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## SUBJUGATION OF BLACK WOMEN AND THEIR REVOLT AGAINST OPPRESSION IN SELECT NOVELS OF ALICE WALKER

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he survival of the Black community is a big question mark even in this century. They are still seeking their identity in vain. They have been pushed to the brim of desperation. They are singularized that they have to fight out their own battle to survive as a normal human beings. They are not even treated as normal human beings but less than animals. They walk as human beings without dignity. A wide range of sexual harassment could be seen on Black women. The law was favorable to the White that none of the perpetrators were punished or even arrested. Black people protested against the rude and unjust law that was against their freedom and liberty. Black women become victims of sexual exploitation by White men and men in their own community. Alice Walker makes them to reach the top rung of the ladder from the low position. Her novels are the windows to see the reality of the Black people, especially Black women in America.

**KEYWORDS:** Suffrage, Discrimination, Womanism, Mental Trauma, Exploitation.

### INTRODUCTION :

Black women writers did not find the methods of white women writers fully satisfying because they were working with different ideas about gender as well as different reception of their gender. Just as female slaves developed a different conception of gender identity later black women writers created a different means of approaching the subject. This tendency is particularly evident in the work of 19th century black women writers who borrowed from the sentimental novel tradition frequented by the white women writers, but strategically changed the format in order to better address of racial issues. This was necessary not so much because the two groups of writers had different views of nineteenth century women's gender,



but because society had differing views regarding the level of womanhood achieved by black and white women. Black women were traditionally regarded as less than their white sisters. The divergence is firmly rooted in the institution of slavery and feelings and beliefs developed in response to slavery. The black women wish to be a part of the "American Family" but they are torn between the claims of their genetic family, the slave community and the master's family which was very vividly depicted by the black women writers.

Alice Walker's first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* commences on a note of melancholy that is sustained by Walker in most of her subsequent narrative adventures. The area of concern for Walker is the domestic sphere where the woman is the significant principle. She appears to believe that the tragic weight of reality that weighs the Black people with humiliation and madness is sufficient material for her constructions. She channelizes her education to bring about introspection in the minds of the perpetrator who, then, moves away from heinous acts. Grange Copeland is sufficiently chastened by Mem and the effect of this change in Copeland is reaped by the third generation represented by Ruth.

Walker appears to be a little more emotional in her second novel *Meridian* in exhibiting the life of the Blacks, particularly, the much harassed Black women. One observes that in *Meridian*, Walker, unabashedly takes the form and assertive voice of the feminist. In her attempts to salvage Black motherhood from the morass of discrimination and violence, she also factors the other pet themes like victimization, separation, frustration, and hypocrisy as well as gender discrimination.

The saga of the Blacks being subjected to violence humiliation continues in *Meridian*. Frustration and desperation accompany them wherever they move. *Meridian* witnessed many such violation and intimidation in her early days. She herself is a victim of patriarchal violence that affects her psyche badly. In ignorance, she gets pregnant through Eddie and, thereafter, they get married. But, she is deserted by him soon after she gives birth to a son.

*The Color Purple* sustains Walker's broadside against the twin afflictions of racism and gender discrimination. Celie, the protagonist is entrapped in a violent landscape where escape remains bleak. She is a victim of social and traditional platform. In this novel Celie is poor victim of subjugation. By the constant raping of Pa she is pregnant and he forces her to quit school. Her two children born to him were sold by him. It causes her terrible shock and pain.

Also in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker articulates the voices of the African-American community. She does pay her customary visit in the narrative field of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, but deftly avoids becoming repetitive by training her critical faculties on some of the heinous social practices of the Black society which conspires to keep the women in a status of perpetual bondage. Tashi, the woman protagonist of this novel, is very much upset over her sister Dura's death. Her clitoris was forcibly excised. This inhuman act has caused her psyche terribly. One can understand various reasons for the mental trauma of Black women.

Black women's psyche is severely wounded through violent sexual harassment and beatings. Margaret, wife of Grange is the typical example suffering mental agony, Brownfield's wife Mem is another example for the victim of patriarchal mosaic in which beating and sexual enforcement are daily phenomenon that affects her psyche badly.

She uses symbolism extensively. She uses symbolic titles which are apt, which also lend themselves to various interpretations. She uses an inert symbolism that is intended to elevate the story. Walker's *Meridian* has an unusual structure which reflects the novel's revolutionary theme and the spirit. *Meridian* means 'Prime', 'Southern', 'the highest point'. Walker's *The Color Purple* has different meanings of different reader. The color purple is encoded within the novel as a sign of indomitable female spirit. Walker defines womanism by the 'color purple'.

Walker uses local dialect of her people to maintain the individuality of her people. The use of colloquial language in its direct simplicity adds vital force to the narration. She shuns the usages of standard

language which would hamper the natural flow. Her artistic triumph lies in her artlessness. She uses metaphorical language to stress certain truths.

In the novel *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker weaves complex tribulations of the Black women. She looks at the grave inhumanity meted out towards the Black women. Some of the stereotypes of this inhumanity manifest as slavery, colonial atrocities, killing and raping of Black girls. Into the tapestry of violence Walker weaves the double dehumanization, of race and gender, suffered by the Black women. *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker shows a complex weaving of the tribulations suffered by the Black people.

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, one could see in the case of slave Zede, the transformation from slavery to a dignified soul. Walker, through Zede, brings into a view the need for powerful aspiration. Aspirations enable the conditions for a life with honor and dignity. Zede's aspirations make her free her life out of filthy colony and enjoy a life of comfort with her daughter Carlotta.

In *Meridian*, the protagonist Meridian attains the glory of pinnacle as an active participant of the Civil Rights Movements. Meridian exemplifies Walker's recurrent statement of women as leaders and models. Meridian triumphs despite the tremendous odds against her.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker portrays the protagonist Celia who overcomes all suffering and achieves major transformation in her attitude to become courageous and self-reliant. The abused woman Celie transforms herself with a help of female bonding. Celie raises her position as equal as men.

## CONCLUSION

One could see both internal and external development go hand in hand which was possible through various Feminist Movements that insisted the right in economic, social, and political rights. The issues of political and economic empowerment and the race pride were rallying cries in the late 1960's. We can state the example of the three different Waves of Feminism which fought for the women's suffrage - voting rights and paved way to political freedom. This movement continued to get freedom from domestic violence and made women to get both economic and social rights. Walker in her novels merges the political and social development like Civil Rights Movement, exposure towards issues like the practice of female circumcision, along with the internal issues of Black women.

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