



## Representation of Economic Exploitation of Women in Society in the Novels of Alice Walker

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### Abstract

A woman is a mother, sister, wife, and other role model for men; women ought to be viewed as queens, partners in all spheres of life, and deserving of respect from the general public. Additionally, this essay attempted to illustrate the gender differences in Walker's books as well as her support for women who defy social norms at the time. This essay seeks to elucidate Walker's perspective on the female characters in her books. In reality, Walker attempted to address women's rights in her book and advocated for giving them greater freedom in a variety of spheres, including the home, social life, politics, and so on. This article also highlights the societal problems that Black women in particular and Afro-Americans in general face. It is undeniable that Alice Walker is a novelist whose works, which address the subjugation of Black women, are recognized for their gender depiction. Walker's goal is to help black women develop a new sense of self and self-awareness that will enable them to be independent on the social, emotional, and spiritual levels. The main topics of her writing include racial injustice, general violence, history and ancestry, and the Civil Rights Movement. The term "womanism," which refers to a type of black feminism that values and celebrates women's strength, adaptability, and culture, was first used by Alice Walker. According to Alice Walker, "womanism" is dedicated to the survival and wholeness of all humans, male and female, and is not strictly exclusive. Among black American women writers, Alice Walker shines the most in every way.

**Keywords:** - Economic exploitation, feminism, society, Gender Discrimination, Civil Rights Movement, Black feminism, Women strength, Women Representation.

**Introduction:** - Alice Walker is one of the most well-known and adored authors of our day. Walker, the daughter of sharecroppers, was born on February 9, 1944, the youngest of eight children. Walker participated actively in the social events of her era and spoke out against injustice in the 1960s civil rights movement. Walker emphasizes the connection between societal transformation and individual development. Women must submit to my supremacy to survive. Furthermore, they have no idea how to rejoice in their lowered sense of value. Black women are underrepresented in their group and are marginalized in many other contexts. African American women who have experienced social, physical, and sexual oppression and dominance aspire to independence. Since the majority of black women are still viewed as slaves, they are looking for a new definition of what it means to be a woman. Black women's main body parts were sold as slaves when they reached adulthood to free themselves.

In this article, attempts are made to oppress, hide, and discriminate against Black women based on their gender and other distinctions. It looks at black women's historical oppression as well as their eventual self-emancipation, awakening, and self-realization. Author Alice Walker is attending a conference for the emancipation of African American women. She exhorts black women to acknowledge the connection they have with other women who have historically cleared the path for them by demonstrating an unwavering attitude of independence. Generally speaking, white Americans formed stereotypes about black people. White Americans took advantage of black women by forcing them to give up their bodies against their will. The state of the black ladies was worse than that of the captured women of vanquished men. The black ladies were regarded like monsters and bare-chested savages. Consequently, their primary struggle to find a definition of themselves based on their strengths and weaknesses (Shukla, S. & Banerji, 2012). They were paid less and forced to work harder. The women were played with and exploited regularly.

They were forced to labor on White people's farms. When some black women fought to maintain their virginity and dignity by refusing to give up their bodies, the situation



deteriorated; more of them were burned alive and faced public punishment. They were victims of racism and sexism, poverty and helplessness, and double oppression due to their gender and color. It was terrible that they were subjected to double servitude. They ended up as their spouses' slaves. They then questioned, "And I'm not a woman?" Take a look at me! Take a look at my arms! No one could head me after all the planting, harvesting, and plowing I did! And what is a woman? As much work as a man, I could do.

Walker's work encompasses the following topics: racial oppression, general violence, history and ancestry, and the Civil Rights Movement. The term womanism, which refers to a type of black feminism that values and celebrates women's strength, adaptability, and culture, was first used by Alice Walker. She is a renowned Afro-American woman who is also a black feminist. Political, cultural, national, economic, and sexual factors all play a part in Alice Walker's black womanism consciousness. Alice Walker addresses racism, sexism, and injustice in America. It is relevant to consider Alice Walker's classification of women into three categories: awakened by political forces, suspended part of the mainstream, and both. Some Indian and Afro-American women are content with their status and the lack of understanding they have with their men, while others are unhappy with their circumstances but are unable to rebel against them and choose to accept them. The stage of revolt is the third.

Positive self-definition is more common among Afro-American women than among Indian women; extended periods of economic autonomy, the presence of three female-headed families, and a family's predilection for having a daughter are potential contributing factors to this awakening of black women. According to Alice Walker, Black women now provide diverse, real-world examples of what it is possible to live. Our new location has been established (Washington 1979:146). But like Indian women, Afro-American women look to their kids for emotional support and fulfillment. They want to be allowed to communicate, laugh, and feel without worrying about their husbands' judgment. They gain power albeit lopsided power from motherhood in addition to satisfaction, which they do not have in their marriages due to infidelity, etc. The central idea of Meridian is the creature sparks of the "suspended" black women's survival culture. Meridian's persona provides a fitting vehicle for the theme. First of all, Meridian is a mentally and physically mistreated lonely, and insane woman. However, Meridian is given the chance to free herself through the Civil Rights Movement, in contrast to the female protagonists in The Third Life of Grange Copeland. She initially gives a movement her whole attention. However, she begins to doubt the necessity of using violent methods to accomplish revolutionary goals as the Movement devolves into a bloody revolution.

Suffering, in her opinion, imparts a sense of perspective and proportion that is crucial to human growth. Meridian becomes philosophical as a result of the oppression that extinguishes all of Margaret and Memm's creative sparks. Alice Walker challenges the idea of Black motherhood as one of strength, selflessness, and sacrifice as Meridian absorbs the collective wisdom of her people. Sharecropping produces mothers like Margaret and Mem who are mistreated. After Mem's endeavor to be a good and protective mother to Ruth fails, George Copeland eventually steps in to fill the position. According to Alice Walker, "She is torn between her desire to become a mother and the fact that motherhood seems to cut her off from the possibilities of life and love (Walker, 65).

Meridian does not view motherhood as being constraining. When she resorts to nonviolent resistance for the benefit of children, it is precisely this conflict in her desire that spurs her ambition to become a mother not in the biological sense of the word, but in the philosophical sense.

The fact that she gave up her sleeping bag, cell, and role and gave it to Truman again is a metaphor for the mother earth role she had served. As he shabbily crawls inside Meridian's bag, Truman comes to terms with the terrifying role he must now play as Mother Earth. As a result, she gives Truman the battle to protect life for him to completely comprehend its



sanctity, signifying both the spirit's awakening and the start of a new personal quest. Thus, the novel serves as a tool for reflection and analysis. In the context of the racist, sexist, and classist American society, Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* earned her the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983 for developing the powerful black liberated woman character Celie, who succeeds in the process of survival at the levels of self and community in a meaningful way.

The novel tells the story of Celie, a black girl who, despite her circumstances poverty, ignorance, and physical and psychological abuse manages to rise above it all by developing self-awareness and reaching out for the delicate, feminine realms of consciousness. Walker uses letters that Celie sent to God and then to her sister Nettie to narrate her experience. Celie prays to God for strength to withstand the physical, psychological, and spiritual torture she endures at the hands of her stepfather. She thus starts her journey from a state of complete helplessness to one of complete empowerment as well as from self-abnegation to self-recognition. The Temple of My Familiar also includes the rewriting of the pre-colonial histories of people of color in South America, Africa, and the United States. Walker centers the skeleton of her writing on a feminine ideal, the goddess, who has endured for all those fifty million years.

Since Lissie Lyles has been transfigured multiple times, either as a person or an animal, she will be the one to tell us the tales of her past lives. Since historical discourse has historically served supremacist, colonial, and patriarchal ideologies, the reader's consciousness will be awakened to themes and issues that have been traditionally left out of historiography as a result of the recollection of all memories from her past and the multiple storytelling structure to which the text turns. Walker attempts to explain the wounds that modern societies inflict on people of color worldwide by using the dream of the memory, which helps us travel back in time to the beginnings of culture and civilization since the memory, like the mind, can dream. The most recent book by Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), explores the lives of a character that is hardly mentioned throughout earlier books. In this book, Alice Walker skillfully blends fact and fiction while communicating with the spirits of the living and the dead. She also deftly addresses one of the most contentious topics of our day: female genital mutilation. In the 1992 film *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Tashi, an African woman living in the fictional Olinka tribe, is followed as she undergoes female circumcision. The film explores her motivations for making this decision as well as the effects it has.

The horrible origin and repercussions of FGM as a cultural practice in the novel are the book's main focus. Thus, after reading a variety of fictional works, we can confidently and correctly conclude that, as a black author, Alice Walker effectively explores black women as social victims who are twice exploited once because of their race and once because of their gender, which mirrors their miserable circumstances in the patriarchal society. Walker demonstrates unequivocally that they are targets of both racism and sexism in American culture while also attempting to change them into emerging black women. This paper looks at how her strong belief in the black womanist principles is reflected in *Meridian*, one of her most well-known novels.

It depicts the tale of a black lady going through a transformative time, her awakening to consciousness, and her following self-discovery and quest for authenticity. Through the figure of Celie, the epistolary novel *The Colour Purple* depicts the struggles and tragedies of Black women. Women in that century experienced emotional and physical anguish.

The men in their family held a dominant position over them. This century was sometimes referred to as the "black century" of African-American women because of all of these factors. Alice Walker's literature has depicted how white people overlook the needs of Black people. Walker believes that there ought to be harmony in society between all genders. The United States of America in the 1920s saw several profound changes. Americans experienced a thriving economy during this time. Both domestically and internationally, they were at peace. However, African Americans faced other issues throughout this time,





including discrimination based on race and gender, economic hardship, and gender stereotypes. Celie, the protagonist in Walker's *The Colour Purple*, goes through a lot of hardships. She has a very hard time getting by in the racist South of the 1920s. Celie's challenges, goals, and achievements seem to reflect Alice Walker's familial ties and early life lessons.

It exposes the harmful preconceptions about women from the 1920s, especially those about Black women. Because they are women of color, black women writers examine complex socioeconomic concerns. They depict the terrible, unfair, and unfathomable suffering of slavery. Paradoxically, white female writers purposefully left out black women writers' writings from literacy anthologies. *The Female Imagination* by Patricia Meyer Spack illustrates the clear indifference and complacency that black female writers face. However, several authors have written about the pathetic state of black women; Alice Walker is one of these authors. In her novels, she addresses topics such as abortion, rape, love, lesbian relationships, nature, god, and ancestors.

"I am obsessed with the spiritual survival of my people as a whole," she declares. Beyond that, though, I'm dedicated to investigating the struggles, obsessions, allegiances, and victories faced by Black women" (Walker, 250). The female characters in the popular book *The Colour Purple* experience a variety of atrocities as a result of the patriarchal system. But in the end, these heroes overcome oppression and achieve self-emancipation via self-identity and empowerment. In a society where men rule, a daughter has always been under the father's authority. In a similar vein, a wife has experienced husband dominance. It is the way that society has developed since the beginning of time. In a society like this, women will inevitably face oppression, exploitation, and silence.

*The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker depicts the same forms of tyranny and exploitation. The patriarchal dominance in both white and black society is depicted in this work. Celie, the book's female protagonist, is an entirely isolated, subjugated, and dominated figure. Alfonso, Celie's father, makes a suppressive statement at the start of the book. You better not ever tell nobody but God, he tells her. It would kill your mother (Walker, 03). After raping Celie, Alfonso now tries to intimidate and silence her.

In the book, Celie refers to Alfonso as Pa, yet it doesn't stop him from raping her. By threatening to harm her mother if she speaks and shares her innermost thoughts, Alfonso silences her. Celie is unable to speak up and tell her mother the truth about the sexual assault she suffered at the hands of her father. Pregnancy is the result of this sexual abuse, and it happens twice. Not her father, but Celie's mother unexpectedly passes away cursing her. In addition, Celie's father takes her children away from her with force. Alfonso desires for the facts about his daughter's rape to be forgotten. He accepted it. While I was sleeping, he took it. I killed it in the woods. Walker defines womanism as a consciousness that incorporates national, economic, political, sexual, and racial considerations (Brown, 04).

Walker's fiction does not specifically feature any one woman. Every woman in every civilization is represented by her protagonist. Walker rebels against subjects and ideas that are outside the purview of her restrained upbringing. She is interested in civil and political rights as well as rights related to ethnicity and culture. She talks on the sensibility of women as well. She breaks her quiet in *The Colour Purple* with her protagonist. She is not going to accept being oppressed. She has an impact on the other female characters in the book. Walker makes the argument that black women in society suffer more than white women do as a result of slavery.

Celie experiences two distinct feelings of alienation: one stemming from her gender, and the other from her race. Throughout the entire book, she must deal with the consequences of sexism. Black women are, as Showalter rightly notes, "the other woman, the silenced partner" in this situation (Showalter, 214). The protagonist of *The Colour Purple* is a Black English speaker and writer who utilize the language to express herself. Strangely, white Americans do not consider it to be a language in and of itself. Walker makes a distinction



between her culture and White culture. She demonstrates how her black origins and background are entirely distinct from that of White people, but she nevertheless shares her opinions with both groups. Through her works, Walker makes her opinions on important themes of culture, race, gender, and ethnicity evident. She separates her female characters into three categories and classes the black female characters. The term "suspended Woman" refers to the first category of female characters. These women experience oppression from society at large as well as from men in particular. There is nothing these female characters can do to protect or defend them.

These kinds of characters are mostly prevalent in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature. The assimilated woman refers to the second category. These women make a lot of effort to fit in with the white society. They put up with the physical abuse. They also struggle with a psychological desire for approval. Literature from the 1940s and 1950s features a lot of these kinds of female characters. The emergent woman is the final category. These women possess the requisite awareness of their needs and capabilities. Their decisions determine how they live. They tell others about their experiences. They also strive to overcome the persecution they endure at the hands of men. The 1960s are typified by this kind. The term "liberated woman" refers to a new category that critics introduced after the 1970s. The free woman is aware of her needs. She puts a lot of effort into realizing her potential and accepting it (Tyson, 394). Whether it's his wife, daughter-in-law, or daughter, a male will beat a woman to instill in her the belief that he is the superior in the relationship in the patriarchal society. Despite her tireless efforts, Celie's father continues to beat her. Her father typically beats her without even needing a reason: "He beat me today because he said I winked at a boy in church. I didn't wink, even though I might have had something in my eye (Walker, 7).

Her father hits her once more for wearing differently than what he views as appropriate: He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway. Sons of women are also beaten, in addition to their husbands. When Harpo stoned Celie in the current book, He picked up a rock and laid my head open (Walker, 14). Harpo asks his father why he beats Celie, to which Mr.--responds, "Because she my wife," yet he does not punish his son for such inhumane behavior (Walker, 23). Celie is still surrounded by her suffering. She finds nothing like Shug Avery, the person he loves, in her. Shug queries Celie about the cause, asking, "What did he beat you for?" For being myself and not you, Celie responds (Walker, 72). As Mel Watkins notes, Celie is just a servant and an occasional sexual convenience to Albert, who falls in love with the vibrant and fiercely independent blues artist Shug Avery (Walker, 01).

Needless to say, marriage is a significant part of everyone's life. In every patriarchal society, a girl's parents decide who she should marry. Similar to Celie in the current book, Mr. just received Celie from her father to get rid of her. She won't force you to give it food or clothing, so you are free to do anything you wish. She has man-like working skills (Walker, 10). In addition, Mr. marries Celie because he requires childcare for his kids. Mr. marries me to take care of his children, says Celie. Because my father made me, I married him. Both Mr. and I don't love each other (Walker, 61).

Walker exposes the prejudice that exists in black culture. Unexpectedly, prejudice within the black community still exists. Walker explores internalized racism and demonstrates how people of color feel inferior to White people in her books and stories. She also demonstrates the methods used by institutionalized racism. Black English is a language that The Colour Purple's protagonist knows how to write and speak. Celie expresses herself with this language. Walker appears keen to set her culture apart from that of the white people. She even makes an effort to demonstrate her black origins and ancestry.

Walker uses her art to communicate her ideas regarding Black people and White people. Alfonso's connection with his new wife is another illustration of a stressed relationship. Celie's father remarries and takes a new mother into the family. Though her new mother never mentions it to her husband, Celie believes that she will save her from her father's



tortures. Instead, she stays silent and tears alone in her room. Remarkably, Alfonso never mistreats his new bride and never beats her. She never says anything at all, though. Most likely, she is afraid of the male's strength inside of her. It's also possible that she is aware of the meaninglessness of what she says. She knows she won't get a chance to speak.

In this fiction, the author presents two powerful female characters who fight patriarchal stereotypes of women and ask tough questions about life in general. Shug is one of these characters. Shug Avery standing upside a piano, elbow crook, hand on her hip," is how Celie characterizes her. She's got a hat on like an Indian chief. Nothing seems to be bothering her thoughts, and her mouth is open, exposing all of her teeth (Walker, 07). The personalities of Shug and Celie are incompatible. She is at ease with her sexuality and physique. She's a stunning woman who can domesticate" Mr. ---, but it's also a fact that she lacks respect from others around her. They discuss a wide range of topics behind her back. Because "his daddy told him I'm trash, my mama trash before me, and his brother said the same," Mr. -'s father won't let his son to wed her (Walker, 109). Her father refers to her as a Tramp, yet those around her refer to her as "Queen Honeybee. When she becomes ill and is left alone on the farm, no one comes to aid her. This is an additional aspect of silencing. Considering that being silent does not automatically prohibit someone from speaking. The demands from society and culture are what cause her to either stop speaking or hesitate to express her opinions. Shug makes up her mind to act like a man to regain her control. She starts speaking in a masculine manner to get inside his territory.

The goal of this movement was to outlaw slavery nationwide. Additionally, it made an effort to guarantee everyone's equality. Black feminism discusses more than only challenging the social structures of the prevailing groups. Additionally, it makes an effort to advance black women's social and economic advancement. Walker's fiction is filled with instances of black feminism. She illustrates how black women are oppressed. Celie, the book's protagonist, is a representation of a devout housewife who takes care of her husband and his kids. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that "one is not born a woman; rather one becomes a woman and Celie's persona supports this assertion (Beauvoir, 3).

**Conclusion:** - Alice Walker serves as a superb illustration of feminist criticism. In every aspect of life, males dominate women, yet as time goes on, women seek independence and to be freed from the mistreatment they endure at the hands of men. Alice Walker skillfully employs technical symbolism to illustrate the social problems faced by black women in American culture and to give us a true picture of the black community, encouraging discussion and problem-solving. In essence, Walker depicts in her novels how women are compelled to live under a man's authority, whether it be their husband or father. A strong woman has the power to improve her own life. One inspiring example of a courageous woman who can start over and establish her identity as a working, self-assured woman is Celie. In actuality, readers' hearts and minds are touched by Celie's story, leaving a lasting impression.

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