



Humanism in *The Color Purple* and *Ladies Coupe*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the struggles faced by the women characters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* and analyses the two novels from a humanistic approach. *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair's second novel, was translated into numerous languages all over the world and was the first book Picador USA had ever printed. It is stated that the women characters in these two novels are the victims of patriarchal oppression, gender-based violence, male dominance and sexism. The comparison of the female characters in the two novels demonstrates how the characters frequently encounter parallel circumstances despite their two different backgrounds. The study shows how the female characters in the novels follow the satisfaction of wants in order to connect with their higher selves. It also focuses on the empowerment of women characters by overcoming all the struggles of their life. Each level of the character's personality development has been evaluated.

Keywords: Humanistic approach, Patriarchal oppression, Male dominance, Empowerment

Introduction:

Alice Walker has made history by becoming the first African-American woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel *The Colour Purple*. American author Alice Walker is renowned for her intelligent presentation of African American culture in her novels, short stories, and poems. Alice Walker's first collection of poems, *Once*, was released in 1968, and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, her debut novel, was published in 1970. In 1982, she penned *The Color Purple*, her most well-known novel. It is an epistolary novel that chronicles the development and self-realization of an African American woman in a Georgian village from 1909 to 1947. Other famous works of Alice Walker are *The Temple of My Familiar*, *an ambitious examination of racial and sexual tensions* (1989); *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), *a narrative centred on female genital mutilation*; *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998) and *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* (2005). Similarly, Anita Nair is an Indian novelist who was honoured by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for her contribution to Literature and Culture. She was awarded the Women of Substance Award by the Times Group for her exceptional contribution to the literary world and India Today Magazine selected her as one of the 30 Power Women in India in their roll call of honours. The voice of women in modern post-colonial India can be heard in one of Anita Nair's most well-known work, *Ladies coupe*. She depicts several female personalities and their life events in this novel. Through this novel, Anita Nair depicts the social reality of women's conditions in patriarchal Indian society. The best book she wrote that established her as a talented author was *Ladies Coupe*. Other famous works of Anita Nair are *The Better Man* (1999), *Mistress* (2003), *Magical Indian Myths* (2008) and *Eating Wasps* (2018).

Glimpse of the novels:

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel that depicts the plight of African women who are oppressed under patriarchy and their emergence from that suppression by discovering their identity. The hardships and eventual victory of Celie, an African American adolescent living in solitary rural Georgia are depicted in

The Color Purple as she learns to reject the crippling self-concept imposed on her by others. Through painfully honest letters to God, Celie tells the story of her life. The female characters of this novel are Celie, Nettie, Shug Avary, Sofia and Squeak. All these women are subjected to gender-based violence in one way or the other. This novel is composed of 90 letters, 61 of which were written by Celie to God, 14 by her sister Nettie, and 15 by Nettie to Celie. Her father has sexually assaulted her twice, caused her to become pregnant, then taken her children and sold them. Both Celie's father and her husband are found to have abused her. The work fully expresses the ideological undertone and clearly describes the battle for emancipation of black women.

Ladies Coupe depicts the story of a woman named Akhilandeswari as she travels in the lady's coupe of a train. She shares her experiences with five different ladies who encourage her to live her own life as she seeks freedom and learns more about the lives of her travelling companions. The novel explores an Indian woman's position as a representative of other women suffering under repressive patriarchal regimes. This novel is the tale of six women who met unexpectedly while travelling by train. These women are all stuck in the unstable social structure and customs.

Patriarchal oppression:

The women characters in these two novels are the victims of patriarchal oppression. Patriarchy is commonly described as “a system of social structures and practices, in which men govern, oppress and exploit women” (web). Black women are subjected to oppression and experience suffering, as Alice Walker depicts in *The Color Purple*. Celie, the novel's protagonist and a black woman, has experienced extreme oppression, pain, and patriarchy. In the novel, Celie, Nettie, Shug, and Sofia are the important women characters who have endured the oppression and anguish of the patriarchal society that represents male supremacy and patriarchy. Mr. Alphonso, Celie's stepfather, silences her and denies her the right to even speak out about her feelings. Even sharing her joy or sadness with anybody other than God is forbidden. Celie's husband, Mr. Albert and her step-father makes her feel worthless. She is sexually abused by her husband and step-father. She has been tortured by her father during her childhood and after getting married, she faces the same torture from her husband too. Celie is a representation of the historical journey that women took from enduring patriarchy to challenging its norms. With her body serving as a perpetual source of exploitation, Celie despises herself. She has struggled with a strong sensation of abuse. As a result of being continually reminded of her ugly appearance, Celie feels inferior and oppressed in her own eyes. Nettie, Celie's sister also over time grows to suffer from her step-father's sexual gaze. She comes to her sister's house to escape from the step-father, but there also Nettie faces the same problem from Mr. Albert. Through the character of Nettie and Celie, Alice Walker shows the plight of women who face oppression and abuse from the men in their lives.

Indian households' patriarchal system is fictionalised in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. Her novel illuminates the varied cycles of Indian women's lives and depicts their fight for freedom and identity. The main character of the novel Akhilandeswari, is a 45-year-old spinster who is the primary earner for her family. When Akhila has considered living alone, her sister Padma reminds her to seek her brothers for approval because they are the family's men. They are against her decision as they don't want a woman to live alone or to travel alone. But Akhila ignores all these restrictions by taking the train to Kanyakumari in order to find herself. In the novel, Janaki's experience illustrates how patriarchal influence over a woman's life is unavoidable. She is portrayed as a spoilt wife who is content with her life and is always taken care of by either her husband or her son. She is a devout, loving wife and mother whose entire existence is subjugated by masculine control. The fact that a woman's value is ultimately based on her capacity to care for a family and children illustrates how social conceptions are at the root of oppression and suffering. As quoted in double marginalization of female characters in the novels of Toni Morrison by Aniksha M and M John Suganya, female characters are oppressed and marginalized twice.

Gender- based violence:

Alice Walker explores the concept of double discrimination in her novel *The Color Purple*. She emphasises that a woman's gender has a significant role in her discrimination. Alice Walker expertly reveals how race and gender both serve as catalysts for oppression against African American women through her

skilfully crafted female characters. Celie's stepfather has denied her the chance for education and stopped her from going to school. As Celie tells it: "The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never cares that I love it...You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say" (*The Color Purple* 9). The trauma associated with race and gender is sparked by Celie's stepfather. His view on the rights of African American women increases Celie's oppression. Men's expectations of women are outlined by Celie's father, who thinks they should be submissive and uneducated so they are relatively simple to control. Celie is given to one abusive man and has no control over either her body or her life. One of the novel's more resilient characters, Sofia, provides an explanation for why she learned to fight. Drawing on memories from her own childhood, she describes the dangers faced by women in a patriarchal society. Alice Walker's perspective on Sofia's youth emphasises the cycle of providing concrete examples of the abuse women experience while also demonstrating how a woman's inferior status encourages trauma. The scenes of abuse in the novel highlight both White America's control over African Americans and men's control over women.

A woman in India must deal with the issue of gender inequality from the minute she is born. One of the main concerns Anita Nair addresses in the novel *Ladies Coupe* is this one. A fourteen-year-old girl in the novel, Sheela, has been physically abused by the father of one of her friends. She is embarrassed and hurt by Nazar, the father of Hasina, touching her inappropriately. Sheela tries to defend herself by opening her mouth, but she is unable to do so. Even Sheela's friend Hasina and her mother are powerless to express how they feel about his attitude. Another character in the novel, Marikolanthu, is a realistic representation of the poor, depressed women of the countryside who are subjected to severe male domination without being questioned. As a child, she worked at the Chettiars' house to assist her mother in raising her brothers. As she grows up, she was sexually abused by a man. Marikolanthu's entire life is altered by this one awful incident, which also dulls her spirit. Anita Nair portrays the trauma that the women undergo in all their phases of life through her women characters.

Male dominance:

Alice Walker has highlighted the characters' frequent usage of misogyny. In *The Color Purple*, female characters including Celie, Shug, Nettie, and Sofia are physically and psychologically subjugated. Celie has no control over her body and her privacy since a young age. Her stepfather, whom she initially thinks is her father, frequently abuses her. He makes her pregnant twice, and he takes both of the children away from her. She was forced to marry Albert and she doesn't have any opinion about her life as she is afraid of her step-father. When his son inquires as to why he beats Celie, he replies that it is simply because she is his wife, symbolising the male dominance in marriage at the time. Albert is teaching this to his son too. Albert also advised Harpo to beat his wife Sofia in order to control her. Celie is treated much like a slave at an auction when she is forced into marrying Albert. Albert wanted somebody to cook and clean for him and to look after his children, so he married Celie. Here, Celie is handed from one dominant black male to another and treated like property and a servant. She is not a real slave, but the men in her life have a strong hold over her and prevent her from making her own decisions.

The women characters in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* are in one way or other dominated by men in their life. Though they are strong enough, they are made inferior by the male dominating society. Even though the novel's protagonist Akhila is the one who earns for the family, she doesn't have social independence. Being a woman, Akhila is forced to ask her younger brother for permission before leaving on a trip. Margaret Shanthi, an important character in the novel, is yet another illustration of how masculine authority oppresses women. She chooses to marry Ebenezar Paulraj on her own terms. He is abusive and cruel and novel's worst illustration of male chauvinism. She transforms from a driven and intelligent student who aspires to build a career on her own into a devoted wife to Ebenezar. He has total influence over her.

Humanistic perspective:

The young girl Celie in *The Color Purple*, who is unable to realise her true self, tremblingly expresses her thoughts. She is passive. The development of Celie's character has gone through various stages. She has made considerable efforts to meet her fundamental needs in order to progress quickly. From childhood onwards, Celie is being abused both mentally and physically. Nettie and Shug understand Celie's situation. Nettie encourages her to react to the ill-treatment that she is facing and Shug supports her to grow

as an independent woman. Alice Walker portrays Shug as a liberated individual. Celie feels safe when Shug is around. These two characters shows a strong women relationship. The foundation of Shug and Celie's friendship is a common bond and mutual support. Celie has come out from the abuses of her husband, started a business and emerged as an independent individual.

The characters in *Ladies Coupe* show the journey of women to identity themselves or to discover their values and worth. All the characters are suffering oppression and abuses and finally they realise their values and decides to fight back. Without a doubt, the protagonist of the novel must continue living her life in a renewed manner due to her unbreakable spirit and unwavering determination. She is on a quest for independence and a relationship. These women share their stories with each other and builds a sisterly affection among them. These women and their stories help Akhila find the answer to her biggest question – “Can a women stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete? (Ladies Coupe).

Conclusion:

The women characters in *The Color Purple* and *Ladies Coupe* have a common experience as women in the society. They all have undergone sufferings from men in their lives. They have made submissive in every way, but these women don't want to continue as a suppressed human being or a person who doesn't have any identity. The women relationship is clearly visible in both the novels. Women empowerment begins with women realising who they are. The women characters in *The Color Purple* that have grown into themselves and broken free from conventional norms are Celie, Sofia, and Nettie. With the aid of one another, the protagonist in this novel successfully gains empowerment and freedom. Through this novel, Alice Walker masterfully captures women's struggle for independence as well as their path to personal growth and empowerment. In *Ladies Coupe*, the different women characters are connected by their stories as they have something common in their life. They easily understand each other's struggles. This is a tale about the inner and exterior journeys of all these ladies, who come from various origins and age ranges. In both the novels, one or more women characters are the victims of sexual abuse. Celie, Nettie and squeak in *The Color Purple* and Sheela and Marikolanthu in *Ladies Coupe* are the victims of sexual abuse. All the women characters in both the novels are subjected to patriarchal oppression, gender- based violence and male dominance. Although the characters have gone through many hardships as a result of patriarchy, they eventually empower themselves and successfully escape the patriarchal web. Every character realises their self-worth and becomes independent.

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