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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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ABSTRACT

Gender decides the place of people all over the world. This is true, particularly to women. If they are not only women but also colored, it has become very difficult to live in this universe. The enforcement of the values and norms of the dominant white culture has made impossible for the black women to hold on to a distinctive way of life. Afro-American woman history is a record of the struggle for the right to exist and recognition of their place in this society. This struggle is long and hard and taken on various forms. This paper attempts to present the violence against women and their fight against violence in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

KEY WORDS:

Womanism, feminism, child abuse, patriarchic family

INTRODUCTION

Alice Melsenior Walker is one of the most prominent and highly acclaimed authors of America. She was the first Afro-American women who won Pulitzer Prize. She has a pivotal role in redefining Black feminist Movement as Womanism. Walker's works are praised for the insightful and exciting portrait of black life in particular the experience of black women in a sexist and racist society. Through her novels, Walker redefines the negative images concerning black women. Walker has presented them as capable of realizing their potentials and when given a chance they will rise as liberated individual.

Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple* is one of the best literary works that vividly depicts the sufferings of Afro-American women from patriarchy, sexism and racism. This is the milestone in the literary career of Walker. In this novel she has not only manifested the violence against women but also has shown their determination to raise their social status and position by instilling in them a strong sense of their right and position in the society.

The Color Purple has not only described the pathetic condition of black women but even has

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gone beyond that purpose. In fact, Alice Walker's true intention in writing this novel is not only to give voice to black women but also to provide them with a path to follow in order to struggle against violence and get their freedom. Walker has shown the evolution of her major character, Celie, from being a sexually abused child to a passive wife and finally to an emancipated woman. Celie, as the central character in this novel is an Afro-American woman who has suffered violence from her patriarchal family and partiality from Whites.

Basically, family is where people share their love and care. The members of the family usually will support each other. But in this novel Celie's family is more a burden for its members, particularly for Celie. She hasn't feel safety and care in her own home and neither for her sister Nettie. In addition, Celie's family is patriarchal. Patriarchal means that women are only subordinates to men. Women have been expected to do all the things what has been expected by men.

Walker has described the violence against women perfectly and also with all its kinds in her Pulitzer Prize novel *The Color Purple*. Celie the protagonist and also the narrator of this novel is an Afro-American woman who has suffered oppression from her family and discrimination from whites. She is a very unlucky girl because she has suffered violence from individuals as well as mentally even in her teenage. Eva Lennox Birch perfectly has told, child rape is an undeniable fact of most black's lives.

The Color Purple has begun with a note of violence and presented it with a girl who is writing to God because she feels that she has nobody to turn to. She can't even pray for fear of somebody hearing her. As her father has instructed her, "You better not ever tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy". Being black and uneducated Celie can only describe the abuse with words such as "titties" and "pussy". The difficult thing in the description of the abuse is her inability to speak about it to her mother. She has forced to get used to it even though she can't do anything to save her life because she doesn't have any power to resist him.

Celie is almost voiceless at this point in the novel. When she has expressed her pain through tears, she has told to be quiet. When she has written the letter to God, she has expressed total hopelessness, feeling she has no power to change her situation. She asks God for a sign to let her letter, indicating that she does not see herself as a valuable human being.

Celie has been robbed not only of her bodily integrity, but also of the child she bore. She does not know even what has happened to her baby. She only knows that her father took it away. Suspecting that the infant is dead, she has told her mother that God took the baby away and killed it in the woods. Once again Celie has covered the brutality of her father.

Being an elder one, Celie is responsible for handling everyone and everything In the house hold; she has to care for the other children, her sick and dying mother, and her abusive father. In the teenage Celie has not only suffered rape but also suffered early pregnancy sufferings.

"I can't move fast enough. By time I git back from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it be dinner time". (The Color Purple 4)

Because of unique nature of the sex only women can become pregnant and give birth to a child. In other words, she is the only capable person to 'create' but instead of rewarding her for this unique act, the patriarchy has punished her by restricting her role and defining her place in the domestic spheres only.

Being a wife, Celie's mother has been tortured sexually by her husband. Not only have that, her

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powerlessness to save her daughter from the abuse of her husband. This is the cruelest kind of violence against women. Even in her deathbed condition she hasn't got any attention from her husband. With the character of Celie's mother Walker has portrayed the violence against the aged women in Afro-American society.

Celie has suffered many kinds of domestic violence; she has lost her mother, and her two babies. In the patriarchic society infant children could be taken away from the black women, like calves from cows. Her father has separated the children from her within few hours after her delivery. Being a daughter she has been misunderstood by her mother, being a girl she has lost her virginity, being a mother she has lost her children.

When her father has separated the children unable to nurse her infants regularly, she endured the pain caused by her swollen breasts. In the teenage she has suffered all these kinds of domestic violence from her father. Celie has written to God that her step – father has beaten her for winking at a boy, even though she has not that idea. Because of her past, she has no interest in looking at men. She has enjoyed the company of women because she is scared of men.

The institution of marriage has strong religious and moral foundations in the society. Marriage itself is a package deal for the girl, often involving monetary and material transactions. In addition in such a context the girl has expected to know lots of things including the culture and life style of her husband, his parents and even their close relatives.

Celie's relationship with her step-father and husband is characterized by psychological and sexual violence in the patriarchal society of America. At first, Mr. --- doesn't want to marry Celie, he wants his marriage with Nettie, sister of Celie whom he has seen in the church, but her father doesn't let him to take her, she is still young and too fresh for him, taking care of his household. So, he offered him to take Celie who is not a virgin anymore, because he has needed Nettie for himself. Therefore, he has let him to take Celie by offering some cows to be with him.

Well, He say, real slow, I can't let you have Nettie. She too young. Don't know nothing but what you tell her. Sides, I want her to git some more schooling. Make a schoolteacher out of her. But I can let you have Celie. She the oldest any way. She ought to marry first. (The Color Purple 9).

From this statement it is very clear that Celie' step – father has wanted to get advantage through his daughters. At the same time, he has spoiled his first daughter and he has considered that everything is going well. He even offers Celie to be Mr. –'s wife. At first, Mr. --- has taken more time, about three months to think of marrying Celie. Mr. --- has married Celie not because of her goodness: hard working, discipline and caring attitude but he seems more interested in getting cows if he has taken Celie to be his wife. With this situation Walker has portrayed dowry, the major domestic violence against women not only in America all over the world.

Denial of education is one of the major violence against the black people. It has been believed that if the blacks are educated they would be aware of their rights. In a similar manner the black men have kept their girls uneducated to make them ignorant about their rights and freedom. It is true that women's equality can be attained through education. Celie is not allowed to go to school. Even her teacher has requested her father to send her to school again, her father not let him to go.

Every man in the world is a wolf a wrapped in the skin of a lamb. He wants his pound of flesh. For him every woman is virtually a body- bone, flesh, curves! A woman is not identified with her intellect,

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her ability, her intelligence, her courage or knowledge. This is what patriarchy, has done to women. It is true in the case of Celie. Both her step- father and her husband treated her as merely a body not as a human.

Truly women has considered by men as animals which do not need to be loved, to be given affection and care. On her wedding day, Celie has understood how hard her life with Mr. --- is going to be, for she has expected to take care of his four children. After the marriage her husband treated her as a slave and as whore. To make himself proud he regularly beats Celie. He conveyed his thought about women with Harpo like,

Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me, Mr. – say, cause she is my wife. Plus she stubborn.

Nettie the younger sister of Celie is another character who has faced violence in this novel. She is the second narrator of this novel. She is not directly or physically affected by violence but affected by mentally. Actually she is not familiar with rape, wife beating, denial of education which has been familiar to Celie, but has feared when she would be affected by all those harassments, and also felt powerless to stop such violence, to her beloved sister.

After the marriage of Celie , Nettie is the target of her step-father. Homelessness is also another kind of violence has faced by the black women in this world. Nettie has been affected by this kind of violence when she has eloped from home when her father approached her to abuse. Then she went to Celie's home. Nettie has eloped from that place also, one night when she refused to have sex with Mr. --. He has told Celie, that Nettie must leave. Before Nettie has departed, Celie has made her promise that she will write her letters. But Mr. – has hid the letters, by this he cutting off the sister's communication, which left them heart broken.

Shug Avery, a blues singer who is has admired by Celie and has criticized for her brevity and her self-confidence by other characters in the novel, has also suffered by violence. Though she has admired by everyone, she has no one to take care of her when she is ill.

Sofia the next important victim of violence, like Shug, a strong character with masculine tendencies, much of the physically demanding work around the farm and the house suffered by domestic and social violence. Harpo her lover and husband has tried to beat her as his father behaves with his step – mother. Mayor's wife asked Sofia to come and work in her home. But Sofia said 'No'. That simple negative answer made her life worse than hell. As she is black, she has no right to say 'no' to white when she is Mayor's wife. When Celie came to meet her in prison she described her condition in the prison. Such a heart broken description has given us a real picture of violence against women in jail.

Mary Agnes is a minor character, whom Harpo taken up with after Sofia has left him. When she has approached a warden in the jail to save Sofia from that place, the white warden has ordered her to remove her dresses to release Sofia. He knows very well that he won't be punishing for raping a black girl. Tashi another minor character also affected by the violence in the hands of her father.

Walker has not only portrayed the violence against Afro-American women, but also shows the path to overcome from the violence has performed by the patriarchic society. Extending the ideas of women against violence, Walker has said, female protagonists establish cordial and friendly relationship with men and everyone else, even with nature.

Celie has tried, to free herself from the system that binds her under male dominance. When she has come to know that Mr. --- hides the letters of Nettie, she has decided to kill hin. But later she changed her idea but she has separated from him. This separation is the major step of Celie against the

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violence. She has broken all bonds and emerged as a powerful, confident woman. She has realized that having an identity is necessary to live a content life. Celie changed herself as a useful member of her community. She also continued her education which was stopped by her step-father. In Memphis she has started her business. She becomes a very successful woman, enjoying her newly gained position as an independent wage earner.

Sofia the next important character who fought against violence from the early stage should be mentioned. She raised her voice and hand when her husband tries to follow the patriarchic tradition. She has not only fought against the domestic violence by raising her voice against the Mayor's wife she fought against the social violence too.

Nettie, by escaping from both her step-father and Celie's husband's sexual approach she fought against the violence. She spends her life in the unknown place with unknown person with courage. By rescuing Celie's missed children she has done a great fight against that violence. Tashi the minor character also raised her voice against the violence committed by her society.

CONCLUSION

All these women gradually, redefine themselves with their own efforts and with the help of other women. They emerge as liberated, confident, empowered strong and independent women. Through these characters Walker has epitomized the realities of the lives of the black women and registered a vociferous protest against the debilitating sexism of patriarchal Society.

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