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LETTERS AS EVOLUTION OF BLACK WOMAN'S VOICE IN THE COLOR PURPLE

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ABSTRACT

Alice Walker in her novels raises black women's voice through her characters that are passive and bound to established black male-dominated society. Her protagonists are the common black women of the society who are victimized by black community. Her focus is the gender equality as well as to make society free from any discrimination. Her women characters are victims of society where they face problems regarding gender and race. **Keywords:** letters, female consciousness, black women, equality

Introduction

The Color Purple is which is her epistolary novel for which she won Pulitzer Prize in 1983, deals with themes of race and gender through feminist perspective in the series of letters. In the novel, letters are very significant for evolution of all the characters in the novels. Letters of Celie and Nettie makes an impact on other female characters. This study is an effort to focus on how Walker's women find freedom through letters.

Walker's female protagonist in *The Color Purple*, Celie is who is a passive woman and victim of her dreadful environment and male characters, tries to convey her inner thoughts through her letters. In her letters, she expresses her psychological condition of mind that is the condition of other black women. Walker gives her novel an ironic turn when Celie liberates herself from conventional marriage and makes her own destiny. She transforms through other characters of novel such as Nettie and Shug. Nettie's letters raises questions of God in Celie's mind. She mentions: "Jesus Christ had hair like lamb's wool. Lamb's wool is not straight, Celie. It isn't even curly." (120) Celie always imagined that God is a white man, but Nettie subverts the idea of

God that gives Celie an opportunity to see through her perspective. Celie through Nettie and Shug realizes that she was writing to God, was a male listener. She mentions:

"The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other men. I know Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (Walker 173)

Nettie on the other hand, is a female listener to her. Nettie gives her perception to see the world through her feminine perspective. "Nettie's letters describe and draw parallels between culture and customs of the Olinka tribe and those of African-Americans in the American South" (Smith 11)

Olinka men and Afro-American men both want to control their women and do not allow giving them education. Only Olinka boys are allowed to go to school. It somewhere is associated with Celie's life. She could not get her proper education because of her environment and Pa's treatment to her. On the other hand, we see Nettie through her education becomes a missionary and gets an independent position in society. She finds herself

independent and complete. Her letters always encourage Celie to become an independent woman like her. She encounters the stereotypes of woman in Olinka and takes a radical step to teach girls.

As she teaches girls, she also becomes a teacher for Celie. She is the only one who tells her that in Africa, both men and women wear pants. And later, we see effect on Celie when she acknowledges her talent and makes unisex pants. Sewing and spinning that is female works gives Celie choice to liberate from her circumstances. Though she is uneducated, while making unisex pants she encounters the male dominated society. Her pants inspire other women to wear them and give strength to raise their voice to acknowledge their existence. When Celie at the first time, learns that Mr.____ hid letters from her, she was ready to kill him, but Shug seizes razor from her hands. She becomes rescuer who saves her from the destructive ruin of her inner mind. Celie mentions: "A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think."(Walker 132) Indeed, later she replaces razor by needle and uses it as a weapon for her emancipation. Needle gives her economic independence and is free to take authority of her choice. Now, she does not need any man for her survival. Now, she is ready to face society without help of anyone. In the end, Albert becomes her friend, not her husband. Albert transforms into a humane from a beast like husband. Celie not only transforms herself, she also transforms Albert. She makes him realize that sewing is not gendered work and anyone can do it.

"When I was growing up, I use to try to sew along with mama cause that's what she was always doing. But everybody laughed at me."(Walker 247)

Through Albert's lines, we get the idea that it is not Albert who is fully responsible for his ill-treatment towards Celie. It is an established society and he is a victim of it. Celie's forgiveness to Albert comes from the emotional and sisterly bond between her and Shug. Shug's sexual relationship with Celie allows Celie to break the stereotypes of heterosexual relationship. Walker with their relation justifies her term "womanism" that means women love women. It also means a sisterly bond. Celie's

relation with Nettie and Shug, shows bondage between women. Every woman in the novel tries to help each other and that is associated with voice of entire community of black women. They, with their actions contribute main protagonist Celie to see female oppression. Shug helps Celie to become an individual. Shug also advises Mary Agnes to sing. Nettie also helps Olinka woman to raise themselves as educated independent woman. When Sofia asks Celie that why did she give advice to Harpo to beat her, she replied that she is jealous of her because she can fight and Celie is weaker and marginalised within boundaries. Celie gets female consciousness of her weakness through Sofia's strength. She only knows how to survive. Albert's sister Kate also suggests her to fight. Through transformation of other woman characters and sisterhood, Celie gets her psychological consciousness. She understands her situation in better way. When Shug tells Mr____ that Celie will go Memphis, Celie raises her voice for first time. At that moment, we completely see Celie's evolution through Nettie's letters and through other women characters. She directly says to Mr.____:

"You a lowdown dog is what's wrong. . . It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need."(Walker 180)

After Celie, Mary Agnes raises her voice: "When I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public"(Walker 183) Later, she leaves her daughter in Sofia's care. Here, we see sisterhood between them. It is remarkable that Sofia who hurt Mary Agnes in the juke point, now totally trust each other. We clearly see their changed behaviour.

In the Conclusion, Walker gives voice to every woman character in *The Color Purple* to break the silence that is repressed and marginalised. Celie completely transforms till the end of the novel. We see Celie as a new possibility among the world of oppression. In the end, Albert transforms and becomes a friend for Celie which shows that Walker clearly wants equality in her characters as well as in the society. Celie encourages other women to wear pants and Albert sews the pants, that is completely considered as miracle in their patriarchal society.

There is no gender identity among them because they are equals.

Nettie also wants equality. She wants equality in education. Her becoming of a missionary is her first step towards equality. According to Smith:

“The female protagonist achieves heroic status when she discovers or creates a “community of equals” (Pearson and Pope 22) that sustains or promises the survival of her newly-created self.”(Smith 6)

Celie gets evolution through Nettie's letters and reaches her selfhood. The letters are not only became her medium of consciousness, but also her and Nettie's freedom.

References

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