

# LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE: A STUDY ON THE COLOR PURPLE BY ALICE WALKER

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## ABSTRACT

*When compared with all other fields, literature acts as a bridge in connecting people and their views. A literary text helps to understand how the most common elements of language are used ingeniously and artistically in literature. An eloquent language gives the readers an account of knowledge on how even simple language indulge, satisfy and amuse the readers. Through the characters in the books, one learns about twists and turns in people's lives, tries to compare them with reality, and how one overcomes the situation. Literature enhances the readers through reading which provides knowledge, good language, vocabulary, literary devices and so on. Literature helps to exhibit creative and imagination skills through language. The paper tries to explore how learning a language through literature moulds and improvise oneself. The book *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker has taken for study.*

**Keyword:** Language, Literature, Self-confidence, Empowerment, Independence.

Language is an imperative aspect of communication. It enhances to builds a relationship and creates a community. The development of language helps different cultural communities to create a healthy society. Literature is different from the common language. A literary text helps to understand how the most common elements of language are used ingeniously and artistically in literature. An eloquent language gives the readers an account of knowledge on how even simple language indulge, satisfy and amuse the readers. Through the characters in the books, one learns about twists and turns in people's lives, tries to compare them with reality, and how one overcomes the situation. Henceforth, the paper tries to explore how learning a language through literature moulds and improvise oneself.

Literature is an eclectic field. It enhances the readers through reading which provides knowledge, good language, vocabulary, literary devices and so on. In the essay Introduction: What is Literature? Terry Eagleton states that,

Perhaps one needs a different kind of approach altogether. Perhaps literature is definable not according to whether it is fictional or 'imaginative', but because it uses language in peculiar ways. On this theory, literature is a kind of writing which, in the words of the Russian critic Roman Jakobson, represents 'organized violence committed on ordinary speech. Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech.

Literature is esteemed by all groups of people. It endorses cultivating sensibility and good manners. Particularly it helps an individual to improvise their language skills. Today world is enriched with science and technology. Earlier to learn we need to go to the educational institution, but now we have enumerable platforms. The advancement in literary learning makes society knowledgeable. There are numerous benefits in reading literary texts it reduces stress, it kinder imagination power, it improves writing skills, vocabulary, concentration power, it teaches and so on. "In 2009, Sussex University conducted a study on the effect of reading and found that reading for only six minutes reduced stress by up to 68%. That made reading a better way to handle stress than listening to music or walking" (TIS).

Literature helps to exhibit creativity and imagination skills through language. Writers use many techniques to create an impression among readers like new-fangled vocabulary, using conjunctions, changes in sentence patterns, anonymity, bilingualism, Polysyndeton and so on. These kinds of techniques will assist the writers to express or describe more by condensing the page limit. It also supports readers to be aware of the literary techniques, improves their language and also it is time-saving. "Literary language is different from everyday language because it draws attention to some property of the language itself, and highlights or foregrounds it. This foregrounding surprises the reader into a fresh perception and appreciation of the subject matter." (Jeffries 163). This type of foreground used by authors is considered as language play which makes the readers extremely overwhelming. The play on words includes rhyme, rhythm, similes, metaphor, alliteration, assonance and so on.

Alice Walker who is from Georgia is an American writer and social activist. Her novels, poems, and short stories insights into the life of African American culture and tradition. One of her notable works *The Color Purple* published in 1982, for which she won the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She is an ardent storyteller. Her characters in the novels create space for the readers to realize and to understand the people far better. Her novels help many women to conscious about happenings around them and also succours women to self emancipates from the oppression they endure.

The novel *The Color Purple* has been slogged and discoursed under various topics. Hence among the literature people, it plays a vital role. As a continuation, the present study aims to study how Walker voices out the language of the voiceless through literature and entirely concentrates on how literature's

role in language. Walker as a womanist writer uses the epistolary form to scrutinise how African-American women characters are silenced in the novel. It also discovers the voice which allows them to achieve self-determination from oppression. Hsiao agrees and believes that “the instability of language, the fluidity of personal identity, and the combat for one’s silenced voice: those are. . . essential lessons for EFL learners to comprehend and analyse western literature and culture”(Huskey).

Walker’s novel, *The Color Purple* tells the story of the protagonist, Celie and her sister Nettie. Celie suffered through the hands of her sexually abusive father Alphonso and later by her husband named Mr. --. She followed the mandatory life of African American women who bothers only about the family and household duties. Although Nettie also had the same choice she refuses to follow the obligatory life of women. Instead, she becomes a nun and leads an independent life. The writing practices of Celie and Nettie supported them to emerge out from subjugation to self-determine. As they nurture, their use of language propagated. Consequently, the language plays a self-motivated role in setting the cadence in Celie’s life.

Celie’s language plays a primary role in the novel. Celie’s letter to God “Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.” (1). Celie’s only listener is God and simultaneously there was nobody to understand her problem. Considering her situation, she started writing letters to God and believed the letters which she wrote were read by God. At the beginning of the novel, Celie’s language was full of mistakes. The language of Celie, in the letters, is not Standard English. Instead, Walker used the non-standard dialect which is a black folk language. Readers find it difficult to read it at the beginning but as they continue reading they felt it as listening to Celi’s voice. However as the novel moves on, her language is also enhanced. When compared with her first letter to the last letter, one can understand the drastic change over in her. Through her writing habit, she attained self-development she vicissitudes from being an undeveloped, muddled adolescent into a mature, self-assured mature.

It is palpable that Celie’s father ruined both his daughter's lives and he contemplated that everything went well. Celie was forbidden education by her father. She was not indorsed to go to school yet she learned with the help of her sister Nettie. Her father believed that the lack of proper education would bring ignorance in her and would make her unaware of her rights and freedom. It is implicit that Celie is one of the examples of African American woman who was not allowed to go to the school. The letter that gives proof that Celie is not allowed to go to school is:

The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never cares. That I love it. Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand. I was all dress for the first day. You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa says. Nettie is clever in this bunch. But Pa, Nettie say, crying, Celie smart too. Even Miss Beasley say so. Nettie dote on Miss Beasley. Think nobody like her in the world... (19)

The writing habit of Celie helped her to come out from the disaster she encountered and it was her stress buster. Her writing skill helped her to escape from the suppression and

only mode to exhibit her agony. Her voice can be silenced by men around her, but not her writing. Moreover, the language gave her the confidence to take up her own decision. Her lack of enhancement in her erratic spellings, her vernacular language and non-standard grammatical structures showed her low social status to which she belongs. *A Room of One's Own* is reflected in a ground-breaking feminist text and is itself a noteworthy serious impact created on women and literature. Virginia Woolf records,

The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing? A large body of work claiming that women are intellectually inferior only supported this hostility, confirming and perpetuating men's self-serving ideas about women.

Language served as a mode to express Celie’s emotions and feelings. Walker through her language expressed exactly Celie’s sentiment. Using her language, the painful words which gave life to the fictional character Celie. Walker portrayed Celie’s character as the same from the beginning to the end. The novel shows the progression of the evolution of the female characters from uneducated to educate. As Celie’s self-confidence developed her language becomes more ingenious and sensitive. Walker makes Celie’s letters very weak but emotional. But she makes the content of Nettie’s letters Walker proved her Standard English. The epistolary form used in the novel *The Color Purple* Walker’s handled a unique narrative technique, which created an impact on the readers. Winfrey states that “Walker’s employment of Black English manifests her concern about the black cultural heritage and her challenge to the superiority of white people’s language. Her experiments with the epistolary novel make the silenced women hear in a double-voiced narrative.”

As Olinkas stated, “A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something,” (144). Celie was treated like an animal, she was not provided with the necessary education. It was her interest and writing practice that helped her to believe in herself. In many sentences, particularly in Celie’s sentences, one can find grammatical errors like verbs were missing. ‘He your daddy’, ‘she in front a little’ are some of the examples. It is one of the techniques of Walker which indicated the illiteracy as well as the social status of Celie. She wrote exactly as she speaks and thinks. Walker tries to depict the mind style of the character’s feelings directly into words which create more power to the character’s soreness and anguishes within her and all around her.

Celie’s letter to God shows her language, at the end of the novel one can find the transformation in her writing style. The writing practice gave her good language and writing skills. When Nettie’s was in Africa, she used to write letters to Celie. The letter writing habits of both the sisters shows the writing practice prevailed among African women. “Speech about women implies an object, whose sexual nature requires euphemism, and whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men” (Lakoff 45). Even as the story propagates, Walker introduces enhancements in Celie’s language, She was not ready to give away her individuality: “My mind run up on a thought, git confuses, run back and sort of lay down” (215). At the end of the novel, she becomes an independent woman, with her occupation, reunited with her sister Nettie and her children.

Literary text not only enriches the literature learners with linguistic involvement like learning, speaking, reading and writing. It also helps the learners to understand culture, tradition and differences that prevail among the nations which will help an individual to maintain a healthy relationship among mankind. According to the interest of the readers, they are many genres in literature like poems, novels, plays and short stories. According to Maley, “there are several reasons behind using literary texts in language teaching and he specifies the factors as universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, Variety, Interest, economy and Suggestive Power as well as Ambiguity”. (Chnara)

English studies today come to cover in itself a wide array of multiple disciplines. The recognition of English as an International language has changed the intricacy of the English language and Literature. This development ranges from growth in education, politics, economy, science and technology. In the educational process, language is the main pillar through which an individual has to plan, educate and evaluate programs. The improvement of individuals in the esteem of their ambition in society means the growth of a nation.

The paper tries to explore how learning a language through literature moulds and extemporise oneself. Through the character Celie it has been proven. At the beginning of the novel, writing letters to God was Celie’s only way of expressing her feeling. There is also a keen and persistent eminence of trustworthiness in Celie’s letters. Her letters to God, which showed her trust and considered God as her friend for guidance and strength overcome her tragic life. Later her realisation about God gave her the maturity to free herself from the system that binds her under male supremacy. She recognises that having a distinctiveness is very useful to live a competitive life.

The study is based on how writing practice helped Celie to improvise her language skills which supported her in all ways. At the same time, she finds her own identity, her voice is

sufficiently empowered to voice out her experience. Thus what happened in Celie’s life is just an example. She is a symbol of hope who proved nothing can stop one from getting educated. For instance, there are enumerable ways a literary text assists one to empower and to be independent. Learning is a permanent wealth, which nobody can annihilate from an individual.

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