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Alice Walker's Portrayal of inequality and unfair treatment towards Women in the Novel "The Color Purple"

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Abstract: This research paper explores Alice Walker's poignant portrayal of inequality and unfair treatment towards women in her seminal novel, "The Color Purple." Through a close analysis of key instances in the text, this paper examines the various forms of oppression faced by female characters, including Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery. By delving into themes of sexism, racism, and misogyny, this paper aims to highlight Walker's powerful commentary on the systemic injustices endured by women in a patriarchal society. "The Color Purple." Through a comprehensive analysis of key instances in the text, this paper elucidates the pervasive themes of sexism, racism, and misogyny, as experienced by characters such as Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery. By delving into the socio-cultural context of the early 20th century South, this paper aims to contextualize Walker's portrayal of systemic oppression and its impact on female characters, ultimately underscoring the novel's significance as a powerful commentary on gender and race relations.

Key Words: Inequality, Unfair Treatment, Oppression, Sexism, Racism.

1. Introduction

English literature encompasses a vast array of genres, each offering unique insights into the human experience. Among these genres, the novel holds a special place, serving as a medium through which authors convey intricate narratives and explore complex themes. One such novel that merits examination is Alice Walker's "The Color Purple," a work renowned for its epistolary form and its poignant portrayal of inequality and unfair treatment towards women. In this research paper, we delve into Walker's depiction of these themes, situating them within the broader context of societal norms, patriarchy, and gender dynamics.

Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" occupies a central position in American literature, offering a searing exploration of the intersecting oppressions faced by African American women in the Jim Crow South. At the heart of the narrative are themes of inequality and unfair treatment towards women, which Walker skilfully exposes through the lens of characters grappling with patriarchal structures and racial discrimination. This research paper seeks to delve into Walker's portrayal of copious instances of injustice within the novel, examining the various forms of oppression experienced by characters like Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery. By interrogating these themes within their socio-cultural context, this paper aims to shed light on the enduring relevance of "The Color Purple" as a poignant critique of systemic inequities. Alice Walker's stands as a monumental work in American literature, shedding light on the lives of African American women.

In "The Color Purple," Alice Walker illuminates the multifaceted nature of inequality and unfair treatment towards women, drawing attention to the pervasive influence of sexism, patriarchy, and sexual chauvinism. Through the experiences of characters like Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery, Walker vividly portrays the struggles and injustices faced by women within a society that systematically devalues their worth and agency. By engaging with these themes, Walker challenges readers to confront the entrenched biases and power structures that perpetuate gender inequality, while also highlighting the resilience and strength of women who resist and transcend societal constraints. Ultimately, "The Color Purple" serves as a powerful testament to the enduring struggle for gender equality and the imperative of dismantling systems of oppression that perpetuate injustice.

2. Review of Literature

Feminism in Selected Novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker by Jana Chýlková, Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, 2011, is a comparing and contrasting study between Toni Morrison and Alice Walker; Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

Udoette, Dr. Monica, S. (2014) states in her study on 'Female Consciousness in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*' that African American literature has been totally male-preserve till the writers like Walker started presenting the slavery from a feminist point of view. She developed the term Womanism just in order to improve the condition of black females. She tried through her novels like *The Color Purple*, to come forward and to handle their social, economic and political situation with required empowerment.

Sexual Exploitation and Gender-Based Violence

14-year-old Celie is a destitute and uneducated girl who lives in rural Georgia. She has been writing letters to God because Alphonso, her father, not only beats her black and blue but also molests her like a beast. He is the inhuman father who has impregnated even his daughter. An abrupt, unpredicted and unanticipated twist given to the normal story is that Celie's mother is a chronic patient. She is not in a position to gratify Alphonso's lust. In such circumstance, he turns to Celie to quench his sexual thirst. Celie's mother is unable to fulfill his inhuman sexual demands.

In Alice Walker's seminal novel, "*The Color Purple*," sexual exploitation and gender-based violence emerge as central themes, serving as harrowing realities faced by the female characters within the narrative. Through the experiences of characters like Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery, Walker illuminates the pervasive nature of these forms of oppression, highlighting the devastating impact they have on the lives of women in a patriarchal society

Celie's Endurance of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

At the outset of the novel, Celie is subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of her own father. From a young age, she is raped repeatedly, leading to pregnancies and a sense of profound trauma and isolation. Celie's narrative unfolds through a series of letters addressed to God, providing readers with intimate insights into her experiences of violation and degradation. Paddy portrays Celie, the protagonist of *The Color Purple*, as an African-American woman who suffers from a patriarchal family and the oppression of the white race. This means that women are more followers and workers for men.

Walker said that being a woman is a problem but being black and a woman is very difficult. Women must obey and fulfill all the orders of men who are the most important and important, or as scientists say, proud of them. In this novel, Celie is a very unfortunate girl because she was abused twice by her father despite being fourteen years old. He had to get used to it because he couldn't stand it (Padhi, 2015).

Sofia's Resistance Against Physical Violence

Sofia, another prominent character in the novel, confronts gender-based violence in the form of physical abuse. Despite her formidable strength and resilience, Sofia becomes a target of violence when she refuses to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations. Her refusal to submit to the oppressive forces of patriarchy ultimately leads to her imprisonment and further suffering.

he best definition to the racism it means the belief that the followers of one race are basically superior to the members of other races. In *The Color Purple*, racism is set as a white antagonist against helpless black one-sided evil-being; those who bring about the violence are themselves the victim of some form of abuse. Alphonso's son beats his wife Sofia after Mr. implies that he was undermined by Sofia's resistance. Walker (1985) says that nothing can make that better than a good sound beating. His family and the people nearby him were treated by him the same way they were treated by his own autocratic father. Generally, racism is symbolized to a cage in the novel, in which the whites are insulting the blacks. Sofia's imprisonment metaphorically refers to how the blacks were imprisoned by racism, and how they were cornered to slavery and domesticity in their own homes (Abdulimam & Yasir, 2015).

Racism refers to the belief that one race is inherently superior to others. In *The Color Purple*, racism is portrayed as a white antagonist against helpless black characters, who are often the victims of abuse themselves. Alphonso's son physically assaults his wife Sofia after Mr. insinuates that Sofia's defiance caused Alphonso's failure. According to Walker (1985), nothing can enhance the experience of a good sound better than a well-executed beat. His family and the individuals in his vicinity were treated in the same manner as they were treated by his own authoritarian father. In the novel, racism is often represented by a cage, where the white characters mock and belittle the black characters. Sofia's imprisonment symbolizes how the blacks were confined by racism, and how they were trapped in slavery and domesticity within their own homes (Abdulimam & Yasir, 2015).

Shug Avery's Negotiation of Sexual Agency

Shug Avery occupies a unique position within the narrative, navigating the complexities of sexual agency and empowerment in a society that seeks to control and subjugate women. As a blues singer and a woman of assertive sexuality, Shug challenges conventional norms and expectations, asserting her autonomy and challenging the patriarchal order. Through the portrayal of characters like Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery, Alice Walker exposes the grim realities of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence within the pages of "The Color Purple." By shining a light on these issues, Walker invites readers to confront the pervasive nature of oppression faced by women in a patriarchal society, while also highlighting the resilience and strength of those who dare to resist and defy the forces that seek to diminish their humanity.

Sofia's interaction with the white upper-class officer in *The Color Purple* highlights the intersection of race and class, shedding light on the gender discrimination and racial oppression faced by black poor women. Sofia's decision to decline working as a nanny for the mayor's children and her subsequent retaliation against the mayor lands her in a difficult situation. She has been incarcerated for twelve years. In the correctional facility, she is subjected to brutal physical abuse, enduring the torment of having her skull and ribs cracked. They pulled her nose free on one side. They accidentally blinded her in one eye" (Walker, 1985). Sofia's blind eye bears a resemblance to Walker's own blind eye. Alice Walker lost her vision as a result of an accident she experienced during her childhood. One of her siblings was at fault for this accident, and she believes that this incident was not unintentional. This recurring blind spot is a common occurrence in various literary works (Walker, 2010).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" serves as a poignant exploration of the multifaceted forms of suppression experienced by women in a patriarchal society. Through the characters of Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery, Walker illuminates the pervasive nature of oppression, encompassing physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions. By dissecting the intersecting forces of sexism, racism, and classism, Walker underscores the intricate web of power dynamics that shape women's lives. Moreover, the novel offers a testament to the resilience and strength inherent in women, as evidenced by Celie's journey toward self-discovery and empowerment. Through her experiences, Walker challenges traditional notions of femininity and presents a vision of liberation rooted in sisterhood and solidarity.

Ultimately, "The Color Purple" not only exposes the harsh realities of female suppression but also celebrates the transformative power of love, courage, and self-expression. By confronting the injustices endured by women, Walker calls upon readers to recognize and dismantle oppressive structures, fostering a more equitable and compassionate society for all.

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