



UGC Approved Journal



IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065

Impact Factor : 5.7



Editor-in-Chief

**Volume 6, Issue 6
June 2018
www.ijellh.com**

Sreedevi.K.S.
Research Scholar,
St.Aloysius College
Calicut University
Thrissur, India
devisuraj0304@gmail.com

FEMINIST AND ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Abstract

Nature proliferates with quizzical wonders. Our heritage of natural resources is being frayed. Man driven by his egotistical attitude, threatens to euthanize the environment and all other living creatures other than humans. While race, class and gender oppressions have commonly found a place in the literary arena, nature has been negated from the core. Alice Walker's epistolary novel *The Color Purple* is quietly an exception. One can trace the images of ecology and woman in the novel which solicits a sorority between the oppression of woman and profiteering of nature by male domination. This paper focuses on the augmentation of the novel to the seminal idea of ecological conscience and environmental protection using tactics that intertwine eco criticism with feminist criticism. This paper attempts to inoculate the novel *The Color Purple* with a theme of feminine and ecological liberation from domination and violence.

Keywords- Eco-feminism, womanism, Alice Walker, Black women, The Color Purple.

Man guided by his anthropocentric views destroys nature. In the same way, man guided by his patriarchal supremacist dogma suppresses woman. The state becomes worse as it involves the passive suffering from the part of the latter groups. In matter of productivity, caring and protecting nature, passive endurance etc. woman and nature have likeness. Eco-feminism is a term emerged during 1970s which focuses on feminist as well as ecological troubles as resulting from male domination in our social system. Womanism is a kind of addition to feminism that embarks a reverence for women regardless of her caste or race. The

notion 'womanism' is a contribution of the celebrated American writer Alice Walker. In her collection of essays entitled *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden's: Womanist Prose*, she states that, a womanist is "A black feminist or feminist of color. . . . Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. . . ." Walker proposes an un-anthropocentric stance towards nature to crack the troubles created by race and gender. Eco-Womanism relates the problems of women of marginalized gender and races with that of the environment. Thus feminine and natural liberty from ascendancy and aggression, and intensification of the link between ethnically marginalized woman and nature is the core of Eco-Womanism.

Alice Walker ingeniously intertwines feminism with ecology in her novel *The Color Purple* which published in 1982. One can trace the images of ecology and woman in the novel. It solicits a sorority between the oppression of woman and profiteering of nature by male authority. This paper focuses on the growth of the novel to the notion of ecological ethics. *The Color Purple* presents a series of mentally as well as physically exploited woman characters. Like the nature is exploited by the dominating man, this woman characters are being browbeaten by the dominating male figures in the novel. These black women suffer a kind of double coercion- from males of their own Black community and masters from the white community. There are woman characters in the novel who suffer from abuses in all levels-physical, sexual, emotional and social, from their male counterparts and from the white dominant society. They are Celie, Nettie and Squeak. Celie, the protagonist of the novel, mutely endures the sexual mistreatment from her step father Alphonso. After that she suffers the same from her husband Albert. Albert is such a cruel man that he wants his wife only for sexual gratification and for looking after his children of his first wife. Her endurance and passiveness to the malpractices of his step father resulting in giving birth to two babies of her step father. Her step father Alphonso threatens her against telling it to anybody, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy." (Walker, *The Color Purple* 1), Celie wordlessly comply with it. This silent suffering of the oppressed is the cause of this exploitation. As the nature doesn't protest against man's malpractices to its resources, women in ts novel also take a passive standpoint. But it s to be noted that, earth protests when man exceeds hs limits of exploitation: earth quakes, flood etc. In the same way, woman like Celie and Sophia explode towards the end of the novel to show their protest.

This paper points that both environment and woman are to be given due respect and treated without changing their crux. Every being is alike in the view of an Eco-Womanist. Black women are very close to nature. So they are often treated as pagans or

heathens. They like nature that poses a contrast to the white supremacist society in which they live in. Anthropocentrism often poses threats to nature. Man is not ready to respect nature and exploits its resources to the maximum. Like this the patriarchal dichotomous gender norms encourage suppression and exploitation of woman folk. Eco-Womanism negates dichotomous concept of everything which is the derivative of patriarchal system- man/woman, human/non-human etc. it sticks on the notion that one is/will never be superior inferior to the other. Everything shares equal rights and freedom.

The opening part of the novel portrays the subjugated existence of Celie. She is the protagonist of the novel. She starts to protest only after her change of worship: from a religious God to an ecocentric god. Escaping from her step father Alphonso and then from her husband Mr. _____, from their sexual harassments, Celie finds solace in trees, birds etc. this act of attaching themselves to nature gives the women characters the energy to survive all hardships. Celie states “God ain’t a he or she, but a It.” (Walker, *The Color Purple* 202). Celie moves to such a kind of self-revelation through Shug. She prompts Celie to be independent. She says “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you are not looking, or don’t know what you are looking for” (Walker, *The Color Purple* 202).

The association of woman to tree is evident in many parts of the novel. Celie writes in her letter “it all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree.” (Walker, *The Color Purple* 23). Tree is the excellent example of man’s exploitation of nature. From an eco-womanist perspective, man considers woman and nature as passive sufferers who always serve for him without any gain or protest. Man enjoys the authority.

Heterosexuality is one of the main outcomes of patriarchy. In this novel, the protagonist Celie chooses to be homosexual as a protest against her dominant husband’s harassments. She begins a homosexual relation with Shug. *The Color Purple* presents the eco-womanist perspectives that focuses mainly on resurrecting nature and protecting nature as well as woman self. Celie finds solace amidst the plantations, fostering nature on the farm. Shug makes her realize that “it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it” (Walker, *The Color Purple* 167). Celie finds solace in her own-built home amidst greenery in Memphis. Celie and Shug impart this awareness to the other women characters in the novel. Nettie’s stay in Olinka speaks about how, nature worship and preservation be it as simple as the worship of the roof leaf can act as a source of strength to fight oppression. Moreover, Walker has portrayed issues of environmental

pollution, deforestation, and global warming with Nettie's stay in Olinka. She has showcased how destruction of greenery leads to the aforesaid problems, one after the other, even in a thickly vegetated country like Olinka. The act of making a spiritual union with nature helps Nettie in healing herself after having seen the ecological disaster the white man has made out of Olinka. The Eco-Womanist makeover in Celie is recognized by the fact that Celie addresses the last letter to everything that matters to the ecology: "Dear God, Dear Stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything . . ." (Walker, *The Color Purple* 292). Shug, Celie, Sofia, and Squeak get solace only from their shift to ecology from their male-counterparts and their oppressions. Nature always poses a platform for them to give away their pangs. Thus, the woman folk become self dependant with the help of ecological 'hands'. The woman characters in the novel conquer all the problems that have mired their spiritual advancement before. Ecological womanism needs hard-headed persuasion and application and Walker recommends this through the novel. Walker seems to embark that it's the high-time to end up man's exploitation towards nature as well as woman. Woman being the maker of progeny has the power to protect ecology from cruel hands.

Works Cited

Gay, Roxane. *Bad Feminist : Essays*. New York :Harper Perennial, 2014.

Walker Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

-----, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden's: Womanist Prose*. London: Women's
. Press, 1984.

Warren, Karen, and Nisvan Erkal. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 1997.