



# DECONSTRUCTION OF THE 'CULT OF DOMESTICITY' BY ALICE WALKER IN *THE COLOR PURPLE* - A CONNOTATIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*Rooted in several philosophies and ideologies, the globe evolves altogether with multiple perceptions and dogmatic penetrations. The emergence of power through these phases of evolution caused the prevalence of a system of societal relations, constituting oppressive and oppressed communities. When the colonial European people colonized the various nations of the world, there emerged the concept of Euro-centrism, imbibing inferiority over the non Europeans. When this made the major struggle of African American people, there occurs a nested struggle of African American women from the stands of both submissive and surpassing women personalities. This paper enables a pragmatic and psychological study of the plot and characters in The Color Purple, exploring the author's posed contradictions and ventured deconstructions in terms of 'womanism' and negritude.*

**KEY TERMS:** *Double Marginalization, Cult of Domesticity, Deconstruction, Womanism, Feminism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Deviating from the phallogocentric literary tradition, so far numerous embodiments of feminism marked the literary arena. Each work addressing the social, physical, psychological, emotional, economical and various other strands of terror, they not only mark their prevalence in the society, rather wakes up the consciousness over the consciences. Alice Walker, the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize, won in her profound attempt in reconciling the trapped female lives with the African American community in her novel *The Color Purple*. More than interpreting the existences, the novel also explores the *vox populi* of the native African Americans. The sufferings and struggles encountered by the characters in the novel from every nook of their survival draws an essentially true portrait of the lived experiences. The Epistolary novel *The Color Purple* highlights the letters of sisters Celie and Nettie, their Catch-22 situation and their toil besides the waspish people engirdled in their lives. Their trapped clueless lives were finally endowed with the contradictory sense of relief and reassurance, where

Alice Walker provides enlightenment to her characters through their struggles over 'real-life' multifaceted baffles and Battles.

## CULT OF DOMESTICITY

A society enforcing women's primary responsibility so as to serve the household chores, whatever physical or mental trauma comes down with, is highlighted throughout the novel *The Color Purple*. Celie, being the one who is abused by her step father, being the one who had no control over her pregnancy and babies, the one who had no desire towards her husband, the one who had no access to her own life, was always pushed to serve the domestic duties including obeyed sex and approved abuses. When Celie is depicted as a fighting yet defeated survivor, her sister Nettie is portrayed as a fighter filled with fear and courage, battling and escaping the toils to seek a life of perfection. The role of being mute about the personal trauma but to submit to the masculine figure, serving his needs and desires by stripping one's own soul, is well endured by the character Celie. Her claims, questions, anger,



frustration were all addressed only in her letters to God, but that did not stop her submissive household domestic worker attitude. Though none of her life tracks were her personal choice, she got no option to stand against the blaze of horror. All she endured was domination, oppression, inhumane acts, unsparing attitude from the patriarchal community around her, which in turn made her not to react but to given in. The only success of Celie underlies in protecting her sister Nettie from Celie's step father and husband.

With the cult of domesticity, also occurs the double marginalization of black women, marginalized by the white community for her African American race and also equally marginalized by the men of her community for female gender. To show the injustices inflicted and the disadvantaged positions forced on the woman in her society, Alice Walker embodies the novel and the casualties in her vision to valorize the vulnerable ones.

### DECONSTRUCTION THROUGH CONTRADICTIONS

Alice Walker contrasts the character Celie with several other brave women characters including Shug Avery and Sofia. It makes both Celie as well as the readers to analyze and realize the changes in the *Elan Vital* and the *Modus Operandi* of women who are from the same community facing similar oppressions. Shug Avery emerges as a symbol of courage and confidence in Celie's life. She acknowledges Celie to voice out her needs and desires, her willingness and adverse feelings, her right to oppose and accept, unlocking Celie from all her entrapments and fear. A woman analyzing the subjugation of women, exploring the status of women and insisting for the need of equality and empowerment makes up the attitude of Shug Avery. Unlike Celie, Shug Avery achieves a status for her own self, seeking chances, creating opportunities and being a lighthouse of empowerment for all subjugated and oppressed ones. Neither she is dependent on men nor does she ignore them. She is not the one representing feminism rather the one who prefers equality of sexes, equality of freedom and equality of everyone's right to life and choices.

On the other hand, when Albert's son started abusing and oppressing his wife Sofia, Sofia got infuriated and left him with no hope. It was the same plight of abuse exerted by Albert on Celie, to which Celie gave in with neither denial nor disputes. Alice Walker deconstructs the assumptions established by the patriarchal circle over womanhood, thereby exposing woman beyond that of sexuality, labor, reproduction and domesticity. Also the ultimate truth about how

radical feminists faced greater challenges than the subjugated ones is explored here. The novelist contrasted Shug Avery and Sofia in such a way that both tried to dissect the established boundaries and traps. While Shug Avery got her way through all, Sofia could not. Being courageous, Sofia could overcome male supremacy of her community but could not get over the domination of the white community. She got stuck into that criterion of double marginalization. Her bold courageous voice remains unheard while her forced service to white community strengthens her oppressed strands.

Alice Walker deconstructs the assumptions by making her women explore the possibilities, challenges and the taunts they had to face through, to deconstruct the elites and construct their flight.

### PHASE OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Alice Walker interprets the constructed stereotypes and the aligned destructive psychic mechanism that gets weaved along the cultural, gender and racial bias. To every reader, she provides a psychological cognizance on what happens to her community, especially her women's lives- the unrevealed injustices and unequal power relations. Towards the beginning of the novel, Celie believes the views of men on her, as being ugly and worthless. She accepts the stinky comments, intolerable abuses and prepares herself to survive through all the complications she was provided with. Her extreme physical and psychological pain and wounds made her stay passive over all injustices. When Shug appeared in Celie's life, Celie explored her own life, through all desires, needs, sexual preferences and worldly pleasures, witnessing the sense of freedom. She was in the same status of social life with Albert and children, but psychologically she evolved and progressed much more, breaking the psychological barriers and dilemmas. Shug appeared a helping hand for Celie, emancipating her from her clueless mental distresses. She helped Celie not only to explore her idea on life, God and existence, but also the conceptions and false perspectives on sex, relationship and contentment. Every women character in the novel shared a bond of sisterhood- Celie and Nettie, Celie and Shug Avery, Sofia and Mary Agnes- in their journeys through passivity and felicity. They faced the challenges, broke it and overcame, or at times subsided as in case of Sofia. However finally they were able to transform into valorous venturous personalities, no more afraid of unfair bias and unjust ill-treatment, and no more stopped by the oppressive sectors of the society.



## CONCLUSION

The novel *The Color purple* widens the readers' understanding of the status and experiences of women not only of being submissive but being a struggler, getting dejected, being tormented but fighting back again and again as a Phoenix from the fire. Every women character in the novel achieves a sense of contentment which is not their actual way of life but a gift of their continuous struggle, as endowed by the author. Alice Walker does not stand against the domesticity trait found in women, rather their falsehood in their acceptance to such submissive cult of domesticity as the only essence of their lives they could masterfully perform. Being a masterpiece of a magical writer, the novel *The Color Purple* explores and imbibes sex with love, struggle with hope, duty with regard and progress with personal space.