



# **AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (AJIRI)**

**ISSN: 2833-2237 (ONLINE)**

**VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3 (2022)**



**PUBLISHED BY: E-PALLI, DELAWARE, USA**

## A Study of Feminine Ties in Walker's *The Color Purple*

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### Article Information

**Received:** October 12, 2022

**Accepted:** November 20, 2022

**Published:** November 26, 2022

### Keywords

*Afro-American Women,  
Heterosexuality, Lesbianism,  
Womanism*

### ABSTRACT

The research aims to probe into the womanism and relationship of women in Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*. Its central concern is to analyze the motive behind the intense and lesbian relationship of such leading female characters of the novel as Celie and Shug. The research tool taken to analyze why the chief characters of the novel prefer women's culture and women's emotional flexibility is 'womanism', a theory first popularized by Alice Walker herself, and queer theory of Judith Butler. The principal finding of the paper is that Celie, Shug, and other female characters of *The Color Purple* look womanish, that is, make courageous, willful, and even lesbian relationship among themselves to display their strength and to resist being the commodities of men. The researchers intended to survey the female relationships and womanism in other works are expected to take the work as a reference.

### INTRODUCTION

The writings of Alice Walker portray the black women's tragic experiences of African-American women living in a racist and sexist society and their struggle for survival and wholeness (King, 2004). Walker's novels illustrate the pain in black people's lives and their hope for personal transformation and renewal. (Walker, 1981) described herself as a 'womanist', a term used by Walker herself to refer to a black feminist who appreciates women's culture, flexibility, and strength. A womanist is committed to make wholeness of entire people, male and female. Walker's women characters exhibit strength, endurance, resourcefulness, resistance creativity and forgiveness on confronting and overcoming oppression in their lives (Barker, 1999; Harris, 1984).

Her writings also call for the change, both personal and social. Personal is essential for social change. Walker is a respected figure in the liberal political community for her support of unconventional views as a matter of principle (Henkinson, 1997). Walker is an open bisexual, yet she is sympathetic to people of all sexualities, ethnicities, and races. Walker's novel, *The Color Purple* (1982) received the Pulitzer Prize in 1983. *The Color Purple* illuminates the issues of the loss of innocence and suffering from human beings (Abrams, 1985). *The Color Purple* narrates the story of a young black woman who fights not only against the racist white culture, but also against the patriarchal black culture. Walker makes criticism against the Afro-American men in *The Color Purple*.

The male characters such as Alfonso and Mr. \_\_ (also called Albert) are depicted as mean and abusive and Harpo as buffoons. At the outset, Celie, a young black girl living in Georgia, is raped by her own father, who, Celie believes, killed both of their children (Hall, 1992). Celie writes letters to God because she has no one else

to write to. Celie, later on, is married to a cruel man, Mr. who actually wanted to marry Celie's sister, Nettie. The female characters demonstrate strong bond in the novel. When Shug Avery, the mistress of Albert, comes to live with them to recuperate from the sickness, Celie becomes her nurse. Shug Avery encourages Celie to become stronger. At the same time, Sofia, Celie's daughter-in-law, inspires Celie to fight against prejudices. Other female characters like Shug, Sofia, and Squeak also revolt against the patriarchal norms and values. Shug wears rough male dresses, involves in drinking, goes to bar and sings (Lewis, 2012). Sofia punches the white mayor and kicks him down and violates male-respecting tradition (Bobo, 1989; Proudfit, 1991).

Positive and supportive relations of Celie with Shug, Sofia, and Squeak encourage her to struggle against the constraints of racist and sexist society. Eventually, Celie redeems her repressive husband and hires him as her assistant in her business. By creating their own world and performing activities in their own ways, they subvert the traditional gender roles and challenge the conventional patriarchal system. The paper seeks to address such questions:

Why does Celie become more attracted to Shug and Sofia? How can Alfonso enact such abominable incestuous rape upon his daughter? Why do Shug and Sofia encourage Celie to stand up against patriarchal norms and against all layers of injustice? What compels Celie to label God as a 'white man'? How does all the energy for self-development germinate in her? The rationale of lies in observing why black women of the novel are marginalized twice: one is for being black, and, the other, for being woman.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The readers of the novel, *The Color Purple* have reviewed the text from different perspectives. A group of critics

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has marked the novel a woman centered, which ventures to project black woman the hero. (Abbandonate, 1993) describes *The Color Purple* as “a conscious rewriting of canonical male text”. Walker meticulously sketches black female characters strong enough to lead their lives without the support of men or husbands. By demonstrating black women who are successful to change their conditions, Walker has challenged the master narratives of canonical male text. *The Color Purple* diminishes the patriarchal authority by establishing strong female characters. Critics have given deserving attention to Shug Avery and Sofia as models for Celie’s evolution, though not to the fact, they are addressed by their surnames.

(Hooks, 1990) writes, “black women like Shug and Sofia (who) rebelliously place themselves outside the contact of patriarchal family norms”. The major traits of these alternatives to male domination are their ability to break through imposed stereotypes and boundaries to provide models for others, both male and female, to follow. *The Color Purple* seeks to “challenge and displace those master narratives” (Abbandonate, 1993). The novel also goes beyond the confines of male-centered narratives. (Adhikari, 1991) regards that Celie, crippled by the sense of inferiorization, non-entity, and guilt, “fights against racist and sexist definition of herself”. Instead of portraying male characters the role model, *The Colour Purple* focuses on the female characters depicted as strong, heroic, and able to overcome the repression through love, compassion, and redemption.

A group of critics has observed the style of *The Color Purple*. (Hall, 1992) finds the epistolary form of the novel unique, as it assists Walker and black women to “subverts male codes of literary expression”. Walker’s form of writing and presentation of the female characters don’t heighten the novel, so it too doesn’t give the space for the black women. There are larger gaps between some letters, but this is not revealed by the author, we have to figure it out ourselves (Abrams, 1985; Harris, 1984). The letters are written in what Walker calls black folk language, which also reduces the easiness of reading. Walker earned high praise for the uses of folk language and epistolary form for expressing issues associated with women (Ross, 1988). (Tate, 1991) regards the novel as the social criticism of the early twentieth century is this way:

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker is able to illustrate the abuse, neglect, and oppression a black woman had to go through in the early twentieth century but also illustrates how a woman must fight back to regain the self-esteem and confidence lost way back in the early adolescent years. Despite its overwhelming success, *The Color Purple* has been criticized for possessing rather, a superficial, fairy tale styled ending. (Lewis, 2012) declares that the novel appears “not a realistic chronicle of human events, but as a fable”. Walker’s greatest accomplishment within *The Color Purple* is its claim for space through the critique of patriarchal theological structure that are, by implication, theocratic (Hooks, 1990). (Similarly, Harris, 1984) observes the characters’ growth as incredible and inconsistent and

mentions, “The issues are worked out at the price of realism”.

These critics assume that Walker is being naturalistic. (Stade, 1985) claims that “Walker presents masculinity as unredeemable, a radical evil, irreducible, the causeless cause of all that is wrong in the world”. Describing men in order to eradicate his destructive concept of masculinity is probably the most humanitarian act of the novel (Bobo, 1989). But these critics fail to see the unusual amount of sympathy that Walker gives to the male characters, especially considering the atrocity and the abuses committed.

In this way, critics have reviewed the text from different approaches. But they have missed noting the womanism and black women’s ties in the novel, Walker’s motive behind highlighting such ties. Here lies the research gap. Hence, the research paper seeks to address the motive behind the womanism and bond among the female characters of the novel.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper applies a qualitative approach to research by using the primary resource, that is, Alice walker’s *The Color Purple*, and secondary resources such as literature from journals, websites commentaries. This study is developed through the theoretical modality of womanism, developed by Walker, and queer theory, discussed by Butler.

‘Womanism’ is a concept used by Alice Walker to describe the relationship of a woman with other woman/women. The relationship of women may be sexual or non-sexual to as to value woman’s strength (Walker, 1981). (Butler, 1990) argued the gender misunderstood because it is “a product of stylization of the body”. In most societies, a person who prefers homosexual bond is regarded as a drag. (Butler, 1990) views gender and sexuality as performative because they exhibit the socialized patterns of behavior of an individual. Some queer theorists have tried to dismantle the key binary oppositions of Western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and natural/cultural. (Barry, 2002) contended that lesbianism constitutes “a form of resistance to existing forms of social relations”.

(Rich, 1995) advocated Lesbian Continuum to designate a wide variety of female behavior, for instance, running from informal mutual help networks set up by women within particular professions or institutions, through supportive female friendships to sexual relationships. The queer theorists and the theory of womanism discussed above are the key theoretical tools taken to observe how womanism is a vehicle of revolting against the patriarchy in Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel, *The Color Purple*, is so radically female centered that some feminist might include the novel within the parameter of lesbian literature. (Walker, 1981) uses her coined term ‘womanist’ to describe a woman that loves other women sexually and/ or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women’s strength. The



female centered literature shows a distinct preference for presenting the female as the strongest and most intriguing figure of the work. And, not surprisingly, this preference may solicit charges of anti-male sentiments.

In *The Color Purple*, unlike the patriarchal belief, female turns to female for support, development and creating identity, leaving their males. By the bond of their loving and nurturing relationship, the females challenge the prevalent patriarchal norms and values. According to (Butler, 1993), gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity, or a locus of agency from which various acts follow. To challenge the domination, women go far beyond gender roles and create their own self. The female intend to accomplish sexual passion through females. Celie and Shug keep homosexual or lesbian relationship to gain orgasm. Lesbian is a broadened term that includes not only literature written by lesbian, but also any literature written by women that has strong images of women (Eliason, 2014).

Celie and Shug challenge the heterosexual belief. The female relationship enables Celie to regain her real existence. Because of the regular help, support, and guidance of Shug, Sofia and Nettie, Celie becomes able to transform herself from the dependent woman to independent self. Their relationship enables them to revise their identity. Lesbianism is not a stable, an essential identity. So, identity can become “a site of contest and revision” (Fuss, 1992).

Celie celebrates her joy and bliss in her business with female companions: expressing, “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time”. It means Celie gets redemption from the help of the community of black females. The females build their independent female world. The patriarchal society has made Celie so feeble that she lacks power and motivations for living a better life. Celie says, “I don’t say nothing. I think about Nettie, dead. She fight, she ran away. What good it do? I don’t fight. I stay where I’m told. But I’m alive”. Patriarchy discourages women to show their natural potential (Rich, 1995).

But Celie gets the impetus for self-realization from Sofia, an independent and self-defensive woman, who fights against Harpo’s attempt to abuse her. When Sofia leaves Harpo to lead an independent life, it gives Celie a realization of the rights of women in the male-dominated society. Celie, according to (Barker, 1999), is so ignorant that she believes whoever wants to fight against the prejudices of men, they will live no more. Sofia teaches Celie to create her own selfhood, neglecting the tolerance and acceptance. That is why, (Adhikari, 1991) observes Celie becoming active and revengeful against the tyranny of her husband after she is accompanied by Shug. With Shug’s encouragement, Celie curses Mr. \_\_\_ being violent when she discovers that Mr. \_\_\_ has kept Nettie’s letter. She says, “How I’m gon from killing him. I think I feel better if I kill him”. Shug is a true example of womanism. Womanism advocates for the existence, liberty, and

identity of black female values (Walker, 1981).

Shug stops Sofia from being aggressive and says: “Now, you won’t. Nobody feel better for killing nothing”. Instead, Shug urges Celie to do the self development activities. Under the guidance of Shug Avery, Celie discovers her own self different from that dictated patriarchal tradition. Shug reveals Celie the mysteries of body and sexual experiences. Shug makes her capable of discovering the way to freedom. The lesbian relationship makes women perceive the difference between sexual abuse and sexual orgasm (Butler, 1990; Fuss, 1992).

The Lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug teaches Celie to realize the difference between sexual abuse and sexual orgasm. Shug’s regular empowerment enables Celie to appreciate her own worth. Celie confesses, “For the first time somebody made something and named it after me”. Now, Celie likes to value herself. She gained her own individuality and turned a new woman. Discovering her own individuality, Celie becomes able to challenge the traditional patriarchal norms and values and leaves Mr. \_\_\_. Celie says:

You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong. Its time to leave you and enter into the creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need. Say what? He ast shock....But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whup your ass. Celie has created her own world inside where she can freely play and make the world of her own. She comes to liberation from traditional patriarchal domain through the community of her black sisters.

The black women like Shug and Sofia, as (Hooks, 1990) regards, rebelliously place themselves “outside the contexts of patriarchal family norms”. It becomes the alternative to male domination and their ability to break the imposed stereotypes that both male and female were to follow. And united, they resurrect themselves from the death of their selfhood. Shug teaches her to sew and wear pants. It is by the feminine ties Celie gradually turns to be a new woman who is capable of breaking all the boundaries on her. One of the objectives of womanism is to invigorate women to free themselves from the captive of their husbands (Walker, 1981).

Celie admits that she is freed from her indifferent husband and announces her rights to exist: “I’m black, I’m poor, I may be ugly, and can’t look. But I’m here”. Here, Celie’s sense of self is so strong that she is no longer helpless, dependent object, rather she proves herself self-dependent, active and matured subject. Similarly, Nettie, Celie’s sister, escapes from the house, challenging the patriarchal social values and roles. Nettie, as (Gaur, 2002) estimates, is supposed to be dead because there is no any information about her since she had escaped. But later on, when Celie discovers that Nettie is in Africa as a missionary worker, her letter becomes an important source for the development of Celie’s life. Nettie encourages Celie to react against Mr. \_\_\_’s crime and get freedom. Nettie is another militant woman who embodies the spirit of womanism. Womanism inspires

the non-white women to revolt against the exploiting nature of male with the issues of racism (Walker, 1981). Nettie teaches Celie to see the outer world and seek to change herself according to that situation.

Nettie says, “The world is changing. It’s no longer a world just for boys and men”. She opens Celie’s eye to the outer world. She shares her missionary experiences to inspire Celie so as to empower her to know the outer world, “Oh, Celie there are colored people in the world who want us to know, to grow and see the light, they are not as mean like pa and Albert, or beaten down like ma was”. Besides, Nettie reveals the family history that Alphonso is not their own father: “pa is not our pa!”. The declaration removes the stigma and shame of incest from Celie’s mind and serves to develop her individuality. The female ties help women to regain peace and happiness in the novel. Celie starts searching peace and happiness in her own life.

Celie completes her independence, becoming an autonomous woman with her own business, story, and money. She is condemns the gender politics. (Ruth, 1990) condemned “the gender politics” elieving that it is an easy way of men to control females. Celie establishes a sewing business. The quilt, composed of different patterns sewed together, symbolizes diverse people coming together in unity: “Let’s make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains”.

Like a patchwork and quilt, the community of love that surrounds Celie at the end of the novel incorporates men and women who are bounded by family and friendship and who have different gender roles, and sexual orientation. (Stade, 1985) observes, “The text has its deepest tinges of women’s liberation, with the establishment of a utopian commune presided over by the heroine and her female lover”. The continuation of Celie and Sofia’s work on the quilt becomes an emblem of unity among women. Eventually, Celie establishes herself a fully independent woman with her own business and female companions. She helps Sofia to be an independent since she hires her in dry good store. Sofia finds a job that suits her individuality. Squeak has also established a new career for herself as a singer.

The female characters assist and support each other and make an extended matriarchal community through which they assert their power against patriarchal/male domination. The relationship among women becomes so interdependent and supportive that eventually it leads to overcome the narrow boundary of patriarchal ideology and establishes them as complete independent human beings.

#### **Masculine Female in *The Color Purple***

Walker, in *The Color Purple*, defies this patriarchal convention and gives masculine roles to female. In a patriarchal society, female are defined as “emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive” (Tyson, 2006). Women are regarded as inferior to males and are assumed for the help of males’ activities. Females

are assigned to do household chores, to take care of their men and children, whereas males are to do outer activities and keep the women under control (Beauvoir, 1983; Woolf, 1992). But Walker’s characters resist such patriarchal notion and subvert the traditional gender roles in the novel, *The Color Purple*. In the process of rupturing the convention, Sofia and Shug play vital roles. They not only act as anti-conventional, but also encourage Celie to transform herself from passive to active female character. Sofia is depicted as an active and bold girl, unlike the traditional females. Sofia appears to be a radical feminist. The radical feminists have the insight that patriarchy is the primary form of male domination that leads to sexual harassment (Ruth, 1990).

Sofia is very much conscious of self-esteem and equality. She can’t tolerate any bad remarks made against her. Once Harpo, the lover of Sofia takes her to introduce with his father, Mr.\_\_\_\_ and talk about their marriage. Seeing Sofia pregnant, Mr.\_\_\_\_ makes bad remarks about her. Harpo sits quietly with his head down being passive but Sofia reacts against those bad comments made against her. Being angry with Harpo and Mr.\_\_\_\_, she says:

What I need to marry Harpo for? He still living here with you. What food and clothes he git, you buy. Well, nice visiting. I’m going home. Harpo you stay here when you are free me and the baby be waiting.

Sofia is physically strong and bold in speaking. The true precept of womanism is having faith in women’s own potentialities (Walker, 1981). Sofia, ignoring the patriarchal norms, intends to do her works in her own ways. Sofia does not accept others’ interruption and insult. Once she makes her mind up to do something, nobody can stop her doing that thing. But Harpo, her husband, does not like this attitude of hers because he was grown up and nurtured in patriarchal culture where the upper hand of male is celebrated.

(Moi, 1988) claimed “patriarchy, throughout history, has sought to oppress women” Because of the matter of superiority and inferiority in the family, Harpo and Sofia always fight. Harpo seeks to control over her even by beating, but she reacts. And, she always wants linearity and equality in the family. The narrator describes the situation in these words:

He try to slap her, what he do that for? She reach down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him across the eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right, under his privates. He roll on the floor. Sofia believes that men have equal role and responsibility as women in household as well as outer work. But, Harpo is so irresponsible that he spends most of the time in eating without helping her (Henkinson, 1997). Harpo does not want to help her in household activities because he thinks that these are the only female activities. Sofia reports: I was giving the children they baths, getting lem ready for bed. He supposed to be washing the dishes. Stead of washing plates, he cleaning them with mouth...When us got to

the field I thought he was going to faint. Harpo does not pay attention towards Sofia's requests. Harpo, as (King, 2004) judges, becomes indifferent towards them because through laziness he wants to establish the supremacy over Sofia.

The irony is the Harpo's indifference to Sofia makes him appear a passive character. Neither can he perform well in outer activities due to his laziness, nor does he do any household activities for the help of Sofia because it makes him feel humiliated. Sofia, being an active woman, does not leave Harpo becoming idle. She makes him do some work. And he accepts to do the indoor works. A womanist is one who dares to subvert the traditional gender role of a woman (Walker, 1981).

By performing reverse works, both of them violate the traditional belief of gender roles. Moreover, Sofia walks a step ahead of violation of gender role by dressing up Harpo's pants while doing outer works. Celie describes: "I see Sofia dragging a ladder and then lean it up against the house. She wearing a old pair of Harpo pants. Got help head tied up in a head rag". Sofia's activeness and passiveness of Harpo are perceived by the readers. By performing the outer works smartly and wearing Harpo's pants, Sofia not only challenges the traditional gender roles, but also ruptures the conventional idea of female clothing. Walker's female characters dare to challenge the conventional gender roles assigned to them. Women need to strip themselves of femininity in order to eradicate oppression (Daly, 1978).

Sofia leaves Harpo and goes with her sister because she wants to get rid of Harpo's irresponsibility towards family life. She is very much bothered and frustrated because he never satisfies her physically or emotionally. Sofia's depression at Harpo's uncaring sexual acts is expressed in this way: "The worst part is I don't think he notice. He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I'm feel. It just him". Sofia's sexual desires are never accomplished by her husband. (Butler, 1990) dismantles the heterosexual norms of the Western culture that ignores the emotions of female sex. Sofia wants dedication, love, and care from him as her husband, but he fails to provide her. To gain the freedom from the bored life, she decides to leave Harpo. (Woolf, 1992) proposed that women to be adamant to fight for their identity and space.

Hence, by daring to leave her husband and house, a womanist subverts the traditional gender role of a woman, living in the husband's house and taking care of her husband, children and his household. Shug attempts to create her own identity as an independent self. Womanists are determined to create their own identity, detaching themselves from the masculine hegemony (Walker, 1981). Shug Avery, on the other hand, crosses the female boundary of gender roles through her sexual assertiveness and outer activities. She rarely performs female roles that patriarchal society defines. She is self-guided and motivated. She is a mother, but behaves as if she has no one or nothing to care for. She does not have

any sign of somberness, shyness and passiveness. She is bold, daring, and active. Shug sings songs in Harpo's 'Juke Joint', being very glamorous (Lewis, 2012). Her dress up is very violates of traditional female norms:

"Shug, wearing a gold dress that shows her tities near bout to the nipple. Everybody sorta hoping something break. But that dress strong". While singing at 'Juke Joint', she is not only singing in front of the crowd but also telling her sex. Moreover, she is sexually very assertive woman because she keeps changing her lovers for sexual satisfaction. (Freud, 1905) dismantled the confinement of 'homo' or 'hetero' sexuality because he was primarily concerned with the sexual pleasure. Sofia is a living example of Freudian sexuality.

Shug and Sofia are characterized as 'manly' or 'womanly'. Talking Shug's and Sofia's activeness and behaviors, (Hooks, 1990) said, "Sofia and Shug are unlike men, but they not like woman either". Gradually, the love between Celie and Shug turns into a lesbian relationship. Lesbianism is a form of resistance because women are encouraged to revolt against patriarchal exploitation (Butler, 1990; Eliason, 2014). In the name of lovers, they perform sexuality and moves far beyond the idea of heterosexuality as patriarchal society prefers. Shug's sexuality travels far beyond simply men or women, as she loves both:

She say, I love you miss Celie. And then she hand off and kiss me on the mouth. Um, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say um too. Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other. Shug Avery, who is always in search of sexual satisfaction and money, never cares for her health. (Butler, 1990) elaborated gender and sexuality as performative, which has nothing to do with the traditional gender roles. Shug does not care about eating, sleeping, and living. Sometimes she lives as vagabond, spending much time in the streets. She returns home in a very bad condition. Celie narrates:

She never give a thought to what she eat. Never give a thought to where she sleep. She on the road somewhere for weeks at a time, come home with bleary eyes, rotten breath, over weight and sort of greasy. Celie's activities demonstrates how she is indifferent to the masculine perception of the world. She never cares for others as well as herself. Sexuality and liberty matter much to a woman and these things can be obtained from women-women bond (Beauvoir, 1983; Walker, 1981).

Though Shug is unbounded to any societal norms, she is able to create her own identity and earn lots of money. She becomes economically sound with full of luxurious materials: "She make so much money she don't know what to do with it. She got a fine house in Memphis, another can she got one hundred pretty dresses". Without the assistance of any males, Shug is able to create her own self, economy, and power. Shug becomes superior to males because she can buy anything to her lover, Grady. In this case, Shug becomes the leader, not Grady the man. Thus, the female characters are presented individuals having masculine quality in the novel, *The color Purple*.

The women have the quality of physical strength, sexual assertiveness, activeness, and daring in speech.

Due to these features, they go beyond the traditional female boundaries and try to establish a new terrain in society. Sofia's strength and Shug's sexual assertiveness are some far beyond female qualities that the patriarchal society imagines as being female. Hence, they subvert the traditional gender roles and become masculine-female. Subversion of gender roles sometimes causes problems. Harpo's insecurity about his masculinity leads to marital problems and his attempt to beat Sofia. Likewise, Shug's confident sexuality and resistance to male domination cause her to be a tramp. By highlighting the feminine ties, Walker subverts the traditional perception of gender and sexuality so that she can create room for the identity and equality of the black women.

### Redefinition of God by Female Characters in *The Color Purple*

Women, especially, black women, were assumed to be debilitated in the traditional/ patriarchal societies. In the patriarchal society, god was defined to be brave and belonging to male and the white. But in *The Color Purple*, Shug and Celie stand as the ideal practitioners of womanism. Womanists reject the notion that god is a white or male (Walker, 1981).

Shug Avery persuades Celie to redefine God in a new way. Celie starts resisting the "big, old, and tall gray bearded and white", monotheistic God. She comes up with a distinctly non-Christian discovery of God and eventually gains liberation from patriarchy. Celie adopts nature God or the universal God which is non-sexist, un-oppressive and un-repressive. Shug teaches Celie that God is neither 'white' nor 'He'. Instead, God is universal and natural. It is in everything including the "flowers, water, wind and a big rock". God is inside her, and she is naturally connected to everything. Shug changes Celie's idea about God. Patrilineal society has been socializing that the males are incarnated as gods because they are brave while female are feeble (Woolf, 1992).

Shug says, "God is inside you and everybody else. Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be". This new perception of God enables Celie to reject male superiority. She gives her idea about nature or universal God that is present in everything and everywhere. Shug provides Celie with a bridge to new spirituality free from the domain of an angry, white male God. The womanist vision of god ruptures the biased ideology of God to redefine female creativity (Walker, 1981).

Shug describes her own experiences of being a part of everything in order to convince Celie. She says, "My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. The other people. I knew that if I cut a tree my arms would bleed". This new definition of God, a womanist vision, blurs and frees the traditional male connotations of God to create

a new feminine concept of God as part of everything. Ultimately, Celie comes up with a new concept of God as she writes in her last letter, "Dear God, Dear Stars, Dear Trees, Dear Sky, Dear Peoples, Dear Everything, Dear God". This reimagining of God symbolizes Celie's move from an object of somebody else's care to an independent woman.

Celie's movement from monotheism to pantheism parallels her movement from isolation and inferiority under patriarchy to a new bonding with other women and appreciation of herself. Feminist critics object to the way society treats men as god (Tate, 1991).

Celie's new-found religion links God with the power of the universe, a pantheistic notion and often associates with religion in which Goddess is worshipped. Shug, in the process of caring and fortifying Celie's self, blames: "Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere soon as you think he everywhere you think he God". Celie feels herself fool and angry at her passiveness in everything. Her initial adherence to the Bible makes her so feeble that Alphonso rapes her. But later, being enlightened, she starts reacting against negative aspects in men. Womanism gives women strength to revolt against the so-called godly personalities (Walker, 1981).

Celie dares to curse Mr. when he denies to hand over the letters from Nettie. While cursing him, she feels the extreme power "seem to come to me from the trees" the nature God. In this way, Celie, under the guidance of Shug, becomes able to redefine God, that is traditionally accepted as male or white. But in the novel, *The Color Purple*, the idea of Biblical monotheistic God is ruptured by the pantheistic notion of God, that is, Nature-God. And the female characters of the novel take the challenge to redefine it. Therefore, it is female ties in the novel that assists to subvert the traditional gender roles.

### CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the novel, *The Color Purple*, Walker portrays female ties as a means for women to summon the courage, and to resist the oppression and dominance of patriarchal society. Walker's female characters take assistance from black female community to create their own selves. The female bonding in the novel is so strong that they do not worry losing some important things for strengthening their knot of femininity. To release Sofia from the jail, Squeak has to bear the rape from her cousin. Their interdependency and encouragement provide them power to resist the male domination. Shug Avery teaches Celie to admire her body and feeling. Shug's renaming of Celie as virgin helps Celie to see the potentialities within her. Shug educates and empowers Celie to struggle. She is convinced herself that like Sofia and Shug she must hold her own self. Walker gives her female characters the skill of sewing, which finally becomes the means of disrupting the gender roles and creating the independent self. Sewing in the novel symbolizes the power women



can gain from productivity, channeling their creative energy. The quilt, composed of diverse patterns sewn together, symbolizes the female unity. Like a patchwork, the community of love that surrounds Celie at the end of the novel incorporates men and women who are bounded by family and friendship and who have different gender roles, sexual orientations, and talents. Sewing, traditionally stereotypical female indoor task, becomes the weapon to fight against the tradition. Women become the definer of God. This reimagining of God on her own terms symbolizes Celie's movement from an object of someone else's care to an independent woman, unlike the traditional patriarchal belief. It also indicates that her voice is now sufficiently empowered to create her own narratives.

### Acknowledgements

The researcher is grateful to the Research Committee of Degree Campus, affiliated to Tribhuvan University, Biratnagar, Nepal, for making invaluable feedback and guidelines during the preparation of the paper. The researcher does not conflict to disclose. The researcher did not receive from any party or agency for the preparation of the paper.

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