

Research Article

Oppression to Revolution: A Transformation of Celie in *The Color Purple*

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the central character, Celie, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* takes towards the carrier. Her success can be define in two ways one is the solidarity of the female community. And the second is the way in which she escapes from the angst of pain. The first one gives her moral support and sets as a role model and second one provides her a space to express herself by writing letters to God. Celie character goes through physical, mental and spiritual pain which allows her to purge herself and eventually attain the freedom. This study focuses on the process her internal journey towards the freedom by allying resilient theory.

Keywords: Womanism, Self-Realization, Repression, Oppression, Revolution, Transformation, Patriarchal system.

Introduction

Women play an integral role in literature. They are portrayed differently by different writers. In the portrayal, women exist only for their man's mind and life not for themselves. The social and cultural conditions forced them to play a minor role in women's world not because of their lacking of ability to regulate themselves, but because of the remissness of social and cultural of their oneness and dignity. Historically, the patriarchal system cause all the hardships of women, which treat them severely and oppressed them.

In order to treat woman equally a new feminist movement was flourished in nineteen century. It strongly fights for the women participation in all activities like economics, politics, education, and all other works. This feminist movement identified many women writers and Alice Walker was one of them.

Alice Walker is considered to be one of the great promoter of this movement and her novel *The Color Purple* cast light on the Afro-American women who suffers a lot from various persecutions including segregation.

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The Color Purple is one of the most controversial novel written by Alice Walker. She uses epistolary to take the reader into the inner psyche of African American woman to understand the misery of their life. Celie major character in the novel, is the protagonist, writes emotional letters to God. This technique helps Celie to express as well as to reflect and reconstruct herself. The thematic image of this novel is survival, rebirth and regaining one's self status. Carla Kaplan (1996) suggests that “without a sympathetic audience, such as Shug, Celie might never have been able to go from her first self-effacing statement “I am” to her later declaration, “I’m here” (130). She writes letter to God and to her sister Nettie. This shows us clearly that she couldn't find anyone to share her feelings and emotions so she started to pen down her feelings and emotions to God. “Finding a listener and finding her voice are inextricably related” (130) she feels strong and respect because of exchanging letters with her best person Nettie.

“In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” The concept of womanism is reflected which was coined by Walker in 1983. Alice Walker defines womanism as a woman who majesties and cherish women’s culture and their capability to exchange and show emotions. Sree explained it as: “the individual identity of black woman and how her identity and bonding with other women affects the health of her community at large. Alice Walker describes this affinity among women as womanism. For her, womanist is one who is committed to the survival and integrity of the entire black race.” (P. 16)

Celie was the best example for rebels against discrimination and social restriction. Celie is a poor black girl who was rapped by her own step father for multiple times and got married to a widower. Father and daughter relationship was based on psychological, sexual and economical oppression in a society of patriarchal system. The reason why Celie was silent is because of the dominant power of the man which leads to the inner strength and freedom and also seeking someone to help her to overcome all the problems. After she is close to Shug which change her life. The bonding between Celie and Shug Avery described as, according to author and critic Eva Lennox Birch (1994), loves everybody impartially and functions in the novel as “a guide and mentor to those whose capacity or love, of either self or others, is stunted by society” (Birch, p. 227). They both became friends and later lovers and Shug's company made her to discover motherly love and that makes her to feel happy and alive.

The female bonding was described by Hudson-Weems (2004) as he overviews that there has always been bonding among Africana women that cannot be broken—genuine sisterhood. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal, one in which each gives and receives equally. In this community of women, all reach out in support of each other, demonstrating a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other by looking out for one another. They are joined emotionally, as they embody emphatic understanding of each other’s shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism included, and in the end, the sharing of the common and individual experiences and ideas yields rewards. (P. 65)

Carmen Gillespie (2011) explains that Shug is smart who has rebellious spirit into Celie’s personality and guides her to the right way to live normally like others. She supports Celie and her family and goes onto the evident of their sexual relationship with Celie. In this concern, Carmen commented in this kind of womanism point of view saying “Shug’s occupation as a blues singer foregrounds the ways in which she fulfills this role in Celie’s life. She provides Celie the means, the vocabulary and the methodology with which to find and sing her own song – her truth, her self-worth and her desires”. (P. 63)

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The Color Purple concentrates on the female attach which donate to women's salvation and changing the way of men's thinking of women. As a result, a kind of a change takes place in the speech of Albert Celie's husband and Harpo who now "reassess and reevaluate their lives and develop a better relationship with their women" (Diwakar, 137). During his conversation with Celie, Albert tells her, "I'm satisfied, this is the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feels like a new experience" (*The Color Purple* 267)

Andersen (2014) stated that Celie has learned to rip up the restraining identity imposed upon her because of the reality that she is a woman. Walker also extends her explanation on the healing power of love and the possibility of change for Celie. She is an uneducated and a poor black American girl who is able to encourage herself to change her circumstances. She is a symbol of faith that is fixed deeply in the mind of readers for her strength, hope and courage. From exploring her process, we able to know clearly that the female bonding is the important thing for the emancipation process. This symbolizes a new beginning for Celie. She has survived despite all the brutality and violence she had experienced and is ready to start from the beginning and to clean forget what she had had as an unnerving experience. She has evolved from being an insecure and inferior girl into a strong and well-balanced woman. (P. 65)

Lewis (1990) stated that "this novel unfolds a model both of and for human beings who are threatened by cultural disorder and by a loss of connection with themselves, with each other, and with the world. By infusing Celie with such a capacity for growth, the author acts as a spiritual guide throughout the novel. Walker traces Celie's journey from living in fear of a patriarchal God that is difficult to identify with to Celie's eventual joy and acceptance of herself, others, and the serenity to be found in daily life. Celie eventually can move beyond a life full of suffering because she realizes life offers so much more as she hones the ability to change and grow". (P.483) so these are the comment given for female bonding and Celie's step towards her success.

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory is contributed by many collective resilience models among them, the notable contributor are Norman Garmezy, who has initiated longitudinal study (PCLS) 3 and masten. Dr.Norman Garmezy defines "resilience as not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, Resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event". (Garmezy, 1991a)

Emmy Werner defines resilience theory as "the capacity to cope effectively with the internal stresses of their vulnerabilities and external stress".

Suniya Luthar defines resilience as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation with context of significant adversity. According to Luthar two things are important for a resilient they are achievement of positive adaptation and exposure to the significant stress.

Ann Masten defines resilience in 2011as "The capacity of a dynamic system to adaptation to disturbances of that threaten system function viability or development".

Michel Unger defines "resilience's as more than an individual set of characteristics. It is the structure around the individual set of characteristics. It is the structure around the individual receives, the way health knowledge is generated all of which combine with characteristics of individual that allow them to overcome the adversity they face and chart path ways to resilience"

Resilience theory is the conceptual framework for understanding how some individuals have the ability to bounce back in life after experiencing an adverse situation in a strength-focused approach. Applying resilience theory in the novel *The Color Purple* is apt to compare the character with resilience theory to prove how the character bounce back from the setback. Humiliating environment of women alone is not shown in the novel but also changing the constant thought of women in the society and making a own position for herself is the central theme. This novel intended goal is to give a voice for black women and to show them the correct way to make themselves emancipated.

The Color Purple is a novel which has a subject of surviving woman who endures cruelties of spousal abuse, lesbianism, dehumanization, depravation and incest. Walker shows Celie in the novel as dependent, defeated personality to an independent liberated individual personality. Celie fourteen years old girl begins her story by pending down all her suffering as a letters to God. Celie is threatened and told her whatever she endures in her life should not be shared to others, so she choose to write letters to share her sufferings, and she may think that he is the creator who brings at least little happiness in her life.

Her father Alphonso is demonic, molesting and beats Celie and rapped her several times. Later, Celie was married to Albert he marries her for the sake of dowry. “Her sexuality and reproductive organs are controlled by men, her submission is enforced through violence. In her terrified acquiescence to much blatant male brutality, Celie symbolically mirrors everywoman” (302). So she is entirely controlled by others, they never allows her to thinks of her happiness and in same way they also never think about her peaceful life.

Celie’s job is to cook, do all the house hold job, and taking care of Albert four uncontrollable children who are equally ruthless towards her like their father. She is completely alienated and alone and she has no entertainment in the house where she lives. In this novel she was shown as completely abused object and few character like Nettie, Sophie and Shug are the main reason for her change. Few incidents like Nettie her sister who ran away from home to the place where she live happily. Sophie who not allow her husband to dominate her and Shug is the main character who lived as a mistress of Celie’s husband she never allow anyone to control over her and she showed many love and affection which is really very new to her and after seeing all these things Celie wants to live her life not in an abusive way she took perfect decision on moving out from her house and try to live a peaceful life. Day by day she improves her confidence and her confidence level and her exposure towards the outside world makes her a resilient business woman.

The character Celie in the novel traces the major development of being a sexually abused child and a passive wife to an emancipated woman. Usually in all families we find love and care but in Celie's case we couldn't find any kind of love or affection. She is a big burden to family, they treat them very abusively. “But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (*The Color Purple*, p. 26), “I do not say anything. I stay where I’m told. But I am alive” (*The Color Purple*, p. 29). It makes clear that her silent speaks indirectly for her life to survive. After getting married to a widower she could smell the unpleasant atmosphere before entering that place. She talks to Nettie before leaving to her husband's home, she says, “it is worse than that, I think. If I was buried, I wouldn’t have to work. But I just say, never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-o-d I got somebody along.” (*The Color Purple*, 26). Celie is banned from going school, and Nettie is the one who always want her sister to be bold and confident, she insists her to develop her

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personality. Her bonding with other characters, in particular Shug is highly leading and greatly bearing a her sudden changing point in regarding her rights and discard wretched condition and improving her own individual characteristics. In this regard, Shug is examines as the main character to let Celie track down her body which affects her consciousness toward her personality to get on her sister's letters is another means that stimulates and makes Celie regulate to set herself free. Shug is the one who discover the letters of Nettie in the mail box of Mr. Albert. The letters notify Celie that her sister and her children, Olivia and Adam, are not death. Celie's final letter on the age to God states that, "I think this the youngest us ever felt." (*The Color Purple*, 295) she decides to leave Mr. Albert and to travel with Shug to Memphis. When Mr. Albert attempts to disappoint and to belittle Celie, Celie responds with full confidence saying that "It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need." (Walker, p.207) To see her, Mr. Albert understands that Celie's mental growth evolves to revolt against him, so he leaves her alone to take her future resolution. In this case, Shug plays an vital role in forming Celie's individualistic personality and in becoming optimistic. Shug is the facilitator who paves the road for Celie and guides her through cheer her to set up her own business of stitching pants. This step is the sign of announce freedom. She becomes very victorious, and she also realize how to delight others. She has a close bonding with women since they are the only people who care and help her to conquer all the sufferings that she went through.

Celie's resilience act made other black woman in society to kick out their difficulties and bounce back from deconstructed to constructed life. Celie is a woman who got raped multiple times, banned to study, her step father sell her to a widower who brutally abuse her, he sell her children, beaten and tortured like a object, hides her only supporter sister's letters; she has under gone all the torches but she give a tough fight agaist patriarchy society and she turns all the barriers into a carrier at end she is a business woman.

Celie revolts against Albert after she has friendship with Shug and Sofia who help her to change her personality form a silent naïve young girl to a self-reliant woman and this is a strong evidence of her maturity. She began to encounter the difficulties of life without help from anyone especially men. In reality, all these changes mark a turning- point in the way feminism is treated. Women in *The Color Purple* are not a repetition of countless previous women who 41 continued to be submissive to male. Now they are completely different women who are able to face the traditional role which feminism presented them with. (Walker, 1983). Facing all the troubles and miseries her she become stronger physically and mentally and by looking her sister Nittie, Shug and Sophia she thinks that she is also capable of achieve something in the world, So the resilience act of Celie is the main reason of her successes.

Conclusion

At the close of the novel Celie stands up for herself. Celie is tired of accepting only miseries in her life, she want something new in her life so she decided not to take Albert her husband's therapy anymore and is ultimate on. She is finally ready to get into a bonding with the rest of the world and begin her own life. As another proving quote from the book states "that's it. Pack up your stuff. You are coming back to Tennessee with me." (p.183). It clearly says that she want to sleep which signifies the re-birth of Celie. The idea of her re-birth is also one of the most important points in the book, Celie comes to grip that she is an adult and has the right to do whatever she

wants, and this time it happens to be leave her old life and go and live with her loved ones in Tennessee (p.183). In conclusion, the novel tells her growth as a human being and shows us how her esteem has increased.

Celie's resilience made inspire other black woman in society to kick their difficulties and bounce back from barrier to carrier. Celie is a woman who got raped multiple times, banned to study, her step father sell her to a widower who brutally abuse her, he sell her children, beaten and tortured like a object, hides her only supporter sister's letters; she has under gone all the torches but she give a tough fight against patriarchy society and she turns all the barriers into a carrier by allowing herself to be taught by Shug and to stand up for herself and that kind of resilience is eventually rewarded. At end she is a business woman.

All African American women go through this experience of being black women where they had to fight fiercely to confirm their identities. So, they encounter the various kinds of obstacles inherited by their communities. They fight against white patriarchy, white women's racism and black men's sexism. This tragic experience is reflected in the black women's personalities where they find forming bonds is the decisive and reasonable way to stay alive and to stand against the white and the black men who have the privilege to exploit them unmercifully. Moreover, segregation is the basic reason behind looking for establishing their own new lifestyle and business to be free from all aspects of life. (Canon, 1985: P.30)

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