

Resistance against Marginalization of Afro-American Women in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Abstract— The present research endeavors to explore how the Afro-American female characters in Alice Walker's, novel, *The Color Purple* break the boundaries of traditional male or female roles. Typically, it focuses on the struggles of African-American women against the exploitation both by the whites and black men. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the black women's tragic experiences in a racist society and their struggle for survival and wholeness. The female characters have masculine traits such as activeness, boldness, and physical strength. Sofia's strength and Shug's sexual assertiveness and Harpo's insecurity are major examples of such disparity between the characters' gender and the traits he or she displays. To analyze how subversion of gender roles sometimes causes problems, the tool taken for the research methodology is feminism or feminist framework. The working hypothesis is to demonstrate how Walker wishes to emphasize that gender and sexuality are not as simple as people believe. Walker subverts and defies the traditional ways in which people understand women to be women and men to be men. She fights against the way black women are receiving two layers of discrimination; one discrimination is for being black and the other for being woman. Walker meticulously sketches the black female characters strong enough to lead their lives. The novelty of the research lies in subverting the orthodox gender roles based on color and sex, and redefining the role of Afro-American women of any color and society.

Keywords— Liberty, Marginalization, Patriarchy; Racism, Resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's writings focus on the struggles of African-Americans, particularly women. Walker's *The Color Purple* (1992) is an epistolary novel which won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction ("National book Awards-1993"). It is a conscious rewriting of canonical male text (Linda Abbandonate, 1993). Alice Malsenior Walker, born in Georgia, United States in 1944, is a renowned Afro-American writer, who coined the term 'womanist' to mean a black feminist, one who appreciates and prefers woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility, woman's strength" and is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female ("Alice Walker- biography", 2018). She projects societies that are racist, sexist and violent. *The Color Purple* is also marked as "the perfect expression of what makes Alice

Walker, Alice walker" (Bradley, 1984, p. 30). Walker's women characters exhibit strength, endurance, resourcefulness, resistance, creativity and forgiveness on confronting and overcoming oppression in their lives, yet they are frank and open in depicting the often devastating circumstances of two-fold afflictions of racism and sexism.

The Color Purple narrates the story of a young black woman fighting her way through not only racist white culture but also patriarchal black culture. When the novel opens, Celie is a young black girl living in Georgia in the early years of 20th century. She is an uneducated girl and writes her letters in common language Celie is entering her adolescence, believing she was raped by her own father and that he killed both of their children. She writes to God because she has no one else to write to. She of course knows her sister Nettie loves her, but she is too young to

understand. Celie is not, however, complaining to God and at this point she is simply confiding in Him. Slowly, Celie evolves into a matured woman with great confidence. For a long time, Celie is almost a slave to her husband. Later, Shug Avery, her husband's Mistress, comes to live with them to recuperate from the sickness and Celie becomes her nurse. She encourages Celie to become stronger. At the same time, Sofia, Celie's daughter-in-law shows Celie to stand up for herself and fight against prejudice and injustice. Eventually, Celie redeems her repressive husband and hires him as her assistant in her business. By creating their own world and own way of performing their activities, the Afro-American female characters subvert the traditional gender roles and resist against conventional patriarchal system.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is purely based on the textual reading of *The Color Purple* on the basis of Gender roles and Sexuality theories. It makes close, discursive, analytical study of the letters, narrative, setting of Walker's novel, *The Color Purple* to demonstrate the resistance of the Afro-American women against gender hierarchy. The research tool or methodology used to conduct this research is the analysis of the text from Feminism. Apart from the intensive study of the text, the methodological tools are also drawn from different theories, especially about the condition of the females in the patriarchal society. For the collection of the related materials, articles from the library, websites, and magazines are taken as secondary sources to discuss on the concept of feminism.

Theoretical Modality

Feminism is a women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. Feminism a specific kind of political discourse; a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism (Toril Moi, 1988). Feminist theory encompasses work in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary critics, art history psychoanalysis and philosophy (Susan, 1995). This movement fights to protect women from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence (Echols, 1989). Patriarchy is probably the oldest forms exploitation of one part of population by another (Sheila Ruth, 1990). The female is female by virtue of certain natural defectiveness ("The Politics of Aristotle", 1885). Modern feminists challenge the biological essentialities view of gender. The French feminist, Simon De

Beauvoir (1974) said that woman was not regarded as an autonomous being. In addition to social and political injustices, there are epistemic injustices (M. Fricker, 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (R.W. Connell, 2005). Catherine MacKinnon (1989) states that pornography affects people's belief in rape myths. Pornography promotes these rape myths and desensitizes people to violence against women. In *Toward a Feminist Poetics*, Elaine Showalter (1992) writes that 'Gynocriticism' is more creative act because it can establish woman as genius and intellectual one and challenges Rousseauistic anti-feminist belief that women cannot equate to men in intellect and creativity. Creativity is an individual and independent entity of a natural gift which belongs to neither male nor female (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Virginia Woolf (1929) went ahead and asked women to have their own room and money if they want to write fiction in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Patricia M. Spacks (1975) shifts from an andocentric to a gynocentric feminist criticism because it asks again and again, how woman's writing is different, how womanhood itself shapes women's creative process. Ecofeminists see men's control of land as responsible for the oppression women and destruction of natural environment (Beihl, 1991). Marxist feminism's foundation is laid by Engels who claims that a woman's institution of family as it exists is a complex system in which men command women's services (Engels, 1884). Socialist feminism argues that women's liberation can only be achieved by working to end economic and cultural sources of women's oppression (Ehrenreich, 1976). Black feminist thought consists of the ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for black women (Collins, 1990). Postmodern feminists also emphasize the social construction of gender and the nature of discursive nature of reality (Butler, 1999).

The feminist approaches mentioned above are useful tools to examine how the protagonist of Walker's novel *The Color Purple* struggles to resist against the double marginalization of Afro-American women challenging the deep-rooted patriarchal norms and values. The feminist discourse has provided chances to understand the text better a voice for equality of all sexes.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Color Purple became concern of many critics immediately after its publication. Critics have commented the text in terms of its symbols, themes and characterization. The major issues of the novel are addressed by some critics. Taking place mostly in rural Georgia, the story focuses on the life of African-American women in Southern United States in the 1930s, addressing their low positions in American social culture ("Alice Walker-biography", 2018). Abandonate (1993) makes a judgment of the work on its symbols. *The Color Purple* symbolically suggests in this physical size, the position and power of the 'womanist' text within the canon: dominated by the weight, proximity and authority of masculine accounts of female subjectivity. It may nonetheless challenge and displace those master narratives Abandonate (1993). Walker earned high praise for the novel, especially for the use of folk language, epistolary form a technique that is both associated with everyday life and with women (Barbara Christian, 1986). Walker's novel, *The Color Purple* articulates and celebrates the eventual triumph and independence of black 'womanist' values (Guyerrow, 1993). Analyzing on the character, Madhumalati (1991) regards that Celie, crippled by the sense of 'inferiorization', 'non-entity' and 'guilt', fights against racist and sexist definition of herself. Walker herself remarks the importance of *The Color Purple* saying that let's hope people can hear Celie's voice ("Alice Walker- biography", 2018). Critic Henkinson (1997) also observes that Walker's greatest accomplishment within *The Color Purple* is its claim for space through the critique of American theological structure that are, by implication biased. And the adoption of epistolary form subverts biased codes of literary expression.

In spite of its overwhelming success, *The Color Purple* has been criticized for possessing rather, a superficial, fairytale styled ending. Royster (1986) declares that the novel appears not a realistic chronicle of human events but as a fable. Similarly, Truider Harries (1984) observes the characters' growth as 'incredible' and 'inconsistent' and mentions that the issues are worked out at the price of realism.

These critics assume that Walker is being naturalistic. Though some critics have approached the text from various perspectives, they have not noticed the gender and colour discriminations of the Afro-American women in the novel. Hence, this article aims to explore on the research gap oriented to resistance against the marginalization of Afro-American women, orthodox gender roles based on

colour and sex, and redefinition of the role of women of any colour and society.

IV. ANALYSIS/ DISCUSSION

Masculine Female in *The Color Purple*

In a patriarchal society, female are marginalized as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing and submissive. Walker, in *The Color Purple*, defies this patriarchal convention and gives masculine roles to female. Hence, her characters in the novel resist such patriarchal notion and subvert the traditional gender roles. In the process of rupturing the convention, Sofia (Celie's daughter-in-law) and Shug Avery (Albert's Mistress) play vital roles. They not only act as anti-conventional but also encourage Celie to transform herself from passive to active female character.

In the novel, Sofia is presented as an active and bold girl unlike the traditional females. She does not accept any bad comments made against her. Once Harpo, the lover of Sofia takes her to introduce with his father, Mr. _ and talk the issue of 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. (p. 33)

Sofia is a woman who wants to do her work in a way she likes. She does not accept others' interruption. 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. Because of the matter of superiority and inferiority in the family, Harpo and Sofia always fight. Harpo tries to keep control over her even by beating but she reacts. And, she always wants linearity and equality in the family. Celie describes:

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. (p. 39)

Sofia, being an active woman, does not leave Harpo becoming idle. She makes him do some work. But he accepts to do the inner ones. So, 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. By doing outer works and wearing Harpo's pants, Sofia not only challenges the traditional gender roles but also ruptures the conventional idea of female clothing.

Eventually, 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 is very sad of Harpo's uncaring sexual acts too.

...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. Heartfeeling don't even seem to enter into it. The fact he can do it like that make me want to kill him. (p. 69)

Sofia, being wife of Harpo, never gets love and respect from her husband. She wants dedication, love and care from him as her husband but he fails to provide her. He is always in search of power to dominate her in order to become superior and he lacks emotional and rational quality. To gain the freedom from the bored life, she decides to leave Harpo. Hence, by daring to leave her husband and house, she subverts the traditional gender role of a woman, living in husband's house and taking care of her husband, children and his household.

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. Neither has she shyness nor is she dependent on any males. She is self-guided and motivated. She is a mother but behaves as if she has no one or nothing to care for. She is drowned in her outer world and tries to create her own identity as an independent self. Once Celie asks her if she ever misses her children when she is away from them, she implies that she misses nothing-

"My kids with they grandma, she say.
You miss'em? I ain't.

I don't miss nothing. (p.52)

Being a mother, Shug unlike the traditional females, is away from her family and children. By leaving the children with her grandmother, she is away from her household and performs manly activities in the outer world. She is bold daring and active. She sings songs in Harpo's 'Juke Joint', being very glamorous. Her dress up is very violating 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" (p. 84). Moreover she is sexually very assertive woman because she keeps changing her lovers for sexual satisfaction. The characterization of Shug and Sofia are characterized as 'manly' or 'womanly' (p. 236). Gradually, the love between Celie and Shug turns into lesbian relationship. In the name of lovers, they perform sexuality and move 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." (p.118)

Shug Avery, who is always in search of sexual satisfaction and money, never cares for her health. She 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. Her activities clearly show that she is very much indifferent to the world. She never cares for others as well as herself. What matters to her is sexuality and liberty. Though she 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. A room full of shoes. She buy Grady anything he think he want." (p.114)

Without the help of any males, Shug becomes 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.

In the novel, some female characters are presented as having masculine quality, unlike the belief of the patriarchal society that marginalized women. These 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. Hence, they resist against the trend of marginalizing women and become masculine-female.

Female Tie as Anti-conventional in *The Color Purple*

In *The Color Purple*, unlike the traditional patriarchal belief, the Afro-American female turns to female for support, development and creating identity leaving their males. By the bond of their loving and nurturing relationship, they challenge the patriarchal norms and values. They try to create their own female world. Walker's female characters powerfully challenge the traditional belief which always regards female as dependent on males. But throughout the novel, Walker portrays female friendship as a means for women to summon the courage to resist the oppression and dominance of patriarchal society. To challenge the domination, they go far beyond gender roles and create their own self. For instance, female tries to gain sexual fulfillment through females. Celie and Shug keep homosexual relationship to gain orgasm. Their activity is far beyond female norms and values. They challenge the heterosexual belief. Lesbianism turns away from various forms of collusion with patriarchal exploitation and instead consists of relationships among women which constitute a form of resistance to existing forms of social relations (Diana Fuss, 1993).

In the beginning all female characters are responsible for their sorrow and exploitation because of their jealousy among them. The relationship between Celie and Sofia and between Sofia and Squeak are the examples of such relationships. But later when they are united they gain new power and ability to form their selfhood. 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 and celebrates joy and bliss in her business and companions. Celie gets redemption from the help of the community of

black females. Celie gets the impetus for self-realization from Sofia, 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. But Celie lacks power and guidance to use those inspirations in her real life. She is so ignorant that she believes whoever wants to fight against the prejudices of men, they will live no more and she quits the idea of fighting.

But everything changes with the entry of Shug Avery who proves herself as an independent and economically strong in her career. She teaches Celie to create her own selfhood, neglecting the tolerance and acceptance. Under the help of Shug, Celie becomes active and revengeful against the tyranny of her husband. 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" (p. 150-151). But Shug stops her from being violent, "Now, you won't. Nobody feel better for killing nothing" (p.150). 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. Shugh make her able to discover the way to freedom. 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. Now Celie likes to value herself. She gained her own individuality and turned a new woman. By this help, support the discovery of Celie's own individuality, she becomes able to challenge the traditional patriarchal norms and values and leaves Mr_. She says:

You a lowdown dog is what's wrong. Its time to leave you and enter into the creation...But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whup your ass. (p. 207)

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. It becomes the alternative to male domination and their ability to break the imposed

stereotypes that both male and female were to follow. And unitedly they resurrect themselves from the death of their selfhood. Celie asserts her freedom from her husband and declares her rights to exist, "I'm black, I'm poor, I may be ugly, and can't look. But I'm here" (p. 214). Here, Celie's sense of self is so strong that she is no longer helpless, a 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. She is supposed to be dead because there is no any information about her since she had escaped. But later, 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. She teaches Celie to see the outer world and try to change herself according to that situation. Nettie 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" (p. 138).

This declaration removes the stigma and shame of incest from Celie's mind and serves to develop her individuality. Now, 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 establishes 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...." (p. 44). 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. The continuation of Celie and Sofia's work on 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 help and support each other and make an extended matriarchal community

through which they assert their power against their marginalization by the patriarchal society.

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

Traditionally, women are defined negatively by the patriarchal society and they are suggested to treat men as gods, but in *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery, a female, insists Celie to redefine God in a new way. Celie starts resisting the "big, old and tall gray bearded and white" (p. 201), 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, unoppressive and unrepressive. Shug Avery teaches Celie that God is not "white" nor it is "He". Instead, God is universal and natural. It is in everything including the "flowers, water, wind and a big rock" (p. 204) and God is inside her and she is naturally connected to everything. 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. (p. 202-203).

Shug changes Celie's idea about God. This new philosophy of God positions Celie as "being part of everything, not separate at all" (p. 203) fortifies her with self acceptance and leads her to reject male mastery. She gives her idea about nature or universal God that is present in everything and everywhere. She 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" (p. 203).

This new definition of God- a womanist vision- blurs and frees the traditional male connotations of God and creates a new feminine concept of God as part of everything. Shug provides Celie with a bridge to new spirituality free from the domain of an angry, white male 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. 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. But he ain't whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other and of it, tell him to get lost. (p. 204)

This new vision of God and man changes Celie's perception towards them. She feels herself fool and angry at her passiveness in everything. Initially she follows Bible to "honor father and mother no matter what" (p. 213) and becomes quiet when Alphonso (father) rapes her. But later, being enlightened, she starts reacting against negative aspects in men. She dares to curse Mr. _ when he denies to handover the letters from Nettie. She curses, "Until you do right by me everything you dream about will fail" (p.213). While cursing him, she feels the extreme power "seem to come to me from the trees- the nature God" (p. 213).

Hence, under the guidance of Shug, Celie becomes able to redefine God that is traditionally accepted as 'male' 'white'. But in the novel, the idea of Biblical monotheistic God is ruptured by the pantheistic notion of God, that is, Nature-God. And female takes power to redefine it. So, it is subversion of the traditional gender roles because the marginalizing tendency of women is resisted.

Assumption of Feminine Roles by the Male Characters in *The Color Purple*

In *The Color Purple*, many female characters go beyond the boundaries of traditional gender role and gain moral victory. Similarly, male characters also become ready to do female tasks as traditional patriarchal society defines and violates the norms of traditional gender role. Initially male characters are very stereotypical and conservative but gradually their stereotypical quality starts rupturing as the novel proceeds. In the beginning, Celie's husband Mr. _ is seen as very cruel and oppressive man. He is very brutal and forces Celie into isolation by not letting know about Nettie. Mr._ captures Celie to substitute his dead wife and mistress Shug. Celie is enslaved, beaten and raped in her house which never

becomes her own house. Since marriage she only becomes the sufferer and object of Mr.-'s frustration:

He beat one like he beat children, cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say Celie, git the belt. The children be one side the room packing through the crackers. It all I can do not cry (p. 23).

Mr._ manipulates Celie physically, psychologically and emotionally. He never pays attention towards his wife. He never helps her in her household. But towards the end of the novel when Celie leaves Mr.-, he starts changing his cruel and lazy character. He becomes a changed person. He himself admits, "Celie I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. I felt like a new experience" (p. 267). He starts working hard. Describing Mr._ as changed person, Sofia says:

He work real hard too.

What? I say, Mr._ work!

And clean that house just like woman.

Even cook, say Harpo. And what more, wash the dishes when he

finish. (p. 229)

Mr._ now is a changed person. He not only starts but also does the traditionally feminine roles, like cooking, cleaning and washing the dishes. His dominating and repressive character against female starts changing. He becomes a 'womanish man'.

At the end of the novel, Mr._ joins Celie's pants making business not being her husband and owner but being a worker and her friend. He comes under the shade of Celie's business life and desires to do the work under the guidance of Celie and man's patriarchal role as 'provider' also transforms into 'receiver'. His primary idea about male as superior to female and female should be kept under control in anyway and men and women are different according to their dress up and work starts collapsing. He earlier believed that "men and women not suppose to wear the same thing. Men suppose to wear the pants" (p. 278). But Celie tells there is nothing about men's and women's wearing. People wear those that make them feel comfortable. Celie further says that there is no any distinct work that is done by either male or female. Men sew in Africa and people don't think them as backward. By listening Celie's logics Mr._ says that he also likes sewing but he feels that when he sews people would laugh. "When I was growing up" he said, "I used to

try to sew along with mama cause that's what she was always doing. But everybody laughed at me. But you know I liked it." (p. 279). Celie by hearing the desire of Mr._ for stitching the clothes, asks Mr._ to stitch the pockets and tells that nobody is going to mock him. Both agree and start sewing and smoking. In this situation, Celie becomes the active person where as Mr._ behaves as female and keeps Celie's words and listens her decision.

In this way, towards the end of the novel, the brutal and destructive aspect of 'masculinity' is ruptured by acquiring new insight of equality between males and females and accepting the feminine roles as a natural task by the males. We can mark resistance against the marginalization of Afro-American women in the novel.

V. CONCLUSION

Traditionally men and women are categorized on the basis of their sex. But Walker, in *The Color Purple*, presents her characters, male or female, totally divorced from the traditional gender role system. Walker's female characters go beyond the belief of traditional patriarchal system. The female bonding in the novel is so strong that they do not worry losing some sort of important thing for strengthening their knot of femininity. Walker gives her black 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 female encouragement and bonding becomes the means to challenge the traditional gender roles. Women become the definer of God. Traditionally women were defined by the patriarchal society. In the novel, Celie, by the encouragement of Shug, redefines not the man but God. This reimaging 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. Finally, the male characters also come under the guidance of females. They also move far beyond the traditional gender roles. Hence, Walker proves that the traditional concept of gender role is man made. It does not have any meaning and therefore impractical.

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