

# MARXIST FEMINIST CRITIQUE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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## Abstract

Women are victimized by patriarchy in various creative processes. One such method is economic deprivation that accompanies physical exploitation in the form of punishment and practice of polygamy with women outside the law. In such conditions women are subjected to inferior status whereas men enjoy social privileges despite these weaknesses. Married women experience such situations more often whereby patriarchy demands monogamy from them whereas men indulge in relationships, outside the house and home. This situation arises primarily when two parties in a marital contract are not on equal footing especially when women belong to an inferior economic echelon. This paper aims to explore the domestic and social exploitation enforced upon women by their family men in particular and patriarchy in general. The only way out of this situation is for women to acquire financial emancipation: women who are monetarily liberated have fewer chances of exploitation as compared to those who are deprived of economic stability. Men respect women with earning capacity and prefer to share domestic responsibilities with such women, whereas housewives are expected to perform their domestic duties, without any reward. The article also seeks to determine whether financial emancipation leads to physical and emotional stability.

**Key Words:** Patriarchy, Gens Tribal System, private property, monogamy, polygamy, economic exploitation, unpaid domestic labor, fiscal emancipation

## Introduction

With the emergence of patriarchy the practice of polygamy became fashionable for men while strict monogamy was demanded of women. Women being at the receiving end in all matters became dependent upon men in all matters. As a result women were physically abused by the more powerful men. Apart from highlighting the root cause of women's sufferings, Marxist Feminism presents emancipatory strategies that empower women. Alice Walker in the Afro-American tradition brings to the limelight the pain and tribulations of the women of downtrodden black communities. The protagonist of the novel *The Color Purple* (1982), Celie, suffers a great deal at the hands of patriarchy when she becomes a victim of physical abuse by her own father. Later, her husband physically punishes her aiming to tame her and uses her like a domestic slave, and cheating on her by going to other women. Similarly

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Sofia undergoes virtual slavery at the hands of the powerful white mayor for a period of twelve years only because she belongs to the poor Afro-American background. Walker removes the causes of exploitation by leading her characters onto the path of transformation. Celie, with the help Shug Avery, learns to face her powerful and rude husband. She acquires skills to gain economic independence by mastering the art of tailoring and establishing her own business away from her cruel husband. When she establishes herself as a financially stable woman her husband also transforms himself and starts valuing her. Walker brings together the old couple in a manner whereby both are respected and both share each other's work. Celie's husband realizes his follies and starts paying attention to domestic work besides showing admiration to his wife. In this way Walker transform her characters to achieve domestic and social status through mutual respect instead of subjugation.

### **Frederick Engels' Theory of Marxist Feminism and Alice Walker**

Marxist Feminism emerged with the publication of Frederick Engel's (1884) *The Origin of The Family, The Private Property and the State*. The book traces the history of women's subjugation and explores its root cause in private property and unpaid domestic labor. In this way Engels breaks the stereotypical notion of female inferiority regarding her biological makeup and rather determines social factors to be responsible for women's exploitation. "Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family* (1884/1972), a fundamental text in Marxist feminism, argued that the move to private property included a shift from matriarchy to patriarchy and was the initiating point for women's subordination and oppression" (McHugh, 2007, p. 79). Matriarchy, which was respected in the presence of the 'Gens Tribal System' was gradually replaced by patriarchy with occupation of sources of income that included slave trade, cattle breeding and food crops. All outdoor responsibilities that were related to the sources of production and ultimate generation of revenue were controlled by men, leading to their social strength. On the other hand, indoor domestic activities were handed to women which became unpaid labor and thus women become socially fragile. Kate Millet (2000) highlights the significant contribution of Engels in documenting the history of patriarchy: "Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the*

*State* thus provides the most comprehensive account of patriarchal history and economy and the most radical” (p. 108).

### **Extension of Marxism into Marxist Feminism**

The theoretical stance of Marxist Feminism parts ways from Marxism since the latter primarily focuses on the problems of men. Nancy Hartsock in an article titled “Marxist Feminist Dialectics for 21<sup>st</sup> Century” outlines Karl Marx’s approach towards women:

I have a number of problems with Marx's own theories, among them: 1) class, understood centrally as a relation among men, is the only division that counts; 2) the analysis is fundamentally masculinist in that workers' wives and their labor are presumed; 3) homosocial birth images mark the analysis in important ways; 4) women come and go in the analysis and are profoundly absent from Marx's account of the extraction of surplus value - the heart of his analysis; 5) he is clearly a 19th-century Eurocentric writer who can pay little attention to such contemporary concerns as environmental issues and the rise of service industries. (Hartsock, 1998, p. 402)

Thus Karl Marx favors patriarchy by highlighting and propagating the rights of men whereas he completely ignores women in his writings. He bases the division of society into classes on the basis of economy and their subjugation because of the domestic and capitalistic attitudes of men. The division of social structures centers men whereas the voice showing female representation is completely silent in the works of Marx. Hartstock rightly calls him a Eurocentric patriarch for whom women’s sufferings do not exist.

### **Unpaid Domestic Labor**

Marxist Feminism seeks the root cause of women’s socially deprived status in finance. Men took possession of wealth and sources of production with the emergence of private property as a result of breaking-up of the ‘Gens Social System’. Engels (2004) in his core book on Marx-Fem brings to the limelight the complex relationship of economy and patriarchy. Evaluating how men gained dominance, he observes that

... as wealth increased, it ... gave the man a more important status in the family than the woman, and, on the other hand, created a stimulus to utilize this strengthened position in order to

overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favor of his children. But this was impossible as long as descent according to mother right prevailed. (p. 66)

This highlights the fact that women have been marginalized with the creation of private property which in turn, enabled men to exercise control in social and domestic spheres. This led to the supremacy of men and ultimately inferior status of women. Pat Brewer (as cited in Engels, 2004) in "Introduction" to *The Origin* describes that Engels in his core book on Marxist Feminism "set out to provide a social explanation for the emergence of women's oppression with the development of the social institution of the patriarchal family and private property at a particular historic period" (p. 7). Engels (2004) further highlights the hegemonic conduct of men on the basis of economic exploitation:

The very cause that had formerly made the woman supreme in the house, namely, her being confined to domestic work, now assured supremacy in the house for the man: the woman's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood; the latter was everything, the former an insignificant contribution. (p. 151)

Women in the time of the old 'tribal gens system' also performed household responsibilities but due to the socialist system they enjoyed prestige and respect in the society. Every individual was answerable to the authoritative system controlled by the elders. The emergence of private property paved the way for patriarchy. The domestic work of women became insignificant as compared to the newly evolved social role of men.

The family or the domestic mode of production is based on the unpaid labour of the wife and creates antagonistic relations of production between the husband and wife. This is the basis of the patriarchal exploitation where the men are the exploiters ... The fact that the same labour when performed in the market is considered productive and has exchange value reflects the concealed value of the domestic labour. (Lokaneeta, 2001, p. 1410)

Domestic labor is considered unpaid work by Marxist Feminist theorists: woman keeps working the whole day but she does not receive any

reward or appreciation from her husband. In fact the hostility increases to the extent where the husband tries to dominate the wife by physically and financially exploiting her. Family life, in a system governed by patriarchy, is dominated by subjugation. 'The word 'family' originates from the Latin word *famulus* which means servant' (Webster.com). A similar amount of domestic labor when performed in the market has value whilst it loses its worth inside the family. Karen Sack (as cited in Smith, 2005) states: "Private property transformed the relations between men and women within the household only because it also radically changed the political and economic relations in the larger *society*" (p. 43). Sharon Smith (2005) further highlights the value of property in a matrimonial relation in the following words:

The modern family arose for one purpose only: to pass on private property in the form of inheritance from one generation to next. All of the romantic imagery of "true love" which has since helped to idealize marriage in contemporary society can't change the fact that marriage is essentially a property relationship. Most people learn this all too clearly if they find themselves in divorce court. (p. 96)

This indicates that romantic imagery of 'true love' is worthless in comparison to family as an economic unit. The reality of relations based on financial practices comes to the surface when both parties face each other in a court room where each of the two partners tries to get maximum economic leverage. Similar exploitative practices are portrayed by Alice Walker in her novel *The Color Purple* (1982) where Celie's husband Albert (referred as Mr. \_\_\_ by Celie in her narration), exercises socially superior power and gets benefit from the unpaid labor provided by Celie. In her post-marriage discussion with her sister, Nettie, Celie describes the domestic burden: "It's worse than that, I think, if I was buried, I wouldn't have to work" (Walker, p. 18). Celie has to perform domestic duties besides taking care of the children by her husband's first wife named - Annie Julia. Celie has to work the whole day not only doing household chores but also field work. In one of her letters to God she states: "He wake up while I'm in the field. I been chopping cotton three hours by time he come" (Walker, 1982, p. 26). After working for extended hours in the fields Celie states that her complexion turns, "... roasted coffee bean color now" (Walker, 1994 27)

showing the amount of labor that her husband demands of his wife. She is told to pick cotton in the fields whereas Mr.\_\_\_\_, (Albert) Celie's husband, relishes the joys of sleeping late hours in the morning time. "The result is that working-class women face a double burden, in which they return home from work at the end of the day only to face all of their family responsibilities" (Smith, 2005, p. 55). Celie's hard field labor is rewarded in the form of physical punishment. As a socially privileged male Mr. \_\_\_\_ does not consider it his responsibility to perform field work that provides him with revenue. He engages Celie in unpaid field labor along with other domestic duties. Albert extracts maximum comfort for himself at the cost of Celie's physical labor. In her letter to God Celie describes his authoritative commands when he says: "go git him a cool drink of water, git his pipe, sit on porch and stare" (Walker, 1982, p. 26). During her working hours, Celie's husband merely sits on the porch and smokes. His job is to only observe Celie in the field without giving her a helping hand. Despite her extreme hard work Celie receives physical beating as reward. Albert's son, Harpo asks him the reason for his abusive attitude towards Celie. In Celie's words: "Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr. \_\_\_\_ say, Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn" (Walker, 1982, p. 22). This highlights the degenerated situation of patriarchy where instead of respecting the individuality, the wife is beaten with the purpose of taming her. Celie at this moment wonders with surprise when Harpo asks her the reason of her stubbornness. "Harpo ast me, How come you stubborn? He don't ast How come you his wife? Nobody ast that" (Walker, 1982, p.22). Celie is much grieved at the situation because of her forceful marriage to a tyrannical husband who exploits her and revels in all the privileges by forcing her to undergo extreme atrocities.

### **Kinds of Marriage in History and Social Status of Women**

The social institution of marriage between a husband and a wife has passed through various stages in history according to Engels (2004), and the first one is "consanguine family". In this stage all individuals had liberty to marry the persons of their liking. The restriction of marriage at this age applied to people of different generations such as father/daughter or mother/son etc. The second developed stage of matrimony is "The Punaluan Family" where marriage is allowed to anyone except to people

of different generations and siblings. This paved the way for mother and father gens. Engels (2004) remarks that “the tribe consisted of a number of groups related by blood on the mother’s side, gentes.” (p. 34) ‘Gente’ denotes the feminine noun, the origin of which is an Italian word meaning folk or people (collinsdictionary/gente). The marital connection between people of the same gens consisting of cousins was banned. The third stage of marriage is “The Pairing Family” where matrimonial relation is allowed between only one man and a woman. Men imposed restrictions upon women in terms of monogamy and loyalty with purpose to ensure legitimacy of children whereas they themselves practiced polygamy openly (Engels, 2004, p.70). It can therefore be concluded that all these types; namely Consanguine, Punaluan and Pairing are features of the ages of barbarism, savagery and civilization respectively.

In old times women were protected and respected by the ‘Gens Tribal System’ that consisted of the elderly people including women members. The aim of ‘gens’ was to provide social protection in the form of shelter and food to the deprived people of the society. “There can be no poor and needy - the communistic household and the gens know their obligations towards the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal - including the women” (Engels, 2004, p. 98). The situation of women changed with the appearance of civilization. After the establishment of the Pairing Marriage, men imposed restrictions of monogamy upon their wives whilst they practically engaged themselves in polygamy. In dictionary terms polygamy refers to possession of multiple wives, for instance the online Cambridge dictionary delineates it: “the fact or custom of being married to more than one person at the same time” (Cambridge/ polygamy). On the other hand Engels (2004) utilizes the concept of polygamy for engagement in illegal relations with multiple women despite presence of a wife. “One man lives with one woman, yet in such manner that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain men’s privileges, even though the former is seldom practised for economic reasons; at the same time, the strictest fidelity is demanded of the woman during the period of cohabitation, adultery on her part being cruelly punished” (Engels, 2004, p. 59).

Alice Walker portrays the character of Mr.\_\_\_\_ (Albert), Celie’s husband, as an example of patriarchy who practices polygamy openly. (As long as Albert subjugates Celie she calls him merely by the title,

Mr.\_\_\_\_.) Despite the presence of his young wife Celie, he openly engages himself in a relationship with Shug Avery, the famous singer of the South also known as “The Queen Honey bee”. Many men like Mr. \_\_\_\_ run after her because of seductive beauty and melodious voice. Mr.\_\_\_\_ confesses his love for Shug before his father in following words. “I love Shug Avery. Always have, always will. I should have married her when I had the chance (Walker, 1982, p. 49). Shug is a renowned singer of the town and Mr. \_\_\_\_ has been courting her for long. Out of love he invites her to his home when she is sick. “He sit over in the corner away from the lamp. Sometime she wake up in the night and don't even see. But he there.Sitting in the shadows chewing on his pipe. No tobacco in it. First thing she said, I don't want to smell no stinking blankety-blank pipe, you hear me, Albert?” (Walker, 1982, p. 43). These sentences indicate the depth of affiliation that Mr.\_\_\_\_ has for Shug. She calls him by his real name. Whilst the treatment that Mr.\_\_\_\_ gives to his lawfully wedded wife is beyond any human considerations.

The novel being epistolary in form, in her letter to God, Celie narrates Mr. \_\_\_\_’s conduct, “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man” (Walker, 1982, p. 22). This highlights the duality of standards on part of Mr. \_\_\_\_, on the one hand he professes to care for Shug while on the other hand he is brutal towards his wife. Celie has to silently tolerate the sufferings as she has nowhere to go. Before her marriage Celie’s stepfather also exploits her physically as well as psychologically. When she resists his wild conduct and rape, he tells her plainly: “...you better shut up and git used to it” (Walker, 1982, p. 3). Hence Celie has to remain silent, “But I don’t never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook. My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long” (Walker,1982, p.3). On one hand Alphonso uses Celie to saturate his lust while on the other hand he uses her like a slave. When the marriage proposal from Mr.\_\_\_\_ comes for Nettie, her stepfather presents Celie, saying, “She ugly. Don’t even look like she kin to Nettie” (Walker, *Purple* 10). But he presents Celie’s qualities as an unpaid



domestic slave by saying, "She'd come with her own linen. She can take that cow she raise down there back of the crib" (Walker, 1982, p. 10). The stepfather has already made Celie pregnant and sold the children for money. He presents Celie to Mr. \_\_\_ as if she were a mule or some domestic animal. This shows that women in a system governed by patriarchy remain at the mercy of their fathers and husbands. The only way of survival is to be submissive and fulfill all men's needs. Like Alphonso, Mr. \_\_\_'s conduct is also discriminatory towards Celie: Shug Avery is loved and respected whereas Celie being simple, poor and a housewife, is disrespected. Socially Shug enjoys higher status owing to her wealth and also because she is a professional singer whilst Celie remains deprived and exploited physically at the house of her father and husband.

### **Women's Slavery and Class System**

Engels (2004) narrates the history of ages and social development in this time period. "The period of savagery coincides with the archeological period of the Paleolithic, up until around 10,000 years ago when rapid changes to production, technology and settlement took place" (p.15). The period of "barbarism start with the Neolithic (or new stone age) featuring smooth and ground stone tools and encompass the beginning of the working of metals, including the bronze age up to the development of iron starting around 1000 BC" (Engels, 2004, p. 15). Similarly the age of Civilization starts around 500 BC. "And the new society, during all the 2500 years of its existence, has never been anything but the development of the small minority at the expense of the exploited and oppressed great majority" (Engels, 2004, p. 99). Out of all the ages the period of Civilization is knit with the exploitation of the largest number of people. In this time period new sources of production that generated surplus income were discovered. Engels (2004) further highlights the division of society into various classes based on economy.

Under the given general historical conditions, the first great social division of labour, by increasing the productivity of labour, that is, wealth, and enlarging the field of production, necessarily carried slavery in its wake. Out of the first great social division of labour arose the first great division of society, into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited (p. 150).

The various classes of people are based on their possession of sources of income. The elite or higher class uses the energies of the lower classes to make themselves more powerful. Patriarchy itself as a class dominates matriarchy which comprises women. The women of the lower class are discriminated to a far greater level. By exercising their control and constantly sustaining it men become powerful and dominate the women in the social circles. Engels “traced the ways in which the rise of private property controlled by men led women to a position of subordination” (Pelz, 1998, p. 123).

The literature created by the women writers of Afro-American community portrays the social division of humanity into factions of masters and slaves. Walker being the prime advocate of women’s rights through her inspiring writings highlights prevalent ideological practices. Walker (1982) in her writings portrays characters that are effectively discriminated by such patriarchal practices that Marx-Fem highlights: women are enslaved and their energies are utilized for the purpose of strengthening patriarchy. The character of Sofia is one such example since the white Mayor of the city forcefully abducts Sophia and throws her behind bars. The reason for her captivity is Sofia’s refusal to work for the Mayor, who considers the refusal as an insult to his person. Sofia in her self-defense returns the insult in the form of a slap. The Mayor is the most influential white person of the town and this is why the whole institution of the police comes to his rescue. “The polices come, start slinging the children off the mayor, bang they heads together. Sofia really start to fight. They drag her to the ground” (Walker, 1982, p. 76). Sofia being Afro-American is oppressed and exploited by the Mayor who is an elite member of the dominant white community. Due to her socially deprived background she has to spend six months in jail under severe conditions that Celie describes in one of her letters to God:

When I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of a eggplant. (Walker, 1982, p. 76)

Sophia's body is completely disfigured by the atrocious conduct of the white policemen. She suffers a great deal due to her poor black background. In addition to physical pain, Celie in her letter to God narrates the burden of labor that Sofia is put under. "They put Sofia to work in the prison laundry. All day long from five to eight she washing clothes" (Walker, 1982, p. 76). The character of Sofia is an example that depicts the social division when she is doubly marginalized by the authoritative White men. As a result of her 'rude and insulting behavior, Sofia has to spend twelve precious years of her youthful life as a slave in the house of the white mayor. She highlights this bitter fact while talking to her husband, Harpo during one of the visits that he pays her in jail.

Twelve years a long time to be good though, she say.

Maybe you git out on good behavior, say Harpo.

Good behavior ain't good enough for them, say Sofia. Nothing less than sliding on your belly with your tongue on they boots can even git they attention. (Walker, 1982, p. 78)

Besides the long drawn punishment, Sofia highlights the atrocious conduct of the influential white people for whom human values are worth nothing. Even then: improvement in subjugating behavior, service to their family, unpaid labor of day and night, and disgracing self-respect is equal to nothing. Sofia indicates the cold heartedness of the white people who like to keep the blacks at their feet. Walker (1982) further documents the enslaved status of Sofia in her discussion with her son whom she meets after five years. Celie, the narrator of the novel narrates the discussion between Sofia and her son.

He say, Don't say slaving, Mama.

Sofia say, Why not? They got me in a little storeroom up under the house, hardly bigger than Odessa's porch, and just about as warm in the winter time. I'm at they beck and call all night and all day. They won't let me see my children. They won't let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you once a year. I'm a slave, she say. What would you call it? A captive, he say. (Walker, 1982, p. 89)

Sofia rightly considers herself a slave since she performs all the activities that are demanded of a slave. She is not allowed to meet her family or even her young children. Similarly she has to obey her masters day and night. The mayor in exercising his powers virtually enslaves her and uses

her energies to benefit his own family. He forces Sofia to unpaid labor and through the character of Sofia and the White mayor, Walker creates the relationship of slave and master, submissive and dominant as highlighted by Engels (2004), the complex connection between two groups of people that laid the foundation of exploitation of the subjugated class. Sofia being a member of the black marginalized social group in American society becomes an easy target for exploitation.

### **Marxist Feminist Emancipatory Strategies in Alice Walker**

According to Engels (2004) women can regain social standing by acquiring wealth and status: "The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. And this has become possible only as a result of modern large-scale industry" (p. 151). The way out of the shackles of deprivation for women is to get economic freedom that would enable them to get liberation from physical exploitation as well. "Woman can be emancipated only when she can take part on a large social scale in production and is engaged in domestic work only to an insignificant degree" (De Boure, 1953, p. 81). Thus economic freedom on the part of women can not only bring stability for them but also homogenize the domestic environment within the institution of the family. Thus only is the liberation of women from social and domestic slavery possible.

In *The Color Purple* (1982) Alice Walker employs the strategies suggested in Marxist Feminism, aiming to empower her female characters and the path of transformation that Walker evolves for Celie brings her true happiness. The incident that totally transforms Celie's life, is the discovery of her sister, Nettie's letter that her husband had concealed in a trunk. When Celie comes to know about Nettie's letters she cannot believe the meanness of her husband. In her letter to God she narrates the discussion between Shug and herself,

He been keeping your letters, say Shug. Naw, I say. Mr. \_\_\_\_ mean sometimes, but he not that mean. She say, Humpf, he that mean. But how come he do it? I ast. He know Nettie mean everything in the world to me. Shug say she don't know, but us gon find out. (Walker, 1982, p. 102)

To Celie's surprise her husband crosses the limits of cruelty becoming the reason of separation of the only loving sister Celie has. Celie is transformed to such an extent that she is ready to kill her husband and at this moment of transformation Walker engages the character of Shug Avery as a mentor for Celie to direct her energies. Shug also realizes the depth of degeneration that Celie had been thrown into: therefore she develops a respect for her at the same time that she starts detesting Albert owing to his nastiness. As Shug says to Celie "Don't kill, she say. Nettie be coming home before long. Don't make her have to look at you like us look at Sofia" (Walker, 1982, p. 122). The role that Shug plays at this critical time in Celie's life is extremely significant. She herself is a famous singer and is already liberated from the shackles of economic oppression. Shug realizes the depth of unconscious slavery that Celie has been living all her life. She leads her to a positive direction by warning her of Sofia's fate, who was a slave in the prison house, in case of any rash step. Shug provides her reasons for survival. She makes her utilize her energies in a positive direction. Therefore Shug suggests to Celie, "We have to git our hands on somebody's army uniform, say Shug. For practice. That good strong material and free. Jack, I say. Odessa's husband. Okay, she say. And every day we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand" (Walker, 1982, p. 125). This indicates the fact that Shug proves an illuminating lamp in the darkest hour of Celie's life. She performs the role of a mentor for Celie by showing her way out from subjugation. Therefore Shug asks Celie to engage herself both mentally as well as physically in creative activities. Instead of demanding things from Celie that could be out of her reach such as expensive items, Shug suggests her to acquire old army uniform in order to teach Celie the art of stitching that she easily manages from Sofia's brother in law. "A needle and not a razor in hand", specifies the application of Marxist Feminist strategy where work is significant that has an economic value. The needle is used for the purpose of stitching and sewing whereas for Walker the use of a razor is not a healthy activity especially when it is used for killing someone. So instead of leading her characters to the path of revenge and conflict. Walker leads them to a way which leads to empowerment. Thus the long tradition of patriarchal exploitation is challenged by the use of improved attitude, behavior and manners.

Besides giving her courage, Shug provides Celie, with self-esteem so that she is ready to confront her tyrannical husband and emerges a confident woman from the lifelong submission into which she has been residing. When Shug announces her decision of taking Celie away to Memphis, Albert becomes infuriated, "Over my dead body, Mr.\_\_\_\_ say. You satisfied that what you want, Shug say, cool as clabber" (Walker, 1982, p. 170). Mr.\_\_\_\_ does not expect such a bold decision on the part of his submissive wife, Celie. Therefore, he asks Shug to repeat the announcement. After understanding clearly the women's intention he turns out to be more arrogant and threatens them. At this time because of her already professionally empowered position Shug proves to be more confident and rescues Celie from his clutches by welcoming his challenge and answering him back in the same tone of voice. This shows self-reliance on the part of Shug and she uses her confidence to encourage Celie to take a stand against her dominant husband Mr.\_\_\_\_.

Celie also presents an interesting response to Mr.\_\_\_\_'s question at this time. "What wrong now? You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (Walker, 1982, p. 170). For the first time in her life Celie appears confident and thus confronts her cruel husband in a tone and with words that dent the prolonged control he has exerted on her from day one of her marriage with him. She tells him plainly about his insignificant personality and is ready to depart from his stereotypical life of patriarchy and enter into the creativity of newness. Celie also informs him plainly about his wicked misconduct in trying to separate her from her beloved sister. "You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world. Mr.\_\_\_\_ start to sputter. ButButButButBut. Sound like some kind of motor. But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whup your ass" (Walker, 1982, p. 170). This indicates the confidence that Celie displays before her husband and other people who have gathered at Sofia's house at the time of her liberation from the 12 year long slavery at the white Mayor's house. When truth comes out about Mr.\_\_\_\_'s despicable nature he become speechless. Celie owing to her newly attained buoyancy further warns Mr.\_\_\_\_ of further consequences when she acquires hope of reunion with her family. When

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ cannot present any sound argument he threatens Celie with social pressure; she quotes him in a letter to her sister, Nettie, “You bitch, he say. What will people say, you running off to Memphis like you don't have a house to look after?” (Walker, 1982, p. 171). At this time a mesmerizing response of Shug’s is narrated by Celie. “Shug say, Albert. Try to think like you got some sense. Why any woman give a shit what people think is a mystery to me” (Walker, 1982, p. 171). This statement of Shug indicates that a woman in a position of exploitation does not care about people’s spitefulness when her own life is in crisis. Further Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ shows his thinking about her, “Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman” (Walker, 1982, p. 176). It indicates the truth of his patriarchal ideology. He also knows that the male dominated system does not give space and freedom to women like Celie; who do not have charming looks, are black and ugly, therefore he is certain about Celie’s downfall.

Engels, like Walker, identifies the need for a demarcation of the boundaries of discrimination. He says: “What is good for the ruling class should be good for the whole of the society with which the ruling class identifies itself” (Engels, 2004, p. 163). In *The Color Purple* (1982) Shug favors Celie and takes her away to Memphis with the purpose of polishing her professional skills and to establish her as an entrepreneur. With this aim she teaches Celie the art of tailoring on old army uniforms. When Celie shows improvement in learning the mastery of stitching, Shug unshackles her from the constant control of her husband. In the new town Celie is given respect that makes it a new home for her. “Shug give me a big back bedroom overlook the backyard and the bushes down by the creek” (Walker, 1982, p. 177). In city life a room with a backyard and natural scenery is of aristocratic worth and that is why when Celie is provided with valuable space of her own, it helps in her grooming. Shug encourages and motivates Celie in a dignified way when she offers Shug to do her household chores as a gesture of gratitude. “You not my maid. I didn't bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet” (Walker, 1982, p. 179). This highlights the fact that unlike her husband and other men, Shug treats Celie nicely. She is not assigned any menial domestic duty; instead Shug provides her with every comfort to establish her as a professional and independent business woman with the purpose of attaining emancipation. Celie brings

refinement to her skills by stitching pants in various sizes, styles and colors:

I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain't been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me. I didn't know what I was starting, she say. (Walker, 1982, p. 180).

Walker follows the roadmap given by Frederick Engels (2004) for the empowerment of women. When women are liberated from domestic duties it becomes easy for them to attain professionalism. Shug does not assign household chores to Celie since she feels that any other work would hinder her success as a business woman. Celie has all the time, energy and resources to experiment in the art of tailoring and creating pants. Shug's help is significant in mastering the art of creativity. Before going on her professional tours Shug takes care of economic problems. "She come home, kiss me, step over all the mess. Say, before she leave again, How much money you think you need this week?" (Walker, 1982, p. 180) This indicates the true support that Shug extends to Celie with the aim to heal her and empower her. She shows her moral backing also by kissing her in order to motivate her when she is busy in perfecting the art of sewing. Besides encouragement the practical help that Shug provides in the form of economic provision is extremely valuable. Thus Celie is able to practice freely without any restriction and she gradually gains perfection in her art. Celie narrates the remarks about the pair of pants that Shug utters, "Miss Celie, she say. You is a wonder to behold" (Walker, 1982, p. 180). Shug also appreciates the precision that Celie acquires. "Shug finger the pieces of cloth I got hanging on everything. It all soft, flowing, rich and catch the light. This a far cry from that stiff army shit us started with, she say. You ought to make up a special pair to thank and show Jack" (Walker, 1982, p. 181). This shows the complete care that Shug gives to Celie. Celie's integrity is kept intact and her individuality is groomed that enables her to attain true happiness. Thus Shug extends all sorts of support to Celie to emancipate her from the traumatized life that she has led so far. Apart from getting moral, ethical



and emotional support Celie also receives financial assistance that paves the path for her to attain emancipation in its truest sense.

### **Professional Empowerment of Celie in Memphis**

With Shug's continuous efforts and support Celie gradually masters her creativity in stitching pants. People around her notice her work with admiration and demand pairs of pants from her to show appreciation for her work. Besides Shug, Jack's wife Odessa also demands a pair of pants from Celie. "Then Shug want two more pair just like the first. Then everybody in her band want some. Then orders start to come in from everywhere Shug sing. Pretty soon I'm swamp" (Walker, 1982, p. 181). It indicates Celie's positive use of her creativity. As soon as the demand for pants increases Celie becomes worried about expenditures and thinks about working in some other field to earn a livelihood. At this moment Shug again proves helpful and shows her direction like a true mentor.

Let's us put a few advertisements in the paper, she say. And let's us raise your prices a hefty notch. And let's us just go ahead and give you this dining room for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew, while you sit back and design. You making your living, Celie, she say. Girl, you on your way. (Walker, 1982, p. 181)

Celie appreciates the suggestions recommended by Shug for improving her professionalism. After the practical application of business plans, both Shug and Celie are able to increase the market for their product. After increasing the prices of pants to a level where they can cover all the expenditures they are able to generate revenue as well. With more women power Celie is able to bring refinement and growth in the quality of the product. Within a few days after the application of the business strategy Celie and Shug are able to achieve their aim of a prosperous professional trade. Celie in her letter to her beloved sister, Nettie narrates her achievements by saying, "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children" (Walker, 1982, p. 183). Owing to her certified accomplishments Celie turns out to be a confident and gratified woman. Her financial stability provides both admiration and adoration from all the people related to her. She is hopeful for the reunion with her children and sister, Nettie. Celie, like Shug, after achieving economic emancipation becomes influential and ultimately valued, thus showing

that Alice Walker (1982) empowers her women characters by following the doctrine of Marxist Feminist philosophy presented by Frederick Engels (2004) and his followers.

### **Celie's Emancipation and her Relations with her Husband**

The liberation of women from both domestic and social slavery is the primary focus of the theory of Marxist Feminism. It strives to achieve a social system where both males and females can co-exist in a conducive atmosphere. The important condition for the freedom of women in Marxist Feminist ideology is “to bring the female sex back into the public industry where both sexes possess legally complete equality of rights and abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society” (Appelrouth and Edles, 2010, p. 87). Marxist Feminism demands equally responsible attitude from men to improve the quality of life for women in order for a system of cooperation to exist where through mutual help survival becomes easy without any fear of subjugation and discrimination. Walker in *The Color Purple* (1982) portrays the character of Celie's husband Mr.\_\_\_\_, because of whose discriminatory conduct Celie leaves him and decides to focus on her personal grooming. When after some time Celie comes back she is amazed to see the transformation in his personality. Celie narrates her discussion about him with Sofia and Harpo in a letter to her sister. “He work real hard too. What? I say. Mr. \_\_\_ work! oo He sure do. He out there in the field from sunup to sundown. And clean that house just like a woman. Even cook, say Harpo. And what more, wash the dishes when he finish” (Walker, 1982, p.189). Celie had left him due to his cruel conduct but Mr.\_\_\_ also changes after this separation when he realizes his folly and starts paying attention to domestic duties. He comes out of his patriarchal behavior and learns to accept responsibility. Walker, following the Marxist Feminist standpoint,s creates such round characters who have the ability to transform themselves with the demand of the situation. Thus Albert also changes when Celie decides to change. Celie narrates his changed approach to life and his wife when she meets him for the first time after their separation.

You know, he say, you look real good since you been up in Memphis. Yeah, I say, Shug take good care of me. How you make your living up there? he say. Making pants, I say. He say, I

notice everybody in the family just about wearing pants you made. But you mean you turned it into a business? That's right, I say. (Walker, 1982, p. 214).

This is the first time that Albert appreciates Celie after decades of marriage with her. Before this he had never paid attention to her or talked to her in a polite manner. The only communication he ever initiated with Celie was issuing commands to fulfill his personal and domestic needs. Thus economic independence and the improved looks of Celie demand the attention and appreciation of her husband. For the first time in life Albert shares his early life with Celie by coming out of patriarchal ideology. Celie narrates the conversation with her transformed husband.

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 everybody laughed at me. But you know, I liked it. Well, nobody gon laugh at you now, I said. Here, help me stitch in these pockets. But I don't know how, he say. I'll show you, I said. And I did. Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes. (Walker, 1982 p. 230-231)

This indicates the fact that patriarchy is not a biological construct but a social creation: a person like Albert who used to assist his mother, stopped doing so when he saw that people laughed at a man doing what were considered domestic duties. Celie asks him to lend a helping hand when she is busy in her work of tailoring and he willingly agrees. Because of his improved conduct Celie starts liking his company. In their old age, Walker transforms both Celie and Albert to achieve emancipation that helps to develop a conducive domestic environment. Celie in her letter to Nettie narrates the changes in Albert's personality:

Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself. I don't mean just that he work and he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience. (Walker, 1982, p. 221)

After parting from Celie Albert realizes her true worth and therefore goes through a process of transformation. Earlier Albert had never paid

attention to any domestic responsibility. He used to beat his wife and never gave any importance to his children or grandchildren. The only thing he was interested in was polygamy which meant running after Shug Avery to gratify his lust. To his old self Celie was like a domestic slave who was made for his comfort. But now he turns out to be a totally transformed person when he gives respect to Celie and other people around him. He also shares all the domestic duties like a responsible person. He comes out of the closed shell of cynicism and starts to appreciate all the small things God has created. Now he listens to long conversations whereas earlier he had neither listened nor tolerated a difference of opinion. Owing to his changed approach he feels satisfaction. Celie depicts the newly attained connection with Albert in a letter to Nettie. "Then the old devil put his arms around me and just stood there on the porch with me real quiet. Way after while I bent my stiff neck onto his shoulder. Here us is, I thought, two old fools left over from love, keeping each other company under the stars" (Walker, 1982, p. 230). Walker's writings provide true emancipation which also is the aim of the Marxist Feminist ideology. Her characters develop intimacies that reflect their true connection. The gesture of standing silently with their arms around each other reflects the truth that when both parties are on equal terms the chances of exploitation are reduced. True happiness, in other words, can only be achieved when women are given economic emancipation.

### **Conclusion**

The theory of Marxist Feminism formulated by Frederick Engels (2004) investigates the history of women's oppression and finds it closely connected to economy. The possession of sources of production that generate livelihood are equally important for women to survive in this age of materialism. Economically deprived women are vulnerable and thus are an easy target of patriarchy. The poor women suffer more due to the hegemonic control of their husbands who inflict physical violence, with the purpose of taming them. In *The Color Purple* (1982) Walker creates the character of Celie, who is beaten and cheated on by her husband, Albert. Men because of their access to sources of production relish the joys of life in every sense. In the presence of the legally wedded wife, men frequently establish polygamous relationships with

other women just as Albert has extramarital relationship with Shug, in the presence of Celie. This article also shows evidence of how influential men use the women of weaker classes to gain personal benefits as in the case of Sofia who is imprisoned by the White Mayor, for refusing to work in his house as maid.

Engels' theory states that the relationship between husband and wife can achieve the heights of emotional attachment when women start earning outside the house and men at the same time start paying attention to household chores, which they ordinarily do not consider worth doing. Walker (1982) shows the transformation of the characters of Albert and Celie where both achieve emancipation, the one from domestic abuse and the other from a narrow-minded patriarchal mindset. The bridge between fiscal savings and domestic duties must be balanced in order to achieve a social system where both men and women can achieve prosperity and this according to Walker is only possible by removing the causes of female suffering which comprise domestic violence, unpaid household labor, polygamy on the part of the men and economic inequalities.

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