

Research Article

Condition of Women in the Works of Alice Walker During the Post-Colonial Era

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Abstract

This review paper explores the impactful literary contributions of Alice Walker, focusing on her portrayal of the struggles faced by African American women in the post-colonial era. Alice Walker, known as the primary author of subaltern literature, delves into themes of racism, sexism, feminism, and womanism, shedding light on the intersecting oppressions experienced by Black women. Through an analysis of Walker's seminal works such as "The Color Purple," "Meridian," and "Possessing the Secret of Joy," this paper examines the emotional and physical traumas endured by her characters, including Celie, Meridian Hill, and Tashi. The narrative framework of Walker's novels, often utilizing epistolary styles, provides a unique lens through which to explore the complexities of identity, cultural expectations, and societal norms. Furthermore, Walker's portrayal of resilience, strength, and the unbreakable spirit of her female characters serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggles for social justice and women's rights. Through her literature, Walker challenges readers to confront systemic injustices and work towards a more equitable and inclusive society. This review paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender, highlighting the enduring relevance of Walker's writings in contemporary discourse on marginalized voices and societal transformation.

Keywords

Women, Women Condition, Celie, Alice Walker, The Color Purple, Post-Colonial Era, Feminism, Womanism

1. Introduction

The primary author of subaltern literature has been Alice Walker. She had continued to be the dominant figure in black literature. She is an activist, as is well known. She truly fought against the tragedy of African and American mothers and children [1]. There are several topics including racism in America, including political difficulties. She touched on the topics of sexism, feminism, and racism [2].

In all of the Black Literature, Walker ignores the subject of slavery because Slavery, Child Labor, and Women's Enslavement are so deeply ingrained in Black Literature [3].

Women are not simply physically exploited in slavery. However, Alice Walker bravely described how their Owners exploited the ladies while they were in slavery. The whole family was sold to various Owners in several colonies; for example, a man was sold to one owner, a lady to another, and children to the others. The family left in a saddening dispersion in this manner. For a very long time, they were unable to meet. The man had to share a home with another female, and the female had to share a home with another male—not their husbands or wives. As a result, their lives experienced their

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darkest moments [4].

Due to slavery and the circumstances of racial suppression, there were no sexual bondages or one-on-one relationships. It seems as if a true representation of Black women in those times is being shown [5]. In this manner, Walker had continued to be the best author in both American and international literature. According to the American Literary Societies, she had produced the most writings in black literature. The value of her own elaborations in the literary work of art, however, is what matters most of all [6]. In an artistic fashion, she expounded on her own life experiences, identity struggles, societal injustices, and much more. She received accolades from the American Literary Society for how she presented racism, sexism, and womanism [7].

Walker prompted readers to consider the place of women in society. The human existence is equally impressed by the male and female personalities. However, because to male chauvinism, women were never given any room, significance, or respect in the patriarchal culture. They were usually taken for granted since they only had one gender, which was feminine [8]. In general, it seems that sexism and womanism are pervasive, whether in America or India, and that women must suffer in any country [9].

“Most cultures place a strong emphasis on personal, sexual, and reproductive life, which is a recurring issue in cultural customs and laws. Many times, “personal law”—the rules governing marriage, divorce, child custody, the division and management of family property, and inheritance—is of special interest to religious or cultural groups. Since substantially more of a higher amount of a woman's time and energy goes into protecting and sustaining the personal, family, and reproductive side of life, it has a far greater influence on the lives of women and girls than those of men and boys” [10].

Alice Walker criticizes all oppressed civilizations and the oppressors from an intellectual standpoint. In reality, it is study into abolishment [11]. In this chapter, her literary career is discussed along with a definition of womanism in Afro-American culture. Additionally, it outlines the study's goals and objectives as well as its limits and field of study.

2. Celie’s Trauma in ‘The Color Purple’

“The Color Purple,” one of Alice Walker's most well-known books, is set in the early 20th century and depicts the lives of African American women in the south of the country [12]. The story recounts the journey of Celie, a young black woman who lives in a patriarchal and racist culture and experiences extreme violence and injustice. The physical and mental violence Celie experiences from her father and then her husband demonstrates the vulnerability and helplessness many women went through at the period [13].

Walker highlights the challenges of black women during the postcolonial period, when the echoes of slavery and racism continued to impact their lives, by exploring the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class through the experi-

ences of Celie and other female characters [14].

Walker's epistolary novel “The Color Purple” is widely recognized as his most popular and highly praised book. The book describes the difficult existence of a young African-American lady in the early twentieth century in the South. The African-American woman's unique identity is examined in *The Color Purple*, as well as how embracing it and developing relationships with other women improve the general wellbeing of her community [15]. Its depiction of Black males has drawn criticism from certain reviewers, but overall, critics and readers have praised the book, which won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. *The Color Purple*, a 1985 motion picture directed by director Stephen Spielberg, was nominated for eleven Oscars, including best picture by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [16].

Walker has received great acclaim from feminist reviewers for his graphic depiction of the violence that women have experienced throughout time, but others have suggested that the novel's cheerful conclusion trivializes the offenses committed by the female protagonist and is at odds with reality [17]. In contrast, other reviews have praised the book's happy conclusion, insisting that it is not in violation of feminist ideals but rather advances the notion that a woman, particularly one who is surrounded by a supportive community of women, can triumph over hardship [18]. *The Color Purple* is a 30-year narrative of brutality, incest, and forgiveness that begins in Georgia in the early 1900s. Through the letters that Celie sends to none other than GOD, Walker illustrates the emotional and physical status of her main character Celie. The Black English, folk dialect Celie uses to describe her situation is flawed, yet the opening passages of *The Color Purple* conjure images of Afro-American enslavement thanks to its lyrical rhythm. Celie, a young woman of fourteen, thinks she is unattractive [19]. She tells the story of her sexual assault and trauma. She is kept alive by her own father because he manipulates her and tells her not to speak out; this is before she even writes her first letter to God [20].

Due to her illness, Celie's mother is unable to satisfy Pa's sexual urge, and Pa continues to brutally assault Celie. She therefore became pregnant, and now that she's huge and heavy, she can't move. Celie is given to a widower as a commodity since she is of no use, and Mr. A Pa tells him that Celie will work for him like a cow. To make matters worse for Celie, her second husband is also a miserable person like Celie's father. By hitting his wife and kids, he gauges how manly he is. Celie is more oppressed while also receiving slave-like treatment and torture [21]. Although racial injustice has long existed in the black community, domestic or sexual violence against women is not a recent problem. The patriarchal culture endorses and condones beating of the wife, which worsens her situation. Every culture in the world accepts this kind of aggression. Celie is also useless and stubborn, bearing her husband's harshness with a certain amount of stoicism like a bearer of burden but having no power to stop sexual coloni-

alism. Her main priority is to survive. She doesn't currently seem to have any options for fighting back [22].

Celie wants to be loved and cared for as a person. In the letters she writes to God and then to her younger sister Nettie, Walker records her silence. Nettie's letters help her regain her sense of herself, which she had previously lost. Shug Avery is the agent who guides her into independence. She is the one who acts as a catalyst for Celie's transformation. Celie is brought out of her dire situation by Shug Avery, who teaches her to appreciate and cherish her body [23]. Celie was compelled to behave like a stereotypical woman in order to comply with societal and patriarchal norms because of her crippled sense of negation or non-entity. Sophia, Harpo's wife, bonds with Celie in a similar way. Sophia, who is intelligent, free, and independent, rejects giving in to Harpo's demands and dominance. Celie admires her daughter-in-law and picks up the vocabulary of resistance and protest as she supports Celie in her metamorphosis [24].

The life of Celie, an African American woman who is battling to find her own identity, is the subject of *The Color Purple* in great detail. Celie had to overcome many obstacles as a black girl growing up in the Deep South in the 1940s before she could establish herself as an independent lady [25]. Celie is shown as being at the absolute bottom of the social order throughout the whole novel. She experiences prejudice not just from white people but also from all black males throughout her life, including her stepfather and her husband. She gets assaulted and sexually assaulted by the guy she thinks is her father right away. She had two kids with him, but she is abruptly separated from them. She is compelled to marry Mr., an elderly widower with four rambunctious kids, after giving birth to her second child. Sadly, she has not changed much in her adult life from her upbringing. She is solely appreciated as a family caregiver and a sex slave for Mr. She continues to experience the same level of brutality and abuse that her stepfather previously subjected her to. It is clear that Celie cannot anywhere in the world exercise her fundamental human rights to self-determination, safety from harm, and bodily autonomy [26].

The epistolary, or letter-writing, style of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* creates a unique narrative framework. Although authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used this kind of narrative structure often, it is seldom used in works of literature nowadays. In the course of the narrative, Celie encounters a number of different black women who aid in her quest for identity. She manages to overcome all obstacles thanks to her close bonds with the other four black ladies in her extended family. Shug Nettie, Sofia, Squeak, each of them provides Celie with motivation and moral support in some capacity so that she may successfully undergo the transformation from a scared young girl to a successful businesswoman in the end. In this book, strong, direct female characters are shown in a favorable light [27]. Women stand up for their honor, families, and rights, provide for the ill, destitute, and unworthy, strive to support their families, and

prevent moral deterioration in society. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, which depicts strong female connections, has come to be known as one of the most well-known modern feminist stories [28].

3. Hardships Faced by Meridian Hill in the Work 'Meridian'

For both African American women and non-African American feminist academics, Walker's work has played a significant role in recognizing and defining African American women's ideas. She came up with the word "womanism" in 1983, and it came to characterize African American feminism for a huge number of African American women who were striving to find their own identities both inside and outside of the white-dominated feminist movement. This phrase is still used to characterize contemporary feminism held by women of African origin, and it refers to the historical appreciation of the works, views, and experiences of Black women [29].

A college student in Atlanta named Meridian Hill is looking for her role in the movement for racial and social equality. She learns the boundaries beyond which she will not go for the cause, but she chooses not to take some of her classmates' advice and still makes big sacrifices for her views. Meridian, who works in a drive to register African Americans to vote, has a wide and sincere concern for the people she meets, and despite being paralyzed by sickness, she continues to work in the deep South while her colleagues resign and relocate to more comfortable houses. Even though they may appear less radical than those of others, Meridian's peaceful tactics work well to further her views [30].

The American South in the 1960s and early 1970s is where Meridian is situated. Meridian, the protagonist, is a black lady from a southern community. After being married, giving birth to a kid, divorcing, and sending her child away, she finds employment in a voter registration drive, pushing African-Americans to register. Meridian connects with people as unique individuals rather than applying generalizations to them, which sets her apart from her coworkers. For instance, Meridian sits and converses with black families while others educate them on the need of voting, attempting to meet their most basic needs of food, warmth, and compassion [31].

Her coworkers leave their jobs and relocate to nice homes as the years go by. She relocates farther south, living in whatever accommodations the community can provide in return for her ongoing service on their behalf. Meridian often experiences partial paralysis after the staging of a rally or other event. She becomes worse and sicker. She considers the history of her people and her place in that history as a halo-like light envelops her head. She eventually recovers and relocates to the next little town [32].

Walker's topics often challenge black Americans' current realities, notably those of black women, as well as their cultural, social, and political past. Meridian was one of her works

that attracted a lot of criticism [33]. The majority of critiques center on Meridian's existential dilemma, emotional struggle, and postponed self. Donna Krolik Hollenberg said the following about Meridian in *Melus*:

the tale of a young black woman's struggle throughout the 1960s Civil Rights Movement to discover who she was. Although the legacy of black women in sexist, racist America is the novel's main topic, it also explores the boundaries of inter-racial interactions between Blacks and Jews, two other minority groups [34].

He makes the argument that Meridian's pursuit of personal development offers an alternative to the 1960s political movement. Walker participated in the Civil Rights Movement personally, as shown by Meridian in the book. As Karen Stein highlights in her article on Meridian:

The story makes the observation that patriarchal capitalism's oppressiveness was often represented in the Civil Rights Movement. Activists just used the political meteor for their own purposes while keeping the concept of spontaneous uniqueness under control. Walker looks for a new meaning of revolution to counteract this destructiveness. Her desire for a decent society is rooted in human transformation rather than simply governmental reform [35].

Walker aims to capture the struggles and reality faced by black women. Her goal is to highlight the hopes and setbacks of individuals who have been marginalized and pushed to the side. According to Lynn Pifer in the *African-American Review*:

For instance, Meridian's own mother is an unhappy parent who only manages to follow tradition by repressing her own feelings. She believes that other moms have deceived her. Another casualty is Nelda, a childhood friend of Meridian's who planned to go college but never completed high school after becoming a mother at the age of 14. Fast Mary's pregnancy causes her to commit suicide, and the weight of her growing Wild Child makes it difficult for her to avoid being hit by a vehicle and killed in the process [36].

Whatever the case, black feminist scholars have emphasized Meridian's personal growth and salvation while focusing on her struggle as a transition from adolescence to adulthood. Black women are often stereotyped as being nothing more than machines for producing children, and Meridian seeks to combat this idea by giving her kid away and enrolling in college. This is one of the novel's key topics. Barbara Christian writes about this in this context:

Because society values motherhood in theory but rejects individual mothers as human beings with wants and aspirations in practice, moms must respect their function even when it comes with negative consequences. In addition to being celebrated for becoming moms, they are also demonized as baby factories that spout society's ills at random [37].

In Walker's book, she talks on the interdependence of personal and social development. Like other black women

authors, Walker is a political writer who aspires for her writing to have an impact on society. A young black girl coming of age in the violent 1960s South and her engagement with the Civil Rights Movement are unquestionably realistic, says Lindsey Tucker in her opinion, although politics and racism are major issues. He emphasizes her efforts in the Civil Rights Movement to transform society. Many reviewers highlight Meridian's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent personal development. Regarding this, Roberta M. Hendrickson state:

Meridian is more than just a book about the Civil Rights Movement; it is a book about the Civil Rights Movement. Walker addressed the social, political, and philosophical questions brought up by the Movement—issues that still preoccupy us today—using her experience in the movement and the experience of others from her generation [38].

He focuses on the movement that reinforced African Americans' shared history of oppression and their relationship to one another as a people. Even if there is disagreement among the reviewers on many elements of this book, the aforementioned critique was unable to capture Meridian's true essence. Therefore, this thesis seeks to ascertain when Meridian Hill awakens in Alice Walker's *Meridian* [39].

4. Emotional and Physical Struggle of Tashi in 'Possessing the Secret of Joy'

In Alice Walker's novel "Possessing the Secret of Joy," which portrays the harsh realities many women encounter in patriarchal societies, Tashi, an African woman from the Olinka tribe, has significant mental and physical difficulties. The story focuses on Tashi's journey as she struggles with her identity, cultural expectations, and the ramifications of female genital mutilation, which she suffered in order to uphold her tribe's customs [40].

Emotional Difficulties

1. Cultural identification: Because she is torn between her Olinka heritage and the Westernized world she encounters as a result of her marriage to an American man, Tashi suffers with cultural identity. As a consequence of this internal conflict, she starts to question her place in both worlds, which makes her feel distant and alienated.
2. Repressed Trauma: Tashi, a victim of female genital mutilation (FGM), must carry the psychological burden of this heinous incident within her. Her psyche is influenced by the pain and suffering of the process, and she struggles to cope with feelings of betrayal, loss of control over her body, and violation.
3. Domestic Unrest: The psychological ramifications of FGM, which make Tashi emotionally aloof and detached, lead her marriage to deteriorate. Her inability to fully express her emotions and experiences makes her emotional difficulties worse and causes a rift in her marriage.

4. Stressed Mother-Daughter connection: The FGM Tashi underwent has had a profound effect on her relationship with her daughter. She is concerned about her daughter's safety and welfare, which pushes her to make difficult decisions on how to avoid facing the same fate [41].

Physical Difficulties:

1. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Tashi's first physical battle is with the barbaric FGM technique, a deeply rooted custom in her Olinka community. She is left with lifetime health problems and difficulties as a result of the procedure's physical agony and long-lasting effects.
2. Health Effects: FGM causes a variety of physical health issues, including as persistent pain, infections, challenging delivery, and other issues that have an impact on Tashi's general wellbeing.
3. Lack of Agency: Because Tashi lacks agency and control over her own body, her physical challenges are exacerbated. The profoundly patriarchal structure of her community is highlighted by the fact that she is obliged to get FGM by cultural conventions.
4. Isolation and Shame: Tashi feels ashamed and isolated from her loved ones and community as a result of the physical side effects of FGM. Her challenges are made more difficult by the feeling of guilt and secrecy she bears about her experiences.

In "Possessing the Secret of Joy," Alice Walker skillfully and perceptively highlights Tashi's emotional and physical issues, drawing attention to the long-lasting impact of harmful societal norms on women's life. The compelling tale of Tashi's journey calls into question societal norms and pleads for an end to actions that injure women and deprive them of choice over their bodies and lives [42].

5. Conclusions

In the post-colonial age, Alice Walker's writings provide a comprehensive and engrossing investigation of the situation of women, especially African-American women, and a unique viewpoint on the junction of race and gender. Through her compelling narration, Walker illuminates the pervasive injustices and tyranny women underwent while shedding light on the harsh reality they faced in a country still dealing with the effects of colonial control. Readers are encouraged to consider the intricacies of women's life in the face of systemic problems through her depiction of female characters, which exemplifies strength, resilience, and the unbreakable spirit to overcome hardship. Walker's work encourages talks about the continuing fights for social justice and women's rights since it not only discusses the historical backdrop of post-colonialism but also connects with modern audiences. Her attention on the connection between race and gender expands the examination of how marginalization and prejudice may coexist, affecting women's lives in particular ways. In conclusion, Alice Walker's writings from the

post-colonial period are evidence of the ability of literature to emphasize the plight of women and subvert accepted social standards. Her stories continue to be a source of inspiration and emancipation for women all around the globe, challenging us all to work toward a more fair and equal society where every woman's voice is respected. Walker's work serves as a somber reminder of the challenges and accomplishments of women in the post-colonial period and the importance of their tales in creating a more compassionate and inclusive society as we go forward.

Abbreviations

FGM: Female genital mutilation

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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