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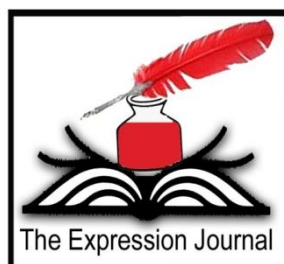
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THE THEORY OF COLOR PURPLE IN THE CONTEXT TO ALICE WALKER'S NOVEL *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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Abstract

"But I don't think us feel old at all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt."1.... said Celie, the protagonist of the novel, as the novel '*The Color Purple*' concluded. Alice Walker, the author has chosen to name the novel '*The Color Purple*' as she wanted to reflect the journey of life of the African- America women from the base life of exploitation to becoming free women, who did not have to bear any more psychological, mental, family, and financial pressures of society and the worst kind of physical exploitation. The day, Celie realized that she is no longer experiencing any pain of any kind and is not only financially independent setting up her own small enterprise 'Folkpants, Unlimited' but also being considered equal egh by Mr. Albert to interact at par, she found life becoming fair. She found her self- worth enhancing as well. Gradually, she was able to live her life, at her own terms i.e. she got her own room painted in purple and red color; the flow of life smoothened. Self-identity gradually surfaced as she was able to unite with her own children, somehow this was justification and extension of herself in the world. Celie feels she is a creator, stitching pants for women, giving expression to her creativity and adorning a calm, peaceful demeanor with the ability to be judgmental and expressive. Nettie who had lived with a missionary couple, travelled to Africa, also found her own identity and united with her sister Celie. Sofia, wife of Harpo is depicted as a fierce and independent woman who refused to relent to the orders of Mayor, thereby, jailed and beaten till face disfigurement. Shug Avery, a blues singer with her confidence level and public popularity impacted Celie to the extent that Celie learnt self-appreciation. Finally, Squeak at the cost of her respect got freedom for Sofia and went ahead to earn money and place as a blues singer, herself. Alice Walker justifies acquisition of self-awareness, self- dependence, and self -respect of her women characters as Celie learns to exhibit choice of colors.

Keywords

Afro-American Women; Exploitation; Discrimination; Physical Abuse; Purple Color.

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Introduction

The Color 'Purple' is created with the right combination in right quantity of blue and red. Both the original colors are unique and special. Purple ensues the placid quietness of blue and the ferocious energy of red. Therefore, it is a typical color, which is vibrant and a soothing at the same time. History of color 'Purple' is enriched with symbolism and values. No one can deny that nobility, luxury, power, ambition, and royalty is seen personified in color 'Purple'. Psychologically, the impact ranges from stimulation to inducing the prevailing perspective of imagination and peace. To begin with the theory of the color 'Purple,' One must admit that it is symbol of Extravagance, Wealth, Dignity, Devotion, Pride, Peace, Mystery, Independence, Magic, Wisdom, and Grandeur. To consider the title of the book, "*The Color Purple*," itself has several layers of meaning. Purple is a color that is symbolic of power, spirituality, and majestic touch. In the story, the color Purple dominantly reflects and represents a complete rainbow of human emotions and experiences, every character lives with humiliations, personal dejections, rejections pains, to small joys.

The novel '*The Color Purple*' has earned the recognition and fame as the representation the empowerment of African American women, Alice Walker became a name to reckon with, her popularity grew manifold. Among her remarkable achievements as an author, her third novel, *The Color Purple* (1982) her life-changing breakthrough masterpiece which won American book award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1983. The novel '*The Color Purple*' is set in Georgia, which is in the Southern part of United States of America, in the 1900s. The central protagonist Celie had no one to share her pain with so she wrote letters to God.

To understand the 'Theory of Color Purple', we need to consider, different color theories floating around the world. These theories are poignant and impressive, in the sense that they alleviate emotions and feelings. Every color has something to say and arouses a different sensitivity. The hue with its tint, shade, and saturation can make everyone to feel and express

differently. There are color theories which bring about a realization of how the interaction of colors can invoke emotions. This concept was well understood by Alice Walker, the author of *'The Color Purple.'* She could visualize the life of Afro American Women in Georgia, United States of America. She had witnessed the pain of many who had lived dull and drab life of greys and blacks. Yet many of the Afro American women rose to richer life hence vibrant colors. Alice Walker created visual harmony with the effect of colors as yellow and red splashed around in the home Shug Avery, a blue's singer who has managed to earn name, fame, and wealth.

To elaborate upon the theory, let us go back to 1666; to trace the color wheel, it was Sir Isaac Newton who had established and invented the color wheel then. He had deciphered colors as 'human perception' which invoked multiple emotions leading to the emergence of the concept that colors are energy as wave length of light. He created the division of colors as, **Primary** (red, blue, yellow); **Secondary** (mixes of primary colors); **Tertiary** (or **intermediate**—mixes of primary and secondary colors). Alice Walker through her narration brought to the readers that primary emotions are easier to be identified in a person and primary colors are found in his/her daily life.

Further Elaboration of Color Being a Reflection of Emotions Goes as Following Correspondence to The Life Situations:

- **Blue:** This unique color is always representing peace; tranquility, and trust including inner depth. The Afro American women in *'The Color Purple'* lived unfortunate life, nature in its raw form exuded peace through its description and peace and tranquility was found by Celie in her later life.
- **Red:** This color is usually associated to display of passion; bounty full of energy; tremendous excitement and even fear generated from signals of dangers. Shug Avery, the mistress of Mr. Albert was introduced by the novelist in a striking red dress.
- **Yellow:** Brightness of yellow is connected to spread and feel of happiness; optimism; hope and enthusiasm. Celie saw the sparkling yellow in the use in upholstery, walls, and costumes of Shug Avery and realized, life is more colorful than she assumed.
- **Green:** Sprawling wide greenery is not only eye soothing but also represents nature i.e. alive and thriving; along with proving the sense of balance that could be spiritual, psychological, physical, and mental. Green is only nature in depiction.
- **Purple:** This is the color of majestic feel, it is known to connote luxury; royalty; and spirituality. The theory of color 'Purple' which is being elaborated upon; in the context to the novel *'The Color Purple'* by Alice Walker clearly indicates that the usage of color 'Purple' by Celie an African American women gradually unfolded the realization and opportunity of becoming 'Empowered.' Shug Avery, the most empowered woman had said "When God made the color purple, he was showing off." c(Walker 73)

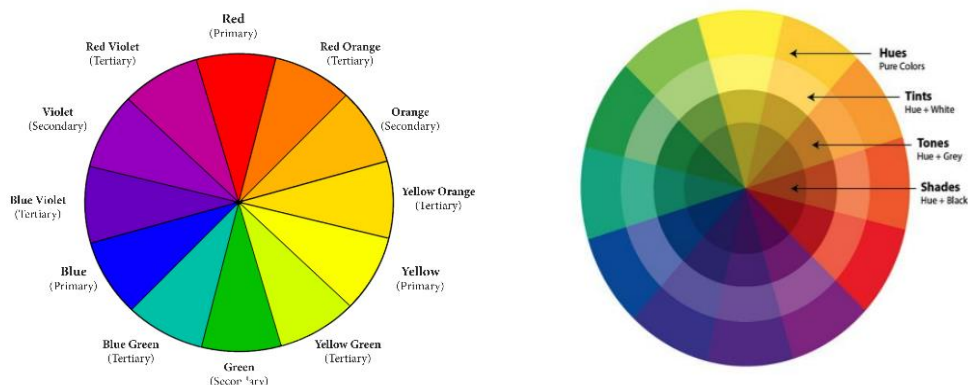
Afro American women were not only discriminated by the white men and women but also by their own male counterparts. Their existence was merely that of a puppet, who probably did not feel the pain. Their sufferings were ignored. The novel *'The Color Purple'* is the clamored effort of the women who were terrified of men in their life, most of all their fathers and husbands. The women could find her physical or mental safety. Their search for self-identity is their journey from black, white, and grey to 'Purple', not only in literal sense but metaphorical as well. The Afro American women used only black, white and grays symbol of sufferings.

Living with these colors aroused melancholy. White is color of purity and wisdom; it stands tall among all colors, was rarely used, it was only dull drab whitish shade that made a person feel belittled was in the offing. Celie, Nettie, and Sophia lived and breathed black and gray. Their life was nothing but typical example Afro American women facing 'Exploitation' and 'Subjugation'.

This paper attempts to trace the footsteps of all the Afro- American women who in their own way struggled to acquire 'self-realization.' In their color less world i.e., devoid of self-worth, self-respect, self-realization, self-esteem, and self- motivation, these women were commanded and drilled to remain manual labor doing the tasks which even men would not ever attempt. Gradually, the women like Celie, Nettie, Shug Avery, Squeak and Sophia inspired by one another acquired hue, tint, shades, and reflections of different colors. It was Celie who learnt to be independent to be her 'Purple' which means to be independent psychologically, financially, mentally, and physically.

To know more about character emergence to stronger personalities of each Afro American women of '*The Color Purple*.' The color wheels can be studied. A study of the color wheels below is only to analyze the evolution of relationships and personalities of characters of the novel '*The Color Purple*.'

Following color wheels that depict emergence of shades- hues of colors and emerging shades in practical usage would symbolically depict emerging personalities. Violet is a natural color, whereas Purple is a manmade color. It can be seen as red violet shade. Purple emerges as a beautiful color as the admixture so does the shade of personality, when a person becomes confident and glowing. Alice Walker, chose to state that she wanted to immortalize all women characters of novel, with this quote "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." (Walker xi)



The artists know, how to go about evolving different shades of same color so does every writer. Alice Walker has studied the life of Afro Americans; she was successful in portraying true to life picture of theirs. Every women character has been well etched with their miseries by Alice Walker. Personal lives had been miserable enough to not allow them speak a word on their own accord, how could they ever have the right to express in public. Sophia, suffered for same to the extent that her body and face was disfigured by the inhuman brutality of Police. She suffered the humiliation, disgrace, contempt, and physical abuse including being raped. This is symbolic of darkness including, the absence of all colors in her life.

Celie, the protagonist had no color in her life. On the other hand, Shug Avery, the blues singer would always be dressed in bright shades, red being her favorite color. The first picture rather a pamphlet of her arrival to the town, of Shug Avery was seen in red by Celie. Red color also indicates passion. We can see in the first circle of shades of primary colors brightness that is natural and inviting. So, was Shug Avery.

Thereby, it is true that life is a combination of colors over lapping and intermixing to providing hues, shades, tints, and tones of different colors. The pattern of color and emotions being interlinked can further understood by delineation of the novel.

The novel '*The Color Purple*' is epistolary. The narrative of the novel moves through letters-

- (1) written by Celie to God
- (2) written by Nettie to Celie
- (3) written by Cele to Nettie.

The story is a painful account of Afro American woman, who suffered discrimination, exploitation and torture that was physical abuse, accompanied with mental and psychological trauma. The protagonist of the novel is Celie whose life is traced from age 14, the men whom she could have trusted and lived a life of settled daughter and wife, ended up tormenting her. As she lost her father early in life and her sickly mother remarried her painful life began to unfold. Celie's step father had probably married her mother only for her property. Celie's mother lay helpless and sick, unable to defend her daughter from being raped by Alphonso, her stepfather, who constantly did so. Celie had faith, she wrote letters to God, but failed to believe God was not a white man, finally Shug Avery convinced her of God's existence.

"Well, us talk and talk about God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?). . . ." (Walker 70-82)

Celie was trying to convince Nettie, her sister and herself that God is not a white man and a distant vision. This explains the pain of Afro American people across United States. She felt that she missed the beauty of nature and life. She was suffering but the faith and serenity of nature could protect her.

The inhuman abuse faced by Celie, made her suffer ceaselessly. She had to take care of her invalid mother, household, and other trivialities. Only saving grace was that she was taught art of stitching by her sickly mother. The basic purpose was to repair and mend clothes in torn and tattered condition, but Celie made it her 'Purple.' Celie mastered her skills and set up a small enterprise called 'Folks pants.' 'Earning self-respect and 'self-dependency.' Alice Walker has etched an evergreen character of Celie, who is an uneducated and poor. She is constantly raped and beaten by her stepfather, Alfonso, When the novel opens, Celie has already been pregnant by her stepfather and given birth to a baby girl named Olivia. Alfonso forcibly took Olivia away shortly after her birth and Celie thought that he had killed her child. Celie gives birth to another child, this time a boy named Adam who is again taken away by Alfonso. Celie's mother who had been ailing for long dies. Unfortunately, she too curses and holds Celie responsible for her misfortunes. Celie was married to a man who was almost the age of her father, he was physically, mentally, and emotionally abusive. She could bear all tortures and managed to finally survive an abusive husband. Celie found her voice gradually under the umbrella of encouragement and compassion of the blues singer, Shug Avery. As Celie befriended Shug Avery, she learnt the value of colors. She was charmed by 'the red color dress' worn Shug Avery

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at the concert of the singer, making her realize how the color 'Red' can be tantalizingly confidence evoking. Red color gives a unique identity. This was the first time she faces and imbibes the importance of color in life. She was not exactly jealous of Mr. Albert and Shug Avery's intimacy and closeness but somewhere deep she longed to share atleast civil relationship with Mr. Albert not be a victim of his physical abuse.

To come back to colors, it is well said "Colors, what a deep and mysterious language, language of dreams", as commented by Paul Gauguin, Famous post- Impressionist.⁵

The feeling that enables one to be expressive in reflecting the joy of spirit. Unlike the basic colors as red, blue, green, or yellow hence are basic emotions. All characters of '*The Color Purple*' are different in their reactions and interaction with others. The Afro American men survive with basic instincts and emotions representing basic colors. It is only the Afro American women who experience mixed emotions from ignominy to independence of thoughts and emerge beautiful as 'Purple'. At first glance, color theory may seem complicated, but a mere understanding of the basic principles of combination of 'colors or emotions is all one requires to start the application in one's creative life. You may be a writer or a painter, an architect or an interior decorator, designer, or a podcast maker, it becomes imperative to understand color theory to live a harmonious life.

The conclusion with the following lines will be perfect summing up "It annoys God...if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it." (Walker 73)

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