

EXISTENCE OF SEXISM, TRANSFORMATION AND RESISTANCE THROUGH SISTERHOOD: A FEMINISTS READING OF THE COLOR PURPLE

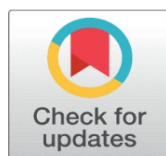
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Received 30 January 2026

Accepted 29 March 2026

Published 23 April 2026

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i5s.2026.7785](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i5s.2026.7785)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* explores the oppression experienced by Black women within a patriarchal society. This paper examines the ways in which sexism, violence, and social inequality shape the lives of female characters in the novel, particularly Celie. The study is guided by two questions: how sexism affects Black women and how Celie transforms herself in response to oppression. At the beginning of the novel, Celie is portrayed as silent, dependent, and powerless because of the abuse inflicted by the men in her life. However, through her relationships with Shug Avery, Nettie, and Sofia, she gradually develops confidence and independence. These women represent different forms of support, including emotional care, education, courage, and resistance. Their influence enables Celie to challenge patriarchal authority and create a new identity for herself. The paper argues that sisterhood functions as a powerful means of resistance and that female solidarity is central to Celie's liberation. Ultimately, the novel presents the idea that women can overcome oppression when they support one another.

Keywords: Women's Rights, Sexism, Patriarchy, and Friendship are All Words that Describe Feminism

1. INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an important feminist novel that portrays the suffering and resistance of Black women in a society controlled by patriarchal values. The novel presents the lives of women who experience sexual violence, domestic abuse, racial discrimination, and social inequality. Through the character of Celie, Walker demonstrates how women are often denied education, freedom, and the right to make decisions about their own lives.

At the beginning of the novel, Celie is a young girl who is repeatedly abused by Alphonso, the man she believes to be her father. She is forced to remain silent about this violence and is later married to Albert, whose treatment continues the cycle of oppression. Celie's experiences reflect the condition of many women who are expected to obey men and accept suffering without resistance.

However, the novel is not only a story of pain and injustice. Walker also presents a gradual movement from silence to self-expression. Celie's transformation becomes possible because of the influence of three important women: Nettie, Shug Avery, and Sofia. Each of these characters represents a different form of strength. Nettie provides emotional support and education, Shug Avery teaches Celie self-worth and independence, and Sofia demonstrates the importance of resisting male domination.

This paper examines how sexism operates in the lives of women in the novel and how sisterhood becomes a means of resistance. It argues that Celie's journey from fear to confidence is made possible through the support of other women. In this way, *The Color Purple* suggests that female solidarity is essential for overcoming oppression and achieving personal freedom.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The goal of this study is to look into how women are harmed by a society controlled by men and what they can do to stop being harmed every day. They asked two questions to reach this goal:

- 1) How sexism against black people common in the United States?
- 2) How did Celie's transformation take a place against Sexism?

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several scholars have examined *The Color Purple* from different feminist and social perspectives. Earlier studies mainly focus on themes such as ecofeminism, racism, gender violence, and the condition of Black women in patriarchal society.

Bhuvaneswari and Rosamma argue that the novel establishes a close relationship between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Their ecofeminist interpretation suggests that patriarchal society treats both women and nature as objects to be controlled. In the same way, Hasanthi explains that Walker's idea of womanism connects human beings, animals, and nature, thereby creating a broader understanding of equality and justice.

Other critics have concentrated on the violence experienced by female characters. Jubair states that the novel presents the double burden faced by Black women, who suffer not only because of their gender but also because of their race. Similarly, Lewis observes that Walker exposes the trauma of women through her depiction of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and emotional suffering.

Pandey and Divya analyse the symbolic importance of family and colour in the novel. According to them, the colour purple symbolises dignity, self-respect, and the emotional growth of women. Raj also points out that the novel can be read as a Bildungsroman because it traces Celie's movement from fear and silence to confidence and self-awareness.

Although these studies provide important insights, most of them concentrate on violence, race, and symbolism. Comparatively less attention has been given to the role of sisterhood in shaping Celie's transformation. Therefore, this paper focuses specifically on the influence of Shug Avery, Nettie, and Sofia. It argues that these women enable Celie to resist patriarchal oppression and to construct an independent identity.

4. DISCUSSION PART

The discussion in *The Color Purple* centres on the experiences of Black women living under patriarchy. Alice Walker presents sexism not merely as an individual act of cruelty but as a system that controls women's bodies, emotions, education, and social position. Through Celie, Nettie, Sofia, Shug Avery, and other female characters, the novel reveals different forms of oppression and different ways of resisting them.

4.1. SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE CONTROL OF WOMEN

The earliest form of oppression in the novel is sexual violence. Celie experiences abuse from childhood at the hands of Alphonso, the man she believes to be her father. He repeatedly rapes her and forces her to remain silent. Celie has no authority to protect herself because she is young, poor, and female. Alphonso uses his position as a man and as a father to dominate her.

Celie's suffering is made worse because nobody protects her. Her mother is weak and ill, and society accepts male authority without questioning it. As a result, Celie learns to believe that pain is a normal part of a woman's life. She writes letters to God because she has no one else to speak to. The letters become the only place where she can express her fear and sadness.

Walker shows that sexual abuse is not limited to Celie alone. Celie's mother is also mistreated by Alphonso. Even when she is physically weak and close to death, he continues to force himself upon her. In this way, the novel suggests that patriarchal society treats women as objects rather than as human beings with emotions and rights.

The abuse continues even after Celie gives birth to two children. Alphonso takes the children away from her, and she does not know what happens to them. This act demonstrates another form of control. He not only violates Celie physically but also destroys her role as a mother. Celie is denied the right to know or care for her own children.

4.2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MARRIAGE

Marriage in the novel does not bring safety or respect to women. Instead, it becomes another form of oppression. After Alphonso forces Celie to marry Albert, her suffering continues. Albert does not treat Celie as an equal partner. He treats her as a servant whose only duty is to work, obey, and remain silent.

Albert insults Celie, forces her to do all the household labour, and often beats her. He believes that he has the right to control her because she is his wife. Walker uses Albert's behaviour to show that patriarchal marriage often gives men authority over women.

Celie accepts this treatment because she has been taught that women must obey men. She has never experienced love, respect, or independence. Therefore, she believes that her suffering is natural. She does not question Albert's actions at first because she has already accepted the idea that women have no power.

The novel also presents the same issue through Harpo and Sofia. Harpo wants Sofia to obey him because he has learned from his father that men should dominate women. When Sofia refuses to be submissive, Harpo tries to beat her. However, Sofia fights back. Through this contrast, Walker presents two different responses to oppression. Celie remains silent in the beginning, while Sofia resists immediately.

4.3. DENIAL OF EDUCATION AND FREEDOM

Another important issue in the novel is the denial of education. Alphonso removes Celie from school because he believes that girls do not need education. By keeping Celie uneducated, he ensures that she remains dependent and powerless.

Education is shown as an important source of freedom. Nettie, unlike Celie, is able to continue her studies. Because she is educated, she has greater confidence and a better understanding of the world. Nettie becomes stronger and more independent than Celie.

Walker therefore suggests that patriarchal society prevents women from gaining knowledge because educated women are more likely to resist oppression. Celie's lack of education makes it difficult for her to imagine a different life. Only later, through Nettie's letters and Shug's guidance, does she begin to learn about the world and about herself.

The denial of freedom is also seen in the way women are not allowed to choose their own futures. Celie has no choice in her marriage. She is forced to marry Albert because Alphonso decides for her. Similarly, women in the novel are expected to remain inside the home and serve men.

4.4. SISTERHOOD AND FEMALE SOLIDARITY

One of the strongest ideas in the novel is that women can overcome oppression when they support one another. Walker presents sisterhood as an alternative to patriarchy. Instead of competing with one another, women in the novel create relationships based on love, care, and mutual understanding.

Celie and Nettie share a strong bond from childhood. Nettie always supports Celie and tries to protect her. Even after they are separated, Nettie continues to write letters to her sister. These letters become a symbol of hope. Through Nettie's words, Celie realises that she is not alone and that she deserves a better life.

Shug Avery also becomes an important source of support. At first, Celie admires Shug because she is independent and confident. Unlike other women, Shug is not afraid of men. She lives according to her own desires and refuses to follow social expectations.

As Celie and Shug become closer, Shug helps Celie understand her own value. She encourages Celie to speak openly and to reject the idea that she must always obey others. Shug also teaches Celie that love should not involve violence or fear.

Sofia is another important example of resistance. She refuses to accept abuse from Harpo and fights back whenever he tries to control her. Sofia's strength makes a deep impression on Celie. Through Sofia, Celie learns that women can resist instead of remaining silent.

Thus, sisterhood becomes the main force behind Celie's transformation. Without the support of Nettie, Shug, and Sofia, Celie would not have been able to escape her oppressive life.

4.5. CELIE'S TRANSFORMATION AND RESISTANCE

At the beginning of the novel, Celie is silent, weak, and completely dependent on others. Years of abuse have destroyed her confidence. She believes that she has no right to happiness or freedom.

However, this attitude changes gradually. Shug's friendship, Nettie's letters, and Sofia's example help Celie understand that she deserves a better life. She begins to question the violence and injustice around her.

The most important turning point occurs when Celie discovers that Albert has hidden Nettie's letters. This revelation makes Celie realise how much control Albert has exercised over her life. For the first time, she openly confronts him.

Celie finally decides to leave Albert and move to Memphis with Shug. This decision is extremely important because it marks the beginning of her independence. By leaving Albert, Celie rejects the patriarchal belief that women must remain with abusive men.

After leaving, Celie begins her own sewing business. She earns money and becomes financially independent. Economic freedom gives her confidence because she no longer depends on men for survival.

Celie's transformation is therefore both emotional and social. She changes from a woman who suffers in silence into a woman who speaks for herself. By the end of the novel, she is no longer afraid. She has learned to value herself and to live according to her own wishes.

4.6. WALKER'S FEMINIST MESSAGE

Through the experiences of Celie and the other women, Alice Walker delivers a powerful feminist message in *The Color Purple*. The novel argues that patriarchy harms women physically, emotionally, and socially. At the same time, it suggests that women can challenge oppression through solidarity, education, and self-respect.

Walker does not present men as naturally evil. Instead, she shows that society teaches men to dominate women. Albert and Harpo behave violently because they have grown up in a patriarchal culture. However, the novel also suggests that change is possible. By the end of the story, Albert begins to recognise his mistakes and changes his behaviour.

Therefore, the discussion of the novel shows that transformation is possible not only for women but also for society as a whole. Walker's ultimate message is that equality can only be achieved when women are respected as independent individuals and when relationships are based on love, dignity, and mutual support.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH SHUG

Shug Avery is the most influential figure in Celie's transformation in *The Color Purple*. Before meeting Shug, Celie lives in fear and believes that she must silently accept the violence inflicted upon her by men. She has no confidence, no freedom, and no sense of self-worth. Shug's arrival changes this condition completely.

At first, Celie admires Shug because she appears very different from other women. Shug is confident, independent, and unwilling to submit to male authority. Unlike Celie, she refuses to follow the traditional expectations placed upon women. She speaks openly, makes her own decisions, and lives according to her own desires. For Celie, Shug becomes a model of female strength.

Their relationship gradually develops from friendship into a deep emotional bond. Shug treats Celie with kindness and respect, something Celie has never experienced before. Through this relationship, Celie begins to realise that she deserves love and dignity. Shug encourages her to express her thoughts and feelings instead of remaining silent.

Shug also plays an important role in helping Celie understand the injustice of her situation. She reveals that Albert has hidden Nettie's letters for many years. This discovery becomes a turning point in Celie's life because it makes her aware of the extent of Albert's control. After reading Nettie's letters, Celie gains the courage to confront him.

Most importantly, Shug helps Celie become independent. She encourages her to leave Albert and begin a new life in Memphis. With Shug's support, Celie learns to depend on herself rather than on men. She starts her own sewing business and becomes financially independent. In this way, Shug not only gives Celie emotional strength but also helps her achieve personal and economic freedom.

Therefore, Shug Avery represents more than friendship in *The Color Purple*. She symbolises self-respect, independence, and female solidarity. Through her relationship with Shug, Celie transforms from a passive victim into a confident and empowered woman.

6. ABSENCE OF RESISTANCE

At the beginning of *The Color Purple*, Celie does not resist the violence and injustice in her life. Years of abuse have made her believe that she is powerless. Because Alphonso repeatedly beats and rapes her, Celie grows up thinking that suffering is a normal part of being a woman. She never learns to defend herself because nobody teaches her that she has rights or value.

Celie's silence is one of the clearest signs of her absence of resistance. Instead of speaking to other people, she writes letters to God. These letters show that she feels completely alone and helpless. She believes that only God can understand her pain because no one in her family or society is willing to protect her.

After Celie is married to Albert, she continues to accept violence without protest. Albert insults her, forces her to work, and beats her whenever he wishes. Yet Celie does not oppose him. She obeys him because she thinks that a wife must submit to her husband. Her acceptance of abuse reflects the influence of patriarchy, which teaches women to remain silent and obedient.

The difference between Celie and Sofia makes the absence of resistance even clearer. Sofia refuses to accept Harpo's authority. When Harpo attempts to beat her, Sofia fights back. By contrast, Celie tells Harpo that he should beat Sofia because Celie herself has learned to accept violence as natural. At this point in the novel, Celie does not yet understand that resistance is possible.

Similarly, Celie does not initially oppose Alphonso when he prevents her from attending school or when he forces her into marriage. She obeys because she believes that she has no choice. Her lack of education also contributes to her silence. Since she has been denied knowledge and independence, she cannot imagine a different life for herself.

Therefore, the absence of resistance in the early part of the novel is not a sign of weakness alone. It is the result of years of oppression, fear, and emotional damage. Walker suggests that when women are denied love, education, and support, they may begin to accept injustice as normal. Only later, through the influence of Shug Avery, Nettie, and Sofia, does Celie learn that she can resist and change her life.

7. TRANSFORMATION IN CELIE'S CHARACTER

The research pointed out transformations of characters especially, Celie finally changed her mind and chose to fight for her freedom like everyone else. Significantly, Shug, Nettie, and Sofia' and their impact. When she found out that Mr. ___ Albert had hidden the letters Nettie had been sending her, she changed her mind. She even thought about killing him, but Shug didn't want her to. They chose to leave him though and go to Memphis. That person didn't understand why Celie had chosen to go or why she had changed her mind so quickly. But Celie was determined to stop being bad to her. She told him, "What's wrong is that you're a shy dog." We are leaving you to go into the Creation. "And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need" (Walker 181). Because of Celie's leave, Squeak, Harpo's wife, chose to break away from her husband's control. Following Sofia's divorce, she married Harpo. Harpo was making Sofia feel bad, so she left him. He then married Squeak, who did what he said without question and couldn't stand up for herself. When Harpo heard that Squeak was going, he was also shocked. "Finally, Squeak look at everyone from under her fringe," he said. She said, "Me." Porter (1982, p. 100) says, "I'm going north."

8. CONCLUSION

The Color Purple presents a powerful critique of the oppression faced by Black women in a patriarchal society. Through the experiences of Celie and other female characters, Alice Walker shows how women suffer from sexual abuse, domestic violence, emotional neglect, and the denial of education and freedom. The novel reveals that sexism is deeply rooted in social and family structures and that women are often expected to accept suffering in silence.

However, the novel also offers a message of hope and resistance. Celie's transformation demonstrates that oppression can be challenged when women support one another. Nettie, Shug Avery, and Sofia each contribute to Celie's development in different ways. Nettie provides emotional encouragement and education, Shug teaches Celie self-respect and independence, and Sofia represents courage and resistance against male domination.

By the end of the novel, Celie is no longer the silent and powerless girl she was at the beginning. She becomes financially independent, emotionally strong, and capable of making her own decisions. Her journey from fear to confidence symbolises the possibility of liberation for women living under patriarchal oppression.

Therefore, The Color Purple ultimately suggests that sisterhood is a powerful means of resistance. Female solidarity enables women to challenge injustice, recover their identity, and create a life based on dignity and freedom.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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