

PROBING WOMANIST EXISTENTIALISM: A READING OF ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE* NAME OF THE

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Abstract: The disquisition entitled “Probing Womanist Existentialism: A Reading of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*” a study on Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*. This dissertation studies the Womanist novel *The Color Purple* from the Existentialist Womanist point of view. Alice Walker launches an advanced ‘ism’- Womanism – which is stronger as well as a microscopic approach to study the problems of the segregated section (Black Women). She designates the new school ‘Womanism’ because the black women are kept away, even among from the feminists. A new compound term- Existential Womanism- is used to analyze her great work, which alone can transcend the meaning of Feminism and Womanism.

The introductory chapter of this dissertation explores the major tenets of Existentialism, and describes at length the multifarious concepts related to it. It also deals with, how Celie, the protagonist of the novel, constructs her identity. The second chapter designated “Walkerian Womanism” discusses the fundamental premise of Womanism, i.e. ‘black Feminism or feminism of colour’. It is an advocacy of or enthusiasm for the rights and achievements etc. of women. The third chapter entitled ‘Positing Womanist Existentialism’ shows the meaning and the compounding of the term ‘Existential Womanism’ and the relevance of the Existential Womanist reading of the novel *The Color Purple*. This chapter also explains the Existentialist view of life that human beings have no given essence but must forge their value and meaning in an inherently absurd world of existence.

Key Words: Womanism, Feminism, Existentialism, Womanist Existentialism

1. INTRODUCTION

The disquisition entitled “Probing Womanist Existentialism: A Reading of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*” contends that the individual uniqueness of a person is determined by his/her life choice. Existentialism, which influenced the European countries after the Second World War, emphasises the importance of lived human experience over his/her given essence. There is no pre-given essence; one’s essence is determined through one’s existential choices. Alice Walker uses the epistolary form of writing to narrate the sufferings of the protagonist. She bodies forth the helplessness and anxiety experienced by the black women in the modern society (in which feminism and existential feminism play an important role.)

Existentialism has got its roots deep since the nineteenth century. Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche were the pioneers. The twentieth century witnessed a change in the meaning of Existentialism. Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and (absurdist) Albert Camus are the major theorists of the twentieth century. Existentialism is divided into two: theistic and atheistic.

The term ‘Existentialism’ is coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel and adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre presented his own existentialist position in a lecture to the ‘Club Maintenant’ in Paris. This lecture popularized the Existentialist thought. Existentialism begins with the necessity of existence.

The idea ‘Existence precedes essence’ means that human nature is determined by the course of life rather than life by human nature. *Reason* is necessary to understand the importance of human life. There are two parts to this portion – first, that human reason is relatively weak and imperfect, and second, that there are dark places in human life which are ‘no reason’ and to which reason scarcely penetrates. Since Plato, western civilization has usually assumed a separation of reason as suited to command the non rational part. Emphasizing action, freedom and decision as fundamental, Existentialists oppose themselves to rationalism and positivism. Man is able to behave in a sensible manner through his reason. He escapes from the bondage of error, from time and change, from death



itself, into the realm of changeless eternal ideas or Truth² and the lower nature which had chained him in darkness are left behind. (Mathew Shilpa. 5)

Existentialism reunites the lower part of the mind with the higher. It means that the union of intelligence, anxiety, guilt etc. gives wholeness to a human being. For Sartre each one is endowed with unlimited freedom. This statement may question the limitations on every individual's freedom of choice. Physical and social constraints cannot be overlooked in the way in which we make choices. The freedom is not defined by an ability to act. Freedom is rather to be understood as a characteristic of the nature of consciousness, i.e. as spontaneity. Sartre presents his notion of freedom as amounting to making choices, and indeed not being able to avoid making choices. His conception of choice can be understood with reference to an individual's original choice, as we saw- the whole life of an individual as expressing an original project that unfolds throughout time.

A man's/woman's life is made up of the sum total of his/her acts. One group (Theist) among the Existentialist theorists says that God is the benefactor. For them one's faith is more important than one's will. But the atheist group has a different point of view. They interpret man's existential condition as a state of alienation from his essential nature which is God-like. Freedom, as for Sartre involves an acceptance of responsibility for choice and a commitment to one's choice. (Mathew Shilpa¹⁰)

The question concerning the essence of human freedom towards the totality of beings (world and god) in the preliminary discussion of 'negative' freedom is defined well by Martin Heidegger.

But why is *the problem of freedom not a particular question?* At this point can only be *roughly* indicated why the problem of freedom, from the very outset, cannot be treated as a particular question. Among the definitions of the essence of freedom one has always come to fore. According to this, freedom primarily refers to autonomy. One speaks, therefore, of the negative concept of freedom, more succinctly of 'negative freedom'. Clearly then, this negative freedom of man is fully defined by specifying what man is independent from, and how such independence is to be conceived. In earlier interpretations of freedom this 'from what' of independence has been experienced and problematized in *two essential directions*.

1. Freedom from... is *independence from nature*....

According to this, freedom means *independence from God*, autonomy in relation to God. (*The Essence of Human Freedom*, 4-5)

The former one (independence from nature) means that human action as such is not primarily caused by natural cause; it is not bound by the natural laws: This independence from nature can be grasped in a more essential way by reflecting that the inner decision and resolve of man is in a certain respect independent of the necessity which resides in human fortunes. From what was said above we could call this independence from nature and history an independence from the 'world', where the latter is understood as the unitary totality of history and nature. Not always, but precisely where a primordial consciousness of freedom has been awakened, a *second* negative concept of freedom goes together with the first. (*The Essence of Human Freedom*, 4-5)

The latter says about the independence from God. Martin Heidegger says in his book '*The Essence of Human Freedom*'

For only if there is such autonomy can man take up a relationship to God. Only then can *he* seek and acknowledge God, hold to God and take upon *himself* the demands of God. All such being toward God would be in principle impossible if man did not possess the possibility of turning away from already presupposes a certain independence and freedom in relation to God. So the *full concept of negative freedom* amounts to *independence of man world and God*. (5)

Authenticity: with this notion of freedom as spontaneous choice, Sartre therefore has the elements required to define what it is to be an authentic human being. This reflects the nature of facticity. This notion of authenticity appears closely related to Heidegger's, since it involves a mode of being that exhibits recognition that one is 'Dasein' (to mark the significance of our existence, Heidegger gave the name *Dasein* to the type of being you are. *Dasein* translates as "being- there." and that is how we should conceive of ourselves). However, unlike Heidegger's, Sartre's conception has clear practical consequences

For what is required of an authentic choice is that it involves a proper coordination of transcendence and facticity, and thus that it avoid the pitfalls of an uncoordinated expression of the desire for being. This amounts to not- grasping oneself as freedom and facticity. Such a lack of proper coordination between transcendence and facticity constitutes bad faith, either at an individual or an inter-personal level. Such notion of authenticity is therefore quite different from what is



often popularly misrepresented as a typically existentialist attitude, namely an absolute prioritization of individual spontaneity. On the contrary, recognition of how our freedom interacts with our facticity exhibits the responsibility which we have to make proper choices. These are choices which are not trapped in bad faith. Sartrean Existentialism is an atheistic philosophy of human freedom conceived in terms of individual responsibility and authenticity. Celie, the protagonist of the novel *The Color Purple*, is eager to get freedom to lead a good life. This dissertation is written according to the documentation format as suggested in the seventh edition of MLA Handbook.

This dissertation includes five chapters including an introduction and conclusion. The second chapter designated “Walkerian Womanism” discusses the fundamental premise of Womanism, i.e. ‘A Black Feminism or Feminism of Color’. It is an advocacy of or enthusiasm for the rights and achievements etc. of women.

The third chapter entitled ‘Positing Existentialist Womanism’ shows the meaning and the compounding of the term ‘Existential Womanism’ and the relevance of the Womanist Existential reading in *The Color Purple*. By this chapter it will be clear that women have no given essence but must forge their values and meanings in an inherently absurd world of existence. Celie seeks in vain to assert a basic sense of dignity by attempting to force Mr., her husband to acknowledge her womanhood (identity).

The fourth chapter named “Celie Signs in a Woman” analyses the novel from an Existential Womanist point of view and describes the development of the protagonist from a downtrodden to a victor, thereby determining her identity.

The concluding chapter asserts that the novel is an Existentialist Womanist novel, in which a woman finds her identity. Woman must affirm her essence. ‘The actual life’ of the woman constitutes her “essence”. Thus Existentialist Womanism in the novel questions the construction of ‘woman’ by the patriarchal society and states, ‘Let the Woman determine her Essence.’ The protagonist tries to mould her life into a meaningful existence and thus she succeeds in her quest of essence. Celie receives her life as it really is and finds her essence with the help of Shug Avery.

2. WALKERIAN WOMANISM

Alice Walker walks into the feminist world of free conception with her version of it- what has come to be termed- womanism. *The Color Purple* is a womanist novel. It is necessary to know Feminism to sign in Womanism. Feminism is a movement which is formed to strengthen women. Feminism starts to grow with the force of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which could be taken as the first forceful modern tract on feminism. Though feminism jumps over three waves, nothing is to be said as an empowerment of the marginal. This kind of segregation towards the black women has caused the growth of 'The Black Feminist Movement'. The purpose of the liberation movement is to stop discrimination on the basis of race, sex, class and colour. So in 1973, a group of Black Feminists in New York formed the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). According to Barbara Smith the specific issues dealt by the Black Feminist activities were of productive rights, sterilization abuse, equal access to abortion, health care, child care, violence against women, rape, battering, sexual harassment, welfare rights, lesbian and gay rights, police brutality, anti-racism, preserving environment etc.(Shahida. 26, 27)

Many authors have defined The Black Feminist Movement. But among them the important definition was Alice Walker's 'Womanism'. It is a feminist term coined by Alice Walker and it is a reaction to the realization that “Feminism” does not encompass the perspectives of Black Women. It is feminism that is “stronger in colour”, nearly identical to “Black Feminism”. Womanism need not be prefaced by the word “Black” but it signifies black women. A Womanist appreciates women's culture and power as something that is incorporated into the world as a whole. It projects the classist aspects of white feminism and actively opposes the ideology of segregation. Womanism describes the way in which women support and empower black man, and serves as a tool for understanding the black woman's relationship to man as different from the white woman's. It recognizes that women are the survivors in a world that is oppressive on multifarious platforms.

Alice Walker defines womanism in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness* in the following way:

Womanist theology is a prophetic voice concerned about the well- being of the entire African American community, male and female, adults and children. Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community.



Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impending black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being. Womanist theology opposes all oppressions based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability and caste (67).

Shahida and M.Chakranarayan comments in their book *A Study: Alice Walker* about Walker's writing style as a Womanist.

Alice Walker has been highly acclaimed for her unique prose style. We find a delicate balance in her writings. She is neither a stern feminist nor advocates patriarchy, rather she is a Womanist one who believes in acting as a grown up responsible serious individual and who works for the upliftment as humanity as a whole, indifferent to gender considerations. Walker has been praised by Gloria Steinem for her story telling technique as she says "The story telling makes it (*The Color Purple*) irresistible to read". She has also appreciated Walker's use of Black American Vernacular as she comments – Walker takes "the leap completely" from written Standard English to Black American Vernacular, refusing to label it "dialect" a word she believes has evoked negative associations in the past. Gloria Steinem espouses Walker's literary style with "no quotation marks" Celei just writes her heart out "pretty soon" she comments, you can imagine why anyone would bother to write any other way. For her *The Color Purple* symbolises the miracle of human possibilities (78-79)

Alice Walker's literature and works have been an expression of splendour and love of life. They have risen from Walker's impression in the lamentations and outcries of Black Women. She has spoken out of life and loving kindness through her poems, short stories, novels, essays, journals, documentaries. Walker suggests 'Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender'. The term womanist evokes a racialised and often class located experience to the gendered experience suggested by feminism. This term has helped to give visibility to the experience of African American women and other women of colour who have always been in the forefront of the movement against sexual and racial systems, yet often been marginalised in history texts, media and feminist movements led by white feminist or civil rights movement led by men of color.

Thus 'womanism' reflects a link with history that includes African cultural heritage, enslavement in the United States and a kinship with other women

especially women of color. As Walker told in *Times* magazine

Feminism (all colors) definitely teaches women they are capable, one reason for its universal appeal. In addition to this womanist (i.e. black feminist) tradition assumes, because of our experience during slavery, that the black women are capable (Shahida.28-29)

Walker narrates black women's experiences in opposition to those of white women. Thus womanism is different from feminism. She proves it by revealing the history of the American racism. Therefore black women are 'womanist' and white women remain merely 'feminist'.

Black women concern for and emphasize on male-female relationships. Unlike the white women, they provide an avenue to foster stronger relationship between black men and women. Walker's definition proves this as she notes that the womanists are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female." Thus, womanism supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men.

Walker's definition manages to invoke three important philosophies that frame black social and political thought namely, Black Nationalism through her claims of black women's moral and epistemological superiority through suffering under racial and gender oppression. Second, pluralism through the cultural integrity provided by the metaphor of the garden as *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* the garden is a metaphor "the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented". Thirdly, integration and assimilation through her claims implying black women are 'traditionally universalist' Thus, implying black women are somehow superior to white women because of their rich cultural heritage, historical back ground and black folk tradition. Their writings mainly aim at expressing and preserving these black folk traditions. Thus black feminist writers like Toni Morison, Jamaica Kincaid, Rita Dove, and Maya Angelou aim at presenting black women as liberated individuals. Their novels present a vision of humanity for all people. Identifying the liberatory potential within black women from their concrete historical experiences.... Jamaica Kincaid (1949) in her novels reflects on the mother daughter relationship in shaping a female identity in a male dominated society and explores the phenomenon of female bounding". (Shahida.30).

Walkerian Womanism stands for the empowerment of black women. It helps them to be



aware that they are strong and intelligent. It enables them to determine their essence.

3. POSITING WOMANIST EXISTENTIALISM

Womanist Existentialism is coined by clubbing Sartrean Existentialism and Walkerian Womanism. Womanist Existentialism follows the features of these two isms. It is clear from the second chapter “Walkerian Womanism” that Womanism is culture specific and poetic a synonym for black feminism. Womanism is an advocacy of or enthusiasm for the rights and achievements etc. of women. The term Existentialism tries to trace the mere meaning of our existence and studies how one determines his/her identity (essence). ‘Womanist Existentialism’ is an attempt to define ‘Womanism’ from the point of view of ‘Existentialism’ on the basis of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Equality of rights and freedom between the sexes is desirable. Simone De Beauvoir appears to exalt all women as possessing the capacity to realize their innate power in the sense of the feminine spirit.

Womanist Existentialism uses an existential approach to analyze the nature of being for the black women. It examines black women’s experiences and how they develop an individual identity in a historically and institutionally male dominant society, where they are segregated.

The most famous line of *The Second Sex* ‘One is not born but becomes a woman’ (*The Second Sex*, 267), introduces what has come to be called the sex – gender distinction. Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* gave us the vocabulary for analyzing the social constructions of femininity and the structure for critiquing these constructions. It was used as a liberating tool: by attending to the ways in which patriarchal structures used sexual difference to deprive women of their “can do” bodies.

Womanist existentialism focuses on the question of the existence of women and the conditions of their existence. And it says that the womanhood (the essence) is determined through life choices. The word ‘existence’ comes from the Latin *exitere*, meaning ‘to stand out’. If the women could stand out from the bondage of the patriarchal ideology and the society where the colour discrimination still exists and if they could keep a distance from it, they would get courage to project meaning into the disinterested world of in- itself. Prof. Shilpa Mathew states in her dissertation entitled *In Quest of Essence: an Existentialist Approach to the Care Taker* about the projected meaning;

This projected meaning remains fragile, constantly facing breakdown for any reason from a tragedy to a particularly insightful moment. In such a breakdown, we are put face to face with the naked meaninglessness of the world, and the results can be devastating. (16).

Womanist Existentialism also follows the Sartrean ideology that ‘existence precedes essence’. A woman has no given essence but she must determine her values and meaning by living in the society without following the ‘patriarchal womanhood’ and ‘color feminism’. A woman must determine her essence. A woman’s self should construct her own values of womanity and determine the essence of her Existence. This encourages her to face future. Women need not destroy ‘the patriarchal womanhood’ or ‘the color feminism’ for constructing her identity, for when a woman determines her identity, it means that can stand alone among those problems. The famous line of *The Second Sex* ‘One is not born but becomes a woman’ (267), written by Simone De Beauvoir, gives emphasis to the relevance of womanist existentialism.

A woman becomes ‘a woman’ only because of the way in which she was brought up. Patriarchal society has put ‘the yoke of womanhood’ (values) upon women and they are forced to plough (live) with that yoke. A woman may/may not be aware of the yoke upon her neck, but her life choices and situations will help to understand this yoke and to remove it by determining her identity. Life choices in the life of a woman help her to determine her ‘self’. A woman will suffer from the disturbances until she determines her identity. Here the word ‘disturbance’ means -the society where she lives, the discrimination on the basis of sex, color, and race etc - the history, which makes her a woman according to the concepts of the patriarchal society. The same history will give or reveal her real identity. A woman can determine her identity by living within these disturbances, because these disturbances give her the energy to overcome it. She becomes ‘a woman’ with this energy. The presence reveals the absence but the absence does not make the presence. And the presence is determined through life choices. Free will, personal responsibility and freedom are also considered as the features of Womanist Existentialism.

Each woman has ‘a woman’ inside. She becomes a woman when she determines her ‘woman’. She can decide how the ‘woman’ should be before others. It is up to her to determine her ‘self’ with the help of the situations that she faces. For e.g. if there is a white paper, sized A4, on the black board, everyone can see its real size until it gets covered. When that is



covered by maintaining a white phase in a diamond shape, everyone sees the diamond shape. It is up to the person, who is the owner of that white paper, who must decide in which shape the white paper is to be seen to others. Likewise a woman becomes 'a woman' through her life. Her choice selection determines her identity. One can never drink from the same river from which he had once drunk. Today's 'I' is not tomorrow's because of the change in the selection of choice. Tomorrow's 'I' may be good or bad. Human freedom enables us to select a new choice or to follow the old one. When one becomes doubtless upon the choice he/she selected, it means that he/she determined his/her identity (essence).

Womanist Existentialism signifies the fact that women are thrown into their existence first and hence, existence is determined only through her life choices. She becomes 'she' only because of the life choices.

The human situation for the existentialist is thus characterised by 'Facticity' (thrownness), Anxiety and Despair. We find ourselves existing in a world not of our own making and indifferent to our concerns. We are not the source of our existence, but find ourselves thrown in to a world we don't control and didn't choose. We are faced with the lack of any external source of value and determination. We are faced with responsibility of choosing our own nature and values and in doing so; we must face the responsibility of choosing human nature and values for humankind in our free choices. This situation describes 'angst'. In seeing the contrast between the worlds we are thrown into and which we cannot control and the absolute freedom we have to create ourselves, we must despair of any hope of external value or determination and restrict ourselves to what is under our own control. (Mathew Shilpa.20)

Womanist Existentialism is also concerned with finding essence and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. Womanist Existential crisis is a stage of development in which a woman questions the foundations of 'the patriarchal notions of womanhood' and 'the colour feminism'. So it emphasizes the uniqueness.

Walker knew that at the time she wrote this novel (*The Color Purple*), black women had no voice. It is through this novel she tried to voice their feelings. She had to face severe criticism from black community for the portrayal of black male as rapists, powerless and oppressive. Walker is not only concerned with finding a voice but also of creating one's own identity through another weak character Squeak or Mary Agnes in the novel epitomizing this transformation. Squeak was Harpo's girl friend when Sofia had left him. It was not

until she told Harpo "shut up Harpo, I'm telling it," that affirms her voice and then affirms her identity by saying "My name Mary Agnes". (Shahida.53)

The Color Purple tells the story about the sufferings of a black woman (Celie) and describes how she determines her identity. At the end of the novel we can see the development of Celie into a woman. Her achievements are the result of her own actions. The development of the protagonist to a woman is influenced from the existentialist notions such as freedom, responsibility, free will and the womanist notions such as overcoming identity crisis, segregation, discrimination. Celie's identity formation can be viewed from a womanist existential point of view.

4. CELIE SIGNS IN A WOMAN

Womanist existentialism focuses on the question of womanhood and the essence of existence. It concentrates on 'the way woman finds her identity'. Alice Walker narrates in her novel *The Color Purple* about the pitiful conditions in which the protagonist-Celie- was born and brought up and the way how she signs in a woman. When we go through the novel *The Color Purple*, we feel Walker's treatment of her themes and characters as if everything achieves a real proportion.

Mel Watkins comments about the style of Alice Walker in the *New York Times* (book review): Alice Walker's choice and effective handling of the epistolary style has enabled her to tell a poignant tale of women's struggle for equality and independence.

Through her novels she is successful in redefining the negative images prevailing concerning black women. Walker has presented them as capable of realizing their potentials through their life choices.

The Color Purple describes the complexity of the problems of black women in America and illustrates their free will which encourages them to determine their individuality, defying the exploitative mentality of a society dominated and conditioned by patriarchal society and color politics. The characters in the novel *The Color Purple* are able to accept the changes and, therefore, attain a state of transformation. The protagonist of the novel Celie is uneducated and sexually abused by her step- father.

You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. May be you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.



Last spring [...] alone .A week go by he pulling on her arm again. She say now, I ain't gonna. (*The Color Purple*.3)

Celie does not use any grammar to convey her feelings. Her sentences are short and to the point and it can be seen in the lines given above. Her sister Nettie received education than Celie so she was able to speak and write.

We are up at five o'clock for a light breakfast of millet porridge and fruit, and the morning classes. We teach the children English, reading, writing, history [, ...] and the stories of the Bible [...](140).

The sentences are simple with no hidden meanings, though we find difference in the structure of sentences from Celie to Nettie's. Celie's sentences are ungrammatical and short sometimes not sensible as:

I ask him to take me instead of Nettie while our new mammy sick. But he just ast me what I'm [...] I duck into my room [...] shoes. He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway. (9)

Alice Walker uses three notions to show the development of Celie to a woman. They are tone, symbolism and juxtaposition. The following sentence sets the tone the emotions of the protagonist.

It all I can do not cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you are a tree. That's how I know trees fear man. (23.)

The colour purple is the symbol of royalty and at the same time it can be considered as the symbol of bruises on the beaten woman's face. 'Nature' is also presented in the novel symbolically. In the beginning of the novel when Mr- physically assaulted Celie, she said,

It all I can do not cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you are a tree. That's how I know trees fear man. (23)

Tree is a symbol of emotionally dead, helpless and passive Celie. Next time we trace nature on Shug's arrival at Mr-'s house,

It like the trees all round the house draw themselves up tall for a better look. (*The Color Purple*).

The trees here symbolize all hard, unfeeling women in the neighbourhood and they look up to Shug as the role model. It is Shug who stirs Celie from an apathetic and unemotional piece of wood almost to the point of thinking as an individual.

Walker juxtaposes weak and strong characters for effecting poise. Celie and Sofia present this juxtapositioning. While Celie preferred to keep quiet and endures all sufferings patiently, Sofia chose "to fight [her] daddy... brothers cousins and uncles". This kind of juxtapositioning gives us the evidence of signing

in 'a woman'. Celie is able to overcome all oppressions of her life and can be seen the way she gives reply to Mr-,

You a lowdown dog is what's wrong [...] It's time to leave you and enter into creation. (*The Color Purple*)

She breaks all the relations with Mr- and she goes with Shug to Memphis. She knows that 'Pa' is her step-father from her sister. This news gives confidence to her. She took up pant making business, suggestive of the fact that all women may be free from the domination of men. She becomes a liberated and confident woman who has not only found her voice but also her identity. Celie's new relationship with the world is manifested by the way she now writes her letters and interacts with people. She expresses her comments, which are very insightful and sometimes sarcastic. She started pondering over life and this shows her matured and developed out look towards her life. In other words she found her essence though her life choices. Celie says:

I [Celie] start to wonder why us need love, Why us suffer. Why us black. Why us men and women [...] I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To art. And in wonderings bout the big things and asting bout the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. (*The Color Purple*).

Shug influences Celie to determine her personality. Her personality transforms Celie's life and allows her to take charge of her own destiny. Celie describes Shug in her letter to God as:

The most beautiful woman I [Celie] ever saw. She some more pretty than my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like something tail. She [...] her foot upon somebody motor car. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some.

Shug is more or less able to understand the psyche of Celie and therefore encourages her to speak about the abuses she has suffered from the hands of Pa and Albert. This helps Celie to relieve herself from all pent up feelings in her for now there is someone to listen and console her Shug gave Celie love and affection like her sister. Simone De Beauvoir's comment becomes relevant here, "A woman is not born but becomes a woman". The half of the novel is about Celie who born as a woman and other portion reveals how she becomes 'a woman'. Thus *The Color Purple* examines how Celei signs in a woman.

5. CONCLUSION

The main idea of Sartrean Existentialism 'existence precedes essence' means that the actual life



of the individual constitutes his/her 'self'. Thus a human being creates values and constructs a meaning for his/her life through his/her consciousness. Womanism is an attempt of the black women to form their identity (Black Feminism). Existentialist and Womanist reflections conjoin themselves in the novel *The Color Purple*.

The Color Purple is a Womanist Existentialist novel, in which a woman finds her identity. Woman must determine her own essence. 'The actual life' of the woman constitutes her "essence". Thus Womanist Existentialism in the novel questions the construction of 'woman' by the patriarchal society and states, 'Let the Woman determine her Essence.'

The Color Purple is the story of a poor black woman (Celie), who is abused by her step-father Alphonso and her husband. The protagonist of the novel keeps silence until she meets Shug Avery. Their relationship gives her energy to face the bitter experiences of the life. The reader knows her past through her letters to God and her sister Nittie. She goes with Shug when she knows that Nittie's letters are kept away from her by Mr-. She finds her two children with the help of her sister. She could determine her essence through these experiences.

The entire novel is the play of Womanist Existentialism. This term will be helpful to understand that the underlying motivation for action is to be found in the nature of consciousness (self) which is a desire for 'being'. It is up to each woman to exercise or to know her freedom in such a way that she doesn't lose the sight of her existence. The protagonist of the novel determines her identity through her life choices.

At the end of the novel we can see the development of Celie to a woman. Her achievements are the result of her own actions. The development of the protagonist to a woman is influenced from the existentialist notions such as freedom, responsibility, free will and the womanist notions such as overcoming identity crisis, segregation, discrimination. Celie's identity formation can be read through a womanist existential point of view.

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