

ATTAINING WHOLENESS THROUGH SELF EMANCIPATION IN ALICE WALKER'S SELECT NOVELS

R. P. Monika

Ph.D Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai

Dr. T. Senthamarai

Associate Professor,

Department of English,

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai.

ABSTRACT

This paper brings out the struggle and the hardship of two female characters of Alice Walker: Celie and Tashi. Emancipation is a process, mostly painful, through which a character allows itself to go through many transformations and attains wholeness. It discusses the conscious effort that the character takes on in order to bring out the change by proving themselves. The two main characters Celie and Tashi stand the test of time and prove how women can reach the wholeness through self-emancipation.

Key words: Alice Walker, Self-emancipation, Transformation, Wholeness.

INTRODUCTION

The African descents of United States are the main reason for the seeding of African American literature. Phillis Wheatley took a step of creating a literature of own late 18th century. There was a great change which occurred during the time of Harlem renaissance (1920's) and it was a great period in flowering of literature and arts. At first African American literature was known as slave narrative because it was an account of people who had escaped from slavery, about their journey to freedom and how they found ways to sustain their lives.

Alice Walker is a famous and a world renowned person because of her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple*. Alice Walker was born in

Eatonton, Georgia in 1944. Her parents were the sharecropper's. After Alice walker grew up she becomes a highly acclaimed novelist, essayist, poet and activist. In 1983 her novel *The Color Purple* won Pulitzer Prize and soon adapted for the big screen by Steven Spielberg. And this brought glory to African American literature. Her full name is Alice Malsenior Walker and she was born in Eatonton, Georgia, on February 9, 1944. She was the youngest daughter of the sharecropper's. Her mother worked as a maid to help and support their family of eight children. When she was 8 years old her right eye was shot by a BB pellet while playing with her two brothers. Whitish scar tissue was formed in her right eye and left a visible mark which made her feel more self conscious about her appearance.

Walker is a sensitive and a versatile writer. She introduced the most exciting and meaningful concept 'Womanism' and it has become a very useful and important term in literature. All of her writing has a touch of Womanism. This concept is mainly for the black society who loves to overcome problems like poverty and slavery. This concept broke all the social norms which they created for blacks to follow. It brought space for proving their specialized talent amongst the white society. This term initiated many black writers to express their feeling. The phrase is reserved mainly for black women who love themselves and their culture and are hell-bent on surviving and shifting out of the life they have spent as underdogs of the society. Apart from literary works she actively showed her interest on activist, she has shown much interest in supporting and has been a part of anti-oppression movements. She has picketed the White House, encouraged African Americans to vote; opposed and denounced genital mutilation of female in the Middle East. She has stood up for Cubans and spoken up against the strictness of pressuring American blockade of Cuba. Another misadventure she has strongly denounced and opposed is the Gulf War.

How the characters in the select novels of Alice Walker attain wholeness via self emancipation. There are two characters shown as an example for self

emancipation and one talks about the fight for future generation and the other about self realisation of her own state and how set herself free. This two characters changed the fixed mind of the society's thought that woman could not do anything on their own and that they were inferior and dependent. Here comes a beautiful example to open the eyes of the society on how the character Celie took a revolutionary change to attain wholeness both physically and mentally and the other character Tashi who took a big decision which forced her into a lifetime imprisonment.

What makes a sudden change in the character Celie in the novel *The Color Purple*? Celie's emancipation process took place only because of woman and sisterhood bonding. Starting from her sister Nettie and to her daughter in law Sofia and to her husband's mistress Shug, she slowly and steadily transforms herself free socially, physically, mentally and spiritually. Shug plays a vital role for the attainment of sense of self and her gradual redemption. Walker believes in giving importance to sister hoodin black woman emancipation. The empowering of womanis shown clearly in sisterhood.

Samuel, for instance, is confused "because to him, since the women [of Olinka] are friends and will do anything for one another ... Because the women share a husband but the husband does not share their friendship, it makes Samuel uneasy. It is confusing". (Walker 141). Even Mr. ___ said to Celie that he did not understand how Shung and Celiebecame close.this shows clearly how sisterhood plays a special role in every woman's life for understanding and sharing their thoughts and opinion.

Next example of sisterhood is Celie and Nettie. These two sister were born in a place where love, caring, affection, attention, sharing all the good qualities of good family were absent. They lived with a violent, rude, abusive father and a sick mother. Nettie knew how her sister was mistreated, rapped, beaten and insulted by her husband andherfather. Nettie gave a moral support and comfort for Celie. "She

also urges her to fight against Mr. ___'s children by showing them a good lesson and letting them know —who is the upper hand". (Walker 25)

Nettie had always been a great teacher for Celie. Nettie got formally educated and she had her own independent ideas and decisions. Nettie helped her sister with reading, spelling she wanted her sister to know everything. Though Nettie was the younger one she wanted her sister to know everything and she took the upper hand of giving all the information to her sister. Celie got broken when Nettie was no more with her. But Celie got good news that her sister was safe and when she heard about her two children she was happy that her children were alive. Celie was happy on hearing the news that her two children were living a happy and a peaceful life and that they were receiving good education and Nettie was also safe. Celie was happy because she came to know that her sister and children were safe and she hoped to meet them someday. She lost to be a parental affection instead she was in the state of substitute mother for Mr. ___ children. She offered herself to her stepfather many times only to save her sister Nettie. These things show a beautiful stepping point of self emancipation.

The awakening of Celie by seeing Sofia Butler, Sofia was a stepsons wife and she plays a vital role for Celie's revolutionary change. Sofia was a fat woman who learns and teach Celie that she grown up in a family of men their she fight for all little things to attain it. All my life I had to fight. "I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers; I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker 38). Sofia refuses the unfair rule that men are superior to women. When Sofia asked permission to Albert to get marry to his son Harpo because she was pregnant because of him, Albert was refuses to get marry her to his son she never begs or please them to accept her instead she said "Naw, Harpo stay here. When you free, me and the baby be waiting" (Walker 38) this moves Celie and she got surprised by seeing her bravery, even Sofia got married to Harpo with her parents' objection. Their marriage life goes happily Harpo helps her and seeing these entire things Celie is shocked because it was not happen in

male dominant family. Even Celie was in unconscious state she listens to Albert words and she supports him and she urges Harpo to beat Sofia, when Sofia hears that Celie urges Harpo to beat him she feels betrayed and she asks Celie about this. Celie said that she was jealous of her so only she did it "I say I'm a fool, I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't" (Walker 38). After listening to it Sofia advises Celie "to bash Mr. __ head open, Think about heaven later". (Walker 39) after this they both become close friends and they both rely on each other throughout the novel.

How Shug has been an eye opener for Celie. The relationship between Shug and Celie was totally different when we compare to the relationship of Nettie and Sofia. Nettie was the one who gives hope in her life and Sofia with her rebellious spirit she teaches how to fight and sustain our life and Shug plays a dual role of being an affectionate mother and sexual mentor. Shug at first was a friend to Celie later as lover and as guiding mother for her. She made her to feel as an independent woman and she is no longer a slave now. She protects Celie from being beaten and when she leaves her she ensures that Celie is not beaten by any one. "I won't leave, she says, until I know Albert won't even think about beating you (Walker 79)". For Celie, Shug was a beautiful girl and she is a God-sent angel to save Celie's life. Celie knows that Shug was the one her husband truly loves but so Celie never thinks of it. When Celie sees her she was deadly sick. Celie decides to take care of her generosity, care and tenderness touches Shug so Shug creates a song for her "to express her gratitude to Celie. For the first time, Celie is aware of being respectable, first time somebody made something and named it after me (Walker 65)", here lesbian relationship begins. Celie feels that she is something better in the world now, she often got raped and she thinks herself as an ugly woman but Shug loves her and makes her to think better of herself and she wants to restructure herself physically and mentally. This shows the importance of restructuring one's own body and knowing them not only emotionally but also physically. Daniel Ross outlined the term saying "One of the primary projects of

modern feminism has been to restore women's bodies. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, women have learned to fear or even hate their bodies. Consequently, women often think of their bodies as torn or fragmented, a pattern evident in Walker's *Celie*. To confront the body is to confront not only an individual's abuse but also the abuse of women's bodies throughout history, as the external symbol of women's enslavement; this abuse represents for women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status". (Ross 70) After Shug sings a song and describes her beauty she first time shows interest to see her body naked in mirror and she shouts its mine. Jacques Lacan says about self is "self," a subject first becomes aware of itself by identification with a person, usually the mother, "although the figure can be any constant nurturer"(Quoted in Ross 77).

Though *Celie* gave birth to two children she never experienced sexual orgasm, Shug was an active sex partner for *Celie* which made her arrest her and made her to take a decision of living in her own without thinking social rules they both had lesbian relationship. After Shug makes her to feel the pleasure of sex and lovemaking which made her to feel the love for the first time. Ross says that "Celie's orgasm suggests a rebirth or perhaps an initial birth into a world of love, a re-enactment of the primal pleasure of the child at the mother's breast (Ross 69)". *Celie* transformation makes her to feel "it feel like heaven is what it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr. ___ at all (Walker 98)." 'After this she feels like she is best and she feel a heaven in the time she spent with Shug and *Celie* feel secured and loved for the first time. Shug initiation of self loving is the first step of emancipation to attain wholeness in her life. Shug love and support makes *Celie* to open up all her troubles she faced in her childhood and adult hood. She makes herself free from male dominating and she joined the community of woman for support. In one of her letter she opens up by saying "My life stop when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stops with Mr. ___ maybe, but start up again with Shug (Walker 85)". Shug is very much shocked to hear about *Celie*'s past.

She comforts her like a mother and energized to face his future. Celie is totally off when she saw Shug with her new husband Grady but they both had a silent intimate relationship, whenever Grady is not their at home Shug come and sleep with Celie. Celie realize that Shug has her own life so she realize to stay away of her life with tears she did this shows herself emancipation leading to wholeness in her life.

Celie gives much importance to spiritual freedom. in the beginning Celie believe that God is white “God is a white and old” like some white man work at the bank...big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wears robes and go barefooted (Walker 165)”. Celie obeyed his words, example for his obedience is Celie never react back to his stepfather for the sexual abuse she under gone we can take it in the way that she obeys god's word" honour father and mother no matter what (Walker 39) excepting help from god she remains silent and obedient is the most painful thing in her life. her patriarchal god has changed in mind and she finally overcome everything and started to love everything from her inner side. Celie has new conception of God and that new god exist in her as an inner support of her and as a spiritual power these thing is also an step of emancipation to achieve wholeness in their life.

Even because of her economic status she endures all kind of unhappiness in her childhood and adulthood. If a woman would like to be strong his economic background should be strong else she will suffer life Celie. Celies economic status is really very shocking When she is a teenage girl, she is almost naked “He say why don't you look decent? Put on something. But what I'm supposed to put on? I don't have nothing (Walker 5).” Celies poverty is the main reason for her inferior state.

The life changing time for Celie because of Shug Celie was a girl who never had a formal education but she knows to make pants. With the help of Shug Celie went to Memphis and learn how to make money with her talent of making pants. She accepts Shug advice and moved out from that unloving family and

starts to live her life in her own. She started her new company named as Folks pants unlimited company with the help of Shug advice she did it. Sofia comes to help her without any hesitation. So when woman obtain an economic independence they will not perish in this society they never need anyone's help to sustain their life in this world by all kind of freedom, Celie's self emancipation made her to achieve great things in life and made her life whole.

There is a big connection between the novel *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* the reason is the minor character like Nettie Samuel, Corrine and Celie's children Olivia and Adam in the novels *The Color Purple* will reappear in the novel. This novel and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is about how the protagonist in the novel took an attempt of freeing herself from all social cultural customs which leads many people in suffering and death. She put a full stop for all the costumes to achieve wholeness eternally.

Tashi was the protagonist of the novel she tells that a small girl who cries for her dead sister Dura due to circumcision an olinkan tribe ritual. The main theme in the novel is circumcision due to her sister death her mother converted into Christian to save her but she leads by tribal elders to follow olinkan culture. So she prepared herself to undergo though the process of circumcision. This going to be a big step to the self emancipation to attain wholeness in her tribe. After the circumcision she is totally exhausted she is mentally and physically disturbed .she got married with Celie's son Adam and they both goes to America.

She analyse herself by thinking that why she undergoes this painful circumcision. Then she came back to America with the plan of killing M'Lissa who did the circumcision for her. She plans to kill her because the misfortune she faced in her life because of her. She killed her and got poisoned and sentenced to death. Walker writing in this story based on what she hears from her parents and grandparents. She came to know that African country engaged with many own belief, customs and tradition. There are many scarifications and circumcisions are happening because of their cultural belief. The circumcisions will done even for

children which is very painful and the pain they endure is till the end of their life. United Nation has included this female circumcision as human rights. Tashi the protagonist, who under goes this circumcision as a symbol of loyalty and respect of her community which makes her to meet psychiatrist which in order f controlling sexual pleasure. “to be accepted as a real woman... to stop the jeering (Alice Walker, 2008: 120)”. She aborts her second child she doesn’t want to bear the pain of caesarean even that to because of circumcision. After circumcision her mind state is “the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinka tradition (Alice Walker, 2008: 63).” Tashi looks this process as a patriarchal domination of women. Tashi returns to Africa and learns the history of circumcision and meets M'Lissa , tsunga she spend time with her to learn all history. She kills her because she continues inflict the same pain on hundreds of young girl because the male leaders of the tribe demand to do it. “M'Lissa continues to inflict the same pain on hundreds of young girls because the male leaders of the tribe demanded it (Katie Lavy, 2012: 63).” Tashi learns that this kind of practice is not called as a tradition instead it is a torture so she decides to save all the girl victims of the future. This shows the emancipation of her leads to wholeness. Even M'Lissa states that “I have been strong strong and brave In service to tradition, to what makes us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. But who are we, but torturers of children?” (Alice Walker, 2008: 219). She kills M'Lissa and save the future female gendration from circumcision. She gives a lesson to all girls and women that “Resistance is the secret of joy!” (Alice Walker, 2008: 279).

Though tashi sentenced to death, she died with great satisfaction that her future gendration going to be free, because of the murder she does. this shows how the self emancipation made her to come out from her physical and mental pain and took a strong decision to kill hr so that she can save her future gendration from circumcision and she attain wholeness through it.

CONCLUSION

The main focus of this paper is fully on self emancipation and how it leads them to their successive wholeness in their lives. There are two apt characters taken from the novel to show their self emancipation which leads them to wholeness in their mind and heart. The two characters are taken from the novel. The Color Purple and Possessing the Secret of Joy. One character in the novel fight for herself to come out from a slavery life and leads a proper respectable life for herself and other in the novel knows clearly that she will be punished on his doing but she is very bold enough to kill a respectable old lady to help hundreds of sister from that painful circumcision. So these two characters totally change the constant thought of a society that women are as weaker, inferior, could not survive on their own, could not think on their own, and could not work on their own. The character Celie and Tashi gives beautiful example to break all the constant thoughts of society.

It also covers beautiful points like the woman must have economic and spiritual freedom so that she can succeed in their life. Celie gives much importance to spiritual freedom. in the beginning Celie believe that God is white “God is a white and old like some white man work at the bank...big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wears robes and goes barefooted (Walker 165).” Celie obeys his words, example for his obedience is Celie never react back to his stepfather for the sexual abuse she under gone we can take it in the way that she obeys god's word "honour father and mother no matter what (Walker 39) excepting help from god she remains silent and obedient is the most painful thing in her life. Her patriarchal god has changed in mind and she finally overcome everything and started to love everything from her inner side. Celie has new conception of God and that new god exist in her as an inner support of her and as a spiritual power. These things are also a step of emancipation to achieve wholeness in their life.

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