

A Study of Identity Crisis and Oppression of Black Women with reference to the Protagonist 'Celie' in 'The Colour Purple' by Alice Walker

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Abstract

Identity Crisis is one of the highlighted issues today. Identity is of various types; self, cultural, social, racial and gender, class etc. Blacks particularly, black women have been made victims by the white men and women as well as black men in their own race. The injustice has been found in multiple identities in black women. The gender, racial and class identities have been oppressed by the dominant male and female societies. The black women have to fight with some issues like; sexism, racism and classism. Every black woman experiences a same kind of injustice even from her own race's black men. One of the great voices of voiceless and suppressed black female society, Alice Walker writes and revolts about the injustice of black women. There is the touch of cry and sense of revolt against the established patriarchal and dominant black faces, in her works. There are various questions unsolved like food, shelter and cloth; are kept permanently unsolved that whites do have. In this paper, I am going to highlight the points of injustice that intentionally and unintentionally burdened over the black females in African American society.

Sexism is a kind of attitude that male gender is superior and female is inferior. In patriarchy, it is believed that women are secondary, lower and weaker. Women are the parts of kitchen and bedroom duties that have to obey the rules of patriarchal society. They should follow disciplines, all the rules and regulations and if they don't, then they would be punished in various ways. Women stay lower and they do not have the right to take better education, she should always be an illiterate person that always do her duties related to their children. Her duty is to nurse her children and it is strictly followed by most of the women in most of the societies. This idealistic view is loaded on women by the society, of following the instructions of her family member from childhood, husband in youth and her children in her old age. Insecurity of black women and their worst condition about injustice is found in Alice Walker's works. In 'The Colour Purple' Walker talks about the injustice on black women and about their identity crisis. She has highlighted the issues like double and triple operation; gender, race and class.

In the present paper, I am going to highlight the points of oppression and injustice over the black females by the whites and result of oppression. The critical lenses of the Alice Walker and her 'The Colour Purple' reveals the dark side of white supremacy that results in injustice related to the black females. This paper also reveals how Alice Walker makes revolt against the White Supremacy and wins over the injustice.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Identity Fight, Double and Triple Oppression- Gender, Race, Class

Introduction

Alice Walker is the African American black female representative writer that demands for freedom to the black women. She highlights about the issues of oppression like sexism, racism and classism. She also tries to show that gender inequality and identity crisis in her lenses all the issue need to be discussed in details. So, that the injustice of women can be opened and they themselves can understand and the strike against that injustice.

1. Identity Crisis and Identity Fight:

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) that identifies the loss of ourself or sense. Another word for identity crisis is psychological state or mental state that disturbs the life of any person. The person who faces identity crisis he carries low worth and his confidence becomes less. At that time, our negative emotions control over the mind and we totally behave negative. We do not remain rationalist because we do carry less self- esteem by the depression and dominance of the society. We raise questions on our own existence or the roles of our identity. The result of the uncertainty in life, Identity Crisis; loses our self-confidence and we like live in isolation.

The best example of Identity Crisis is 'Celie', the female protagonist from 'The Colour Purple' by Alice Walker. Celie is twice raped and abused by her stepfather, Alphonso. Celie forgets her identity as step daughter and think herself as the toy in the hand of Alphonso. The simple satisfaction she has is that, her two children are not her biological brother and sister; because Alphonso is not her own father. Then, Celie is sold to another person Mr. Albert and again, left for marrying with her own sister Nettie. Alice Walker fights for black identity through Celie, that fight against her oppression and finally marries with a white woman not any man. Celie decides to live with Shug Avery (Lilly) that teaches Celie about the self-esteem and love.

2. 'Double Oppression' in 'The Colour Purple' and Walker's critical lenses regarding 'Triple Oppression'

2.1 Gender Oppression/ Sexism: In the African American society every black woman is oppressed by the whites. The common theme that Alice walker uses in her works is sexism. It is about misbehaviour of white people with the black women, as they believe she is weaker by sex. The dominant white people society do believe that, black women are secondary or just an object of use. It is the belief that makes white believes in their supremacy over black female society. In The Colour Purple, raping and selling to Celie, is an example of gender oppression or sexism by Alphonso, her stepfather.

2.2 Race Oppression:

"I think that it is very good that it's a very becoming more racially and ethnically mixed" (An interview on CNN, 'A Talk Alice Walker Talks Race, Women and Power')

Race Oppression according to Alice Walker is that, racially the black women are tortured and suppressed by their own race's dominant males. Race is a particularly known for its customs that Black women marry in their race but some dominant males sell them if they want. Alphonso's killing Celie's father and marrying with her mother and harassing her; all that come under race oppression. Alphonso's treatment with Celie shows that Celie does not have any identity or carries zero identity. That is why; Alphonso takes an advantage of Celie.

3.3 Class Oppression / Classism:

In this oppression and discrimination people do believe that their class is better and great in a same race.

They either are economically rich or politically upgraded. That is why they assume that; they are superior and other races are inferior. This can be applied to Miss Millie. Millie is the mayor of the town where Celie lives. Millie is a racist and believes that, her class is superior. She always mistreats other black women. Millie thinks that, that she is a champion of black women.

Conclusion:

Alice Walker's 'The Colour Purple' depicts the issues of Identity Crisis, Struggle for Identity, Double and Triple Oppression; gender race and class. The above issues are highlighted and depicted in a bold way through the characters. Through Celie a protagonist, Alice Walker tries to visualise and overcome the actual condition of black women society.

At the beginning of the novel, Celie tolerates the torture, misbehaviour and misconducts of her stepfather, her husband. But finally, Celie decides to leave male society and happily establish the relationship with one woman rather than a man. Celie's decision shows that, she doesn't need male society for fulfilling her needs; female society is self-sufficient.

In one of her interviews on 'Race Women and Power' on CNN, Alice Walker talks about the solution of world's problems in her new poem 'Democratic Womanism'. Walker talks the same that, women can create their own democratic world, where every woman is independent and they will have their own world without men...

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