



**Celie's Journey to Freedom: A Study of the Steps She Takes and
the Means that Support Her in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple***

رحلة سيلبي نحو الحرية: دراسة في الخطوات التي اتخذتها والوسائل التي دعمتها في
رواية اليس وكر "اللون الارجواني"

Prepared by

Ashraf Asa'd AL Qaisi

Supervised by

Dr. Nadia Tareq

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Authorization

I, Ashraf Asa'd Mohammad AL Qaisi, authorize Middle East University (MEU) to supply copies of my thesis to libraries, organizations establishments and even individuals upon request.

Name: Ashraf AL Qaisi

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line.

Date: 12/3/2017

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This thesis entitled "Celie's Journey to Freedom: A Study of the Steps She Takes and the Means that Support Her in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" was discussed and certified in December, 2016.

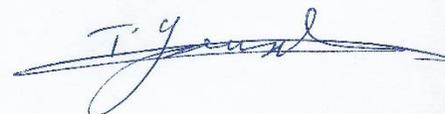
Examination Committee

Signature

Dr. Abdial Tareq Supervisor

Dr. Rawfiq Youssef

Dr. Nedal Al-Mousa



N Mousa

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents and my wife who have been a precious source of support and inspiration during the challenges of graduate work and life and whose good examples have taught me to work hard to achieve success.

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Abstract

This study aims at identifying the steps that the central character, Celie, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* takes towards freedom. Celie's freedom comes from two main sources. The first is the solidarity of the female community around, which provides her with support and strong role models to follow. The second is her letters' writing, which provides a venue for her self-expression and helps her to purge herself of all the abuses that she has faced. Celie's freedom goes through physical, then spiritual, and finally economical phases, specifically when she establishes her own business. Alice Walker believes that the harsh conditions from which Afro-American women suffer in their communities are due to, in part if not fully, the patriarchal system, classism and racism, that is why she suggests 'womanism' as the ideal.

Key words: *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker, patriarchy, feminism, womanism, solidarity.

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إعداد

أشرف أسعد القيسي

أشرف

الدكتورة نادية طارق

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على الخطوات التي اتبعتها بطله قصة اللون الأرجواني (سيلبي) نحو الحرية، فحريتها جاءت من خلال مصدرين رئيسيين: المصدر الأول هو تضامن المجتمع النسائي حولها و الذي وفر لها نماذج من القوة والدعم لتسير على خطاها، أما المصدر الثاني فهو كتابة الرسائل والذي يوفر لها مكانا للتعبير عن ذاتها ويساعدها على تطهير نفسها من جميع أشكال الإساءة التي واجهتها. إن حرية سيلبي مرت في مراحل أولها الجسدية و يليها الحرية الروحانية وأخيرا الحرية الاقتصادية و كان ذلك عندما قامت بتأسيس عملها الخاص. تعتقد الس وكر بان الظروف القاسية التي تعانيها النساء الأمريكيات من اصول افريقية في مجتمعاتهن سببه جزئيا ان لم يكن كليا نظام الاضطهاد الاجتماعي و الطبقي الاجتماعي و العنصرية العرقية , لذلك فإنها تقترح النظرية النسوية كحل نموذجي لحل مشاكل النساء السود.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللون الأرجواني, اليس وكر, الاضطهاد, النسوية , النسائية ,التضامن.

Chapter1

1.1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Woman has played an integral role in literature which has had a great impact on many writers whether essayists, novelists, poets, or dramatists. Woman is portrayed differently in various literary works since she could only exist through the eyes, minds and lives of a man but never for herself. Woman is forced to have a marginal role in the man's world not because of her inability to manage herself but because of the social and cultural conditions which contribute to the neglect of woman's identity, personality, dignity, and status.

More than that, the patriarchal system which has caused all the mentioned hardships for women, has a deep root in history. This system has treated them severely and oppressed them. In this regard, it depicts the humiliated gender as children who have to endure the dominance of men. In addition, men exploit women for their own benefits, and they deprive them of developing themselves on different levels especially in education, socially and even in investment through banning them from establishing their own

business. Furthermore, this system has had many appalling consequences on women exemplified in their sexual, economic, spiritual and psychological state.

For this reason, a new Feminist movement appeared in the nineteenth century to support the rights of women which calls for equality between men and women with regard to rights and duties. Moreover, it strongly believes in women's abilities to participate in all activities such as politics, education, economics, and others. Alice Walker is considered one of the great supporters of this movement and her novel *The Color Purple* throws light on the Afro-American woman who suffers a lot from various persecutions including segregation.

Literature has played a significant role in changing the image of black women in society as a whole and in the west specifically. There are many writers, scholars and advocates who fought fiercely for this noble cause everywhere. Feminist writers and activists aim at changing the stereotypical view of women through fulfilling the gender equalities and disapproving the injustices to women. In this case, they use the literary works as a means of inventing a world to show that women can have a normal and equal life like others.

In her dissertation, “Celie's Emancipation Process in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*” Amira Baga (2010) mentioned that many Afro- American women writers who use literature to express their perspectives toward the issues of blacks such as Maya Angelou, Harriet Jacobs, Maria Stewart, Melton McLaurin, Jaeda De Walt, Lyn Mikel Brown, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker often emphasize the issues of feminine identity, self-esteem and fulfilling self-realization in their literary works. The impact of racism and sexism on black women are the main themes of these black writers. Their works indicate that the female characters have the capability to transform, to develop and to have a high rank in all aspects of life.

Alice Walker is one of the prominent black writers who wrote one of the most controversial novels, titled *The Color Purple* in an epistolary form in which she strongly advocates the rights of the black women who fight and persist to obtain their rights and to be treated equally to men. Furthermore, she reveals the brutality that the black women experience either economically, socially, emotionally, or sexually because of their race and gender.

Importantly, Walker uses the epistolary form to take the reader into the inner psyche of an Afro-American woman in order to have a full

understanding of her misery. The major character of the novel, Celie, writes emotional letters to “God” about her life. Moreover, this technique helps the protagonist to speak for herself and to reconstruct her personality and her sense of self. Celie's letters, gives Celie the advantage of expressing herself and pouring down her ideas, which paves the way for her independence. The novel's narrative technique is associated with the thematic image of survival, regaining one's self-status and rebirth.

Carla Kaplan (1996) suggests that “without a sympathetic audience, such as Shug, Celie might never have been able to go from her first self-effacing statement “I am” to her later declaration, “I’m here”(130).In this regard, this form of writing effectively dramatizes the necessity to tell a story. In the case of Celie, this is made even more important because “finding a listener and finding her voice are inextricably related”(130) she feels strength and respect because of exchanging letters with her best person, Nettie.

Alice Walker is a creative writer who embodies in her works the stereotype of blacks' sufferings in the western societies in the character of Celie who rebels against discrimination and social restrictions. In this respect, it is considered a reflection of the self-discovery and re-creation of Walker's personality. Celie is a poor black girl who was raped by her step-father and

was married to a widower. The relationship of Celie with her husband and step-father is based on sexual, economic and psychological oppression in a society that is governed by the patriarchal system; this kind of silence is due to the surrender to the power of the man which leads her to look for inner strength and freedom as a woman seeking the help of her close friend, Shug.

So, things start to change for Celie after she meets Shug Avery who, according to author and critic Eva Lennox Birch (1994), loves everybody impartially and functions in the novel as “a guide and mentor to those whose capacity or love, of either self or others, is stunted by society” (Birch, p. 227). The two women become friends and then lovers. It is in Shug’s company that Celie finally starts to feel happy and alive. It is because of Shug’s motherly and loving presence that Celie rediscovers her strength and curiosity for life.

1.2. Biography of Alice Walker

Alice Malsenior Walker is a well-known Afro-American writer who was born in Eatonton, Georgia. She studied in Spelman College in Atlanta, and became an active member in the Civil Rights Movement, and participated in many demonstrations across the country such as the famous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. Since then, she has been actively involved in political activist and has spoken about various debatable issues.

She considered herself a feminist, who reflects the various experiences of black women in society regarding sexism and racism.

She was greatly praised for her precise description of the life of black people. Her works were widely read all over the world which has made her a leading voice of the African American Civil Rights movement. In her early life, Walker was badly injured with a gun and lost one of her eyes. This incident and the harsh southern situation affected and shaped the themes and issues that are presented in Alice Walker's later literary works. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1983.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The most crucial issue of this novel is the oppression inflicted on the protagonist, Celie, because of the patriarchal system exemplified by her husband and step-father; and offers the steps that the main character adopts to set herself free from all the destructive consequences of sexism and racism.

The Color Purple depicts the extreme poverty of the Black family in the early 20th century as well as the inhumane treatment of Black Americans.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

This study aims at achieving the following:

1. Showing how Celie is able to liberate herself from the damaging results of the patriarchal system.
2. Analyzing how other characters help Celie to be an independent person.
3. Exploring and analyzing the importance of writing letters for Celie.

1.5. Questions of the Study

This study will answer the following questions:

1. How does Celie set herself free from the patriarchal system?
2. Do Celie's sister and other characters have a role in her liberation?
3. What is the importance of writing in obtaining freedom?

1.6. Significance of the study

The importance of this study is to show how black women can obtain their rights and free themselves in spite of all the difficulties that they may encounter from a particular class of society who see that they should control

all aspects of women's lives. Hence, this novel focuses on how the women establish their identity depending on feminist theories.

Celie shows the effects of a culture dominated by a white racist patriarchy that makes itself most felt in relationships between blacks, especially in a family. More than that, Walker wants to draw the reader's attention to the ways in which black men brutalize their women. The young women are abused in different ways by their society, and Celie suffers from a double violence both physically and spiritually by her-step-father and Mr. Albert. Sofia notes that "(a) girl child ain't safe in a family of men"(Walker, 38).

The novel of *The Color Purple* clearly displays the environment of the Afro-Americans, which is historically characterized by poverty, labor shortage and oppression. Even though Walker's novel is fiction, it seeks to portray a very realistic image of the life of the black people in the early 20th century. Walker argues that the sexual and economic oppression of black women by black men is tightly linked. Pa robs his wife and her daughters of their inheritance. And later in the novel, Celie is seen to be the only one working hard on the farm. Similarly, Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," is a kind of a collection of short stories written in a form of prose based on her

awareness of womanism and her experience as a black woman where she suggests the universality of oppression. In this essay, she depicts her family's poverty and misery in which they are hard-working in the farm to get little food. In her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Alice meditates on the stereotype of black American women who necessarily established the bondage of slavery during the hard times to support each other. Walker refers to these women not as slaves, or Africans, or Americans, or even women-she calls them saints: "these crazy saints stared out on the world, wildly, like lunatics..." (Walker 695).

Through her work, Walker emphasizes issues of class, racism and oppression which she has been struggling with throughout her life. She is a strong supporter of womanhood and has developed the philosophy further into the concept of womanism. Through womanism she raises the consciousness of identity. In addition Charles Taylor (1994) enlightens these themes as well and adds the notion of recognition. Thereby she opens up possibilities for the black people and other cultures to be recognized. Recognition enables people to change the stereotyped image of themselves. However, the idea of discovering your own identity cannot be done entirely on your own. According to Taylor (1994), there are some important factors that are essential in confirming one's identity such as language and dialogue. People learn from

each other, that is why one cannot develop on one's own. In this respect, interaction is very important since it is the core that affects the process of forming ideas and changing opinions and positions towards things. In order to discover one's personality, Taylor explained that: "We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (P. 32).

Actually, Taylor (1994) strongly believes that "We can flourish only to the extent that we are recognized" (P.50)so, people are dependent on recognition from others as all humans seek recognition from others. Understanding or misunderstanding is a key factor in building up the personality of people. If a class of society is misunderstood by others, it will result in a deformed image which in its turn becomes a source of oppression.

It seems like throughout all the trouble Celie had to go through, a proving success came. She had started the pants business, which enabled her to stand up for herself. She had the courage to fight back. This even brought a key success into recognition, which symbolized her growth as a human being. This shows us how her self-respect had increased. Finally, with her recognition and success she was able to achieve equality with her husband,

who finally changes and realizes that what he had done was wrong and accepted it as a mistake.

Alice Walker does not only write her novel to give a voice for the black, but also to guide them to the right path and to give them hope to be effective members in the society and to discover ways by which they can map out their own lifestyle. The story has a sense of hope, inspiration and optimistic vision for the future.

1.7. Limitations of the study:

This research cannot be generalized since the results are based mainly on only one community. This story was composed by Alice Walker who strongly attempts to defend the black women's rights to be equal to men. The chosen main character is a young girl called Celie who struggles to set herself free and to find her lost identity. She goes through catastrophic experiences which turned her into a hopeful woman seeking liberty with the help of her sister, Nettie, and Shug.

1.8. Limits

This research is limited to the study of Celie's character in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and therefore the findings cannot be applied to other works or aspects of this work.

1.9. Definition of Terms

Feminism: "The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests".

(Hooks, 1990)

Patriarchal social system: According to Welter (2014) it can be defined as a system where men are in authority over women in all aspects of society. In modern American culture and society, the idea of patriarchy is not as accepted or practiced as it once was decades ago.

Epistolary novel: is "a self-conscious, self-perpetuating process of emotional self-examination which gathers momentum and ultimately becomes more

important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing letters. That is the very center of an epistolary novel” (McElaney-Johnson, 1999, p 110).

Womanism: is a term that was coined by Alice Walker (1983) in her book “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” to depict the dreadful life of the black female in their communities. Alice Walker explains the womanist as a woman who dignifies and respect women’s culture and their ability of exchanging and showing emotions. Sree explained it as: “the individual identity of black woman and how her identity and bonding with other women affects the health of her community at large. Alice Walker describes this affinity among women as womanism. For her, womanist is one who is committed to the survival and integrity of the entire black race.” (P. 16)

Female Bonding: Hudson-Weems (2004) said that

There has always been bonding among African women that cannot be broken—genuine sisterhood. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives and receives equally. In this community of women, all reach out in support of each other, demonstrating a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other by looking out for one another. They are joined emotionally, as they embody empathic understanding of each other's shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism included, and in the end, the sharing of the common and individual experiences and ideas yields rewards. (P. 65)

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

2.1. Theoretical Studies:

The theoretical studies include the opinions of scholars and novelists toward *The Color Purple*.

Kohlberg (1969) stated that the moral development of humans passes through six stages, ranging from early childhood where avoiding punishment is the main objective to the post conventional stages where ethical principles guide a person. Kohlberg also states that moral development is best taught through history and literature. *The Color Purple* is a wonderful way to teach moral development as we see the character Celie starts out in the pre-conventional stages then matures through the post conventional stages. Most young adults are in the conventional stage of moral development, so *The Color Purple* wonderfully fits Kohlberg's criteria. (P. 299)

Ogunyemi (1985) stated that women were not only confronting the problems of racism and class differences, but were also suffering from the consequences of sexism in their patriarchal culture. In the early twentieth

century American black people were not equal to the white community, especially women, who faced oppression from various parts of society. (P.48)

Skovmand (1988) stated that a change in the United States Constitution in 1861 demanded the abolition of slavery. Unfortunately this did not involve great changes for the black people living in the United States. On the contrary, many continued to live as slaves, which was the only way to survive. In the same year the American civil war broke out and lasted until 1865. In these years people from the Northern States were fighting to help liberate the slaves in the South. However, as the war ended, the troops from the North withdrew and even though the black people were liberated, they went back to live as miserably as before the war. In a time characterized by labor shortage and misery in the South, nobody took notice of the black people and it was very difficult for them to make a living. (P. 20)

Hooks (1989) stated that “domination always involves attempts to objectify the subordinate group. ‘As subject’ people have the right to define their own reality ... and ‘as object’ one reality is defined by others”. Since Mr. _ is a headman of a family, he has the right to subjugate his children and to rape his wife and even torture her whenever he wants. When Nettie sees and suggests fighting, Celie focuses on survival but states: “I don’t know how to

fight. All I know how to do is to stay alive” (*Color Purple* 19). For Celie, her unwanted intercourse with Mr. _ is consistent with his model of dominant masculinity. (P. 42)

Lewis (1990) stated that “this novel unfolds a model both of and for human beings who are threatened by cultural disorder and by a loss of connection with themselves, with each other, and with the world. By infusing Celie with such a capacity for growth, the author acts as a spiritual guide throughout the novel. Walker traces Celie’s journey from living in fear of a patriarchal God that is difficult to identify with to Celie’s eventual joy and acceptance of herself, others, and the serenity to be found in daily life. Celie eventually can move beyond a life full of suffering because she realizes life offers so much more as she hones the ability to change and grow”. (P.483)

As David (1999) said “the significance is not so much in the qualities that God is denied as in the qualities that God is finally awarded. The disconnection between people and the world is a very important issue. This disconnection underlies and advances the novel’s structure that relies on showing how people can change for the better when they demand a loving God as well as a place in the world. Regardless of the personalized version of God and the universe that Celie eventually develops, it becomes clear that the

characters need a source of love and guidance in their life that grants them peace with their chosen roles rather than seeking a place within society's narrow confines". (P.17)

Alice Walker proposes singing of blues music as an integral of writing letter which was composed by the earlier African slaves in the United States of America. It was used as a mean of self-expression and an outlet to express their sorrow and sadness. Kamien (1984) stated that "The blues lyrics are often intensely personal, frequently containing sexual references and often dealing with the pain of betrayal, desertion, and unrequited love. Sometimes they might talk about unhappy situations such as being jobless, hungry, broke, away from home, lonely, or downhearted because of an unfaithful lover" (P.98)

Collins (2000) commented that "it is therefore possible to conclude that the blues is actually another self-expression form among African Americans. It is not merely entertainment, but it is a way of solidifying community and the social fabric of working class Black life in America. (P. 145)

According to Ang (2001) in the last decades of the twentieth century, the Western world became more and more concerned with issues of ethnic, social, political and gender equality resulted in the politicization of race and ethnicity the increased political consciousness and activism of those who found themselves marginalized and discriminated against on the basis of their race, sexual orientation, gender or ethnicity. (P.177)

Ray (2005) observed “the jail that Sofia is held in is a metaphor for all black people caged by racism. For others, though they do not serve in a literal prison and instead are confined to servitude and domesticity within their homes”. The discrimination of race dominates to such an extent that Sofia is not allowed to sit in the front seat with the mayor's wife while teaching her to drive, pointing to her that “This is the South”. (P. 62)

Razak (2006) claimed that “Walker focuses on the sharing and mentorship that are a traditional part of idealized Black mother-daughter relationships. Walker further refers to one specific relationship between women: the relationship between a mother and her child. The fact that her two examples in this entry involve a mother-child (presumably a daughter) situation suggests that she considers motherhood essential in the experience of being a woman.”(P. 99)

Carmen Gillespie (2011) explained that Shug is a smart character who has a rebellious spirit that she passes into Celie's personality and guides her to the right way to live normally like others. She supports Celie and her family and goes on a sexual relationship with Celie. In this concern, Carmen commented in this kind of womanism point of view saying "Shug's occupation as a blues singer foregrounds the ways in which she fulfills this role in Celie's life. She provides Celie the means, the vocabulary and the methodology with which to find and sing her own song – her truth, her self-worth and her desires". (P. 63)

A womanist aims at developing the status of women and to take care of the men and the society. On the other hand, the *Color Purple* concentrates on the female bonding which contributes to women's liberation and how to change the way of men's thinking. As a result, there is a kind of a change taken place in the speech of Albert and Harpo who now "reassess and reevaluate their lives and develop a better relationship with their women" (Diwakar, 137). Albert during his conversation with Celie after she has returned back tells her, "I'm satisfied, this is the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feels like a new experience" (The Color Purple 267).

Andersen (2014) stated that Celie has learned to tear down the restraining identity imposed upon her because of the fact that she is a woman. Walker also extends her explanation on the healing power of love and the possibility of change for Celie. She is an uneducated and a poor black American girl who is able to enhance her situation. She is a symbol of hope that fixes deeply in the readers mind for her strength, faith and courage. From exploring her process, it seems that female bonding is one of the main elements that women need in order to emancipate. This symbolizes a new beginning for Celie. She has survived despite all the brutality and violence she had experienced and is ready to start from the beginning and to clean forget what she had had as an unnerving experience. She has developed from being an insecure and inferior girl into a strong and well-balanced woman. (P. 65)

2.2. Empirical Studies

Literary critics, such as Ross and Walton (2008) explored the themes of Celie's psychological metamorphosis and the development of her female identity in *The Color Purple*. Similarly, Adrienne Rich and Donna H. Winchell analyze how the change in Celie's character and the repossession of her own body, which Celie believed to be the property of her husband, directly

influence the process of her healing and the achievement of harmony and reconciliation with Mr. Albert.

In an interview with Whitaker (2012) Alice Walker said, “The story of Celie, is a simple Southern woman— abused first by her father and then by the man to whom her father eventually marries her off— whose confidence and self-awareness are awakened under the guidance of a free spirited cabaret singer, Shug Avery”. Again it is this Shug who proves a turning stone for the submissive Mary Agnes (Squeak's new name) to gain herself- identity through music. A single free-spirited woman paints colorfully the colorless lives of Celie and Squeak.

Sheffield (2014) asserted that “the right of men to control female body is a cornerstone of patriarchy. Violence and the threat of violence against females represent the need of patriarchy to deny the woman’s body of her own property”.(P. 400) Pa shows determination in holding Celie in his captivity and bondage by raping her. Most feminist critics consider the family as the focal repercussion of male powers and therefore as patriarchy’s supreme model and institution. In the family, Pa has the absolute power to control the family. It effectively gives him the exclusive license to flagrantly violate his women. In Pa’s home, Celie also works like a slave. She tells in her letters

how she carries out her work as if she is a domesticated animal. She also receives physical violence and in one of her letters she expresses her complaints about it. She resorts to writing to understand fully what's happening to her which later enables her to stabilize the events of her life. By writing she not only defines herself against the patriarchal rule, but also makes up for those traces and wounds imprinted by others.

Andersen (2014) stated that she, Celie, has developed from being an insecure and inferior girl into a strong and well-balanced woman. She has learned to tear down the restraining identity imposed upon her because of the fact that she is a woman. *Color Purple* reveals an optimistic point of view toward a future in which feminism could be recognized and celebrated. Walker believes that every woman, regardless of her age, race, and social position can become a feminist with the help of other, mannish women. As an African American writer who deals with an epistolary novel, she imbeds the voice of an ill-fated African American woman in an established literary form and allows an uneducated black Southern woman to speak for herself. As an African American woman, Walker is also able to convert a sense of social slavery and alienation into an ultimate victory. (P.65)

As seen, this section is very important since it enriches our background about the various researches done by different scholars and experts who are qualified in their fields aiming at analyzing *the Color Purple* and to find out the ideologies of thinking and the aspects that people in different cultures believe in. This is clearly embodied in the character of Shug who persuades Celie to believe in God through His creatures and to eliminate the typical image that the Bible mentions.

Chapter 3

3.1. Methodology

The methodology that is used in the current study is both descriptive and analytical. It seeks to find out the outside contexts behind the development of the characters, themes and plots of the novel *The Color Purple*. Also, reading and discussing the ways that are used by the major character to liberate herself from the harsh conditions that are imposed on her. It is important to be familiar with the concept of "Wominism" which is very important in the novel to reflect the idea of Alice Walker that is considered as a turning point in the character's life in order to rebel against discrimination and to re-build her own personality and identity.

At the end of the novel Celie stands up for herself. It shows that she's not going to take Albert's treatment anymore and is moving on. She is finally ready to enter into a relationship with the rest of the world and start her own life. As another proving quote from the book states "that's it. Pack up your stuff. You are coming back to Tennessee with me." (p.183). This quotation was shortly followed on a sentence stating that she needed to sleep which signifies the re-birth of Celie. She has left her old ways full of pain and sorrow

and walked forward into a world unknown to her. The idea of her re-birth is also one of the most important points in the book, Celie comes to grip that she is an adult and has the right to do whatever she wants, and this time it happens to be leave her old life and go and live with her loved ones in Tennessee. In conclusion, this is very important because it symbolizes her growth as a human being and shows us how her respect has increased.

3.2. Sample of the study

The sample of the study is the characters of the novel who participated effectively in helping the protagonist to survive and to sustain herself life away from misery.

3.3. Procedures of the Study

1. Reading the biography of Alice Walker.
2. Reading the full-text of the novel *The Color Purple*.
3. Finding out the resemblance between the novel and biography.
4. Reading the previous studies concerned with the main topic of my study.
5. Analyzing the novel relating it to the concept of "Feminism".
6. Discussing the Findings.

Chapter Four

4.1. Introduction:

The Color Purple by Alice Walker is considered one of the best literary works that gives a clear picture about the sufferings of African-American women from patriarchy, sexism and racism. According to Carole J. Sheffield, “the right of men to control female body is a cornerstone of patriarchy. Violence and the threat of violence against females represent the need of patriarchy to deny the woman’s body of her own property” (P.400). In this novel, she not only shows the humiliating environment of women but also exhibits her firmness to change their social rank and position by developing in them a strong sense of their right and their position in society. The novel not only portrays the pathetic condition of black women but even goes beyond that purpose. In reality, the intended goal from writing the novel is to give a voice for the black women and to provide them with the right path in order to emancipate themselves.

Walker traces the development of her major character, Celie, from being a sexually abused child, a passive wife and finally to an emancipated woman. African-American women have many awful things in their life; they have to face double hardships as Blacks and as women. Celie, as the main

female character in this novel is an African-American woman who is severely tyrannized by her patriarchal family. Mainly, family is where people usually find love and care and the members of a family usually support each other. In this novel, however, Celie's family is more like a burden to its members, especially for Celie. At the very beginning, Celie cannot make much sense of her experiences, she is rather the passive victim of her environment: "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive" (*The Color Purple*, p. 26), "I do not say anything. I stay where I'm told. But I am alive" (*The Color Purple*, p. 29). It is clear that Celie is able to keep salient in order to be safe in spite of the burdens and sorrows that have fallen upon her shoulder. When she talks to Nettie, before leaving her husband's home, she says, "it is worse than that, I think. If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work. But I just say, never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along." (*The Color Purple*, 26). Addressing God here suggests the depth of alienation, loneliness, and marginality that Celie experiences.

More than that, Celie's Pa exploits his daughter. Alphonso is a vicious character in all his acts, but the most vicious act appears when he sells Celie, in the name of marriage, to a widower with four children who wants a woman to serve him, manage his housework and bring up his children. Before that, although Celie has had her own childbirth, she hasn't seen them growing up

with her because Celie's own children are soon given to foster-parents by her Pa, to a couple who later become African missionaries.

Learning is the most productive and profitable means used in Celie's liberation. Celie's sister, Nettie actively contributes in enlightening Celie with the surrounding through teaching. This step gives the protagonist the advantage to express herself. Celie is a typical black woman who is banned from going to school in order to be marginalized and unaware of her natural rights. Nettie determinately insists to teach her sister to develop her personality and confidence which will inspire her with new ideas that leave a tremendous impact on her to look for freedom. Teaching is a decisive step where black women find it a practical means to enlighten others of their rights.

Her relationship with other characters in particular Shug is an influential and turning step in regaining her rights, getting rid of her wretched conditions and developing her own personal characteristics. In this regard, Shug is considered as the main means to let Celie discover her body which affects her awareness toward her personality.

Finding out her sister's letters is another means that invigorates and makes Celie determine to set herself free. Shug is the one who finds the letters of Nettie in the mail box of Mr. Albert. The letters inform Celie that her sister

and her children, Olivia and Adam, are alive. Also, they join the school in Africa, and they will go back to their homeland very soon which causes happiness to Celie. To uncover the letters is the catalyst that undoubtedly urges Celie to seek freedom and reinforces Celie's confidence. The news fills Celie with the needed energy to rebel and think deeply to reunite with her sister and her two children again. Writing letters is like a testimony by which Celie documents her sufferings and they are used as a means of Celie's self-expression. When Nettie returns from Africa with her two children, the family is reunited and Celie feels a happiness and love that she has never before experienced. Celie's final letter to God states that, despite her old age, "I think this the youngest us ever felt." (*The Color Purple*, 295)

As a result, she decides to leave Mr. Albert and to travel with Shug to Memphis. When Mr. Albert attempts to disappoint and to belittle Celie, but Celie responds with full confidence saying that "It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need." (Walker, p.207) To see her, Mr. Albert understands that Celie is grown enough to revolt against him, so he leaves her to take her future decision. In this case, Shug plays an important role in forming Celie's independent personality and in becoming confident. Shug is the facilitator who paves the

road for Celie and guides her through encouraging her to set up her own business of sewing pants. This step is the sign of declaring liberty. She becomes very successful, and she also understands how to love others. She has a close relationship with women since they are the only people who love and help her to overcome all the troubles that she went through.

4.2. Feminism and Womanism:

The feminist movement (also known as the women's movement or women's liberation) refers to a series of campaigns for reforms on issues, such as women's suffrage, reproductive rights, domestic violence, and maternity leave, equal pay in the workplace, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. The movement's priorities vary among nations and communities. Feminism is a movement that wants to form economic, political, cultural and legal rights for women. Feminism is: "the advocacy of women's rights on grounds of equality of the sexes." (*The Oxford Dictionary*) Thus the feminist movement threw light largely on the segregation based on sexism.

A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious of a woman's life and problems and feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. Feminists believe in the transformation of the society for a better future. According to Sandra Bartky

(1990), feminist consciousness is a consciousness of victimization. “To understand oneself as a victim is to be aware of an alien and hostile force which is responsible for the blatantly unjust treatment of women and for a stifling and oppressive treatment of sex-roles; it is to be aware too, that this victimization in no way earned or deserved, is an offense” (P. 254).

Feminists understand that a tyrannized woman stands for the whole of the female community where the oppression is practiced against them by the other gender so, the sense of bonding is a solution which supports the victimized gender and relieves them to rebuild themselves and to have new thoughts and life style that help them to survive and to fight to gain their fair rights. This support forms the precious power that provides the weak gender to work hard to overcome their sufferings and to form their own identity. (Sandra Bartky, 1990)

Feminist critics show a mutual respect to their identity and status in different communities, so they are interested in reading the novels or stories of women aiming at finding out the worthy values of their gender and they are able to develop themselves politically, psychologically and socially. Feminist understanding is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. Feminist consciousness turns a “fact” into a

“contradiction”, and often, features social reality. Thus, women understand what they are and where they are in the light of what they are not yet. Thus, they comprehend their world and also what it is not and the world that could be if changed. (Sandra Bartky, 1990)

It is necessary to understand what is meant by the term 'black feminist consciousness' before analyzing Walker's idea of womanism. The word 'black' indicates the race and feminist means a person who knows that the exploitation is caused by patriarchal system and that one is ready to end that dominance to reestablish the lives of women and to build a society based on no segregation. Hence, one is also prepared to struggle to redress the situation so as to bring racial, social, sexual and economic equality for the black women.

This awareness comes from the feminist movement, gives a clear image about the miserable lives of the black women like Sofia, who suffer because of the patriarchal system in their societies, and who fought fiercely to gain their legitimate rights in her society. All the women folk in the novel have to go through painful experiences imposed by men. It depicts the miserable treatment given to the black women by their men. At the same time the novel

concentrates on the awareness among the black women about their self, status and rights.

The term of womanism was coined by Walker who depends on her own experience and believes in the women's ability to be developed. Alice goes through different types of social obstacles such as classism, racism as well as segregation. It is crucial to understand her new concept and its importance before reading her novel to know its function in *the Color Purple*. It is obvious that the characters of the novel are affected by their understanding of their personalities and their relationships with one another. Initially, Phillips (2006) explains that the term of womanism firstly appeared in Walker's short story titled "*Coming Apart*" which explores the elements that affect the marriages among blacks. Walker writes: "The wife has never considered herself feminist-though she is, of course, a "womanist". (p. xix).

Her term was massively used in her collection of essays called "*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*" in 1983. The ultimate goal behind creating this term is to eliminate the various kinds of violence that black women confront in their everyday life and to unify all people. Phillips (2006) clarifies the aims behind adopting this term by giving women a voice to talk and to express themselves and to provide them with a new way by which they can fight against oppression from all sides of society to regain their rights.(P. xx).

Walker's concept was commonly used in various fields for instance, social sciences, sexuality, literature, history, etc.

In this course, it is inevitable to make a distinction between the terms feminism and womanism to have a better understanding of each one. Generally, People think that feminism and womanism have the same trend (Phillips, 2006: xxi). The major distinction between them is that feminism concentrates on gender while womanism throws light on the higher racism. Feminist literature is considered as a "protest literature" (Ogunyemi, 1985: 64) where it attacks the patriarchal system in communities. Feminism does not only take care of women issues, but also shapes a feminist philosophy. Feminism is associated with the white women writers who attempt to make a change in the awareness of their personalities while black women writers consider themselves womanists. Womanists believe that they are different from the white women since they go through the experience of persecution which is imposed upon them by their black societies, so they receive double oppression for being women and black (Ogunyemi, 1985: 64). In addition, black women encounter oppression regarding classism, racism, and sexism by whites (67). Both of them have something in common which is a political view on equality and power base in society. On the other hand, both of them are different because womanism wants equality in communities to be split

among races and sexes. In order to achieve that, it is important for the womanist to give the authority to man and to believe in the ability of the black man even though she is abused by him. She understands that the blacks confront the same segregation from the whites because of the color of their skin which makes them have something in common and enables her to empower him (68-69).

The Color Purple shows thirty years of struggle in the life of Celie, a poor Southern black woman who is exploited physically and emotionally. She begins her journey from powerlessness to the state of full empowerment and from denying herself to understanding herself.

Since most of the black male writers have not succeeded in describing the black women's real life, many black women writers come to give a clear image about their own, real and authentic selves. Their literary works are kinds of explosive voices against suppression imposed by the victimizers. The consciousness of victimization is immediate and revelatory, "it allows women to discover what social reality really is" (Bartky, 1999: P. 254).

In this respect, Simon de Beauvoir (1999) rightly says, "the humanity is male" but for the black women the "humanity is white and male," (p.93) as they suffer from racial and gender oppression, they differ from both the white

women and the black men. The black woman has to fight for equality both as a woman and as an African American. Thus, their experiences obtained from living as African American women support their sensibility called black feminist sensibility.

The overall social self-esteem of the black is lower than any other social group; hence they are expected to fight against sexist, racist and class oppression. As a group they have not been socialized to assume the role of oppressor. White women and black men can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be neglected by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiter of women. Black women without an institutionalized 'other,' that they may discriminate against, exploit or oppress, often have lived different experiences directly challenging the prevailing class, sexist, racist social structure and its associated ideology. This lived experience shaped their consciousness and changed their attitude from their oppressors. Bell Hooks (1990) has rightly pointed out that it is essential for a continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the vantage point of their marginality and "make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter hegemony" (P.58).

All African American women go through this experience of being black women where they had to fight fiercely to confirm their identities. So, they encounter the various kinds of obstacles inherited by their communities. They fight against white patriarchy, white women's racism and black men's sexism. This tragic experience is reflected in the black women's personalities where they find forming bonds is the decisive and reasonable way to stay alive and to stand against the white and the black men who have the privilege to exploit them unmercifully. Moreover, segregation is the basic reason behind looking for establishing their own new lifestyle and business to be free from all aspects of life. (Canon, 1985: P.30)

In his article, RajendraThorat(2014) explains that

“The black women's ability to forge the individual unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective stand point is important to black women's survival. It is an attempt towards self-definition to show who one is, what one is and what one would like to be. The black feminist consciousness indicates the black woman's self- definition. Thus, for the black women, struggle involves embracing a consciousness that is simultaneously Afro-centric that reveals the black perspective and at the same time feminist.”

Also, Alice Walker defines the womanist as a woman who appreciates women's culture and their ability of exchanging and showing emotions. A womanist stands for the wholeness of both male and female groups because the womanist is traditionally a universalist not a separatist. Alice Walker mentions the reason behind introducing the term of womanism stating that "She explores the individual identity of black woman and how her identity and bonding with other women affects the health of her community at large. Alice Walker describes this affinity among women as womanism. For her, a womanist is one who is committed to the survival and integrity of the entire black race." (Walker.16)

Walker's idea of womanism is clear in the novel. For her, this term reflects the continuation of the women's struggle toward their emancipation and to confirm their identity. She portrays the world of black women who love other women as being 'whole'. (Walker, 1983)

Celie and Nettie stress the sense of solidarity and sharing, the sense of community, that brings about blossoming in self and society.

They demonstrate consciousness of their continuous exploitation and slavery due to color and gender. Nettie believes in change which is essential for the survival and harmony in society. They show an invincible female spirit that helps their empowerment. So, they become independent by showing that they are able to get by themselves without men.

However, feminists who are mainly from the white middle class neglect the more severe oppression based on racism and classism suffered by black women. It was because of this neglect and ethnocentrism that the black women defined womanism as a more intense fight against persecution and prejudice.

As a womanist Walker firmly believes in the influence that creates strength that women can do to help each other because the world that they live in is dominated by men. Women modify their understanding toward men because of a woman. The protagonist of the novel, Celie, revolts against Albert after she has a friendship with Shug and Sofia who help her to change her personality from being a silent naïve young girl to a self-reliant woman and this is a strong evidence of her maturity. She becomes able to encounter the difficulties of life without help from anyone especially men. In reality, all these changes mark a turning- point in the way feminism is treated. Women in *The Color Purple* are not a repetition of countless previous women who

continued to be submissive to male. Now they are completely different women who are able to face the traditional role which feminism presented them with. (Walker, 1983)

4.3. Solidarity: a Means to Freedom

Female bonding or female solidarity is the central power that plays a great role in Celie's emancipation process. Mainly, it motivates Celie to change her life completely and to set herself free both physically and spiritually with the help of these women ranging from her sister, Nettie, to her daughter in law, Sofia, and her husband's mistress, Shug.

The Color Purple clearly indicates that the patriarchal domination over black women was by using their physical might as well as treating the women as mere animals, as is shown in Mr. Albert's vindictiveness to Celie, Harpo's hateful attitude towards Sofia and Mr. Alfonso's grudge. Thus, a woman is kept away from her normal life, becomes solitary and makes them turn to other women for comfort, care, security and unity. Sisterhood is undoubtedly the basis or center in the novel. (Brenda, 2009: P.10)

Bonnie Thornton Bill's essay "Race, Class and Gender" as cited in Lynda Stone's book *The Education Feminism Reader*(1994) says: "The concept of sisterhood has been an important unifying force in the contemporary women's movement... this concept has been a binding force in the struggle against male

chauvinism and patriarchy.”(P. 42) the women characters in *The Color Purple*, who are Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery, Sofia and Mary Agnes have a kind of intimate friendship. Also, this kind of sisterly attachment helps Celie set herself free and turns her to be an independent person. As Clenora Hudson Weems (2004) comments:

Given that we know all too well how comforting sisterhood is, we must welcome it and its rewards for others as well as for ourselves. Thus, for the moment, let us reflect on how much more beautiful our world would be if all sisters simply loved each other. Our children would be more secure, therefore, they would have not just one female guardian, but many to attend to their needs.(P.73)

The sensational tie and understanding which is created among women saves them from the cruel effects of physical exploitation and domestic harshness. The black women are delighted with their togetherness. They narrate stories, weave quilts, plant their gardens and sing songs. Walker considered them as artists who with colors painted their imagination. She concentrates on the strong relationship that the women have because of the severe sufferings. Sarah Addison Allen in her book *The Peach Keeper* (2012) says: “We’re connected as women. It’s like a spider web. If one part of that web vibrates, if there’s trouble, we all know it, but most of the time we’re just

too scared, or selfish, or insecure to help. But if we don't help each other, who will?" (P.18)

In the novel, the 'quilt' that Celie gave to Sofia as a kind of present when she was leaving for her maternal home has a symbolic value which reflected the sisterly love they shared together. Similar female bonding is visible in the Olinka section also. Reverend Samuel respects the reality that women get along well with each other. It is obvious in the novel that women do various tasks together like doing the housework and taking care and nursing each other's children.

It is known that in all African societies, females were forced to be subordinate because of the feeling of alienation which encouraged them to develop sisterly love to neutralize the effects of patriarchy. A sisterhood is something that can only be understood by a female as Clenora Hudson (2004) comments that this specific kind of sisterhood refers especially to an asexual relationship amongst women who confide and trust each other and willingly share their thoughts, true feelings, their fears, their hopes, and their dreams. In enjoying, understanding, and supporting each other, women friends of this kind are invaluable to each other. With such love, trust and security, it is difficult to imagine any woman without such a genuine support system as that found in genuine sisterhood. (P.65-66)

The actual power of the community can be found in women's alliance with one another. One such instance is Nettie's letters that speak about the friendship among Olinka wives of the same husband and Celie finds Shug as her greatest supporter. Shug Avery, a blues singer and mistress of Mr. Albert also motivates Mary Agnes, Harpo's girlfriend, to face the crowd at Harpo's juke joint. Celie was fascinated by the life Shug Avery was leading and she emancipated herself from the depressive life she lived with Mr. Albert.

The foundations of the female attachment depend on faith and trust, on believing and sharing. At the beginning, Shug did not like Celie and treated her harshly but later they had a close relationship. Shug was the reason behind Celie's emancipation and supported her with the materialistic requirements essential to get an independent life and build her own business. The friendship of Celie and Shug Avery is beyond Mr. Albert's understanding. Shug supported Celie in every matter and they got along so well together that later Shug rebelled against Mr. Albert because of his treatment of Celie.

The relation of the women take different shapes: some are in the form of motherly or sisterly, some are connected with sex, some are in the form of mentor and pupil, and some of these forms belong to friendships. Each one of the female characters has her own reasons, which is the source of power that

makes her stand firmly in the face of problems. For example, Sofia is one of the characters who explain that her ability to get involved in a fight comes from her strong and tight relationships with her sisters. The relationship of Nettie with Celie anchors her through years of living in the unfamiliar culture of Africa. Most important, Celie's ties to Shug bring about Celie's gradual redemption and her attainment of a sense of self. (Rashmi, 2003: p.129)

Baga (2010) stated that Walker always pays close attention to the importance of female solidarity in black women's liberty in her writings. She is certain of the empowerment of black women if they have a well-connected group which will enable them to make a change from the present-day unnatural definitions of woman and man.

Smith (1982) finds that the unifying bond between black women is through their friendships, their love, and their shared oppression and that they collectively gain the strength to separate themselves from the bondage of their past and piece together a free and equal existence for themselves and for those they love. (p. 182).

Baga (2010) explained that men usually have a tendency of understanding solidarity as a form of refusal and retaliation by women against men. In fact, solidarity is associated with something fully different, it has to do

more with spiritual, physical and material help that women use to support each other. It is a tool used to get rid of all the hardships for the liberation and empowerment of women.

Thus female bonding is a matter that ties the women to not only share their feelings, affections, sorrows and opinions but also helps them to share their domestic chores, looking after children and their needs. It helps women to overcome their sorrows, to move ahead in life and to get liberated just like Celie in the novel. She, with the aid of other women, started her own tailoring business, had a new home and last but not least she got her family back -her children and her sister. If people cared, shared, and lived with the feeling of togetherness, the planet would have been a better place to live in.

To Celie, Nettie is the source of education and hope. Both characters live in a family where love and sentiment are completely absent. The step-father treats Celie harshly and this harsh treatment is continued when Celie is married at the hands of her husband. In comparison to Celie, Nettie attempts to relieve her sister after she observes that her sister is beaten and humiliated by her arrogant husband, Mr. Albert, and she motivates her to fight him to stop his abuse toward her. This attitude reflects the power and the strong personality that she has and her ability to make changes. Furthermore, Nettie

encourages her sister to respond against any abuse that she receives from Albert's children by making them understand that she has her own personality and she is able to show her superiority.

Nettie is an educated girl and she is extremely impressed by Miss Beasley, her teacher, who is a defiant person with her own beliefs and agitated way of thinking. Miss Beasley helps Nettie to form her own personal identity, sensibility and ability to confront difficulties. In the same way, Celie deals with Nettie as her own teacher who guides and gives her the instructions to face her troubles. Nettie helps her sister to survive the catastrophic conditions through teaching her anything that she really needs, like writing and reading. This reflects Nettie's strong determination and firmness to carry out her plan to save her sister.

Moreover, Baga (2010) clarified that Nettie always strives to keep her sister in touch with the surroundings, so she updates her with anything occurring in the world. Nettie observes closely the brutality and abuse that her sister suffers from while staying with Celie at Albert's house. Consequently, she exerts great efforts in order to free her sister by teaching her, using different tools like small cards that she puts on the objects whose names are written on the card. This educational goal is set by Nettie to free Celie of her subordination. Having this kind of skill starts to affect Celie's belief in God by

blaming Him for all the gloomy aspects of her life which she has gotten involved in. Also, she becomes able to read her sister's letters that Nettie sends from Africa.

Celie finds in writing letters a comforting way to compensate her sister's absence. This skill enlightens Celie and she becomes a knowledgeable person. In her letters, Nettie greatly attempts to comfort her sister and change her ideas towards the whites, aiming at raising her self-confidence in her African origin through explaining some Biblical stories, like saying that all the religious figures mentioned in the Bible are black even the first civilized nation established across the world was in Africa. This type of information changes Celie's mind and principles of what she had acquired about whites. Consequently, she becomes proud of her nation.

The news of her children is the turning point that changes the life of Celie up-side-down and makes her become a self-confident, spiritually strong and optimistic woman. Celie considers her sister as the source of happiness, optimism and the best model she can follow to her independent personality or identity. Knowing that her children and her favorite person, Nettie, are still alive gives Celie physiological strength which revitalizes her.

In a reversal of roles, Celie also plays a key role in helping Nettie during the hard times that she goes through. She has a double role towards her

sister, for firstly, she has to compensate Nettie for the absence of their mother and secondly, she tries to save her sister's life from the brutality of her step-father. The loving bond sustains them even after they are set apart and they believe that they will meet once again one day, which gives them hope to overcome all the difficulties.

Hence, the intimate relationship that has grown between the two sisters is actually decisive since it provides the protagonist with the energy that she needs to confront the critical times, to find her personality and to be self-reliant.

Sofia is another example that Celie had found, who taught her a profound, helpful and inspiring lesson and oriented her to the right way in order to establish her identity and liberate herself. Sofia is depicted as the huge woman who sets her own principles in life and sticks to them tightly. For example, she strongly believes that fighting is the only way to survive and the only method that can be followed to keep her personality and to be safe. She gets involved in many troubles with different members of her family to preserve her identity and to show her fixed beliefs. The following quotation undoubtedly reflects Sofia's life and the kind of family that she grew up with. She believes that to be born a girl child isn't safe in a family of men.

Celie and Sofia are utterly different in this regard for Celie does not have the capability to show her personality and to confront hardships. Instead, she prefers to be marginalized and be silent during the time of suffering. On the other hand, Sofia is a strong and confident woman .She rejects the tyrannizing social conditions and refuses to be mistreated by any person. She attempts to show her independent personality and to establish her own life. In this regard, she fights the white and black people in order to gain her rights. She does not accept to be subordinate while Mr. Albert was humiliating her. This gives men the message that she is unlike other women, and she is ready to defend her personality whatever the cost. For example, she reacts against the abuse and humiliation she received from the mayor by hitting him back. This reaction is shocking to Celie because this is the first time that she sees a woman with a full rebellious spirit rejecting humiliation. So, Sofia is a role model for Celie because she encourages her to look for her identity and to retaliate against violence and create her own free life and personality.

Celie is indeed amazed by the self- determined, confident and strong personality of Sofia. Celie sees Sofia for the first time when Sofia comes asking Mr. Albert to marry his son, Harpo. She is shorter than Abert's son, Harpo, but she is huge. This quotation indicates Celie's impression of Sofia "like her mama brought her up on pork." (*The Color Purple*, p.30)

The idea of man's dominance is embodied in the personality of Mr. Albert. So, he objects to the marriage of Sofia and Harpo to take place and she refuses to bow down to his wishes as he intends to subdue her. Before leaving Mr. Albert's house, she tells Harpo that she cannot keep on her relation with him unless he lives freely and is able to make a decision alone. This situation impresses Celie greatly since she sees the bravery and strength of Sofia. Also, this reaction affects the typical image of women in society that Celie is familiar with. Sofia married Harpo irrespective of his father's refusal.

At the beginning, they live comfortably and safely. Moreover, Harpo does not represent the image of the black man, whose main feature is dominance, but instead he helps his wife in all of the house chores, such as taking care of the fireplace and washing clothes. They live happily together, but this kind of relation is banned in a society that believes in subordination and segregation between the two genders, as seen when Mr. Albert instigates his son to hit his wife because he totally refuses to have a confident and liberated female in his family. Moreover, Celie is like Mr. Albert. She is surprised to see a cooperative man with his wife because she has been fed with the idea of suppression and submission, so she too encourages Harpo to beat her in order to make her bend to his wishes. Sofia is outraged when she

realizes that Celie is the one who roused Harpo to deal with her severely and she considers it as a kind of betrayal. Also, she expresses the feeling of sorrow to see a woman completely supporting a man against another woman. Shocked by Celie's discovery, she asks her about the reason behind this kind of mistreatment and in her response, Celie expresses jealousy that Sofia can do whatever she likes without hesitation and with no regard to the consequences of her actions. In comparison, Celie wonders why she cannot behave in the same way and this motivates and inspires her to think deeply of changing her lifestyle and to rebel against the violence that she suffers from in her life. She starts to believe in her power and ability to make her voice heard.

Sofia understands that Celie is harshly abused in this environment by Mr. Albert, so, she advised Celie to face Mr. Albert to stop his violence against her. After that, both of them begin to understand each other and they talk frankly about their miserable experiences which shape the turning point of their speech. Sofia told Celie that she was mistreated by her family, but she did not surrender to their wills and she kept on defending herself to have her own right. She informed Celie that the social system forces women to be subordinate to men and women should resist this system which deprives them of having their basic rights, like education. So, Sofia gives Celie an important message that is: a woman can stand alone away from man's help. And, she can

be independent, confident, motivated, and have self-determination. This speech enlightens and comforts Celie which paves the way in front of Celie toward liberation and to live freely.

Moreover, Baga (2010) elaborately explained the role of Shug who is considered as the most important figure since she lends a hand to Celie to gain her freedom. Their relationship is completely different from the relationship with the two previously mentioned characters. Actually, Nettie is an example of trust that motivates Celie to stay alive, while Sofia embodies the image of disobedience that stimulates Celie to defend herself to get her rights and to set herself free. But, Shug stands for passion and sexuality. She is considered as a lustful woman who is also the sweetheart of Mr. Albert. She later becomes the best friend to Celie. She acts as the guide or mother who has a great impact on Celie, encouraging her to look for her lost identity, confidence and freedom and to be self-reliant. She motivates her to reject all shapes of slavery and discrimination.

Shug plays a significant role in Celie's transformation. She embodies the figure of the mother who looks after her children and tries to keep them safe from the surroundings. She is considered as the mentor who orientates

Celie to the right way to get rid of the awful conditions that she used to have. Shug helps Celie to establish her own personality and find her liberty.

Celie sees Shug for the first time in a picture. Mentally, Celie sees her as the prettiest girl that she has ever seen. Celie keeps on drawing a mental picture of Shug in her mind for many years till she has the chance to meet Shug for the first time when she is brought to stay with them since she is seriously ill. Celie shows willingness to take care of her till her health gets better. This situation clearly shows Celie's pity and kindness. In return, Shug decides to write a song "Miss Celie's song" to show her feelings and thankfulness toward Celie. This is the first time in which Celie is shown appreciation and it makes her feel that there is something missing in her life. This is expressed in the following quotation

"[this is the] first time somebody made something and name it after me." (*The Color Purple*, p.65) The song is considered as the spark that ignites their relationship. By having such a relationship, Celie is provided with the support she needs that enables her to confront Mr. Albert and to go against his will.

In order to survive, Celie has to forget her body, personality and soul. In this respect, if a woman feels disconnected to her body, it will enable her to survive being exploited by the male and being placed in the inferior position.

In comparison, after she has a relation to Shug, she confirms her body and Celie is encouraged to experience physical intimacy with Shug which leaves a great impact on Celie. In the next day, Celie feels that she has become a different person because of having an emotional connection with someone which makes her live in a new world.

The relation that grows between the two characters is both natural and sentimental, since Celie has never known love with anyone before. The most important point that Shug achieves is that she throws the light on making Celie know her own body which shapes the essential way to look for freedom and to recreate her destroyed identity. If Celie is able to realize and discover the features of her body, she will be interested in finding out the selfhood.

Shug is a clever woman who enjoys a distinctive feature, which is listening to the problems of the people and using her abilities to comfort them. In this regard, she asks Celie to tell her about her troubles which in turn gives Celie a chance to get rid of her pains. Celie unburdens herself freely and without tension for the first time after years of being silent. Celie expresses her view in one of her letters where she clarifies that her life is destroyed and

she is humiliated once she gets to Mr. Albert's house, but with the presence of Shug she starts to feel that her life is vivid and more interesting because she has found the person who understands and supports her. So, her friendship with Celie gives her the needed power to encounter difficulties expressing that "My life stop when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stop with Mr. Albert maybe, but start up again with Shug." (*The Color Purple*, p. 85)

One of the most important elements that *The Color Purple* throws light on is the theme of spiritual liberation since it is the reflection of self-determination and self-reliance. At the beginning of the story, Celie has an image of God based on the Bible's description that He is white and old. She sticks to the teachings of the Bible performing the rituals according to it. She follows the teachings of God thinking that he will help her overcome all the catastrophic situations that surround her and this makes her isolated and marginalized.

However, she does not believe in God any more since He is responsible for all the problems and violence that she is facing. Moreover, she proclaims that God treats her in the same way that white people treat her, so she tries to get rid of the patriarchal system in order to be free spiritually. Celie's belief in God is affected by Shug's description of God. Shug attempts to create a new understanding of God. Shug does not believe in the church depiction of God

because she thinks that church does not give a full image about God, so she decides to have her own realization of God. Shug's interpretation makes the protagonist realize that love, appreciation and enjoyment of beauty are the ultimate goals of life. By following Shug, Celie is able to get over the patriarchal God and to enjoy life from her own point of view.

In addition to spiritual liberation, financial liberation is also very important for women since it is the source of power and authority that enable women to live freely and helps them to gain their rights and to be safe in this life. So, money is used as a tool of power where women can establish their own lifestyle and build their personality in the way they like. *The color Purple* is the novel that depicts the poverty of Celie as the reason behind the catastrophic and miserable consequences that Celie encounters which causes her sorrowful status in society. Celie is banned from having anything or doing anything by Mr. Albert. She works every day in the farm with Harpo but the harvest proceeds belong to Mr. Albert. He intentionally does not pay her a wage to show her that she is enslaved to him and he exploits her for his greedy interests.

Unfortunately, Celie is an illiterate woman who was forbidden from going to school or to receive an education, but she is a clever woman, who uses her skills in designing pants. As a result, Celie is motivated by Shug to

leave her husband's house and to look for her independence. Shug encourages her because she is very sure that Celie has the ability to stand alone if she takes advantage of her skills in making pants, so this will provide her with the financial and social power which leads her to have her liberation and confidence and to find her lost identity. Consequently, she leaves Mr. Albert's house who threatens to not give her any help if she leaves. Celie moves to live in Memphis. There she sets up her own business with the help of Shug where she is able to make money. She really respects Shug who guides her on how to liberate herself from the oppression of her father and Mr. Albert. And then, she expands her workshop to have a garment company "Folks pants Unlimited Company".

If a woman is economically free, she can be free in every aspect of her life like having her own ideas, personality, and relying on herself. Moreover, Celie is a girl who exploits her creativity to establish her own job and she uses her ability and her own taste to design clothes, so this reflects her inner beauty and self-confidence.

After this Celie becomes an independent woman which marks the turning point in her life and creates a positive situation for her and this makes her feel that she is born once again since she is able to fulfill her dream to be an independent female. She is satisfied with herself since she has regained her

stolen personality and confidence. This business gives her a chance to emancipate herself and to have a close look at the world which relieves her and makes her reshape the image of the surroundings.

Hence, this novel carries a clear message for white and black females who suffer from violence and discrimination; that they have to believe in their abilities and to trust that they can change the miserable situation and that they can get rid of the patriarchal system that men have imposed upon them and caused sadness and sorrow for them. In this concern, Walker did not only write the novel to give a voice for women but also to guide them to the right way that they have to follow to regain their liberation. Moreover, she explains the main steps that they can adopt in order to have freedom, whether economic, spiritual or physical freedom.

4.4. Letter Writing: as a Necessary Step to Freedom

The novel of Alice Walker is written in the epistolary form that was well-known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though this type was not popular as a means of writing in African American literature during the 19th century, it widely flourished in the late 20th century which was called the age of renaissance of the female African writers of America. Some writers

composed their novels basically depending on writing letters like Sherley Anne Williams and Alice Walker.

The epistolary novel is a genre or a style that is based on writing letters as a tool of narration. This kind of genre is particularly used by females first as a kind of protest against the stereotype of preventing women from expressing themselves, and second to reflect their inner feelings toward any issue like fighting for their rights or showing their rejection of the unfair treatment they received from men where society deprived them from basic rights like education.

Walker intentionally uses this kind of writing style aiming at rising up the voice of the poor women, especially the African American women since they suffer in their societies not only in the U.S.A but also in other countries. She attempts to use this kind of literature to pave the ground for women to express their feelings and to explain their issues for other communities hoping to find someone to hear their voice and help them.

Samuel Richardson is considered the most prominent novelist who wrote in the epistolary literary form. His celebrated novel, *Clarissa*, is constructed in a way that shows the communication taking place between different characters of the novel that reflect their inner thoughts and psychological states. (Campbell, 1995)

One of the distinguishing features of this form of novel is that the reader feels that the characters are not characters but real people since they behave naturally, showing their real intimate feelings in their letters which should not really be read by others. Thus when we read the letters of the two sisters, Nettie and Celie, we see them as real. Even the language used in writing the letters is colloquial and reflects the psychological states of the characters. Moreover, this form gives the reader the chance to follow the development and changes in the personality and the life of the characters, in particular the different stages that the protagonist experiences from being humiliated to being liberated.

Celie prefers to express herself by writing letters to stand against her step-father. Celie is a character without power who does not have the authority to assert her personality, but amazingly, Celie does not show a sense of despair and decides to document her difficulties and suffering in writing letters to her sister which is considered as a kind of rebellion against the current situation.

Some people may ask themselves how the uneducated female who was once banned from going to school has the ability to write letters to express herself. Yet, this is not completely impossible since with her sister's assistance, Celie is taught to write. The reader who reads Celie's letters will

easily understand that they are written in vernacular. He/ She will observe that there are so many mistakes in Celie's writings. But that does not matter at all, since the significant thing is her capability to write using her own words which relieves her.

Significantly, Celie promised herself and her step-father not to inform anyone about the sexual abuse by her step-father except God. Celie decides to write letters to challenge her step-father who raped her many times. This kind of writing is considered as a revolt against those who mistreated her frequently and tried to marginalize her and silence her. So, these letters are considered as the sign that breaks the silence and guides her to the world of liberation.

Writing is a very important skill that is used as a means of transferring somebody's sufferings. Celie prefers to write when she does not find anyone to trust or to be honest with to tell him about her pains. She was banned from going to school by her fake father who uses her for his own interests. More than that, her mother passed away and Nettie who is a close person to her has run away from home to avoid being raped by her step-father. All these catastrophic circumstances lead Celie to mistrust all people except God, till Sofia and Shug become her close friends and assist her.

By using her writing and her persistence, she is able to cope with the hardships that she faces and can turn the isolation and segregation of the life of slavery into glories. Thus in *the Color Purple*, the novelist throws light on the power of writing that gives the protagonist the will to fight back against oppression. Like the author, Celie is an Afro-American woman who has the ability to stay alive in spite of the problems by the power of writing.

When a person practices writing, he intends to relieve himself psychologically and mentally. He writes sincerely since there is no reason for him to lie to himself. In this regard, Celie writes letters in order to heal her feelings and her psychological state from the harm of the closest people who lived with her. Even though writing letters does not stop her sufferings and pains, but it provides her with the required power and energy in order to eliminate and manage the grief and sadness which isolate her from the other world where she is indeed able to recreate her personality and to live normally like others having hopes and wishes for a prosperous life. So, writing gives Celie the opportunity to be aware of all the circumstances of her own life.

In addition, Celie is able to create a world of her own by her writings, which is not like the world where she really lives that is full of oppression. In this world, she is free to do whatever she likes. This guides her to search for freedom and to reject segregation and oppression and to understand her

situation and how she can set herself free. Therefore, writing becomes a tool for rebuilding her personality and identity.

Chapter Five

5.1 Conclusion

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a novel that wonderfully reconstructs the identity of a new black woman, Celie, who totally changes from being abused due to patriarchy to be independent.

Celie, a black poor and uneducated girl, is able to recreate her environment. She is an ambitious character that influences the readers by her strength, determination, faith and courage. From the basis of the womanist perspective, it shows that female solidarity is one of the important factors that women really need in order to become liberated.

Nettie, Sofia and Shug help Celie a lot in gaining her freedom. Nettie has a double task as sister and teacher of teaching Celie how to write which is her only outlet to express her feelings and sufferings. Sofia has the function of being a mentor for Celie. In fact, with her rebellious spirit, she exerts a critical effect on Celie's understanding. The strength and bravery of Sofia makes Celie become aware that a woman can be independent, strong and courageous, and that keeps her safe from being insulted and paves the way for a new free self.

Shug's initiation of Celie to the wonder of the body is one of the main steps that enable Celie to set herself free. By discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate a desire for self-discovery. Seeing her own body in the mirror makes her understand the features of her own body and to feel her existence which leads her to think of her personality and identity. In other words, Celie is able to get over of the stereotype of women's subordination by female bonding which gives her the unlimited power to fulfill her own gorgeous victory to be freed spiritually, physically and economically. Shug's concept of God makes Celie understand that the most significant thing in life is love, admiration and enjoyment of the beauty and happiness of life. Celie becomes more confident and she determines to fight.

Thus, we can see that the vision of Walker's womanism is achieved in the personality of Celie. Walker focuses on recreating the personality of the inferior class of society especially the blacks. (Tucker, 1988) Celie is a woman who is grown from being a humiliated girl into a responsible woman with the help of other women, regaining her stolen identity and running her own business.

Moreover, the idea of solidarity and writing are the most impressive steps that effectively contribute in the process of Celie's freedom. Writing plays the role of therapy for Celie. Through the letters, Celie starts to

understand what is happening to her. She starts to question herself and her situation. Her bonding relationship is not less important than writing which inspired her to seek freedom in all aspects of her life. Expressing herself is like a therapist who tries to heal the patient's wounds, spiritually and psychologically after a destructive experience and gives Celie the power to manage and control the painful moments she goes through. Letters are practically the means of structuring Celie's identity.

In her world of letters, Celie enjoys a sort of freedom never tasted before and that helps her to understand the humiliating condition she lives in and leads her to start thinking of the possibility of adopting this freedom into her real life.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker provides a pattern where men and women establish ideal relationships. Her message and vision are that women have all the powerful elements that enable them to stand up against the violence of men through supporting each other called solidarity. The women in the novel, even those who have interests in the same men, nevertheless bond together to support and sustain one another throughout the novel. People who used to suffer and struggle ultimately succeed and win the happiness they deserve.

Thus *The Color Purple* does not only exhort black women but all other oppressed women in the world to live an independent life both physically and economically. In order to be free from patriarchal domination and establish harmonious relationships with men, women should learn how to be independent through their own efforts and keep on fighting against the prejudice and the patriarchal domination of men, so Evans (1984) stated that “...Walker is able to have her major character Celie to express the impact of oppression on her spirit as well as her growing internal strength and final victory” (P. 469). This statement shows that after the long time of fighting Celie is able to achieve liberation which is considered as an exemplary and echoing voice for all women.

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