

The color purple by alice walker

Literature



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Lecturer: Violence in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* Published in 1982, Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* explores various social aspects of the Southern United States African communities of the 1930s. In her masterpiece and through use of literary elements, Alice demonstrates various social issues affecting the particular community. One of the major social issues evident throughout the novel is oppression. According to this novel, the issue of oppression has been associated with social evils such as violence, sexual abuse and racism all which are significantly evident in the novel. This oppression is inflicted physically, sexually and emotionally. Right from the beginning, the plight of Celie, the protagonist, is continually abused by her father who then silences her through emotional blackmail or what other victims refer as "psychological entrapment". 1

Celie's father does not care about her or her mother's emotions, respects no one, and is devoid of any form of spiritual dimension. He perceives women as 'chattel', or objects to gratify his primitive lust. Celie is constantly beaten and raped. As a result of this abuse, Celie bears two children for her father despite her being a minor. Celie gets emotionally tortured by the thought that her father killed her first baby and abducted and sold her second one. The father also forces Celie to marry the ugly Mr. Johnson, and then tries to sexually abuse her sister Nettie. 2

In her miserable marriage to Mr. Johnson, Celie is abused and treated as his slave and that of his many children. Precisely, Celie's life is engrossed by never ending domesticity, violent abuse, ridicule and torment, which tremendously destroys her self-esteem as a woman. Nettie also runs away from her father's abuses at home to Celie's place, from where she also runs away when Mr. Johnson makes advances on her. Celie never hears from her

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sister again and lives in a state of ambiguity. Unlike Celie, Sofia is a non-nonsense character married to Mr. Johnson's son Harpo who despite being less chauvinistic as compared to his father beats her into submission, and assumes the opposite gender as being social inferiors.

Just like the black male characters inflict harm to assert supremacy over their women, members of the white society employ violence on black people to force subservience. Violence is evident when Sofia beats Harpo as she is more physically strong. However, consistent violence at home makes her run away with her children. Sofia later refuses to work for the mayor's wife and slaps her as a way of fighting the white supremacy. She is as a result taken to prison and later forced to be the mayor's wife's maidservant for twelve years. Generally, many people in the novel suffer multiple jeopardy and are oppressed based on their gender, race and social class position³.

The author uses various literary elements to explore the issue of oppression. Letters have been widely used in this piece. The epistolary form of letter writing emphasizes the power of communication. Celie writes to God while Nettie writes to Celie. This gives both sisters strength. Alice uses the first person and direct speech with no quotation marks in writing the novel. First person narration connects the reader and the narrator more intimately. Direct speech makes a situation seem like it actually happened in the life of the specific character.

Oppression significantly contributes to the meaning of this work. Oppression acts a bridge between social evils and liberation. It catalyzes collective affinity and solidarity among the oppressed, and helps the victims to work towards independence from oppressors, as well as take control of their own lives. This means that a currently oppressed society today means end of

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violence, abuse and oppression in successive generations.

References

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