

**Unraveling the Threads of Celie’s Journey in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple**

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**Article Received:** 02/01/2026

**Article Accepted:** 02/02/2026

**Published Online:** 03/02/2026

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.02.07

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**Abstract:**

Alice Walker dexterously writes that women can heal women's problems better than men. She encourages women's culture, emotions, and feelings. The multidimensional quality of life is manifested in her novels. The ability to appreciate and enjoy the experience of one's immediate surroundings is well portrayed. She writes on women's love for folk, the spirit, music, dance, the moon, food, self-struggle. Her main focus is on an individual's spiritual development. The author is aware of the socio-political status of the black people in America.

**Key words:** Black women, women;s love, identity

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**Introduction:**

Black women's "struggle emanates from a deepening of self-knowledge and love." (Christian 82) .Alice Walker's concept of nature matches with the Wordsworth notion of man's relationship with nature in his poem Tintern Abbey. Most of the incidents in the novel have a frequent recurrence with nature. Alice Walker starts Kate's association with redwood trees. Occasionally, Kate feels that the tree is an epitome of profound spirituality and stops her from attending the Buddhist meditation classes. Though she sits under the redwood trees with her immersed thoughts, feels isolated in a group.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) sketches the significant themes of sexual violence, reality, oppression, African tradition, identity and liberation, letters, friendship and female bonding. All Walker's experiences are ingrained in the web of stories in the novel. Afro American writers: Toni Morrison and Alice Walker reveal the oppression of the community and enhance the deep insight of black women's empowerment. They suggest black women to develop spiritually, psychologically and physically by themselves as self is more important in one's life. Their protagonists develop the feminine quality of wisdom and gain life skills experience.

Self is that conscious thinking thing whatever substance is made up of (whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) – which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as this consciousness extends. (Locke 98)

Sexual violence plays a major part in *The Color Purple*. Celie and Sofia are the victims from childhood to marriage. During 1930, lynching is a common threat for the Southern black which is presented in the protagonist Celie's brutal experiences by her father Alfonso in the novel. Being her father, Alfonso rapes and hits her for simple things. Moreover, he tells Celie that "You better not never tell anybody but God. It'd kill your mammy." (Walker 3) Alfonso abuses Celie especially when her sick mother visits a doctor. In her other novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker conveys the same idea. The character Margaret is ill-treated by her husband, Grange. She is victimized and abused by him. Though she loves him, he maintains sexual relationship with a prostitute,

Josie Gladys Willis writes, Margaret's behaviour is ....outrageous, audacious, and courageous, only in that she does what a woman is never

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expected to do. Actually, she does what men do to survive and what women can never do and survive. (Willis 23)

Celie's mother inquires about the father of her child when she has given birth to the second baby. She replies that they are God's children and hides the truth because if she expresses the reality, Alfonso would kill her ailing mother. Based on Celie's mistreatment, childhood horrific experiences of sexual violence by her step father, Alice Walker has showed the constant threat of the Afro-American women. The black women are described as weak and submissive who endure pain and the sufferings throughout their life. The writer develops the novel by entangling all the conditions of children and women that prevail in Afro-American society. Celie, an epitome of abuse since teenage, has been forced to marry Mr. Albert.

To escape from Alfonso's abuse, Celie marries Albert and estimates herself as an incapable and ugly girl. Though she marries him, still sustains the psychological and physical cruelties daily. When Alice Walker brings out the black women's problems of horror, abuse, violence, childhood trauma through Celie's character into the public domain, she immediately receives the negative response from the black man in her community. Let's hope people can hear Cele's voice. There are so many people like Celie who make it who come out of nothing. People who triumph. (Anillo and Abramson 67)

Alice Walker explores the realities of oppression, insanities, and loyalties of black women in a relationship with black men. Celie, Shug Avery, and Nettie are portrayed as black women in the novel. The patriarchal power exasperates black women and they struggle for independence and identity. Black women's subjugation is helpless as Celie and Sofia. They do not have the courage to overcome oppression. Celie mirrors the image of a woman in Afro-American society. Added to this, the real conditions of African tribe's traditions are portrayed in *The Color Purple*.

The author reappears, insisting on the reader's attention to the literary, refractive nature of his work, and yet ... simultaneously insisting on its realism, its truth to observed life, its non-literary dimensions, its non-literary authority. (Lessing 8)

Nettie's departure to Africa presents the indications of their strong roots. Once again Black Americans want to attain freedom, liberty and move away from the clutches of the dominant group. Nettie visits many places like the U.S, New York, London, Olinka in Africa

and again to the U.S. signifies the black people's search for identity. The novel throws light on integrated families and kinship. In Olinka people are stubborn. Celie's children feel happy in Africa. They enjoy the African food, way of life and customs. Children are fond of African girl Tashi. The marriage of Adam and Tashi is a revival of the birth of a new Black world. African girls have to undergo female circumcision, a traditional practice in Africa before marriage which is the painful state of the African woman gender.

Nettie's experience broadens the scope of the novel by showing how the Africans often set up their own systems of oppression that have nothing to do with the oppression that is inflicted by white people (Scholl 260).

It is an outrageous attempt Walker flays on the crude and unhygienic ritual of the African tribe on the young girls. Tashi has to undergo female circumcision and Adam too experiences facial scarring before marriage. Alice Walker's other novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) deals with traditional marriage. Unique problems of black women in Africa as well as the United States are explored. These religious practices should be stopped which is an unnecessary pain to the women's gender.

We cannot excuse this as a cultural tradition. There are many cultural traditions that used to exist in many parts of the world that are no longer acceptable. We cannot excuse it as a private matter because it has very broad public implications. It has no medical benefits. It is, plain and simple, a human rights violation. (Clinton)

Liberation and redemption are the main concepts of *The Color Purple*. Slowly, Celie moves from a victim to a guardian and makes herself strong. Shug Avery's arrival brings many changes in Celie's life. Alice Walker shows the oppressed conditions of the black women to create awareness among all the women in the world so that they can learn from their experiences and make themselves confident, strong and rebellious in this patriarchal society. From the inner conflicts and sufferings, Celie gains strength and improves herself. She is liberated from her husband Albert. Mae G. Henderson points out, Unlike Celie, who derives her sense of self from the dominant white and male theology, Shug is a self-invented character whose sense of self is not maleinscribed. Her theology allows a diving, self-authorized sense of self. (73)

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Celie becomes an independent lady and tries to free herself from all sorts of restrictions and becomes an entrepreneur in making hand crafts. Her business encourages and enlightens all other women to extend their hands. Sofia too joins and continues the work of quilting. Celie hires six women employees and supports them a lot. She has the skill of designing pants in different models. She chooses the texture according to the African climate. She is happy, content and learns to love herself and others. Her self-confidence and self-esteem make her an entrepreneur. Celie says "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time."(Walker 222). It is the emblem of unity among black women. Only this strong women bonding made Celie is confident.

Celie's identity as an individual and entrepreneur relates to the black Communities in the Southern United States during the twentieth century and Chinese Communities. Household work, friendly nature, interpersonal skills and social gatherings give strength and liberation to women. Alice Walker develops the drastic change in the protagonist of fourteen years from a small, innocent, timid natured girl to a respectable, mature woman in the society. She even gains her husband's love which she has missed at her young age. She shares her feelings with other women and gives advice to her stepson Harpo. The writer sketches Shug Avery's character differently who is the embodiment of freedom in choosing her career as a blues singer and refuses to lead a domestic life. She is an example of a strong, independent, courageous lady.

The third phase, which has not yet ended, they [women] have attempted self-explanation and self-definition. Women writers have created a deliberate female aesthetic (Showalter 33)

Female bonding and friendship are one of the important themes in *The Color Purple*. Sofia is very friendly with Celie. Shug Avery's bond with Celie is very intimate, two sisters Celie and Nettie help each other. For a period of time, Celie undergoes many problems in her life which have been overcome by female bonding. Walker creates the strong women bonding and friendship to gain love from their husbands. Shug Avery as Mr. Albert's mistress enters Celie's house when she falls sick. Celie has already been fascinated with her photos and is surprised to see them in her house at once. Shug Avery initially behaves rudely towards Celie, when Celie nurses her, they have become friends. Shug Avery starts teaching everything to Celie. Soon, Celie becomes infatuated and forms a female bond with her which helps not only in overcoming the oppression but also in proving her creative potentialities

Friendliness is observed in Revered couple Samuel and Corinne. When Nettie approaches them for help, they immediately accept her consent. Nettie is left with little option as she is forced to leave her sister's house because of Mr. Albert's abusive behavior. Nettie goes with the couple Samuel and Corinne who run a missionary in a town, whom she eventually accompanies to Africa along with the adopted children of Celie.

Letters play an important form of communication in *The Color Purple*. Celie, a fourteen year old, uneducated girl who lives in South America opens with her anguish of expressing to God through letters. After Nettie departs from Celie's life, she drafts many letters.

Shug Avery observation reveals Albert's secret of hiding letters for many years.

What does God do to me? He gives me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I have been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other men I know. (Walker 173)

Letters strengthen Celie once again and unite each other. A feminist critic Janet Gurkin Altman states that:

The paradox of epistolary is that the very consistency of epistolary meaning is in the interplay within a specific set of polar inconsistencies. The letter format has the power to suggest both preserve and absence, to decrease and increase distance (Johnson 101).

Thus, *The Color Purple* describes the life of a dark color uneducated, innocent girl who faces the problems of physical and mental exploitation into a matured independent woman. The corpus of the novel traces the sufferings of black women. Color does not make any difference though black or white. The favorite color of Celie that Alice Walker has mentioned in her preface "is always a surprise but is found everywhere in nature" is the significance of the title.

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