



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ILL-TREATING IS INHUMAN” IS DEALT IN ALICE WALKER'S NOVELS  
"THE COLOR PURPLE" AND "MERIDIAN"

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ABSTRACT

The paper intends to throw light on critical analysis in detail and its effect on slavery, racism and feminism. The paper will also examine the contribution of the novelist, Alice Walker in her works "The Color Purple" and "Meridian." This paper is a brief survey of the selected texts of Alice Walker from the entire canon of Afro-American. The objective of this survey is to bring to light the psychological aspects which explore the real agony in the minds of the people under slavery, racism and women’s struggle. The sufferings they undergo each and every minute of their life which makes them feel unfit to live in the world. They don't have the chance of being loved by someone and so they hate themselves and are being disturbed psychologically. They are always subjugated by upper class people or men in all aspects. They feel traumatic which is an emotional wound that leads to psychological injury. The novels, "The Color Purple" and "Meridian" by Alice Walker pictures the issues of slavery, racism and women's struggle which involves the readers in, while reading it.

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INTRODUCTION

People who suffer from race discrimination and slavery are being separated from the society or community. They are not by any means considered as individuals. This is the injustice done to them. We are very well aware of the term slavery and racism where slavery is the customary action or habit of owing human beings as property, especially for the use as forced laborers and discriminating or pre-judgmental of people in regard to race. Slavery and racism are the root cause for many issues like gender difference, women’s struggle, sexualism etc. There is despondent in the lives of black women.

Slavery, Racism in “The Color Purple” and “Meridian”:

The novel, "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker is in regard to the black community in the South of America during the late nineteenth century. Though the blacks gained their right to equality, they were still treated as slaves and inferior to whites. This novel The Color Purple is an epistolary novel. This is manifested with the series of letters and diary entries. This helps us understand Celie’s story in her own reliable voice.

Celie, the protagonist of the novel, "The Color Purple" who writes letters to God because of her sufferings through her father. We could realise the existence of slavery even after the abolition of slavery. She has been treated as a slave in her own home. This is the theme line throughout the novel. Slavery owns ones liberty. Shug Avery, Mister's long-time mistress. Though she has dark black skin, she leads her life without others support and she is very bold. "She is the woman in control of her life." (Walker, The Color Purple, 52). "She is gorgeous and knows it, with only positive thoughts about her very black skin."(Walker, The Color Purple, 52). Such positive thoughts in oneself helps them to be confident. The novel, "Meridian" by Alice Walker was written in the year 1976, which is a semi-autobiographical novel. It is described as Walker's "meditation on the modern Civil Rights Movement." This novel is considered to be the critique of the Civil Rights Movement by the literary critics. It was depicted by Walker that the African-American woman’s struggles which made Meridian more than a document of the resistance during the Civil Rights movement. The African-American woman’s battle was against misogyny and violence rather than only oppression. There was also a great struggle for equality (Dick). When the protagonist, Meridian Hill escorts school children, the poor and black children were forbidden to attend. This concept of not letting the children brings in the sense of

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inferiority within themselves. They feel the negligence even when they are young. This idea is being inculcated and this gets fossilized in their mind. Meridian's struggle in bringing to equilibrium her identity and her loyalties to race is pain bearing. "Lynne Rabinowitz recalls her confrontations with a family of Jewish deli owners in the South. During this confrontation, Lynne reflects on their mutual resentment: the couple judges her as a white woman who associates with black men, and judges them for forsaking their once-oppressed Jewish community to join the community of oppressors - the dominant Anglo-American culture."(Walker, Meridian) Lynne leaves her family behind after a lot of tragic losses and joins the Civil Rights Movement. Until Civil Rights Movement, there was no freedom for the blacks in America from racism and slavery, even though it was announced that there were equal rights and abolition of slavery. The movement provided liberty to blacks from separation and batched them as the citizens of America in the sense of serenity. The movement helped in the betterment and improvement of the black community. Marxist theory was first developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism shares with other progressive social movements an uncompromising hostility to all forms of domination - sexism, racism and so on, but what marks Marxism out from other progressive movements is that Marxists struggle is always to outlive the manifold forms of subjugation and exploitation in and through the self-emancipation of the wage earners. Thus Marxism is Revolutionary Socialism. Slavery, racism and sexism is the offspring of the domination. Marxism comprises of all kinds of domination which constitutes racism, sexism etc. This is being accommodated in the novels "The Color Purple" and "Meridian." In both the novels, the protagonists, Meridian and Celie undergo a lot of struggles in their life to blow away the subjection. They are exploited in the novel by men and are dominated. Meridian is from a working class family and she fights the battle against the domination of the whites and claims for equality.

### **Feminism in "The Color Purple" and "Meridian"**

The word "slavery" includes the pain in the blacks where they are put into a situation in which they accept to what their owners say. And here comes in the being of forced sexualism where the black women are abused physically and sexually. This brings in the unremovable scar in their minds. Celie, black woman, the protagonist has been abused sexually by her step father, Alphonso. She couldn't tell it to anybody. Her stepfather says, "you better shut up and git used to it." (Walker, The Color Purple, 3). She expresses that, "But I don't never git used to it. And now I feel sick used to it. I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long." (Walker, The Color Purple, 3). This sufferings didn't get stoped with it. She struggled even after marriage with Mr. Albert. She was impregnated by her stepfather twice with a daughter and a son. Shug Avery is independent and also advices Celie to be independent. "You got to fight them, Celie, she say. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself."(Walker, The Color Purple, 21), she says Mr.'s sister, Kate. This shows how few women are independent in their lives and fight for their needs. It brings in the theme of women empowerment. Atlast, the protagonist gets rid off from her husband's control. "Dear God, He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got something in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women,

tho, cause I am not scared of them."(Walker, The Color Purple, 7). She was beaten and punished even for not committing any mistakes. Her father assumes that she has winked at a boy and punitions her. The sentence that she use, I am not scared of women. This depicts how frightened she is of men because of the way her father behaves with her. "She ain't fresh tho, but I spect you know that. She spoiled. Twice."(Walker, The Color Purple, 9). It throws the light on how women are being objectified. "I lay there thinking bout Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe." (Walker, The Color Purple, 11). Though women are tortured by men in many ways, they always have the motherly nature in them, which could never be eradicated. Celie is just 2 years elder than her sister, Nettie. But her motherly love towards her sister is amazing. She has nailed her motherly character through her affection towards her sister. Women are always women.

Though some women are restricted from doing their education, they excel in certain other fields. Women are mentally strong by birth. They don't give up. Celie was tormented but she understands and values the simplicity in her life, and this makes her wise. Celie's freedom is provided through her ability to sew. Maternal heritage is examined in each of the works with special attention by Walker. (Bloom,166). In the beginning, Celie writes letters only to God because of the way she was restricted to say to others what has happened in her life. But there is a drastic change towards the end where she expresses her feelings and emotions to her sister, Nettie. This emphasizes on how Celie has come out of the male chauvinistic society. This shows she is no more into the clutches of men. There is the existence of sexualism because of slavery and racism, Meridian and Lynne were misused by Truman Hill who betrayed them at different times. Sexualism comes into being because of the domination and suppression which is the key note of slavery and racism. Black men fought for equality as they were into the clutches of whites under the racism and slavery. Whereas black women were the sufferers as they had to fight with racism, slavery and sexism as well. Meridian becomes part of "a group of students, of intellectuals, converted to a belief in violence only after witnessing the extreme violence, against black dissidents, of the federal government and the police,"(Walker, Meridian,15). The way she gets into it shows how inclined she is to get the freedom. Women are very keen and independent are they involve themselves in the movement. She also takes steps to educate the blacks about the importance of their rights. She doesn't seek for name and fame rather involved in improvising the black community with betterment. "Whatever she was doing - canvassing, talking at rallies, trying her sneakness, laughing - ...tears rolled slowly and ceaselessly down her cheeks. This might go on for days, or even week."(Walker, Meridian, 80). In spite of lot of pain and agony within herself, she managed and tolerated the pain and was very much dedicated in achieving her goal. Being the representative of the black community and being a woman, she takes lot of initiatives as she could realize the true lives of the blacks in America.

Feminist theory concentrates on examining gender inequality. Themes surveyed in feminism include sexual objectification, suppression, patriarchy and stereotyping. Feminist theories are a group of similar theories that share several principles in general. The 3<sup>rd</sup> fundamental principle of women's activist hypotheses is to look at criminal offending, exploitation and criminal equity preparing with regards to different fascinating social elements, incorporating into expansion to sex, race and

ethnicity - social class, age and sexual orientation. Examinations of male power within the family show that abusers have the tendency to see their wives and children as property that they can exploit in any way they wish, including sexually. This is relevant to the character of Celie where she is treated like a property inside the family by her father later by her husband. This could also be referred to Lynne where she is betrayed by Truman in the family. Even after betrayal, she reconstructs and leads her life. Simone de Beauvoir is a French writer and a feminist. Few of her sayings are mentioned below which goes in hand with the significant themes of the two included novels.

"...her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly." This is taken from one of her theories "The Second Sex." The above quoted line is applicable to the life of women where their rights are being snatched away and are blamed for not being perfect.

"A man attaches himself to woman - not to enjoy her, but to enjoy himself." This was uttered by Simone de Beauvoir which is suitable to the novel *The Color Purple*. Celie is being raped by her step-father Alphonso and he impregnates her. He says her to get used to the pain. This shows how the male chauvinistic society has the motive of enjoying themselves under these circumstances.

Though some women are restricted from doing their education, they excel in certain other fields. Women are mentally strong by birth. They don't give up. Celie was tormented but she understands and values the simplicity in her life, and this makes her wise. Celie's freedom is provided through her ability to sew. Few lines about the role of women by Harold Bloom, a critic:

"Meridian's opposition to the cultural depictions of African-American women that, although black women have been historically marginalized or 'erased' in the mass media, they do not stand outside the culture, they do play and always have played an integral role in shaping culture."

### Significance of the title – *The Color Purple*

This title is a very cardinal symbol. The protagonist, Celie undergoes a tough time. Even then, she observes the beautiful aspects and appreciates them. "*The Color Purple*" is continually equated with suffering and pain. Sofia's swollen, beaten face is delineated as the color of Celie's private parts: the site of her sexual violation. After then, Shug counsels her that life should be enjoyed. When they were in the midst of the purple flowers in a field, Celie is asked to look at the flowers and to cling to their beauty by Shug. Shug also adds that, "you must look at all the good and acknowledge them because God placed them all on earth." And now, she has a better adoration for life and everything it has to offer. The protagonist being a 14 year old girl, Walker wisely makes the style of writing as a small girl who writes with lot of grammatical and spell errors. This allows the readers to witness the real agony in Celie.

### Significance of the title – *Meridian*

The word "meridian" in a dictionary-style is defined as "the highest apparent point reached by a heavenly body in its course." For instance, the sun is at its meridian at noon. Meridian is also defined to be "the highest point of power."

The protagonist of this novel, Meridian is a meridian. She symbolizes or presents the image of the "highest point." She reaches the goal successfully by being the activists of the Civil Rights Movement inspire of her peers or fellow acquaintances have quit due to some of their own desires and to pursue it. She has dedicated her life to do good to others. Women can never be underestimated. They achieve a lot better than men. One such person is Meridian in the novel who seems to be the role model.

### Criticisms

Alice Walker's novels were praised and were also criticized as well. "The criticism of her novel was even stronger because at the same time Walker showed a picture of black males that is far from "flattery." *The Color Purple* is not just a feminist novel restrained to the analysis of sexual oppression. It is about being a woman and black, living in the frame of male civilization, racist and sexist by definition, being subject to all possible forms of oppression." Lines about Alice Walker by Harold Bloom: "A contemporary writer who calls herself "author and medium" is by no means idiosyncratic and Alice Walker certainly seems to me a wholly representative writer of and for our current era." According to Rene Tawa in the Los Angeles Times: "Walker has become a focal spokesperson and symbol for black feminism and has earned critical and popular acclaim as a major American novelist and intellectual." To conclude, there are always trials and struggles in one's life. It is up to us to be courageous and overcome them. The themes used are a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the world. The writings of the feminist writers suggest that their inner spirit and feelings are the welfare of the women only.

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