

# The Color Purple: A Womanist Perspective

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**Abstract**—The aim of the article is to look at Walker’s selected novel *The Color Purple* and to analyze the black female characters. The selected female characters are analyzed through different themes, considering their lives’ experiences e.g. rape, education, African heritage, empowerment, use of her voice, and activism. It will also cover the roles of race, gender and identity on the life of black women. Article will also look at the novel (“*Afro-American Novel and its Traditions*”) of “Bernard Bell” to enlighten the black oppression

**Keywords:** Alice walker; *The Color Purple*; Black women.

## Introduction

African American women’s lives have been deeply affected by racism, sexism and classism that are the part of societal system and its psychological restriction. The American society compartmentalize its various ethnic groups by the racist, sexist and classist structure, and defame the black colored as inferiors and characterizes the males as center of society and females at margin. The groups of blacks are relegated to an underclass by virtue of their race and similarly black women are relegated by black men by virtue of their sex. The greatest source of oppression of black women in America is the racist and sexist and the class exploitations that form the basis for their victimization. Sexism paralyzed the minds of African-American women, defiled their sexual being and even worse is it scarred them psychologically. Thus, the Black women suffer from the twin evils of racial discrimination and gender bias. Black women suffer not only because they are Black and female but also because they are economically weak and dependent. The black women who could hardly gauge the norm are discriminated and dehumanized which eventually make them lose their self-esteem and develop self-hatred. They struggle for their survival but it becomes a part of the black struggle.

*The Color Purple* is Walker’s third novel published in 1982. The novel was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award, and the following year received both, the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award. Walker was called a distinguished writer in African-American studies at the University of California in the spring of 1982 and in the coming years she taught at Brandies University as Professor of Literature. *The Color Purple* is a black woman’s story about pain, suffering, endurance, and friendship. It’s a story of hardship and hope, of reunion and reconciliation. In this novel, Walker depicts how the black women have been oppressed due to their relationship with men and only the sisterhood or the women of their own community can make the black women free and empowered.

The novel is the story of Celie, a barely educated girl, who is raped by her stepfather and then married off to a man who needs a good home maker to look after his children. Her stepfather threats her that she had better tell no one but God about the rape. Depressed Celie starts writing letters to God. Her children are taken away by her stepfather, and her sister Nettie is forced to leave the house leaving Celie completely alone. However, she slowly develops an extended family that includes Shug and Sofia. Shug is her husband’s mistress and Sofia is the one who marries Celie’s stepson. The love that Celie and Shug come to share not only awakens Celie’s sexuality but also makes her free by allowing her to express her thoughts and to say what she thinks and thus helping her in regaining her identity. She transforms herself into an independent woman with a sense of self and a creative talent that she eventually expands into a business making the most comfortable pants available. Eventually, with the help of Shug, Celie discovers the letters that Nettie has been writing to her for years and that her husband has been hiding those letters from her. Reading the letters, Celie finds out the truth regarding her family and children. She gets disturbed and is hurt deeply by the fact that God had allowed such things. Then she stops writing letters to God and starts writing to Nettie. She explains to Shug, “he gave me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won’t ever see again. Anyhow, I say, 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 emphasizes the universal oppression of black women in *The Color Purple* but she ends her novel with happiness and reconciliation. Bernard Bell in the “*Afro-American Novel and its Traditions*” comments that:

*The Color Purple* is more concerned with politics of sex and self than with politics of class and race...it's unrelenting, sever attacks on male hegemony, especially 32 the violent abuse of black women by black men, is offered as a revolutionary leap forward in to a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism. (263)

**Conclusion:**

Present article gives a clear message that it was only the sisterhood or the women of their own community that make the black women free and empowered. The Black women suffer from the twin evils of racial discrimination and gender bias. Black women suffer not only because they are Black and female but also because they are economically weak and dependent. They struggle for their survival but it becomes a part of the black struggle.

**Acknowledgements:**

The authors are great full to the department of English "Women College Srinagar" for providing the necessary literature to complete the work.

**References:**

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