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## Manifestation of Humiliation and the Gift of Healing: Alice Walker's the Colour Purple

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A . Pearlin Synthia & Dr. P Kumaresan

Research Scholar (Full-Time) Sudharsan College of Arts and Science Pudukkottai 622104

Well ye know  
What woman is, for none of woman born  
Can choose but drain the bitter days of woe  
Whichever to the oppressed from the  
oppressors flow

--- Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam* Alice Walker's stormy 1982 novel *The Colour Purple* (New York : Washington Square Press, 1982) chronicles the struggle of several black women in Georgia, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 and the American Book Award in 1985. Alice walker is a Georgia-born author, poet and the first black woman ever to receive the award for fiction. *The Colour Purple* unleashes a storm of reception which is excellently written as a black cultural representation and also intrinsically woven with pathos and humour, brilliantly laced with excellent characters. Walker explore themes, that highlights the human conditions: the power of voice, the power of strong female relationships, the disruption of traditional gender roles, loss of innocence and faith, racial discrimination and oppression. In spite of all the hurdles, Walker examines the relationship between men and women, women with women and between parents and children. *The Colour Purple* takes the reader to a sojourn journey where the characters suffer

from violence, racial discrimination, and sexual oppression to discover love, marriage, family and the truth as a spirituality of healing elements as an answer to their manifestations of humiliation.

The story of this simple symbolic novel has both subplots and takes within tales. The story speaks about the thirty year life story of the characters, set in rural Georgia. Celie the protagonist is a poor, rough - looking girl and a semi - literate who speaks in a heavy dialect. The dialogues are written in epistolary style which Celie out of frustration and isolation, write letters first to God , then to her sister Nettie in Africa. At first Celie believes that God and Jesus are white men. Later on she comes to understand that God can be anything - a feeling of joy or connection with another person, or with nature and Celie eventually comes to realize that God is not so much a person or thing as a means toward happiness and fulfilment. The very first line of the novel starts with , Thus the reader can understand the violence and suffering of a fourteen year old Celie, typically depicted in the horns of incest and abuse. She is raped by her step father and has a result she bears a child who turns up missing. She also has a second child, who her step father

abducts. Celie's ailing mother dies after cursing Celie on her death bed.

Alice Walker strikes a nail head -on the social taboos which most of the black women writer's shy away from, with some exceptions of Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin because she is much concerned about the sufferings of her own people.

Celie is expected to serve her abusive father, and later her husband. But her younger sister Nettie, not wanting to do either, runs away from the advances of Celie's husband. But Nettie seeks shelter in the hands of Sam Corine, a young missionary couple who have adopted Celie's two children. Celie's brutal husband Albert needs a servant to take care of his two children. She has been severely beaten by him for several years. When Albert brings home a former common-law wife named "Shug" (short for sugar) Avery, with whom Albert born three children before his previous marriage. Shug has been living an independent life as blues singer, leaving her illegitimate children to be raised by her parents. But, now Shug is ill and when Albert asks Celie to nurse her to health there results a ménage à trois with a twist; Celie falls for Shug, forming a relationship, while both are living with Albert.

The male dominated world has kept women in the cage of bondage. Has Barbara Christian

says, clearly sexism and racism are systems of societal and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of afro American women. (Black Feminist Criticism.71).

Walker's female characters show their destiny in relation to God, the coloured women's position in relation to man, society, white people, financial freedom, sexual freedom and identity. In the *Colour Purple* the female characters the female characters Celie. Nettie, Sophia, Squeak, Corrine all represents the microcosm of the world of women in pain. Celie the oppressed soul was finally given a healing by Shug Avery.

Walker is certainly concerned with the liberation of all womankind. In an interview with critic John o' Brien, " I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and triumphs of black women".(interviews with black writers new York: live right, 1973). Walker is always preoccupied in her writing with the suffering of black women. Women are exploited very seriously, especially Celie who is married to Albert to look after his children and expected to work on the farm and submit without objection to all of Albert's demands. She is also meant to accept Albert affair with Shug which extends even to him sleeping with her under the same roof. In fact fidelity is not seen as an important quality by men, although same

behaviour becomes a cause of comment. In spite of all odds Celie transforms from a raged child in to sophisticated lady turning her humiliation in to success has a gift of healing. She says:

Look different. Got on some dark blue pants, and a white silk shirt that look righteous. Little red flat- healed slippers, and a flower in my hair (195).

Netty relates her experiences have a missionary in West Africa. Initially she is excited at the prospect of returning to her roots in order to convert her ethnic brothers and sisters. A series of disappointments and disillusionments follow, she realises that they are uninterested in slavery. Paradoxically, Corinne, Samuel and Netty are alien outsiders among their own original people. Olinka society is first fascinating, but has deeply disturbing customs. Women are treated abominably, not allowed education or independence and are under the protection of men.

The practice of female circumcision and facial scaring is also revolting to Netty. Since, it's a barbaric custom and she feels helpless to influence the tribe or to help the victims. She writes how the pampered the Olinka men sat around while the tribes women did all the work. Young girls had to have their faces scared and there genitalia mutilated in bloody initiation. For a woman to look at a man's face

considered brazen. Olinka men literally had the power of life over women. Netty remains tolerant and her reward is marriage to the only male character that shows strength and integrity.

Conflicts occur over the traditional male qualities of power, dominance, and control, female traits of submission, obedience and servitude. Albert teaches his Harpo to beat his wife Sophia to make her mind. "Wives is like children", he says, "you have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that well than a sound beating "(42). Even though she is a strong willed woman, she tells Celie, "I ' m getting tired of Harpo.All he thinks about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife, he want a dog"(67). But in keeping with the general feeling of optimism, Sofia is also able to achieve tolerance and friendship. Thus Alice walker's the Colour Purple is a book about beauty, truth, love and triumph of the human spirit. Even Alice walker spoke of how this work often served as an antidote to depression and even suicidal urges. She believes that the gift of loneliness that produced this book is a precious gift to the world and ultimately will be a gift to immortality. At last it reveals the core of optimism. 'We shall overcome Someday'.

#### **References:**



1. Bradley, David. *Alice Walker: Interviews with Black Writers*. (Ed). John O' Brien, New York: Live Right, 1973. Print.

2. Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon, 1985. Print.