

From Dystopia to Utopia: An Ecofeminist Study of “The Color Purple”

Tania Ranjan Behera
Jr. Lecturer in English
Govt. Women's Jr College, Sundargarh

Abstract:

The term “womenism” was coined initially to inspire the future feminists and writers and thinkers to properly engage them with the dynamism of such concept, for interpretation and re-interpretation in broader perspectives of Feminism. The Color Purple has a definite and clear concept of womenist stance of Alice Walker whenever she has rejected the ideological lineages and traditions intense by religious conventions, also various discoveries pertaining to the liberation of spirituality as a direct counter argument to such conventions and traditions. This paper also deals with the most profound notions of spirituality and self- identification related comprehensive understanding for those who are involved in this gender biased struggle. Also focuses on Ecofeminist discourses to be considered to have developed at the intersections of multiplicity of theoretical disciplines such as Ecocriticism, Post- colonialism and Feminism. It also portrays the abuse and misabuse of nature and that of oppression of women. It brings the elements of discrimination which are based on identities such as species, races, genders and classes. The article emphasizes on the exploration of the details of Utopian thoughts as well as Eco-utopian aspects closely intertwined with the general notions of Utopia. In conclusion, as a practical movement, Eco-feminism as condemned and attempt to eradicate the firmly established discrimination ingrained within the existing patriarchal perceptions so that the repressive hierarchal notions of gender difference could be negated.

Key words : womenism, utopia, ecofeminist, color purple

Arıkan (2015) has observed that the term ‘Womanism’ was initially coined by Alice Walker during 1983 so as to inspire the future feminist writers and thinkers to properly engage with the dynamism of such a concept so that proper interpretation and reinterpretation of the concept could be performed in the general discourse of the development of broader perspectives of Feminism. This concept, as has been opined by Bhuvanawari and Jacob (2012) have specifically underpinned the approach of Alice Walker involving various aspects such as her narrative enquiries into development of self-definitions, contextualisation of the norms of social agencies and the discourse of spiritual renewal. In this context, Bloodhart and Swim (2010)

have argued that *The Color Purple* has crystallised the womanist/feminist stance of Walker whenever she has rejected the ideological lineages and traditions propounded by religious conventions and has also presented the various discoveries pertaining to the liberation of spirituality as a direct counter argument to such conventions and traditions. The emphasis has been on the gradual process of deconstruction of transcendence of dualism. CHEN and QIAO (2009) have outlined the notion that Walker had provided new meanings to the general discourses of Feminism in both the private and public spheres in the Colour Purple and in Meridian. This could be better explained as the concentration of literary emphasis on the notions that accessing the sphere of public discourses is primarily related to the national political dynamics including the engagement in political progressive struggles. However, Walker has also emphasised on the ideation that the fundamental objective of such struggles should be the gaining of a resounding voice and social agency which could only be achieved through acquisition of the most profound notions of spiritual and self-identification related comprehensive understanding for those who are engrossed in such struggles.

This has been the context to which a cursory evaluation of the notions of Ecofeminism could be performed. The objective of Ecofeminist concepts could be identified, as per the notions of Gaard (2010), to be that of exploration and analysis of the relationships in between nature and women through development of a particular genre of literature. Gaard (2011) have determined that Ecofeminist approaches are strongly indicative of the perspectives of the similarities in between Sexism (domination of women by men) and Speciesism (the progressive degradation of the natural environment). Thus, Ecofeminist discourses could be considered to have developed at the intersections of multiplicity of theoretical disciplines such as Ecocriticism, Post-Colonialism and Feminism. Such narratives, as per the research of Gaard (2017), conspicuously provides a direct critique of the repression of women in the societies of Euro-American and Afro-American lineages as well as that of the parallelism which could be established between the instances of abuse and misuse of nature and that of oppression of women. *The Color Purple* has been an attempt, from the research perspectives of, towards the direction of exploration of the selected themes in the novel under consideration as well as those which could be cross-referenced with this, to contemplate the feminist speculations which could be ingrained in the review literary pieces. Furthermore, the novel has been another attempt, as have been opined by Jin-ke (2007), to address the broader issues involving the elements of discrimination which are based on identities such as species, races, genders and classes. To this effect, Jun (2008) have analysed two specific novels with the first being *The Color Purple* and the second one being the *Housekeeping* penned by Marilynne Robinson. The orientation has been to assess the notion that these two novels have been feminist utopias in which various elements of dystopia have been incorporated. Furthermore, the emphasis has been on the exploration of the details of utopian thoughts as well as the eco-utopian aspects within these two particularly interesting texts since Ecofeminism has been closely intertwined with the general notions of Utopia. Alice Walker has been specifically vocal about her attempts, as per Kings (2017), about the exploration of means through which female empowerment could be achieved. Thus, she and Marilynne

Robinson both, had embarked on, through their respective literary endeavours, towards formulation of eco-utopian feminist space. This has been a particularly significant development concerning bestselling novels of the two of the most celebrated contemporary writers of American and Afro-American with origins.

According to Lin (2010), Walker has posited to the notion of an Earth-based religion in opposition to that of Christianity which has been consistently observed as the mainstream religion within that of the USA. This position has permeated through her conceptualisation of the mainstream social traditions which Walker had witnessed as the base of her religious identity of a Christian Methodist. Such observations have been validated through the research of Li-shuang (2015) as accurate in terms of the spiritual development of Walker blending the emergent spiritual impetuses with those of the core functioning of Christianity. This has been markedly different from the spiritual development of the indigenous personnel within North America as their spirituality had emerged through the unique process of indigenous traditions and customs. Mao-lin (2006) has, thus, identified the spiritual development of Walker to be comparable to that of the religious/spiritual hybridist approach.

From a definitive and chronological perspective, it could be identified that Alice Walker has been one of the foremost as well as earliest Eco-feminism advocates who had categorically rejected the institutional discourses of Christianity so as to inculcate an attitude which could explicitly liberating and spiritual in nature involving the religious notions of hers. Norwood (2014) has observed that Walker had embarked upon a journey of spiritual reckoning in terms of maturing as a seasoned writer. This perspective has been further supported by Ping (2002) as an important delineation within the general discourse of Feministic literature. Such perceptions have also been indicative of the fact that Alice Walker has been a spiritual eco-feminist par excellence. There are two particular reasons for such a statement. The initial one has been outlined by Sadeq (2017) as the fact that Walker categorically conveys the tenets of eco-feminism intertwined with that of her spiritual nature. The next one have been specified by Shiva and Mies (2014) as the fact that Walker could be observed to have consciously accepting the identity of a spiritual eco-feminist which could further be categorised as Walker becoming an Ecowomanist as well. The stance related to Eco-womanism has been amply elaborated by Alice Walker in both of her novels, *The Color Purple* and *The Same River Twice*, through the previously mentioned gradual and methodical deconstruction of the transcendence of dualism through her arguments that her spirituality has stemmed from the Earth itself out of the notions that God could be personified through Nature itself as well as every living organism could reflect the energy which is alternatively associated with that of God.

The Color Purple has been an epistolary novel highlighting the story of the Afro-American female protagonist named Celie. The novel brings in the psychological plight of Celie through her letters to God in which the revelation of her life is outlined through her roles as a daughter, wife, sister and finally as a mother. These letters could be viewed, as per Stephens (2013), not only as the chronological records of the various phases of the lives of such women,

however, also, as the sources of information to measure the progress and growth of the writers of such letters as definite personalities.

According to Sturgeon (2016), *The Color Purple* focuses on the theme of dual repression perpetrated against the women of Afro-American origin and the subsequent experiences of them. Walker has contended that Afro-American women has been consistently suffering from institutionalised discrimination at the hands of the Euro-African community and the males in the Afro-American community have been responsible for perpetrating another mode of repression on their women through the imposition of the double standards associated with the Europe centric social perspectives on such women. However, Vetrivel (2015) has determined that the primary thematic concern of the novel is reflective of the desire of Walker to project a final outcome of life which could be considered to be positive in nature. This is why the central character of Celie ultimately triumphs over all the measures of adversities in spite of the harshest of conditions. The Christian theocratic doctrine of forgiveness to all is also highlighted to be integral to the character of the protagonist of the *The Color Purple*.

The research of Wu (2019) has outlined that the gradual shift of the attention of the protagonist from the anthropocentric male God who, explicitly is an ineffective entity from the perspective of the protagonist, to that of an almighty who could be acknowledged through an ecocentric outlook. This notion has been conceptualised the embodiment of Godliness in birds, in air, in trees and in every other force as well as object of nature. Such a specific perspective could lead the readers towards the development of a particular frame of mind related to the eco-feminist notions of the socio-cultural histories of the human societies. This notion could be better explained from the observation that Celie had been subjected to repeated abuse in several forms including physical, emotional and social and the relative forlorn afflicting the conditions of such women has been amply demonstrated in the threat which could be identified at the initial section (Page 1) of the novel where the supposed impending death of the mother has been stated to be the instrument which persuades girls to remain silent about their plight. The faultlessness of Celie has not precluded her from getting condemned by the existing patriarchal cultural norms of the contemporary age. Thus, Walker has depicted the character of the protagonist to highlight the implications of the forced degradation of the person as the engendering of the feelings of inferiority within the person which has apparently exiled her from the traditional strata of appreciably 'good' girls.

In this context, Xiao-hong (2014) have delineated that counterargument against the patriarchal conventional notion of divinity in the manner which has been utilised to project such arguments in the novel. This could be better explained as God, in spite of the possession of omniscience, does compromise with the wickedness of the males and acknowledges the silence of tortured and abused women to be the actual scheme of things. Furthermore, *The Colour Purple* has also specified that continuous cruelty associated with the male dominance which

primarily victimises women on the basis of their projected physical inferiority and this has culminated in the emergence of antipathy and animosity amongst the women towards their bodies as well. This situation has been put into perspective by Yan-ting (2015) to be the condition where the attempts of Celie to negate the pain to which she had been forced to be subjected have culminated in the desensitisation of herself and emotional hollow spaces have been formulated in her psyche because of such developments. Kings (2017) has opined that such conditions have stemmed from the historical development of patriarchal cultural structures which have replicated the gender biased relationship based frameworks of social agencies to empower men and emasculate women and to demonstrate the power of the powerful over that of the powerless.

As a definitive and practical movement, Eco-feminism has condemned and attempted to eradicate the entrenched discrimination ingrained within the existing patriarchal perceptions so that the repressive hierarchical notions of gender differences could be negated as well. This attempt has prompted Alice Walker to provide the epistolary structure to the novel so as to effectively subvert the predominant code of western traditional literatures. The projection of Eco-feministic notions has been appropriately utilised by the author to demonstrate the subsequent fragmentation, unresponsiveness and alienation of the psyche of the repressed women such as Celie in the novel.

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