

# RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE

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## Abstract

Discrimination in the society among humans is a serious issue which has to be curtailed. Due to this discrimination, difference of opinion evolves which makes the adapted or immigrant society a weaker one losing all their rights and hope of living in the land. Racism is a brutal master taming the innocent people with iron chains. People suffer getting adapted and they are not accepted by the natives. They are discriminated for their race, class, caste, and gender. Though all the discrimination seems to be a serious one, racial issue is the worst of all. Racial discrimination prevailing in America is taken into consideration for analysis and particularly Afro-Americans. Afro-Americans undergo the stress brought by the white people. They are separated from the natives in the public places, schools, churches, and it extends wherever they meet. It is not confined to the elders but to the entire society of Afro-Americans. They are suppressed and oppressed and extreme tortures cannot be explained in words for it is related to subjugated feelings. Their non-violent struggle to come out from such cobweb of the society is nullified. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is taken for analysing the concept of racial discrimination. Being a sufferer of the societal discrimination, she has portrayed the typical society with her characters. Though they are in the deteriorated state, they are in search of their individual identity and not with the racialised mask.

## Key Words

The Color Purple, racial discrimination, women discrimination, discrimination in native land.

## Introduction

Equality is the society brings nourishment and enhancement to individual lives. It opens the door for humans to know the values of life, ethics of living, and contented mind which leads to excellence and happiness. But it remains as a daydream and everyone struggles to be in the equalised state which brings discrimination. The discrimination in the society occurs is based on class, race, caste, creed, and gender. Many societies struggle against such discrimination which makes them disoriented. Discrimination brings disparity which retains a scar in the minds of the

people. Unless the discrimination is eradicated, people cannot lead a peaceful life. They do not want to prolong in such painful experiences because the pain endured is unbearable. Though many of the societies struggle due to discrimination, the paper analyses the discrimination of race in the American society. America is known for its assimilation of cultures and people. The American society is also called as salad bowl/mosaic for its amalgamation of multiculturalism. Though it overlaps with assimilation, the white people are not ready to accept the adapted people. People migrate to America for raising their economic standards, due to pressures, takes as slaves, and many others. The other reasons for migration are a common one but slave tradition seems to be terrified. This paper analyses the concept of racial discrimination in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983).

### **The Color Purple**

Alice Walker, an Afro-American knows the hardships of her society and she has depicted the reality in her novels. Her novel *The Color Purple* portrays how the people are tortured and harassed for being non-native. The protagonist of the novel, Celie undergoes sexual harassment from her childhood days which makes her to lose hope and faith on anyone except her sister Nettie. Being a black women she undergoes sexual harassment not only from their society but also from the white. Walker has depicted that the women characters, are either meek or confident loses their self and identity for being black women. The story reveals that the black male characters in the novel typically stick to the patriarchal notion of man and they do not want to consider their women as human beings like them and they also undergo racialised harassments.

White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favor their interest and support the continued oppression of other groups. (Hooks 16)

This attitude of men in the novel make women characters to undergo all sorts of harassments and finally they realise their self and rebel. Walker brings forth how the characters react with the situations either with the black or white.

### **Racial Discrimination**

Racial discrimination is a serious one which affects the entire society and it has to be eradicated first for it is anti human. The whites are not amicable with the non-natives which brings discrimination. They do not want to support the people but instead given tortures for being in their land. The whites do not want the non-natives to rise up in the society and this is depicted

in the story with lynching of Celie's father. This lynching is found in the history under the Jim Crows Law and Walker has presented to her readers the background history.

During the first great name of lynchings, propaganda urging the defense of white womanhood from black men's irrepressible rape instincts was conspicuous for its absence. As Frederick Douglass observed, the lawless killings of Black people were most often described as a preventive measure to deter the Black masses from rising up in revolt. (Davis 185)

Celie's father was a successful business man and the white merchants got jealous over him. The whites thought that he grabbed their business. So they want to wipe the black man trace and lynched him in the public place in front of Celie's mother. This made her to get into madness. "Then the white merchants began to get together and complain that their store was taking all the black business away from them, and the blacksmith shop that he set up behind the store, was taking some of the white" (Walker 157). The whites are not bothered about the adapted people for they vary in their race, class, colour, and creed. They want to adapt a systematic way of life neglecting the non-natives. They need the non-natives only for doing hard works and do not consider them as humans. In this racial discrimination, not only the men suffer but also women and children. Women's position is more perilous compared to others for they undergo sexual harassment from their own society as from the well as whites.

### **Women Discrimination**

Women whichever society or place they belong to, they are not considered as souls. They are considered to be the meanest living on earth and their basic rights are curtailed. In the novel, the author portrays the character of Sofia and how she loses her confidence and learnt some lesson from the white. Sofia, being a bold one happens to meet the Mayor's family in the market. Looking at the children's cleanliness, Mayor's wife asked her to be her maid but Sofia refused. When she compelled again, Sofia got angry and used harsh words. This irritated the Mayor and his wife and it ended in a clash that ended in Sofia's imprisonment.

The social hierarchy in white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy is one in which theoretically men are the powerful, women the powerless, adults the powerful, children the powerless; white people the powerful, black people and other non-white people the powerless. In a given situation, whichever party is in power is likely to use coercive authority to maintain that power if it is challenged or threatened. (Hooks 118-19)

Sofia has undergone harsh punishment which disfigured her. She has to endure the pain for long years and she was made to work for the whites. This made Sofia to lose her self and confidence and she thought that only power they can dominate the powerless and not with their confident or self. Being in the white place, she learnt that even the white women are not given their rights but

the white women are contented that they are superior to black men. “White folks is a miracle of affliction, say Sofia” (Walker 98). The white women suppress and oppress the black for they vary in colour. This variation in race not only curtails the rights of the adapted but makes them to lose their rights even in their own land. Due to the lack of resources and to deteriorated economic status, the Africans even lose their self in their home land to the whites.

### **Discrimination in Native Land**

Discrimination brings disparity among people due to variation within them or their surroundings. It makes them to be alien in a foreign land and sometimes in their own land. It makes the people to be confined and have discomfort in mingling with others. If one is discriminated in their own land, it will be the worst condition for them. They have to withdrawn from their birth rights and curtail in a nutshell losing their individual identity. In the novel, Walker portrays the state of the Africans through the letters of Nettie how they have lost all their wealth and natural resources. She states the position of the Olinkans under the domination of whites. People are not conscious of their surroundings and they are unaware of being dominated. This is known from the story through the words of Nettie after she goes to Africa. Nettie flees to Africa due to the harassment of promising Celie to write letters. She went with the missionaries, Samuel and Corrine. While travelling by train, she felt the ill-treatment of the whites. They have to occupy separate seats and should not dine with them or else they have to bear the tortures. Nettie nurtured Celie through her letters carrying information about Africa. Her letter states the position of the native African people and how they are tortured. They are not allowed to get the basic education and particularly girls.

The vast majority of poor black women in this society find they are continually subjected to abuse will be an element in most of their personal interactions. They are more inclined to accept abuse in situations where there are some rewards or benefits, where abuse is not the sole characteristic of the interaction. (Hooks 125)

The Olinkan people are made to move from their place for constructing a rubber factory. Though the African people had a place, they are not allowed to live there. The white people took all their wealth and confined them in a place restricting food, shelter, and water. Due to the lack of basic need, the Olinkans have to shift their native place. Even in their native place, they are ruled by the whites for the lack of economic status and natural resources. The Olinkans have to abide by the words of the dictator without any explanation whatever it may be. This is due to the power and wealth of the white which made the Olinkans subside. The native people began to think that the white people are meritorious and they bring to reality whatever they think. This is because of the racial discrimination which makes them to think inferior.

## Conclusion

Racial discrimination changes the lives of people and their feelings for their society. It has to be eradicated or else everyone will lose their mask. Celie because of fear for men thought that God is also white for He did not pay heed to her words. “God all white too, looking like some stout white man work at the bank” (Walker 85). But after reading the letters of Nettie, she dropped her thought. After realising her state, Celie comes to know how to react to situations and relations. She blasted Mr.- for his worst activities and left home with a Shrug. She began to stitch pants and also wear it. She felt comfortable in it and began to stitch for her society people. But she refused to stitch for the whites which show that the wound has healed but retaining the scar. Hooks let’s out her statement for sexist oppression and racism as

Significantly, struggle to end sexist oppression that focuses on destroying the cultural basis for such domination strengthens other liberation struggles. Individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression. (40)

Exterminating racial discrimination from the society safe guards and develops not only the individuals but also the society. The society which is free from racial issues knows the true value of human and the ethics of living. This in turn, nourishes and enhances the society to be in an equalised state.

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