

# THE HARDSHIP OF WOMEN IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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## ABSTRACT:

Alice Walker's fictional African nation where female genital mutilation is practiced. In her novel **Color Purple**, Tashi marries an American man named Adam then left Olinka because of the war. She is a woman torn between cultures, Olinkan and Western. Instead of free from not having the procedure done as a child it ends up bothering her. The novel explores what it means to have one's gender culturally defined and emphasizes that, according to Walker, Torture is not culture.

*The Color Purple* is regarded as a Walker's most successful and critically acclaimed work written in epistolary style. The novel depicts the harsh life of young African-American woman in the South in the early twentieth century. *The Color Purple* explores the individual identity of the African- American woman and how embracing that identity and bonding with other women affects the health of her community at large. Although some reviewers have taken issue with the novel's portrayal of Black men, the novel has largely been celebrated by critics and popular audiences alike, winning both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. In 1985 filmmaker Stephen Spielberg directed the film adaptation of *The Color Purple*, which was nominated for eleven awards including the best picture by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Walker has been highly praised by feminist critics for vividly portraying the brutality that women have faced throughout the years, but some have argued that the novel's happy ending makes light of the offences suffered by the female protagonist and runs contrary to reality. Conversely, some reviewers have defended the novel's upbeat ending, claiming that it is not disloyal to feminist concerns, but rather furthers the idea that a woman especially one surrounded by a community of nurturing women can overcome adversity. *The Color Purple* is a tale of violence incest and redemption that starts out in Georgia in the 1900s and goes on for thirty years. Walker delineates her protagonist Celie's mental and physical state through the letters which Celie writes to none other than GOD. The Black English, folk dialect used by Celie narrate her plight is faulty yet its lyrical cadence appeals the opening pages of *The Color Purple* evoke Afro-American slavery. Celie is a young girl of fourteen years who consider herself ugly. She narrates about her sexual abuse

her victimization. She survives at the hands of her own Pa. as she is warned not to speak out; her first letter to god is preceded by pa's manipulation warnings about the benefit of her silence.

Celie's mother being ill is unable to satisfy her husband's sexual appetite and Pa continues to make brutal sexual attacks on Celie. As a results she became and pregnant she being big is unable to move. For Celie of being no use is handed over like a commodity to a widower Mr. A Pa assures him Celie like a cow will serve him. To add to Celie's misery her husband after marriage is of same sorry ilk as Celie's Pa. He measures his manliness by beating his wife and children. Being treated and abused as a slave and Whore Celie's oppression increases. The black society has always suffered racial oppression but violence against women whether sexual or domestic is not a new one. The patriarchal society licenses and permits wife beating which makes her plight worse. Throughout the world all cultures permits this type of violence. Celie too, good for nothing plus Stubborn because a wife has no control against sexual colonialism and like a best of burden she bears a kind of stoicism and tolerates her husband's brutality. Her primary concern is to survive. So far her fighting back does not seem an option in beginning.

Celie as a human being desires to be loved and cared. Walker registers her silence in the letters which she writes to God and later to Nettie, her younger sister. It is through Nettie's letters that she gains her lost sense of individuality. The agent that leads her to autonomy is none other than Shug Avery. The blues singer and her husband's mistress. It is she who works as a catalyst in Celie's metamorphosis. Sugh Avery raises Celie from her desperate condition by teaching her to love her body and respect it. Celie's crippled sense of negation or non-entity had forced her to act as a stereo typed female, conforming to social, patriarchal strictures Sophia, Harpo's wife, too ties a knot of sisterhood with Celie. Sophia, educated, liberated and independent refutes to succumb to Harpo's desires and authority. She helps Celie in her transformation and Celie admires her daughter-in-law and learns the language of revolt and protest.

The Color Purple thoroughly focuses on a life of Celie, an African American woman who is struggling to develop her sense of selfhood. As a black woman growing up in the Deep South during the 1940s, Celie has gone through many difficulties before she could establish herself as an independent woman. All through the story, Celie is presented at very bottom of the social hierarchy. At the same time with being discriminated against by whites, she is also treated badly from all black men in her life her stepfather and her husband. From the beginning, she is beaten and raped by the man she believes to be her father. She has two children with him but they are quickly taken away from her. After her second pregnancy, she is forced to marry Mr., an old widower with four unruly children. Her life as a wife, unfortunately, shows little difference from her childhood. She is valued only as sex slave and a caretaker for Mr.'s family. She still has to endure the same kind of cruelty and maltreatment as the one that her stepfather had done to her before. It is obvious that Celie cannot enjoy the basic human rights of self-determination, freedom from violence, and ownership of her own body no matter where she is.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is written in an unusual narrative structure through the epistolary, or letter writing, form. Although this kind of narrative structure was very popular among the writers of eighteenth and nineteenth century, it is rarely used in literary work of the modern era. Throughout the story, Celie meets several other black women, who help contribute to her discovery of selfhood. She survives all difficulties through her strong relationship with another four black women in her extended family. Shug Avery, Nettie, Sofia and Squeak. Each of them, in one way or another, give Celie an inspiration and moral support to be successfully transformed from a frightened young girl to a successful business woman at the end. The representation of positive female characters in this novel is very powerful and forthright. Women defend their honor, family, and right and care for the sick, needy and undeserving and work to ensure their family's livelihood and keep society from moral decay. With this portrayal of powerful female relationships, Walker's *The Color Purple* has eventually been recognized as one of the famous contemporary feminist tales.

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