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## Essence of Womanism in *The Color Purple*

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Alice Walker created the splash in the literary world because of her womanist concept in her epistolary novel *The Color Purple* in 1982. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her fiction in 1982. And she was the first black woman to win this prize. Many women writers during 1970's and 80's like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, Walker, Joyce Carol Thomas, Audre Lordes and Paul Marshall talk about how black women's lives were affected by sexism and racism. Their writings were like bulwarks against social taboos. As far as the characteristics of black writing is concerned it includes the themes of search of identity, cross-cultural context, history of slavery, entrapment, restricted mobility, low self esteem in women and theme of lesbianism like in Alice Walker's *The color Purple*. In Walker's essay collection *In Search of our Mother's Garden* (1983) she defined the term womanism, a concept whose principles already permeated in *The Color Purple*. This novel is a typically radical American text because it speaks about female bonding and lesbian relationships. As we know Walker doesn't call herself a feminist but womanist. Her 'womanism' is a philosophy of respecting and believing in abilities of women. She gives it a broader spectrum by making it a "feminist of color", a woman who loves other Women sexually or non- sexually, appreciates and prefers women's emotional flexibility and women's abilities. *The Color Purple* gives limelight to self-made woman Celia. And it forcefully tried to restore the dignity of the female character. The novel was published in 1982 is one of the most read texts across race, class, gender and cultural boundaries. The Novel follows Celia, a black woman who struggled in her life. She was raped by her step father, following two pregnancies. Then she was forced to marry a man whom she never loved. She is pinned underneath a deep- rooted dominating force of patriarchy. It is only through love of Shug Avery; Celia is able to foster her own creativity and voice. Shug is a mistress of Mr who is a singer. Her philosophy of life is anti- patriarchal and anti- white. She goes by feelings and desires and not by biased, gendered conventions and traditions.

I tell you something else, shug say to Mary Agnes, listening to you sing, folks git to thinking bout a good sew.

Aw, miss shug. say Mary Agnes, changing color.

Shug say, what, too shamefaced to put singing and dancing and fucking together? she laugh. That's the reason they call what us sing the devil's music. Devil's love to fuck.(p.no.99)

This leads to Celia's redefinition of God, family, notion of motherhood and attitudes of sexuality. Shug explains to Celia that God is neither He nor She but It. Someone that resides within people. She said, "God is everything. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it" (p.no. 203) She preaches the sermon of love and caring. All the characters that change for the better in the novel are affected by her. All the women characters like Celia, Nettie, Shug, Sofia, Squeak etc created their own world outside male chauvinistic society. The quilt metaphor picks up Walker's womanism, in that, a quilt is associated with bits and pieces sewn together and gain identity and self-confidence

which is empowering e.g. Celia doesn't die in this world in order to be born blessed in the next. She is reborn in this world which enables her to enjoy life to its full. Just as Celia tries to link herself with her literary maternal ancestors and Afro- American roots. In fact, the very form of the novel is evolutionary and points to Walker's womanism. The importance of sexuality within womanism reveals sexuality in touchstones to power and spirit ultimately a path to the self. By listening to her inner longings Celia then arrives at her self-affirmation. Her recognition of own voice and the voice of her role-models allows for a growth that leads to her own existence. The ancient voice of Ovid's Philomela resonated in Afro-American women writers especially in *The Color Purple* where Celia is raped, bruised and silenced. The concept of Philomela explicitly intertwines rape, silencing and destruction of feminine subjectivity. Although like Philomela Celia is also silenced in a very stereotypical way but Celia overcomes all these disasters. It is where Walker emphasizes in the novel that ability to express one's thoughts and feelings is crucial to developing a sense of self.

The novel ends when Celia is finally rewarded for her tribulations. She is reunited with her loving sister Nattie. She at the end finds herself completely happy and altogether complete. Celia has shed the patriarchy that had oppressed her for years, reclaimed her sexuality through her love for Shug, in turn forcing her to acknowledge her own existence. The reversal of roles that we see in the novel where women dress like men (Sophie) and where men (Harpo) cook and clean and where women love women (shug) as men love women, sexually, is part of Walker's womanist agenda. She believes that womanism must include women as men. But women will be the centre in building up family and community. It is interesting that even God is replaced in the novel by Walker's womanism to mean beauty in nature and the universe. Her pantheism is an offshoot of her womanism.

So, over all traditional gender a role are disrupted in the novel and redefines the feminism by the essence of womanism. Alice Walker subverts the stereotypical feminism by understanding the women to be women and men to be men. At the end of the novel, we feel that Celia is 'solid' (an adjective that she once used admiringly to describe Sofia). Love has sustained Celia; she has learned to love herself and to share love despite continually cruel pressures. She has endured and learned to fight and eventually won her battles. In fact, not only has she won but has also claimed a sense of joy that she never realized was possible. Her strong faith and ability to hold on reunited her with Nettie and her own children. The family is whole again, Celia has survived physically and spiritually.

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