

## Development of the Protagonist ‘Celie’ in Alice Walker’s ‘The Color Purple’

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**ABSTRACT:** *The African-American female writers wrote about the conditions or situations of women in the Black society. Alice Walker also followed the other women writers in writing about the conditions of women in the society. The novel The Color Purple also examines the situation of the Black women in the society. In this society women are always considered as inferior to men. They were always dominated by the male members of the society. Most of the characters in this novel face the problem of racism, oppression and discrimination. But things do not remain the same way. The submissive and voiceless character in the novel suddenly develops and becomes an independent strong character.*

*This paper examines the changes and development in the character of Celie. How she realized herself and found her own identity, the bond of friendship and other things are discussed here.*

**KEYWORDS:** *African-American women writers, oppression, bonding, development, identity.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker is born to the family of sharecroppers in Eatonton, Georgia. She is the winner of Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and also the winner of American Book Award for fiction. It is written in the epistolary form. African-American women writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and many others mainly wrote about Black women in the society. They can relate themselves to those stories which they write. It may be because as a woman these African-American writers had to face many problems to expand their literary works. And they started to express themselves freely through their works. These works portray their struggle and growth in the literary activities. They also write about race, gender and class and if we look deeply into the matter, these women writers relate the things to their past. The past of the African people related to slavery. The way they are abused or tortured by the White people and here the Black women became an object in the hand of the White people. Women have to face most of the problems. They are discriminated because of their race and also they are treated badly because they are women.

Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* shows how Black women are dominated in their own society. Oppression is the major problem in the society. Women should always follow the traditions of the society. She is not allowed to break the rules and search for her own independent life. But all the characters in the novel do not become the victim of the society. Some women try to protest against their society and they are often called as ‘bad woman’ by the people.

Bonding among the women help them to change their lives gradually and in this way development in the submissive character can be seen. With the help of friendship among the women, the weak character establishes their own identity and realizes their own self. So this paper examines how in this novel the character of Celie develops with the help of the strong character like Shug Avery.

**Development of Celie:** The novel begins with the character of Celie as a very submissive character who is dominated by the male members in the society. The novel begins with the line ‘You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy’ and from this sentence it is clear that someone is threatening not to tell anyone about the things that have happened with the person. And the character is Celie who is being threatened by her father. Celie is fourteen years old when the novel begins and she is abused physically and mentally by her stepfather. And she could not protest anything but she has to bear it all silently. The character of Celie clearly depicts how women in the society are treated by the male members. The male characters in the novel always try to dominate the female characters. The characters like Celie and Squeak can be called as submissive characters. But there are also female characters who protest against the society for their own identity. The position of women in the society is such that women should always restrict themselves within the boundary of their house. They should look after the house, take care of the children and husband and do everything to please the family members. And if someone tries to cross this boundary they are called different names in the male dominated

society. Such types of characters in these novels are Nettie, Shug Avery and Sofia. These characters play important roles in the development of the character of Celie.

The first character that encourages Celie to protest against her situation is her sister Nettie. Celie is married to Mr\_. Mr\_ actually wanted to marry Nettie but their stepfather did not allow Nettie to marry. So he gave Celie to Mr\_. And Mr\_ treats Celie very badly. Not only Mr\_ but the children also treat her very badly and Nettie is aware of all those things that are taking place in the house of Mr\_. Harpo, the son of Mr\_ also treats Celie badly and he even hit her head with a stone. According to Alice Walker, "But she keep on. You got to fight. You got to fight" (*The Color Purple* 18). Here Nettie is encouraging Celie to protest against her situations. But no changes can be seen in Celie's character. She remains the one who is always submissive, bear the abuses and look after the house. After Nettie, the characters who encourage Celie to protest are the sisters of Mr\_. And after them comes Sofia, Harpo's wife who try to teach Celie to change her attitude towards life. But Celie remains the same.

The turning point of Celie's life comes when she meet Shug Avery. Shug Avery is the one whom Mr\_ wanted to marry earlier but his father didn't like her and so he had to marry his first wife with whom he had four children. Now after many years they met again. Shug Avery used to sing around and she has come to their town now. She is called 'The Queen Honeybee' by the people. She is suffering from some disease and there is no one to look after her. So one day Mr\_ went out of his house and brought Shug Avery with him. Celie really admired Shug Avery but Shug's behavior towards Celie was not good. According to Alice Walker, "You sure is ugly, she say, like she ain't believed it"(44). Shug did not like Celie because she is ugly and Celie herself believes it. But Celie started to take care of Shug Avery and gradually a good bond developed between the two. Shug Avery started to dedicate song to celie and for the first time she felt really good. She also taught Celie to love herself and in this way some changes could be seen in her character. Celie told Shug that her husband used to beat her and does not treat her well and Shug promised that she would not leave her alone. Here Shug Avery is as a strong character, she does not care for the society rather she tries to develop her own identity in the male dominated society. She has been called different names by the society for her character but she did not even care. And one day she decided to take Celie away from her husband. Everyone in the family is shocked that Celie spoke for herself.

For the first time Celie says, "You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (180). This sentence shows the change in Celie's character. Earlier she had no voice to reply to her husband's words but now she had the courage to speak directly. Here it is clear that she does not like her husband and wants to leave him. She wants to be free from those bondings and want to see the world with the person who loves her and respects her.

So the new life of Celie begins with Shug Avery in Memphis, where she realized herself fully and learned to be happy. She also learnt to make pants and her pants became so famous that later she decided to begin it as a business. She started loving herself and also she loved Shug Avery very much. After she came from Memphis she found some changes in the character of Mr\_. Earlier he used to abuse her, never treated her like a human being but now gradually a bond developed between Mr\_ and Celie. Celie could not bear when Shug falls in love with another man. But Celie learned to accept the reality and tried to live her life. Later Mr\_ again proposed Celie but she wanted to remain as a friend with him.

After Nettie went away from Celie's home she did not received any letters from Nettie. But with the help of Shug Avery, Celie found that the letters were hidden by Mr\_. Towards the last part of the novel Nettie also comes back home. Finally we noticed some changes in the character of the protagonist. The weak and submissive character changed to an independent one.

## II. CONCLUSION

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* shows the situation of women in the Black society and the oppression they have to face in their daily life. One should not always stick to one's problems but they should try to change themselves in every way possible. Changes may be possible if we find a true person who really wanted to do good to the needful person. And here it can be clearly seen how with the help of Shug Avery the character of Celie changed towards the last part of the novel.

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