesthetic pursuit, through her persistent physical toil and the encouragement of Sofia. Celie's elucidation of existence is modified and her societal posture is toughened as she envisions herself manufacturing pants while sitting in Shug's dining room. Celie moreover advances to explore the world herself, renouncing to greet anyone else's exposition as she step ahead with her current line of work.

CONCLUSION

The Color Purple represents Celie's liberation as she arises to deem herself as an indispensable, donating appendage of the community and believes her own being and ingenuity. Celie is emancipated as she embraces her body and unchains her soul, spirit and pecuniary limitations. Through the letters which became a medium to voice-over her existential episodes and her bond with Nettie, Sofia and Shug, she achieves freedom. Every concealed feature becomes discernible as one takes a prospect into the work from a critical stance of feminism. Women, who are obligated to sustain under the supremacy of father or husband should have faith in their identity and self and the conceivability of her valuable existence and should be nourished with the indomitable spirit. Such a perennial leitmotif traverses through Alice Walker's award-winning novel, *The Color Purple*. As Celie's survival becomes a tale concerning the quest and being reunited with the omnipotent being, she is proclaimed as a brave woman who disseminated her selfhood as a reliant and poised functioning woman and reconstructed a pristine mode of existence for herself. Celie harbingers the way for the rest of the women to the direction of a fresh and refined aliveness without any male constraint or enforcement and emerges as the paramount mouthpiece though she herself had been injured time and again.

REFERENCES

Abel, Elizabeth. (1982), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Daniel, Ross W. (1988), "The desire for selfhood in the color purple", *Modern Fiction Studies*, John Hopkins University Press, vol.34 No.1, pp. 69 –83.

Harris, Trudier. (1984), "On the color purple, stereotypes, and silence." *Black American Literature Forum*, African American Review (St. Louis University).

Hooks, Bell. (1990), "Writing the Subject: Reading *The Color Purple*". in Louis Gates Jr. H. (Ed.), *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, Meridian, Plume.

Irigaray, Luce. (2004), "The power of discourse and the subordination of the feminine". in Julie, R and Ryan Michael (Ed.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell.

James, V. U. [et al.]. (2000), *Black Women Writers Across Cultures: An Analysis of Their Contributions*, International Scholars Publications Oxford.

McDowell, Deborah. (1987), "'The changing same': generational connections and black women novelists." *New Literary History*, JHU Press.

Royster, Philip M. (1986), "In Search of Our Fathers' Arms: Alice Walker's Persona of the Alienated Darling". *Black American Literature Forum*, Indiana State University.

Walker, Alice. (1983), *The Color Purple*. Woman's Press.

Woolf, Virginia. (1989), *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt Brace & Co.

AUTHOR'S BIO-NOTE

Somasree Santra is an Assistant Professor of English at Amity University, Kolkata and a Ph.D. Research Scholar at the Department of English, Adamas University, Kolkata. Her dissertation concentrates on the writings of the British author, A. S. Byatt. Her areas of interest include feminist critical study, 20th century literature and analysis of fictions, Indian Writing in English, African literature, literature from the margins, partition literature and linguistics.

She can be reached at:

Address: Santosh Sarani, Banamalipur, Barasat, North 24 parganas, West Bengal, India, Kolkata- 700124

Ph. No. - +91 9163677308

Email id. - somasree07@gmail.com
