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Disruption of Traditional Gender Roles in Walker's *The Color Purple*

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By

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The thesis entitled "Disruption of Traditional Gender Roles in Walker's *The Color Purple*" by Mr. Jeevan Koirala has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The Color Purple concerns a universe in which traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness, sexual gratification and physical strength are present in female characters. Sofia's strength and Shug's sexual assertiveness are virtually unsurpassed by any of the male characters. They have rubbed off out to more feminine characters and vice versa. Shug, for instance, learns from and reciprocates Celie's gentleness and care, while Celie picks up some of Shug's sexual assertiveness and follows her suggestion that she become owner of a business, a traditionally male role. Mr. ___ and Harpo, conversely, become feminized. Mr. ___ learns to sew and to be a good listener and Harpo cooks, changes his baby's diaper and kisses his children. Therefore, Walker sees fixed gender roles as meaningless and impractical.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Critical Biography

Alice Malsenior Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, United States in February 9, 1944. Being Afro-American, her family has Cherokee, Scottish and Irish lineage. After high school, Walker attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated in 1965 from Sarah Lawrence College in New Yorkers, New York. She was married to activist Mel Leventhal from 1967 to 1976; the couple had a daughter, Rebecca Walker, a prominent activist and writer. Walker, being an African-American writer and feminist, received the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* in 1983.

Walker's writing includes novels, stories, essays and poems. Topically they focus on the struggles of African Americans, particularly women, and they witness against societies that are racist, sexist and violent. Her writings also portray the black women's tragic experiences in a racist and sexist society and their struggle for survival and wholeness. Walker's writing pays homage to the complexity of human experiences, it illustrates the pain and violence that has marked so many black people's lives even as it offers hope for personal transformation and renewal.

Walker describes herself as a "womanist" – her term for black feminist –which she defines in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, as one who "appreciates and prefers woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility [. . .] woman's strength" and is "committed to [the] survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female" Walker's this philosophy has shaped most of her writings. Her women characters display strength, endurance, resourcefulness, resistance, and creativity and

forgiveness in confronting and overcoming oppressions in their lives, yet she is frank in depicting the often devastating circumstances of the twin afflictions of racism and sexism. Her writings also provoke the theme of change, both personal and social. Personal change is essential for social change.

Walker is a respected figure in the liberal political community for her support of unconventional and unpopular views as a matter of principal. She is an open bisexual and sympathetic of people of all sexualities, ethnicities, and races. Her first book of poetry was written while she was still a senior at Sarah Lawrence. She took a brief sabbatical from writing when she in Mississippi and worked in the United States civil rights movement.

In addition to her collected short stories and poetry, walker's first work of fiction, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, that expresses the effects of racism, sexism, poverty on the southern family life, and the family's women experience at the hands of their men, was published in 1970. In 1976, Walker's second novel, *Meridian*, was published. The novel dealt with activist workers in the south during the civil rights movement, and closely parallels some of Walker's own experiences.

In 1982, Walker published the novel *The Color Purple*, having the story of a young black woman fighting her way through not only racist white culture but patriarchal black culture was a resounding commercial success, and the immediacy of the characters and the story struck a nerve in readers, regardless of race, age, or gender. The book became the best seller and was subsequently made into a 1985 movie as well as a 2005 Broadway musical play.

Walker wrote several other novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* and *The Secret of Joy* (which featured, among other protagonists, characters or

descendants of characters from *The Color Purple*) and has published a number of collection of short stories, poetry, and others.

Walker became political activist, in part due to the influence of activist Haward Zinn, who was one of her professors at Spelman College. She spent several years in the 1960s working specifically as a civil rights activist, and continues to be an advocate for civil rights for all people. Apart from that, she is active in environmental, feminist, animal rights causes and has campaigned against female genital mutilation.

Exiting criticism of Walker's work has centered largely on the depiction of African-American men, in particular relating to the novel *The Color Purple*. When the novel was published, there was some criticism of the portrayal of male characters in the book. The main concern of the much of the criticism was that the book appeared to depict the male characters as either mean and abusive (Albert/"Mister") or as buffoons (Harpo). This criticism intensified when the film was released, or as narrative of the film cut a significant portion of the eventual resolution and reconciliation between Albert and Celie.

Charles Johnson, in the updated 1995 introduction to his novel, *Oxherding Tale*, criticized *The Color Purple* by saying, "I leave it to readers to decide which book pushes harder at the boundaries of convention and inhabits most confidently the space where fiction and philosophy meet". The shock waves of his comments were felt in academia, where Johnson broke an unspoken taboo against criticizing another writer of color.

Walker addressed some of these criticisms in *The Same River Twice*: Honoring the Difficult 1996. *The Same River Twice* was an autobiography of sorts, discussing specific events in Walker's life, as well as the perspectives of experiencing reaction to *The Color Purple* twice, once as a book and then as the movie was made.

Critical Summary of the Text

The Color Purple is not written in the style of most of the novels. The author does not tell us everything about the characters, the setting, and why the characters behave the way they do. The novel is written in the series of letters, not dated. There are larger gaps between some letters, but this is not revealed by the author; we have to figure it out ourselves. The letters are written in what Walker calls black folk language, which also reduces the easiness of the reading.

When the novel opens, Celie is a young black girl living in Georgia in the early years of twentieth century. She is an uneducated girl, and writes her letters in common language. Celie is entering her adolescence beleaving she was raped by her father and that he killed both of their children. She writes to God, because she has no one else to write to. She feels that what happened her is so terrible that she can only talk about it to someone she feels/loves her. She knows her sister Nettie loves her, but she is too young to understand. Celie believe only to God may she talk honestly and openly about her suffering. Celie is not, however, at this point, complaining to God, she is simply confiding in him.

Slowly, Celie evolves into a mature woman with great confidence, but not before her sister Nettie is taken away from her, and she marries a cruel man who really wants to marry Nettie. For a long time, Celie is almost a slave to her husband, until her husband's mistress, Shug Avery, comes to live with them to recuperate from the sickness and Celie becomes her nurse. Shug is a strong woman and she encourages Celie to grow stronger. At the same time, Sofia, Celie's daughter in law shows Celie to stand up for herself and fight prejudice and injustice, and fight.

As the novel proceeds, the 'infernal repetition' of hierarchical system within patriarchy goes on rupturing. In Walker's new world males no longer dominate females, white, no longer dominate blacks, and human sexuality becomes truly a matter of choice. Celie through her writing escapes the old hierarchical structures and discovers a new world, a world in which she as a liberated being is free to live humanly. On the other hand, the characters like Shug, Sofia and Squeak being very revolutionary challenges the patriarchal norms and values. They also go beyond so-called gender roles they are assigned to. Shug wears rough male dresses, involves in drinking, goes bar and sings. She also performs 'nasty things'. Like wise, Sofia punches the white mayor and knocks him down and violates the male respecting tradition. Here, Shug and Sofia becomes the impetuous for Celie to develop her mentality and activities against patriarchy. The novel charts Celie's resistance to the oppression surrounding her, and the liberation of her existence through positive and supportive relations with other woman like, Shug, Sofia and Squeak; are heroic in their struggle against the constraints of racist and sexist society for their triumph over the repression; not through violence but through human virtues to the oppressors involving themselves in creation, respecting the own 'self', forgiving the perpetrators, and also by forming the good relationship with women.

Eventually, Celie, redeems her repressive husband and hires him as her assistant in her business; Sofia and Squeak who have become the victim of domestic violence as well as social injustice have also developed themselves as 'independent self', working outside the house. By creating their own world and own way of performing their activities, they disrupt the traditional gender roles and challenged the conventional patriarchal system.

Literature Review

The Color Purple is a woman centered novel in which Walker ventures to create black woman the 'hero'. She sketches black female characters strong enough to lead their lives without the support of their men/husbands. By showing black female are themselves able to change their condition, Walker has challenged the master narratives of canonical male text. Linda Abbandonate in *A View from Elsewhere*, praising the greatness of the novel, claims that *The Color Purple* is a "conscious rewriting of canonical male text". She, making a literary connection between *The Color Purple* and *Clarissa* Samuel Richardson declares:

> Placed beside *Clarissa* on my bookshelf *The Color Purple* symbolically suggests in this physical size, the position and power of the "womanist" text within the canon: dominated by the weight, proxility, and authority of masculine accounts of female subjectivity. It may nonetheless challenges and displaces those master narratives. (296-308)

The novel also goes beyond the confines of male centering; instead of portraying male characters, the role model, it focuses on the female characters strong and heroic, able to overcome the repression through love, compassion and redemption. Celie, who combines the dual nonentities [blackness and femaleness], is able to overcome the oppressors, by the support and cooperation of other women, like, Shug Avery and Sofia. Walker's own term "womanist" is applicable here. Celie, Shug and others are acting womanish i.e. "like a women"- referring to courageous, audacious, or willful behavior and one who "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and strength and committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people; male, and female – universalist and capable, loving individual men sexually or non sexually." (Insearch xi)

The novel is so radically female centered that some feminists might include the novel under the term of lesbian literature. Here, the term "lesbian" is broadened to include not only literature written by lesbians, but also any literature written by women that "refuses to do what it is supposed to", that has "strong images of women", and that has a "refusal to be linear" (Smith 175). According to smith, such literature is innately lesbian: "not because women are 'lovers' but because they as the central figures, are positively portrayed and have pivotal relationship with each other" (175). Unfortunately, the term "lesbian" is loaded with pejorative connotations in our homophonic society. So walker uses her coined term "womanist" to describe "a woman that loves other woman sexually and/or none sexually, appreciates and prefers woman's strength". Whatever term is chosen, female centered literature shows a distinct preference for presenting the female as the strongest and most intriguing figure of the work, and not surprisingly, and this preference may solicit charges of anti-male sentiments.

In the same manner, *The Color Purple*, by erasing and withholding men's surnames diminishes their patriarchal authority as, in contrast, supplying women's surnames establishes an alternative to male domination. This is especially important for Celie and Nettie. Critics have given deserved attention to Shug Avery and Sofia Butler as models for Celie's evolution, though not to the fact they are surnamed; for instance, Bell Hooks writes of "black women . . . like Shug and Sofia [who] rebelliously place themselves out side the context of patriarchal family norms . . ." (294). The major traits of these alternatives to male domination is their ability to break through imposed stereotypes and boundaries to provide models for others; both male and female, to follow. These alternatives are clearly androgynous. Albert and Celie argue but can not decide whether Shug and Sofia are better characterized as

'manly' or 'womanly' (236). In the end they agree that "Sofia and Shug not like men . . . but they not like women either" (236). However, Walker only presents this androgynous alternative in the form of female characters with surnames.

Walker earned high praise for the novel, especially for the use of folk language, epistolary form - "a technique that is both associated with everyday life and with women" (Barbara Christian); and her characterization of Celie and other female characters. *The Color Purple* is also marked as "the fiction of the highest order" (qtd.in Royster), "the perfect expression of what [. . .] makes Alice Walker Alice Walker" (Bradley 30); "striking and consummately well written" (Mel Watkins). Walker herself remarking the importance of *The Color Purple* says, "let's hope people can hear Celie's voice. There are so many people who make it, who come out of nothing, people who triumph" (World Authors 1125).

Madhumalati Adhikari regards that Celie, crippled by the sense of 'inferiorization' 'non-entity' and 'guilt', "fights against racist and sexist definition of herself" and finally "manages to overturn the conventional definition of good and evil in relation to women, by emphasizing that she exist primarily as and for herself" (20). Like wise, Barbara T. Christian praises Walker's intrepid in that [she] gives " *Color Purple* a distinctly a womanist thrust by having Celie triumph over brutality wife – beating –incest –through her sisters –through Shug [. . .], Nettie [. . .] and Sofia" (425).

In *Framing Blackness*, Guyerrow asserts that, "Walker's novel *The Color Purple,* [. . .] articulates and celebrates the eventual triumph and independence of black 'womanist' values" (51-52). By the same token, Claudia Tate, also regards the novel as the social criticism of easily twentieth century and Walker is quite successful to depict the scenario. Tate opines:

In *The Color Purple,* Alice Walker is able to illustrate the abuse,

neglect and oppression a black woman had to go through in the early

twentieth century but also illustrates how a woman must fight back to

regain the self-esteem and confidence lost way back in the early

adolescent years. (15)

In spite of its over whelming success; *The Color Purple,* has been criticized

for possessing rather, a superficial, fairytale styled ending. T. W. Lewis declares that

the novel appears "not as a realistic chronicle of human events but as a fable" (qtd in

Hankinson 485). Similarly, Truider Harries observes the characters' growth as

"incredible" and "inconsistent" and mentions as, "the issues are worked out at the

price of realism" (6). These critics assumes that Walker being in a naturalistic

manner. But they misunderstood Walker because she was visionary as well as

romantic and realism does not fit to visionary and romanticism.

One of the most severe attacks on the novel's female centering came from a

male critic, George Stade, who observes that the text "has its deepest tinges of

women's liberation, with the establishment of a utopian commune presided over by

the heroine and her female lover, although a couple of womanish men are allowed to

hang around, so long as they behave themselves" (264). As the article progresses,

Stade's idea of what entails a "womanish man" becomes apparent: a man who

engages in such sewing (266). "Womanish" apparently means the equitable sharing of

domestic duties.

Further, he trivializes the incidents of physical and sexual brutality in the

novel; for example, "Celie is pestered by the demands of her husband" and he implies

that the stepfather is exaggeratedly presented as "the primary ogre, the type of all

men" (265). He interprets any emotional expression of the male characters, such as,

crying, as weakness. Stade claims that Walker presents masculinity as "unredeemable, a radical evil, irreducible, the causeless cause of all that is wrong in the world" (266). If "masculinity" is what endorses physical and sexual brutality, the inability to express emotion and the absence of co-operative effects in domestic activities, then Walker is not amiss in presenting it as he claims. Describing men in order to eradicate his destructive concept of 'masculinity' is probably the most humanitarian act of the novel. Stade fails to see the unusual amount of sympathy that Walker gives to the male characters, especially considering the atrocity of the abuses committed; she finds a way to love, redeem, and bring the male characters back into family at the end of the novel.

Critic James C. Hall also criticizes the style of the novel as Walker presents, and her attack on the patriarchal ideology. Hall has the opinion that her form of writing and presentation of the female characters does not heighten the novel, so as; it too, does not give the space for the black women. Hall remarks:

> Walker's greatest accomplishment within *The Color Purple* is its claim for 'space' through the critique of patriarchal theological structures that are, by implication theocratic. If the adoption of epistolary form subverts male codes of literary expression, Walker continues the daemonic subversion, further directing her attention to philosophical and political structures that are also limiting of black women. (89)

In *Towards a Black Feminist Literary Criticism*, Barbara Smith suggests that the critics best suited to evaluate works written by black women are black women themselves. She notes: "black women's existence, experience culture and brutally complex system of oppression which shape these are in the 'real world' of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown" (168). Smith,

however, implies a greater homogeneity of the black experience than that which actually exists. Class differences in class and sexual orientation, are crucially important. Being a black woman; will not automatically produce the "non hostile and perceptive analysis of works written by persons outside the 'mainstream' of white/male cultural rule" called by Smith, as Trunder Harris' reading readily illustrate (169).

However, many women, black and white (and all the colors in between), find themselves outside of the "'mainstream' of white/male cultural rule" by reasons of class, sexuality, and religious/political ideologies. Marginalized women, who live contrary to society's expectations for them, understand enough about the nature of oppression to recognize it wherever it exists. The marginalized woman, especially she is placed on the further edges of the margin, recognizes and identifies with other marginalized women. She is in the best position to provide the types of evaluation desired by Smith:

> . . . She would think and write out her own identity and not try to graft the ideas or methodology of white/male literary thought upon the precious materials of Black women's art. Black feminist criticism would by definition be highly innovative; embodying the daring spirit of the works themselves . . . black feminist criticism applied to a particular work can overturn previous assumptions about it and expose for the first time its actual dimensions. (175)

The present study will concentrate on the issues of traditional gender roles and its disruption by the major characters of the novel. I have designed this research by dividing it into four chapters. The first chapter will be the introductory part; and it includes; critical biography, critical summary of the text and review of literature. The

second chapter will focus on gender roles and sexuality theories, as a methodological

tool. The third chapter will analyze the text thoroughly on the basis of theoretical

modality outlined in the second chapter. And finally, the third chapter will present the

conclusion of this research drawn on the basis of textual analysis in chapter three. I

have drawn up necessary ideas from various sources and theories that appear relevant

to my personal mode of approaching the text. It will purely be the textual reading of

The Color Purple on the basis of Gender roles and Sexuality theories.

Chapter II

Theoretical Modality

Origin and Meaning of Gender Roles

A gender role is a set of perceived behavioral norms associated particularly with males and females, in a given social group or a system. It can be a form of labor by gender. Gender is the component of the gender/sex system, which refers to "The set of arrangements, by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed needs are satisfied" (Reiter 1975:159). All society, to a certain effect, has a gender/sex system, although the components and workings of this system vary markedly from society to society. People's gender roles may be defied as the kinds of activities that society determines to be appropriate for individuals possessing their kind of external genitalia.

Gender roles have long been a predominant of the 'nature versus nurture' debate. Traditional theories of gender usually assume that one's gender identity, and also, one's gender role, is a natural given. For example, it is often claimed that women are naturally fit to look after children. The idea that differences in gender roles originate in differences in biology has found support in parts of the specific community. Nineteenth century anthropology sometimes used descriptions of the imagined life of Paleolithic hunting and gathering societies for evolutionary explanation of gender differences. For example, those accounts maintain that the need to take care of offspring may have limited the females' freedom to hunt and assume positions of power. More recently, sociobiology and evolutionary psychology have explained those differences in social roles by treating them as adaptation. Supporting the view that gender role as adaptation, Alex comfort in *Sex in Society* (1963) explains:

The 'gender role' which as individual adopts - 'manly' or 'womanly' -
according to the standards of his culture, is oddly enough almost
wholly learned, and little if at all built in; infact, the gender role
learned by the age of two years is for most individuals almost
irreversible, even if it runs counter to the physical sex of the subject.
(42)

Here, comfort users gender role to index the wide variation in styles of behaviour
between societies, but it also suggests that within them the degree of choice is fairly
limited. By making aware of these cultural differences, comfort hoped to demystify
human sexuality and so help to release them from what he believed were unnecessary
and irrational sexual taboos. At the same time, however, his more guarded emphasis
upon the irreversibility of gender roles seems to tell against the promise of any easily
accessible path to sexual liberation.

Due to the influence of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist works and Michel
Foucault's reflections on sexuality, the idea that gender was unrelated to sex gained
ground during the 1980s. This view claims that the person born with male genitals
could be of feminine gender. In 1987, R.W. Connell did extensive research on
whether there are any connections between biology and gender role and concluded
that there were none. Most scientists reject Connell's research because concrete
evidence exists proving the effects of hormones on behavior. However, hormone
levels vary, and disorders can cause intersex status. Simon Baron-Cohen, a bridge
university professor of psychology and psychiatry, has said that "the female brain is
predominantly hard-wired of empathy, while male brain is predominantly hard-wired
for understanding and building systems." Some researchers, such as Bruce Lipton,
believe that neural synapses in early childhood are formed due to the environment of

the child, so if parents were to treat the child as to his or her assigned gender, then the brain would develop for that gender role and thus would be 'hard-wired'.

Dr. Sandra Lipsitz Bem, a psychologist who developed the gender schema theory to explain how individuals come to use gender as an organizing category in all aspects of their life. In 1971, she created the Bem Sex Role Inventory to make how well you fit into your traditional gender role by characterizing your personality as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. She believed that through gender –schematic processing, a person spontaneously sorts attributes and behaviors into masculine and feminine categories. According to interactionist approach too, "gender roles are not fixed and they can influence all kinds of behaviour, such as choice of clothing, choice of work, and personal relationships, but are constantly negotiated between individuals (qtd. in Stark-153). Therefore, an individual processes information and regulate their behavior based on whatever definitions of femininity and masculinity their culture provides.

The current trend in Western societies toward men and women sharing similar occupations, responsibilities and jobs suggests that the sex one is born with does not directly determine one's abilities. While there are differences in average capabilities of various kinds between the sexes, the capabilities of some members of one sex will fall within the range of capabilities needed for task conventionally assigned to the other sex.

Gender roles first began in the Mesopotamian region at about the same time as civilization (around 8000 B. C.). Originally, in the Paleolithic Era, men and women were treated equally. These nomadic family groups did not have any wealth simply because their prey migrated regularly. In fact, women contributed over 70% of daily food. However, in the Neolithic Era, men and women discovered agriculture and

could gain wealth over their fellow men. In these early societies, men took the role as judge, which was a task that was considered "an arena of public concern under male control" (Nagle 2006).Women, however, in charge of the family and household. To help them, women had their children, servants, and slaves.

The roles of women were fluctuated in the course of time. Originally, in Egyptian and Greek societies, women had a "high degree of freedom and were often able to function on much the same level as men" (Nagle 2006). They had the power to own their own property or to dispose it of. Moreover, they were also involved in politics and religion as well. But, as the Roman civilization came into being, the role of women was somewhat narrowed and their power was transferred to men because of the influence of Christianity and Christianity took woman as mere objects of reproduction and help mate to man in procreation. St. Aquinas believed that women are a "misbegotten men". And, hence, in Christian communities females were undermined and males were emphasized. In the Bible, woman is presented as inferior to man because "woman was taken out of man" and the woman was also the first to sin by eating the forbidden apple. The lord said to the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you". (Genesis 3:16)

It is clearly shown that the status or roles of woman were turned or made active to passive. As the time dept on changing, so did their roles and position. Hence, the roles of man or woman were turned into a cultural representation.

Rodney Stark, talking about modern gender roles, in his book *Sociology Tenth Edition,* says that gender is obvious in society. The gender (role) occurs with children's playing materials and their nick names.

> Every society has a number of gender roles and takes measures to
>
> insure that heir children know their place within society and their

gender. Little boys, for example, are seen with blue blankets and are

given toy guns and tanks to play with. Girls, on the other hand, have

pink blankets and their toys usually consist of dolls and plastic cooking

items. (112)

Even with the nicknames, gender is obvious in society. Boys tend to be called

Butch or something similar. Girls have nicknames more along the lines of Sweetie,

Honey, or Sugar. This is just one of the methods that parents use to insure that their

children "will be different" (Stark 2007). In some societies, men are supposed to be

aggressive and dominant, while women are gentle and submissive. Men go out and

earn a living, while women stay at home and take care of the children. In some

societies, Stark says, "it is rare for women to have equal political rights [. . .] in 60

percent of these societies, women have no political rights" (114).

Traditional Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles are the activities that the patriarchal society

determines to be appropriate for individuals possessing their kind of external

genitalia. "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and

decisive; where as women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive." (qtd in

Tyson, critical theory 83). By taking these roles for granted the patriarchy tries to

legitimize, maintain and justify the male monopoly of positions of economic, political

and social power and keeps women powerless by denying them the educational and

occupational means of acquiring economic, political and social power. Hence,

traditional gender roles are established on the ideology of patriarchy, taking the

external genitalia in consideration.

Patriarchy by definition is "sexist" which means it promotes the belief that

women are innately inferior to men. This inborn inferiority of women is called

biological essentialism because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women. Feminists don't deny the biological difference between men and women, in fact, they celebrate those differences. But they don't agree that such variations as physical size, shape and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women. For instance, men are more courageous, better leaders, more intelligent or more logical. Feminism therefore distinguishes the word sex which refers to our biological constitution as female or male and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are categories created by society rather than nature Tyson quotes in *Critical Theory Today* as, "Patriarchy continually exerts forces that undermine women's self-confidence and assertiveness, then points to the absence of these qualities as proof that women are naturally, and therefore correctly, self-effacing and submissive" (85).

Traditional gender roles are deconstructive for men as well as women because they dictate that men are supposed to be strong (physically and emotionally), they are not supposed to cry because crying is considered a sign of weakness, a sign that one has been overpowered by one's emotions. Failure to provide adequate economic support for one's family is considered the most humiliating failure of a man because it means that he has failed at what is considered his biological role as provider. Similarly, it is considered unmanly for men to show fear or pain or to express their sympathy for other men. Expressing sympathy for other men is especially taboo because patriarchy assumes that only the most mute and stoic forms of male bonding are free of homosexual overtones. Men are not permitted to fail at anything they try because failure in any domain implies failure in one's manhood Tyson Says:

The patriarchal concept of feminity which is linked to frailty, modesty and timidity – disempowers women in the real world: it is not feminine to succeed in business, to be extremely intelligent, to earn big bucks, to have strong opinions, to have healthy appetite (for anything), or to assert one's rights. (87)

Patriarchal ideology suggests that these are only two identities of women. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal roles, she is a 'good girl'; if she doesn't, she is a 'bad girl.' But it is patriarchy that will do defining because both roles are projection of patriarchal male desire. For example, the desire to own "valuable" women suited to be wives and mothers, the desire to control women's sexuality so that men's sexuality cannot be threatened in anyway and the desire to dominate in all financial matters. According to patriarchal ideology, "bad girls violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they are sexually forward in appearance or behaviour, or they have multiple sexual partners" (89). Likewise, "good girl is rewarded for 'good' behaviour by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture. To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal feminity and domesticity: she is modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing" (89). Woman has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving her family. She may be sad about the problems of others, and she frequently worries about those in her care but she is never angry. Tyson further expresses his view that "patriarchal gender roles have not been eliminated by modern women's entrance into the male-dominated workplace, even if some of those women now hold what used to be traditionally male jobs" (90).

Disruption of Sex and Gender

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens defines "sex" as "biological or anatomical difference between men and women, where as "gender" concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females" (158). On the basis of these psychological features human beings are categorized into two different genders, 'masculine' and 'feminine' and are accordingly assigned different social roles to perform. These roles in turn help them to have different experience of life. In contrast to relative stability of sex, gender changes over time because of the changing social and cultural roles assigned to genders are constantly moulded by the experience of the performance of those roles.

Sex is dependent on biology but gender might be independent to biology and has psychological and cultural connotation. In this sense, sex is unalterable, fixed and biological in origin which refers to the physical difference to the body whereas gender is socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to males and females based on the perceived differences of sexes.

In social construction perspective not only gender but also sex is seen as socially developed status and has been challenged by psycho-social and critical theories and practice after the 1970s. the development of post-structuralism, especially the works of Derrida and Lacan and Foucault's theoretical discourse on sexuality have brought a radical change in the discourse of sex and gender. Those challenges are constantly supported by new theories of sociology, feminism and literary criticism. In this context, sex is understood more as continuum constructed of chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, and hormonal sex all of which "work in the presence and under the influence of a set of environments" (Fausto Sterling 71). It makes no sense therefore to assume that there is merely one set of traits that generally

characterizes men and thus defines characterizes men and thus defines masculinity; or likewise, that there is one set of traits for women which defines feminity. Such a unitary model of sexual character is a familiar part of sexual ideology and serves to reify inequality between men and women in our society.

In contrast to such biological ideologies, Connell, purpose a non-unitary model of gender. Both feminity and masculinity vary and understanding their context, dependent variety is regarded as central to the psychology of gender. He also argues that since masculinity and feminity coexists in the same person, they should be seen not as a polar opposites but as a separate dimension. He argues, "Feminity and masculinity are not essences: they are ways of living certain relationships. It follows that static typologies of sexual character have to be replaced by histories, analysis of the joint production of sets of psychological forms" (Connell 179).

In addition to such a perspective, Lewontin stresses the relevance of the socialization process: the development of person's gender identity "depends on what level was attached to him or her as a child . . . Thus biological differences became a signal for, rather than a cause of differentiation in social roles" (142). In the context of this perspective, it is more coherent to talk of gender as the understanding of how what it means to be a woman or to be a man changes from one generation to the next and how this perception varies different racialized, ethnic and religious groups, as well as for members of different social classes. Gender categories thus are seen social constructs. They institutionalize cultural and social statues and serve to make male dominance over women appear natural: "gender inequality in class society results from a historically specific tendency to ideologically 'naturalize' prevailing socio-economic inequalities" (Stolcke 19).

According to Judith Lorber the concept of gender as constructed was explored by American feminists in the 1970s, particularly Susan Kessler and Wendy Mekenna. It is only in the 1990s, that a full fledged analysis of gender as "wholly constructed, symbolically loaded, and ideologically enforced is taking place in American feminism" (5). When it is established that gender is socially defined or constructed then it can also be 'undefined' or 'deconstructed', thinking that the social, cultural and political discourses and practices of gender lie at the root of women's subordination.

Lorber further argued that gender is "a social institution" and when the society got its gendered structure it began to produce the gendered system of dominance and power. It means that gender is defined in terms of binary opposition between masculinity and feminity and it operates as a means and not as an end. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also defines gender in terms of power differentials. She says:

> Compared to chromosal sex, which is seen . . . as tending to be immutable, immanent in the individual, and biologically based, the meaning of gender is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (in the sense that each of the binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the other), and inextricable from a history of power differentials between genders (28).

Hence, in the power relationship, what seems to be the case is that we are born sexed but not gendered and taught to be masculine or feminine later. It is the process of gendering we create our cultural version of men and women. Supporting this very view of gender as construct, Beauvior states, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . Which is described as feminine" (Abrams 89).

Drawing on psychoanalysis and Foucault's writing, some critics have successfully contested the notion of gender in a radical way. They have pointed out the interrelationship between gender and heterosexuality. Judith Buther also tries to link the discourse of gender with the discourse of heterosexuality in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* as, "The heterosixualization of desire requires and insituates the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine' where these are understood as expressive attributes of male and female" (23).

These 'expressive attributes' of gender require repetition in order to establish gender as an identity. According to her, gender ought not to be constructed and stable identity, or a locus of agency from which various acts follow, rather, argues that gender is a symbolic form of 'public action whose recurrence allows for our recognition as desiring and desirable subjects. She says, "The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butter 179). According to Butler's theatrical metaphor, gender is fragile, provisional, unstable, the sum total of its appearances rather than the expression of a unifying core. Masculinity and feminity come in many transient guises, all of them in some measure unfinished or incomplete. And this is as true 'historically', when one considers the range of competing definitions of what it has meant to be a man or a woman, as it is true individually, when one remembers the difficulties in growing into and sustaining an identity. Butler's claim that gender is primarily an act of signification or representation can sound as if gender is a matter of choice, of picking up and discarding identities at will.

Destabilization of Sexuality

Traditionally, sexuality is divided into two categories; 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality'. Normal sexuality is traditionally associated with heterosexuality genital relations where as homosexual relation is taken as perversion or unnatural.

Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalysis have undoubtedly been associated with a view of sex in which sexual is aligned with the genital and his work on sex and sexual identity is often figured solely in terms of biological instinct. The result is that Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) is popularly read as a treatise underpinned by as essentialist logic which connects sexuality with instincts and in which biology (instinct) determines the subject's sex-gender identity. He moved away from the confines of 'homo' or 'hetro' sexuality and questioned the idea of (per) version of sexuality. He is primarily concerned with the sexual pleasure. He argues that "sexual pleasure is not confined to heterosexuality or two opposite-sex genital relations. Moreover, it is clear in *three essays* that heterosexuals are as 'perverse' and as aberrant as any sexual subject" (qtd. in Purvis, "Sexualities" 432).

Freud, by giving emphasis to pleasure rather than 'naturality' or 'unnaturality' of sexuality traveled away from traditional concept of heterosexuality as normal and other as perversion or unnatural.

Similarly, Michael Foucault published his book, *The History of Sexuality I: An Introduction* (1976) where he talked about knowledge, power and discourse for sexological and medical formulations of sexuality. For Foucault, sexuality is the joint operation of knowledge and power in discourse. He proves that "sexuality is not simply the natural expression of some inner drive or desire as Freud assumed rather, the discourse of sexuality concern the operation of power in human relationships as much as they govern the production of a personal identity" (qtd. in Butler 435). By

stressing the ways in which sexuality is written in or on the body and showing how the homosexual is forced into cultural (in)visibility, Foucault begins to dismantle the notion that sexuality is a transparent fact of life.

In the similar vein, Judith Butler argues most powerfully that identities figured as feminine or masculine do not axiomatically require the anatomical grounding which has traditionally differentiated sex and gender identities. Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* probe and question models of sexuality and identity which cohere around the assumed stability of heterosexuality. Her investigations also display similar indebtedness to the work of Foucault and reveal the influence of post-structuralist especially Derrida and Lacan, "what Butler interrogates in *Gender Trouble* are the seemingly inevitable contradictions between sameness and difference which mark identity formations based around gender and sexuality" (Purvis 442).

Butler does not underestimate the knowledge and power associated with 'heterosexual' and 'heteronormative' matrix. Refining this notion in *Bodies that Matter,* she notes how one effect of such 'hegemonic heterosexuality' is the attempt to naturalized genders, Butler suggests that performances associated with 'drag' illustrate how gender is open to imitation rather than being a constative or substantial expression of who or what one is, drag helps to highlight the ways in which gender can also be figured in terms of 'sylized repetitions' of acts for which there is no origin or copy. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues that "drag plays upon the difference between the anatomical body of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (442). In *Bodies that Matter* Butler strengthens her case, suggesting that drag is not confined to lesbians or gay rituals or queer cultures. Drag is not understood as a secondary imitation of prior, original gender. Rather heterosexuality is itself part of repeated effort to imitate its socially constructed idealizations.

Butler's main contention is that gender does not axiomatically proceed from sex. Although the sexes might seem binary in their 'morphology' and constitution', for Butler there are no grounds to assume that genders ought to remain as two. Alternatively phrased, gender does not necessarily mirror sex, expanding a key argument in *Gender Trouble* that the relation of gender to sex is not mimetic, Bodies that matter abandon the notion of an innate or intrinsic gender identity. (qtd. in Purvis, Sexualities 445).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the recitation of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames can bring to light the constructed status of the heterosexual as original. Qualifying these claims in *Bodies that Matter,* she emphasizes that the constructed status of heterosexuality does not imply that opposite sex relations are thus denaturalized or that parodying dominant norm is sufficient to dislodge them. The connection between drag and gender subversion is not axiomatic.

All in all, Butler tries to prove gender and sexuality as 'performative' in the sense that the features which a cultural discourse institutes as masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual it also makes happen by establishing an identity that the socialized individual assimilates and the patterns of behaviour that he or she enacts homosexuality by this view, is not a particular identity that effects a pattern of action, but a socially pre-established pattern of action that produces the effect of organizing in a particular identity.

By the influence of deconstruction and radical feminism, Lesbian, gay and inclusively queer theory has emerged in the field of literary criticism. The term 'queer' was originally derogatory, used to stigmatize male and female same sex. Love as defiant and unnatural, since the early 1990s however, it has been increasingly adopted

by gay and lesbians themselves as a non-invidious term to identify a way of life and an area for scholarly inquiry.

A number of queer theorists adopted the deconstructive mode of dismantling the key binary oppositions of western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and naturally cultural, by which a spectrum of diverse things are forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power and centrality, while the second is derogated, subordinated and marginalized. In *Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), Adrienne Rich posited what she called "Lesbian Continuum" as a way of stressing how far-ranging and diverse is the spectrum of love and bonding among women, including female friendship, the family relationship between mother and daughter and women's partnerships and social groups, as well as overtly physical same-sex relations. Rich says, "I mean the term *Lesbian Continuum* to include a range through each woman's life and throughout history of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (qtd. in Zimmerman, 184).

This concept of the "Lesbian continuum" therefore designates a wide variety of female behaviour, running, for instance, from informal mutual help networks set up by women within particular professions or institutions, through supportive female friendships and finally, to sexual relationships.

Like many other critical approaches, Lesbian/Gay studies within this "queer theory" influence have drawn particularly on post-structuralist work of the 1980s. One of the main points of post-structuralism was to deconstruct the binary oppositions, showing, firstly, that the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute, since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of the other and,

secondly it is possible to reverse the hierarchy within such pairs, and so 'privilege' the second term rather than the first. Hence, in Lesbian/gay studies the pair heterosexual/homosexual is deconstructed. The opposition within this pair is seen, firstly, as inherently unstable: as Diana Fuss puts it, in the introduction to *Inside/outside: Lesbian theories, gay theories*, much current work in the field aims "to call into question the stability and ineradicability of the hetero/homo hierarchy" (1).

This anti-essentialism in relation to sexual identity is taken further by other critics; Judith Butler, a prominent contributor to inside/outside points out in her essay that identity categories like 'gay' and 'straight' "tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for liberatory contestations of that very oppression" (14-16). Hence, it might be argued, she says that the concept of homosexuality is itself part of homophobic (anti-gay) discourse and the term 'homosexual' is a medical-legal one, and preceding the invention of the corresponding term 'heterosexual' by eleven years. In this sense, heterosexuality only comes into being as a consequence of the crystallization of the notion of homosexuality. Thus Lesbianism is not a stable, essential identity, so that, "identity can become site of contest and revision" (Fuss 19). She further argues that, all identities, including gender identities, are "a kind of impersonation and approximation . . . a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (Fuss 21). This opens the way to a 'post-modernist' notion of identity as a constant switching among a range of different roles and positions; drawn from a kind of limitless data bank of potentialities. So, the distinction between naturally-given, normative self of heterosexuality and the rejected 'other' of homosexuality. The other in these formulations, is as much something within us as beyond us, and self' and 'other' are always implicated in each other, in the root sense of this word, which

means to be intertwined or folded into each other. As basic psychology show, what is identified as the external 'other' is usually part of the self which is rejected and hence projected outwards.

Changing Roles

A person's gender role is composed of several elements and can be expressed through clothing, behavior, choice of work, personal relationships and other factors. These elements are not concrete and have evolved through time. Gender roles were traditionally divided into strictly feminine and masculine gender roles, though these roles have diversified today into many different acceptable male or female gender roles. However, gender role norms for women and men can vary significantly from one country or culture to another, even within country or culture.

Gender role can vary according to social group to which person belongs to or the subcultures with which he or she identifies cultural identity. Historically, for example, eunuchs had a different gender role because their biology was changed. Many terms have been developed to portray sets of behaviors arising in this context. Androgyny is a term that denotes the display of both male and female behavior, also exists. The masculine gender role in the west has become more malleable since the 1950s. One example is the "sensitive new age guy", which could be described as a traditional male gender role with a more typically 'female' grooming habits. Some have argued that such new roles are merely rebelling against tradition more so than forming a distinct role. However, traditions regarding male and female appearances have never been concrete, and men in other eras have been equally interested with their appearance. The popular conceptualization of homosexual men, which has become more accepted in recent decades, has traditionally been more androgynous or effeminate, though in actuality homosexual men can also be masculine and even exhibit machismo characteristics. One could argue that since many homosexual men

and women fall into one gender role or another or androgynous, that gender roles are not strictly determined by a person's physical sex. Whether or not this phenomenon is due to social or biological reasons is debated. Many homosexual people find the traditional gender roles to be very restrictive, especially during childhood. Also, the phenomenon of intersex people, which has become more publicly accepted, has caused much debate on the subject of gender roles. Many intersexual people identify with the opposite sex, while others are more androgynous. Some see this as a threat to traditional gender roles, while others see it as a sign that these roles are a social constructs and that a change in gender roles will be liberating.

According to sociological research, traditional feminine gender roles have become less relevant and hollower in western societies since industrialization started. For example, the cliché that women do not follow a career is obsolete in many western societies. On the other hand, in the media there are attempts to portray women who adopt an extremely classical role as a subculture. Women take on many roles that were traditionally reserved for men, as well as behaviors and fashions, which may cause pressure on many men to be more masculine and thus confined within an even smaller gender role, while other men react against this pressure. For example, men's fashions have become more restricted than in other eras, while women's fashions have become broader. One consequence of social unrest during the Vietnam War era was that men begun to let their hair grow to a length that had previously been considered appropriate only for women. Some what earlier, women had begun to cut their hair to lengths previously considered appropriate only to men.

Chapter III

Textual Analysis

Masculine Female

In the patriarchal society females are defined as, "emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive" (qtd. in Tyson, "Critical Theory" 83). They are regarded as inferior to males and are assumed for the help of males activities. According to this convention, females are given roles to live in a family and practice household and take care of their men and children. Whereas, males have to do outer activities and keep the women under control.

Walker, in *The Color Purple*, defies this patriarchal convention and gives masculine roles to females. Hence, her characters in the novel resist such patriarchal notion and disrupt the traditional gender roles. In the process of rupturing the convention Sofia and Shug Avery play the vital role. They not only act as anti-conventional but also encourage Celie to transform herself from passive to active female character. Here, Barbara Smith's idea of 'Lesbian' is applicable. Smith opines:

> The term 'lesbian' is broadened to include not only literature written by lesbians, but also any literature written by lesbians, but also any literature written by women that "refuses to do what is supposed to", that has strong images of women and that has a 'refusal to be linear'. (Smith 175)

In the novel, Sofia, is presented as an active and bold girl unlike the traditional females. She is physically strong and bold in speaking. She is very much conscious of self-esteem and equality. She does not accept any bad comments made against her. Once, Harpo, the Lover of Sofia takes her to introduce with his father, Mr. __ and talk the issue of marriage. Seeing Sofia pregnant Mr. __ makes bad remarks about her.

Harpo sits quietly with his head down and being passive but Sofia reacts against those bad comments made against her. Being angry with Harpo and Mr. __, she says, "What I need to marry Harpo for? He still living here with you. What food and clothes he git, you buy. [. . .] Well, nice visiting. I'm going home. Harpo you stay here when you are free me and the baby be waiting" (33).

Sofia is a woman who wants to do her work in a way she likes. She does not accept others interruption. Once she makes her mind up to do something, nobody can stop her doing that thing. But Harpo, her husband, does not like this attitude of her because he was grown up and nurtured in patriarchal culture whose the upper hand of male is celebrated. Because of the matter of superiority and interiority in the family, Harpo and Sofia always fight. Harpo tries to keep control over her even by beating but she reacts. And, she always want linearity and equality in the family. As the scene Celie describes, "He try to slap her. what he do that for? She reach down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him across the eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates. He roll on the floor" (39). Furthermore, Sofia believes that men have equal role and responsibility as women in household as well as outer work. But, Harpo is so irresponsible that without helping her, he spends most of the time in eating. In face he does not want to help her in household activities because he thinks that these are the only female activities. And if he does these activities, the male dignity will be lost.

> . . . This was after supper was over, too. I was giving the children they baths, getting 'em ready for bed. He supposed to be washing the dishes. Stead of washing plates, he cleaning them with his mouth . . . After all that food he look too sick to walk. When us got to the field I thought he was going to faint. (62)

Harpo does not pay attention towards Sofia's request. He becomes indifferent towards them because through laziness he wants to establish the supremacy over her. But ironically this indifference makes him a passive character. Neither he can perform well in outer activities due to his laziness nor he does household activities for the help of Sofia because it makes him feel humiliated.

Sofia, being an active woman, does not leave Harpo becoming idle. She makes him do some work. Due to laziness and uninterest he does no outer works but accepts to do the inner ones. So, by performing reverse works, both of them violate the traditional belief of gender roles. Moreover, Sofia walks a step a head of violation of gender role by dressing up Harpo's pants while doing outer works. Celie describes this scene as:

> I see Sofia dragging a ladder and then lean it up against the house. She wearing a old pair of Harpo pants. Got help head tied up in a head rag. She clam up the ladder to the roof, begin to hammer in nails. Sound echo cross the yard like shots.
>
> Harpo eat, watch her. (64)

The above lines clearly assert the idea of Sofia's activeness and passiveness of Harpo. Harpo lives inside the house and watches her working. By doing outer works and wearing Harpo's pants, Sofia not only challanges the traditional gender roles but also ruptures the conventional idea of female clothing.

Eventually, Sofia leaves Harpo and goes with her sisters because she wants to get rid of Harpo's irresponsibilities towards family life. She is very much bothered and frustrated because never satisfy her either physically or emotionally. Sofia is very sad of Harpo's uncaring sexual act too. She says, ". . . the worst part is I don't think he notice. He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking.

No matter what I feel. It just him. Heartfeeling don't even seem to enter into it . . . The fact he can do it like that make me want to kill him" (69).

Sofia, being wife of Harpo, never gets love and respect from her husband. She wants dedication, love and care from him as her husband but he fails to provide her. He is always in search of power to dominate her in order to become superior and lack emotional and rational quality. To gain the freedom from the bored life, she decides to leave Harpo. Hence, by daring to leave her husband and house, she disrupts the traditional gender role of a woman, living in husband's house and taking care of her husband, children and his household.

Shug Avery, on the other hand, crosses the female boundary of gender roles through her sexual assertiveness and outer activities. She rarely performs female roles that patriarchal society defines. Neither she has shyness nor is she dependent on any males. She is self guided and motivated. She does everything that she thinks is right. She is far away from her family life. She is a mother but behaves as if she has noone or nothing to care for. She is drawned in her outer world and tries to create her own identity as an independent self. Once Celie asks her if she ever misses her children when she is away from them, She replies that she misses nothing.

My kids with they grandma, she say.

she could stand the kids, I had to go.

you miss 'em? I ast.

Now, she say. I don't miss nothing. (52)

Being a mother, Shug, unlike the traditional females, is away from her family and children. By leaving the children with their grandmother, she is different from her household and performs manly activities in the outer world. She is away from the belief of patriarchal gender roles. She does not have any sign of somberness, shyness

and passiveness. She is bold, daring and active. She sings songs in Harpo's 'Juke Joint', being very glamorous. Her dress up is very violating of traditional female norms, "Shug wearing a gold dress that show her tities near bout to the nipple. Everybody sorta hoping something break. But that dress strong" (84). While singing at 'Juke Joint', she is not only singing in front of the crowd but also selling her sex. Moreover, she is sexually very assertive woman because she keeps changing her lover for sexual satisfaction. Talking Shug's and Sofia's activities and behaviours Bell Hooks questioned their identity. She says; "Sofia and Shug not like men . . . but they not like women either" (236). The characterization of Shug and Sofia are characterised as 'manly' or 'womanly' (237). Gradually, the love between Celie and Shug turns into lesbian relationship. In the name of love they perform homosexuality and moves far beyond the idea of heterosexuality as patriarchal society prefers. Shug's sexuality travels far beyond simply men or women as she loves both.

> She say, I love you miss Celie. And then she hand off and kiss me on the mouth.
>
> Um, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say um too. Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more.
>
> Then us touch each other. (118)

Shug Avery, who is always in search of sexual satisfaction and money, never cares for her health. She does not care about eating, sleeping and living. Sometimes she lives as vagabond spending much times in the streets. She returns home in a very bad condition. As Celie describes:

> . . . she never give a thought to what she eat. Never give a thought to where she sleep. She on the road some where for weeks at a time, come home with bleary eyes, rotten breath, over weight and sort of

greasy. No place hardly to stop and really wash herself, especially her

hair, on the road. (218)

Her activities clearly show that she is very much indifferent to the world. She never

cares for others as well as herself. What matters to her is sexuality and liberty.

Though she is unbounded to any societal norms, she is able to create her own identity

and earn lots of money. She became economically sound with full of luxurious

materials. "She make so much money she don't know what to do with it. She got a

fine house in Memphis, another can she got one hundred preety dresses. A room full

of shoes. She buy Grady anything he think he want" (114). Without the help of any

males, Shug becomes able to create her own self, economy and power. Shug, becomes

upper to males because she can buy anything to her lover, Grady. In this case, Shug

becomes the leader of Grady, the man.

In the novel, some female characters are presented as having masculine

quality, unlike the belief of a patriarchal society regarding what a woman should be.

Those women have the quality of physical strength, sexual assertiveness, activeness

and daring in speech. Due to these features they go beyond the traditional female

boundaries and try to establish a new terrain in the society. Sofia's strength and sass,

Shug's sexual assertiveness are some far beyond female qualities that the patriarchal

society imagines as being female. Tony's view sounds similar to their activities;

"patriarchal gender roles have not been eliminated by modern women's entrance in to

the male dominated work plan, even if some of those women now hold what used to

be traditionally male jobs" (Tony 90). Hence, they disrupt the traditional gender role

and become masculine female.

Female Tie as Anticonventional

In *The Color Purple,* unlike the traditional patriarchal belief female turns to female for support, development and creating identity leaving their males. By the bond of their loving and nurturing relationship they challenge the patriarchal norms and values. They try to create their own female world. Walker's female characters powerfully challenges the traditional belief which always regards female as dependent to males. But throughout the novel, walker portrays female friendship as a means for women to summon the courage to resist the oppression and dominance of patriarchal society. To challenge the domination they go far beyond gender role and create their own self. For instance, female tries to gain sexual fulfillment through females. Celie and Shug keep homosexual relationship to gain orgasm. Their activity is beyond the female value or norms. They challenge the heterosexual belief. In *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry says, "Lesbianism turns away from various forms of collusion with patriarchal exploitation and instead consists of relationships among women which, by definition, constitute a form of resistance to, and a radical reorganizing of, existing forms of social relations" (141). The relationship among women become so interdependent and supportive that eventually leads to overcome the narrow boundary of patriarchal ideology and establish them as complete independent human beings.

In the beginning all female characters are responsible for their sorrow, and exploitation because of their jealousy among them. The relationship between Celie and Sofia, and Sofia and Squeak are the examples of such relationship. But later when they are united they gain new power and ability to form their selfhood. The female relationship enables Celie to regain her real existence. Because of the regular help, support and guidance of Shug, Sofia and Neltie, Celie becomes able to transform

herself from the dependent woman to independent self and celebrates joy and bliss in her business and companions; "I am so happy, I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (222). It means, Celie gets redemption from the help of the community of black females.

Celie gets the impetus of her self realization from Sofia, independent and self defensive woman, who fights against Harpo's attempt to abuse her. When Sofia leaves Harpo to lead an independent life, it gives Celie a realization of the rights of women in the male dominated society. But Celie lacks power and guidance to use those inspiration in her real life. She is so ignorant that she believes, whoever wants to fight against the prejudices of men, they will live no more and she quit the idea of fighting, "I don't say nothing. I think about Netive, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (22).

But everything changes with the entry of Shug Avery who proves herself as an independent and economically strong in her career. She teaches Celie to create her own selfhood neglecting the tolerance and acceptance. Under the help of Shug Celie becomes active and revengeful against the tyranny of her husband. With Shug's encouragement Celie curses Mr. __ being violent when she discovers that Mr. __ has kept Nettie's letter. She says, "How I'm gon from killing him. [. . .] I think I feel better If I kill him" (150-151). But Shug stops her for being violent, " Now, you won't. Nobody feel better for killing nothing" (150). Instead Shug urges Celie to do the self development activities.

Under the guidance of Shug Avery, Celie discovers her own self- different from that patriarchal tradition. Shug reveals Celie the mysteries of body and sexual experiences. Shug makes her able to discover the way to freedom. The lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug teaches Celie to realize the difference between

sexual abuse and sexual orgasm. Shug's regular empowerment enables Celie to appreciate her own worth, "for the first time some body made something and named it after me" (77). Now Celie likes to value herself. She gained her own individuality and turned a new woman. By this help, support and the discovery of Celie's own individuality, she becomes able to challenge the traditional patriarchal roles and values and leaves Mr. __. She says:

> You a lowdown dog is what's wrong. Its time to leave you and inter
>
> into the creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need.
>
> Say what? he ast shock.
>
> . . . But Neltie and my children coming home soon. I say, And when
>
> she do, all us together gon whup your ass. (207)

Celie has created her own world inside where she can freely play and make the world of her own. She comes to liberation from traditional patriarchal domain through the community of her black sisters, as Bell Hooks says, "Black women . . . like Shug and Sofia rebelliously place themselves outside the context of patriarchal family norms" (Hooks 294). It became the alternative to male domination and their ability to break through imposed stereotypes both male and female to follow. And, unitedly they resurrect themselves from the death of their selfhood. Shug teaches her to sew and wear pants. Gradually she turns to be a new woman to break all the boundries on her. Celie asserts her freedom from her husband and declares her rights to exist; I'm black, I'm poor, I may be ugly, and can't look [. . .]. But I'm here." (214). Here, Celie's sense of self is so strong that she is no longer a helpless, dependent object rather she proves herself self-dependent, active and matured subject.

Similarly, Nettie, Celie's sister, escapes from the house, challenging the patriarchal social values and roles. She supposed to be dead because there is no any

information about her since she has been escaped. But later, when Celie discovers that Nettie is in Africa as missionary worker, her letter became an important source for the development of Celie's life. Nettie encourages Celie to react against Mr. __'s crime and get freedom. She teaches Celie to see the outer world and try to change herself according to that situation. She says, "The world is changing. It's no longer a world just for boys and men" (167). Nettie opens Celie's eye to the outer world. She shares her missionary experiences to inspire Celie to empower her to know the outer world, "Oh, Celie, there are colored people in the world who wants us to know, to grow and see the light. they are not an mean like pa and Albert, or beaten down like ma was" (138-139). Besides, Nettie reveals the family history that Alphonso is not their own father, "pa is not our pa!" (182). This declaration removes the stigma and shame of incest from Celie's mind and serves to develop her individuality. Now, Celie starts searching peace and happiness in her own life.

Celie completes her independence becoming an autonomous woman with her own business, story and money. She establishes sewing business. The quilt, composed of different patterns sewed together symbolizes diverse people coming together in unity." Let's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains she say." (44). Like a patchwork, quilt, the community of love that surrounds Celie at the end of the novel, incorporates men and women who are bounded by family and friendship and who have different gender roles, and sexual orientation. The continuation of Celie and Sofia's work on quilt becomes an emblem of unity among women.

Eventually, Celie establishes herself a fully independent woman with her own business and female companions. She helps Sofia to be an independent since she hires her in her dry good store. Sofia finds a job fit with her individuality. Squeak has also established herself with a new career singer. The female tie makes real to Stade's view

of the text. He says; "The text has its deepest tinges of women's liberation, with the establishment of a utopian commune presided over by the heroine and her female lover" (266). They help and support each other and make an extended matriarchal community through which they assert their power against patriarchal male domination.

Redefinition of God by Female Characters

Traditionally women are defined by the patriarchal society. And they are given different roles to perform. But in *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery, a female, insists Celie to redefine God in a new way. Celie starts resisting the "big, old and tall gray bearded and white" (201), monotheistic God. She emerges into a distinctly non Christian discovery of God that she eventually gains liberation from patriarchy. Celie adopts the nature God or the universal God which is non sexist, unoppresive and unrepressive.

Shug Avery, teaches Celie that God is not "white" and "He", instead, God is universal and natural. It is in everything including the "flowers, water, wind and a big rock" (204) and God is inside her and she is naturally connected to everything. Shug says:

> God is inside you and inside everybody else. [. . .] Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything . . . Everything that is or ever was or every will be. (202-203)

Shug changes Celie's idea about God. this new philosophy of God positions Celie as "being part of everything, not separate at all" (203) fortifies her with self acceptance and leads her to reject male mastery. She gives her idea about nature or universal God

that is present in everything, everywhere. She describes her own experience of being part of everything in order to convince Celie. She says, "My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air The other people [. . .]. I knew that if I cut a tree my arms would bleed" (203). This new definition of God-a womanist vision-blurs and frees the traditional male connotations of God and creates a new feminine concept of God as part of everything. Shug provides Celie with a bridge to new spirituality free from the domain of an angry, white-male God. this reimagining of God symbolizes Celie's move from an object of somebody else's care to an independent woman. Celie's movement from monotheism to pantheism parallel's her movement from isolation and inferiority under patriarchy to a new bonding with other women and appreciation of herself. Celies new found religion links God with the power of the universe, a pantheistic notion and often associates with Goddess religious. Shug in the process of caring and fortifying Celie's self blames:

> Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere soon as you think he everywhere you think he God. But he ain't whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other and of it, tell him to git lost. (204)

This new vision of God and man changes Celie's perception towards them. She feels herself fool and angry at her passiveness in everything. Initially she follows Bible to "honour father and mother no matter what" (213-44) and becomes quiet when Alphonso rapes her. But later, being enlightened she starts reacting against negative aspects in men. She dares to curse Mr. __when he denies to handover the letters from Nettie. She curses, "untill you do right by me everything you dream about will fail"

(213). While cursing him she feels the extreme power 'seem to come to me from the "trees" (213)- the nature God.

Hence, under the guidance of Shug, Celie becomes able to redefine God that is traditionally accepted as "male", "white". But in the novel, the idea of Biblical monotheistic God is ruptured by the pantheistic notion of God i.e. Nature God. And female takes power to redefine it. So, it is disruption of the traditional gender role because female became the definer of not only mankind but also God in *The Color Purple*.

Assumption of Feminine Roles by Male Characters

In *The Color Purple*, many female characters go beyond the boundaries of traditional gender role and gain moral victory. Similarly, male characters also become ready to do female tasks as traditional patriarchal society defines and violates the norms of traditional gender role.

Initially male characters are very stereotypical and conservative but gradually their stereotypical quality starts rupturing as the novel proceeds. In the beginning, Celie's husband Mr. _ is seen as very cruel and oppressive man. He is very brutal and forced Celie into isolation by not letting know about Nettie. Mr. _ captures Celie to substitute his dead wife and his mistress, Shug. Celie is enslaved, beaten and raped in her house, which never became her own house. Since marriage she only becomes the sufferer and object of Mr. _ 's frustration, "He beat one like he beat children. cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say Celie, git the belt. The children be one side the room packing through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry" (23). Mr. _ manipulated Celie, physically, psychologically and emotionally. He never paid attention towards his wife. He never helps her in her household. But towards the end of the novel when Celie leaves Mr. _ , he starts changing his cruel and lazy character. He becomes

changed person. He himself admits that "Celie I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. I felt like a new experience" (267). He starts working hard. Describing Mr. __ as changed person Sofia and Harpo says:

> He work real hard too.
>
> What? I say, Mr. __ work!
>
> He sure do. He out there is the fields from sun up to sun down. And clean that house just like woman.
>
> Even cook, say Harpo. And what move, wash the dishes when he finish. (229)

Mr. __ now is a changed person. He not only starts working but also does the traditionally feminine roles, like, cooking, cleaning and washing the dishes. His dominating and repressive character against female starts changing. Here, George Stade's idea of 'womanish man' fits for this condition. His idea of 'womanish man' becomes apparent: "a man who engages in such sewing . . . and 'womanish' apparently means the equitable sharing of domestic duties" (266).

At the end of the novel, Mr. __ joins Celie's pant making business not being her husband and owner but being a worker and her friend. He comes under the shade of Celie's business life and desires to do the work under the guidance of Celie and man's biological role as "provider" also transforms into "receiver." His primary idea about male as superior to females and females should be kept under control in anyway and men and women are different according to their dress up and work starts collapsing. He believes that "men and women not suppose to wear the same thing. Men spose to wear the pants" (278). But Celie tells that there is nothing about men's and women's wearing. People wear those that makes them feel comfortable. Celie further says that there is not any distinct work that is done by either males or females.

Men sew in Africa and people don't think them as backward. By listening Celie's logics Mr. ___ says that he also likes sewing but he felt that when he sew people would laugh. "When I was growing up, he said I use to try to sew along with mama cause that's what she was always doing. But everyday laughed at me. But you know I liked it" (279). Celie by hearing the desire of Mr. ___ for stitching the clothes, asks Mr. __ to stitch the pockets and tells that nobody will be going to mock him. Both agreed and start sewing and smoking. In this situation Celie becomes the active person whereas Mr. ___ behaves as female and keep Celie's words and listens her dicision.

Harpo, son of Mr. ___ also advocates for the gender roles and tries to control his wife, Sofia through beating. He wants to teach her the feminine roles violently but he himself does nothing. He is also very conservative like his father but later he changes his view and reconciles with his wife, Sofia at the end. Harpo never helps Sofia in household activities because he regards it as a woman work. Once, Kate, sister of Mr. ___ asks Harpo to help Celie in household and bring water. But he replies that doing housework is not only the woman's task.

> You a big boy now. Time for you to help out some.
>
> Women work, he say. [. . .] I'm a man.
>
> You are a trifling nigger, she say. You git that bucket and bring it back full. (22)

Harpo regards women's works are embarrassing and shameful to men. Women are for the household activities and men are for outer one. Harpo is very worried for his manly status because his wife, Sofia is so active that he turns into passive. But he wants his upper hand in the family and try to bring Sofia into household through power. But the problem of Harpo is that Sofia wants equality

between couples and cannot be controlled by beating. So there always occur fight between Harpo and Sofia. Later, when the plot develops, Sofia leaves Harpo and tries to create her independent self. Then, Harpo's perception towards women also starts changing. He also involves himself into women roles that he regard primarily as humiliating. Once. Sofia says to Celie that though he is lazy while doing outer work but he loves the part of housekeeping. Sofia says, "I rather be out in the fields or fooling with the animals. Even chopping wood. But he loves cooking and cleaning and doing little things round the house" (62-63). Harpo sometimes, helps Sofia by caring children and helping Sofia in household.

> Baby sit real still, strain real hard, fart us laugh, but it sad too. Harpo
>
> pick it up, finger the daidie and get her ready for a change.
>
> I don't think she wet, say Sofia just as.
>
> But he change her anyway. (72)

Harpo changes himself from the stereotypical male to the general man. At the end of the novel, he reforms his ways. He looks Sofia with respect and the eye of equality. Harpo accepts Sofia's guidance at the end. By helping Sofia in household and let her doing work at Celie's business, Harpo won the heart of Sofia and both reconcile and save their marriage and live happily.

> Well you got me behind you, anyway, say Harpo. And I love every
>
> judgment you ever made. He move up and kiss her where her nose was
>
> stitch.
>
> Sofia toss her head. Everybody learn something in life, she say. And
>
> they laugh. (289)

In the novel, walker presents the male characters who primarily are rigid in gender roles. But later, in the course of time, they change their views and become

ready to assume the roles of females that they previously think humiliating to them. Mr ___ and Harpo's idea regarding females and wives are changed and more importantly their concept of so called "masculinity" is totally ruptured by the end of the novel. Therefore admiring Walker's very achievement in the novel, George Stade expresses, "Describing men in order to eradicate his destructive concept of masculinity - that endorses physical and sexual brutality, the ability to express emotion and absence of co-operative effects in domestic activities - is probably the most humanitarian act of the novel" (236). Hence, towards the end of the novel, the brutal and destructive aspect of "masculinity" is ruptured in the novel by acquiring new insight of equality between males and females and accepting the feminine roles as a natural task by the males, they disrupt the traditional gender roles.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Traditionally men and women are categorized on the basis of their sex. Taking sex in consideration, people are given certain roles to perform according to the society and culture they belong to. According to social convention, males are considered to be physically strong, active and independent. They are supposed to perform outer activities, whereas females are considered weak, passive and dependent and whose task is to follow their husband. They are given roles to take care of their household and children. But Walker, in *The Color Purple*, presents her characters, either male or female, unlike the traditional gender role system. Her female characters have masculine traits, such as, activeness, boldness and physical strength. On the other hand, the male characters turns to be weak, passive and dependent.

Many characters in the novel break the boundaries of traditional male or female gender roles. Sofia's strength and sass, Shug's sexual assertiveness and Harpo's insecurity are major examples of such disparity between a character's gender and the traits he or she displays. The blurring of gender traits and roles sometimes involves sexual ambiguity, as seen in the sexual relationship that develops between Celie and Shug. Disruption of gender roles sometimes causes problems. Harpo's insecurity about his masculinity leads to marital problems and his attempt to beat Sofia. Likewise, Shug's confident sexuality and resistance to male domination cause her to be a tramp. Throughout the novel, Walker wishes to emphasize that gender and sexuality are not simple as people believe. Walker subverts and defies the traditional ways in which people understand women to be women and men to be men.

Walker's female characters go beyond the belief of traditional patriarchal system. To create their own self, they take help from the black female community not

with their males. The female bonding in the novel is so strong that they do not worry loosing some sort of important thing for strengthening their knot of feminity. For instance, to release Sofia from the jail Squeak has to go through the rape from her cousin. Their interdependency and encouragement provide them power to resist the male domination. These female characters are attached emotionally, psychologically and more surprisingly, sexually. Shug Avery teaches Celie to admire her body and feeling. She declares Celie a "virgin" – revealing her the mystery of her body. Shug's renaming of Celie as "virgin", helps Celie to see the potentialities and possibilities within her. Shug educates and empowers Celie to struggle. She is convinced herself that like Sofia and Shug she must hold her own self: "our own self is what us have to hand" (238). Eventually Celie is able to learn to negate the insensitive and dominating voices of men and find her own existential voice. She says; But I am here." (214) This indicates Celie's attainment of her self-respect which paves way to stand herself as free, independent individual. This self-respecting capacity is the result of the female tie that supports, encourages to create the independent selfhood. Like Celie, Squeak is able to hold her self-esteem by demanding Harpo to call her by her real name, Mary agnes. The renaming of Celie and Squeak is an act of taking authority and development of authentic voice by the help of female bonding.

Walker gives her female character the skill of sewing, which finally becomes the means of disrupting the gender roles and creating the independent self. Sewing in the novel symbolizes the power women can gain from productivity channeling their creative energy. The quilt, composed of diverse patterns sewn together symbolizes the female unity. With the help of Shug, Celie overturns the idea that sewing is marginal and unimportant women labor and she turns it into a lucrative, empowering source of economic independence. Sewing traditionally stereotypical female indoor task becomes the weapon to fight against the tradition.

The female encouragement and bonding becomes the means to challenge the traditional gender roles. Women become the definer of God. In the novel, Celie, by the encouragement of Shug redefines not the man but God. In the early parts of the novel, Celie sees God as white patriarch "don't seem quite right" (201), but she says it's all she has. Shug invites Celie to imagine God as something radically different, as in "it" that delights in creation and just wants human beings to love what it has created. Eventually Celie stops thinking of God as she stops thinking of the other men in her life – she "git man of her eyeball" (204) and tells God off, writing "You must be sleep" (209). But after Celie has chased her patriarchal God away and come up with a new concept of God, she writes in her last letter, "Dear God, Dear Stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God." (292). i.e. Pantheistic God. This reimagining of God on her own terms symbolizes Celie's move from an object of someone else's care to an independent woman, unlike the traditional patriarchal belief. It also indicates that her voice is now sufficiently empowered to create her own narratives.

Finally, the male characters also come under the guidance of females. They also move far beyond the traditional gender roles. Harpo and Mr. ___ comes under the side of their wives. Mr. ___ starts to work as a worker in Celie's sewing business and becomes ready to do work under her. Likewise, Harpo, who always used to be worried for establishing his power over her wife Sofia, reconciles with her and starts helping her in the household activities like cleaning, cooking, washing and caring the children. Hence, Walker proves that the traditional concept of gender role is man made. It does not have any meaning and hence impractical.

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