

Humiliation and Healing - A Study of Alice Walker's Women Characters

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Alice Malsenior Walker is born on February 9, 1944 as the eighth child of Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker. Growing up in a sharecropper family in Eatonton, Georgia, Walker experiences firsthand the southern atmosphere in which the "black vernacular [is] prominent and the stamp of slavery and oppression [are] still present" and which will shape many of her future works: When she is eight years old, Walker accidentally gets shot in the eye by one of her brothers playing with his BB gun. The incident leaves her blind in her right eye and turns the young Alice into a timid and reclusive child. Yet, this solitary attitude leads her "really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out" (Walker, 1990: 244). It brings her to "read stories and beg[i]n to write poems." (Walker, 1990: 245). Alice Walker focused on versatile themes in her novels. For Walker, Womanist writing is that which focuses on African-American women in twentieth-century America. This tradition of novels tends to deal with the oppression of African-American women, not only by means of white domination but also by specific white and black males. In these novels, we often meet women who fight against all odds for their survival and for the survival of their families. In their disjointed and dislocated communities, these women are often mothers who seek to protect and bring together their families for the sake of future generations. Other notable authors who have written in this tradition include Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. Their female characters were kept in cages for too long and are finally

learning how to sing. Colourism within the black community is one among the themes. Alice walker coined the term "Colourism". She defines it as a "prejudicial" or preferential treatment of same race people solely based on their colour. The bits and pieces that she weaves together have much in common. They originate in the south and they reveal the lives of African American women in various stages of development. Her novel 'the Colour Purple' is a series of 90 letters that Celie a silent protagonists' humiliation to god. It provides the reader with a vision of how the social intersection of racism and sexism affects the African American family. She has realized the artistry, resiliency, and strength of women. She writes to and for women of all colours and cultures and trying them to know their inner selves and the bind up wounds resulting from centuries of silence and abuse. Although walker has been labelled a feminist writer, she prefers the term *womanist* rather than "feminist", for she believes that the term womanist captures the spirit of African American woman that remains her primary commitment. Alice walker herself told I believe it is from this period, from my solitary, lonely position that I began really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about. *Roselily* is about an unwed African American woman with three children. I am this being who, for whatever reason, feels dedicated the whole of humanity I do. I deeply regret any harm or any perceived harm but i may have done to anyone by any behaviour of mine. Her nonfiction work Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual binding of women

focuses on horrors and scars of racial problem. In view of Dr. R. Mummachi:

Alice Walker the feminist deals with the oppression of black women and men. Her quest is a new identity for black women, a self-awareness that will make them self-dependant on social basis, passionately and internally. Harassment, general ferocity, violence, humiliation, exploitation, civil rights movement all these form the sum and substance of her works. 'Womanism' according to Alice walker is not narrowly exclusive; it is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. In all aspects, Alice walker is the brightest star in a galaxy of black American women writers (Racism, Violence and Cruelty in Alice Walker's Novels, 2014).

Alice walker holds a place of covetable prominence in African American literature. She portrays the struggle and journey of African American men and women in an effort to empower and emancipate the entire black race. She is concerned with the "survival whole" of her people who are humiliated, discriminated and dishonoured by the white majority. Walker particularly focuses on the black women's strategies of survival in a racist white society and a patriarchal black community. Her personal experiences and observations as a black woman are replicated in her works and in her characters. Alice Walker with precision in her writings shows that being black women is twice harder than being just a woman or just a black man. The black woman faces the problems of defining humiliation and overcoming isolation, which are caused by cultural taboos and by the gender barriers. Walker believes that with the strength of sisterhood, compassion, love and forgiveness black woman could revive their world and benefit the black community as a whole. Among her works it was decided to confine the study of Walker's women characters in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Roselily*, *The Colour Purple*, *The Temple Of My Familiar* and *Now is The Time To Open Your Heart*. These novels share Alice

Walker's artistic strategy of survival to cover social problems such as gender and racial oppression. The present study proposes to define the humiliation undergone by Walker's female characters to achieve decisive independence and freedom from all humiliations through preserving their cultural and ethnic heritage. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines humiliation as "to make someone feel ashamed or lose their respect for themselves". The researcher uses this definition to point out the humiliation of mind and body occurred or inflicted to the female characters of Alice Walker. Healing is used here to refer the stoicism of female characters to overcome their mental and physical agony. This research will exhibit, how healing takes place at the end, after turmoil and turbulence in the life of characters. In *The Colour Purple* the proposed theme has the power to create and strengthen newly woven bonds among black women leading them to a sense of autonomy, which in turn leads to the discovery of their talents by taking humiliation as a weapon, and achieved psychological wholeness to fight oppression. The protagonist Celie, an abused and vulnerable girl fights her way through life and questions everything she has been taught. Walker's novel and slave narratives reveal the oppression of the speaker, unearthing horrific treatment that had previously gone unchallenged. Celie achieves her goal at the end after much gains and losses in her life.

Thus this paper has demonstrated how Alice Walker attempts to create a situation that reflects the plight of black women in the real world and how the situations and incidents try to heal and redeem them, thus paving way for their own selfhood.

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