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SELF DISCOVERY IN *THE COLOUR PURPLE*

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ABSTRACT

The Colour Purple is known for its depiction of domestic violence, which Walker presents through Celie. But in the course of Celie's search for truth, she realizes that the culture she has endured in the south is abusive to all women. In this novel the black women are trying to find their place in the world. It is the struggle of women to prove their identity. Celie survive in harsh conditions and becomes strong and self dependent. When she meets Shug and escapes from Mr.____, she learns that women can be equal to men in power, in knowledge, and in finance. In the end of the novel, Celie is no longer weak and submissive. Instead, she has become a self assured female. The novel is a journey of self discovery for Celie and for other characters.

Keywords: Spiritual Awareness, Black Women, Solidarity, women empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* is a disturbing, moving and spiritually uplifting novel. In her preface of the book, Walker wrote:

"This is the book in which I was able to express a new spiritual Awareness, a rebirth into strong feelings of oneness...."

The Colour Purple tells the story of a black woman Celie raped by the man she believes to be her father and then forced to marry an older man she despises. It is narrated through letters from Celie to God and to her sister Nettie. In this novel we can see, how black women survive in hard condition and become self dependant. This novel tries to focus on the struggle of

black women for their own identity and get independence and gender equality in society.

The protagonist Celie is a speechless, half educated and a dumb girl. She is the symbol of black women who have no value and importance in the patriarchal society. Her step father Alphonso is the embodiment of cruelty and suppresser. He raped her twice .Consequently, she became the mother of his two children Adam and Olivia . Later Celie is married with Mr.____ who can be labeled as an altar ego of her step father. He treats her like a beast. There is no any sort of love between them.Celie is of the view that

"Mr.____ marry me to take care of his children.
I marry him cause
My daddy made me. I don't love Mr.____ and he don't love me."

Physical violence seems to be common occurrence, even in those relationship which are quite loving like that of Harpo and Sofia. Harpo beats Sofia many times. Even Celie is of the view

“Wives is like children. You have to let ‘em know who got the Upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.”

Celie realizes the futility of her existence with Albert and his children. Celie submits to his ill-treatment and accepts everything he does. Called ugly and worthless very often by both her father and her husband, she comes to accept their judgment. She simply endures, wanting only to survive.

“He beat me like the childern .Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt....It all I can do that not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man.”

The fact that Celie in moments of extreme physical pain transforms herself into a tree is an example of “a black woman’s proximity to the passive suffering and agony of nature”.

Sofia is an example of such type of women who never compromise with anything at the cost of their freedom. She is strong, assertive and independent. There are many incidents in which Sofia prove herself a firm lady. Her fight with Mayor is an example of it. She dares to answer back to the Mayor’s wife. She will never surrender to Harpo:

“I love Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I’ll kill him dead before I’ll let him beat me.”

The message of the novel is that women must stand against the unjust treatment they receive at the hands of men and they must do this by helping one another. Shug knows the value of women’s solidarity. When she knows how Albert treats Celie, she loses her desire for him. Then she helps Celie and Mary Agnes to escape their lives of domestic abuse and drudgery. In the process, she gives Celie a sense of beauty and spirit.

Celie’s faith is childlike and it undergoes a number of alterations as the novel progresses. She

realizes that God is not as she really thinks. Nettie’s letters begin to realize her that God was more like her. Shug helps Celie not only to understand and accept her own individuality but also to change her conception of spiritual truth. Shug rejects the narrow Church and its false perceptions, preferring to have a personal religion in which God figures “ Not as a she or he but a It.” She admires natural world and its beauty. Shug tells her,

“God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come Into the world with God.....It ain’t a picture show. It ain’t something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything.”

The women in the novel support one another through out the novel in order to sustain self reliance. The bond of sisterhood is important, both literally in the persons of Celie and Nettie and metaphorically in the persons of Sofia and Mary Agnes, Celie and Shug Avery, and Tashi and Olivia. Celie is able to change her status of a sexually abused slave woman and free herself economically, physically and spiritually with the help of Shug. In *The Color Purple* Alice Walker’s true intention from writing this novel is not only to give voice to black women but also to provide them a path to follow in order to get their freedom. Walker shows us the evolution of her major character, Celie, from being a sexually abused child to a passive wife and finally to a free woman. The ray of hope even in despair is the important aspect of the novel. Although Celie suffers a lot but she does not give up. She is able to free herself from all the harsh conditions in which she lives.

Walker emphasis that women would learn to make ‘room’ for themselves. The female characters of the novel prove Walker’s idea by facing the challenges boldly. Celie’s pants making is an important symbol of her freedom. From an abused woman, Celie emerges as an independent, creative business woman.

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