

Reflection of Women's Problems in Alice Walker's The Color Purple Novel

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Abstract: *The major problem of this study is how African- American women's suffering is reflected in The Color Purple novel by Alice Walker. The objective of this study is to analyze the novel based on structural elements and to analyze the novel based on feminist approach. In analyzing The Color Purple novel, the writer uses qualitative method and feminist approach. The object of the study is Alice Walker's The Color. Purple novel published in 1982. The data sources consist of primary data and secondary data sources. The primary data sources are The Color Purple novel itself and the secondary data sources are the other sources related to the analysis such as the author's biography, and the other relevant information to analysis of this research. The method of the data collection is library research. The technique of data analysis is descriptive analysis. The outcome of the study is shown in the following conclusions. First, from the structural analysis of the novel, it shows that Alice Walker wants to express her idea about how African- American women are suffered by their society that is caused by the whites and black men. Second, based on Feminist Approach, the conclusion is that there is African – American women's suffering in the Alice Walker's The Color Purple novel. Walker creates that unfair treatment will always result rebellion. Third, this novel presents the social construction that women who have suffering and pains in their lives can transform their lives to a better life.*

Keywords: Oppression, gender discrimination, African-American women, suffering and feminism approach, feminist, principles of Feminism, Women's Right.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 16th century, the African-Americans who lived in the United State had been through difficulties life. It happened since they arrived in America. They faced discrimination, segregation and stereotype for decades. Sometimes, they were being treated as animal and they lost their human rights. Especially for women, they were not free from suffering as a part of society. Suffering is when someone feels unpleasant in her life. It can be in psychic and mental or both of them. Suffering is an individual's basic affective experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with harm or threat of harm. The suffering of women can be reflected in the literary works. It can be realized in the kind of short story, novel, poem etc. Novel is the one example of it. Novel is a long narrative in literary prose that serves fiction story on the word form which has intrinsic and extrinsic element. Generally, a novel tells about human life with many problems in society.

A real example of the suffering of African – American Women is reflected in a novel by Alice Walker entitled The Color Purple. The novel was published in the 1982. This is one of the literary works of Alice walker that talks about black feminism. The Color Purple can be called as the master piece of Alice Walker. The Color Purple also has some awards, for example in 1983; it received Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and The National Book for Fiction. The writer is interested to analyze The Color Purple novel because of some reasons. The first reason is because the story of this novel is wonderful and based on true story. Alice writes about the position and condition African-American's woman in America. This novel tells about the suffering of black woman in America. The second reason is because The Color Purple is considered the best novel. It received some awards, for example Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and The National Book for Fiction. It shows that The Color Purple is the best novel or fiction on that year. It was also adapted into film and musical drama with the same name. The third reason is because The Color Purple also gives an education factor. The writer wants to explore about feminism value in America: how the women's position, women's role, women's right, and women's participation. The writer gives information that black women have different position in America. In the society, their activities and rights are so limited. The fourth reason is The Color Purple has simple plot in the story. It makes easy to the reader to more understand about the story. The writer wants the reader easier to understand with the message of the movie. So, the audience can get the moral value of the novel.

II. METHODOLOGY

In analyzing Alice Walker's The Color Purple, the writer uses descriptive qualitative research. The object of this research is Alice Walker's The Color Purple novel. In conducting the research, the writer is going to analyze it by using a feminist approach. There are two data sources in this study, they are Primary Data and Secondary Data Source. The primary data sources are taken from the dialogue, character's description, plot and all of the statements related to

the problems of The Color Purple novel. The secondary data is the supporting data taken from literary books, criticism or articles that has relation with the novel.

The technique of data collection in this study takes the following steps to the data analysis, they are: Reading the novel Alice Walker's The Color Purple novel in many times, Browsing to the internet to get several information and articles related to the object of the study, Identifying the problem and to find the data, Collecting some supporting data from other references related to the topic, Taking the important notes of important data, both primary and secondary data, Arranging the data into several parts according to its classification, Occupying the classification into several chapters, Drawing the conclusion of the analysis that has already done in the former chapter. The technique of the data analysis that is used is descriptive. The writer makes some interpretations of the novel dealing with the character from the major character which researcher wants to analyze using feminist approach.

Feminist is as way to identify individuals who supported not merely an increased public role for women, but also women's right, private, position, participation, even broadened into political, cultural, economic, social, and ethical dimension to be find themselves as autonomous beings.

Major Principle of Feminism

1) Women Position

Women position in the 19th was really suffer. Because in this period, the position of women is subordinate class and men is the super ordinate in the society. According to Andersen (1983:9), feminists believe that women are treated as inferior. The meaning of feminism has been developed and understood in different ways. Woman was oppressed by a special form of life called patriarchy through which man appropriate all superior social role and keeps women in subordinated and exploited position (Mandell, 1995: 14).

2) Women's Role

In the 19th century, Women's role in the family and society as wife's and mothers. They are always associated with domestic roles. According to Humm (2002: 118), "Domesticity places the house and the work associated with it as women's most proper place and the function are to harmonize their family life". It is supported by Hillyer (in Mandell, 1995: 54), Women are traditionally defined by their role as daughters, wives, and mothers. Women with disabilities are assumed unable to fulfill traditionally defined caretaking and partnership role.

3) Women's Right

Human rights are owned by all of man. Women have rights to decide their authority. Women have equal right with men, such as right for just treatment, right for championship, right for child care, right for equal education, right for public role, right for religion, right for love (Mandell, 1995: 188). While, according to Humm, (2002: 53), Women also demand the right to choose what they attend to, including having freedom to be what they want to be.

4) Women's Participation

In the society, publics have rights to show their opinion included women. But in the fact, Men's aspiration is more important than women's aspiration. Mandel states that women's voice, decision, opinion, and critique are ignored by the men (Mandell, 1995: 215). So, Women must improve their capability and capacity to make their aspiration is heard by public in society because, Feminism is both way of thinking and way of acting so women needs to actualize themselves as an actor in social institutions (Humm, 2002:233).

III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Feminist is a literature view that believes women and men are equal. There are not different between men and women in the society. The men and women have same rights and duties in their life. This condition encourages feminism to citizen patriarchy that still valid in the society and who try to build gender equality. Patriarchy is a social system that believes men have the highest position than women in society. Patriarchy judge that men have dominance and authority in all activities in public life. All decisions are depended on men. Women do not have opportunity to get their rights like men in the public life.

1) Women's Position

In the society, the position of men is super ordinate class and women are the subordinate class. It means that women have lower position than men. Men dominate all aspects than women, so women are only having a few opportunities to get equal education like men. The Color Purple novel shows that the position of black women is under men in their society. It can be seen from the major character of The Color Purple novel, namely Celie. Celie is drawn as a weak girl. As a black woman, she is not only getting discrimination from whites but also from African - American men. In her family and society, Celie always placed under men. She always accepts bad treatment from men in her society especially her step father, Pa/ Alphonso. Pa/ Alphonso always beats, rapes and subjected her like a dumb. As the oldest child in her family, Celie must have to take care of her sisters, cook, and does the entire household. She does not know the way to against her father although her sister, Nettie, suggests her to fight back and depend with herself. You got to fight them, Celie, she say. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself. I don't say nothing. I

think bout Nettie, dead. She fights, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive (TCP, 1982: 22).

Celie never gets better education, because her father, Pa/ Alphonso, forbid her to go to school. Pa/ Alphonso thinks Celie is very stupid than her sister, Nettie. So, Celie cannot read and write well. 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 first day (TCP, 1982: 10).

You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say. Nettie the clever one in this bunch (TCP, 1982: 11).

2) Women's Role

In the society, Women's role is very limit. It is because of the domination of men in the society. Men have big dominations than women. Men can do anything what they want, but not for women. Women are associated with domestic role. Traditionally, women's roles are as the cooker, cleaner, mother and nurse of the family, and often forces into the demanding commands of men. In The Color Purple novel, Walker wants to show that women's role in that period is very limited. Women and men have different role. Women's role is only in the domestic role. They cannot easy do what they want to do. As the major character, Celie faces these problems. She is required to take care of her own family after the death of her mother, caring for her siblings and her stepfather. She spends all her time only in the home. I'm big. I can't move fast enough. By time I get back from the well, the water be warm. By time I get the tray ready the food be cold. By time I get all the children ready for school it be dinner time (TCP, 1982: 3). After she marries with Mister/Albert, her life does not change. Mister/ Albert marries her not as a wife but as a servant for his family. It is happened. He needs someone who can take care his children, house, and serves his sexual desire. The girl's hair hasn't been comb since their mammy died. I tell him I'll just have to shave it off. Start fresh. He says bad hick to cut a woman hair. So after I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner? They have a spring, not a well, and a wood stove look like a truck? I start trying to untangle hair. They only six and eight and they cry. They scream. They cuse me of murder. By ten o'clock I'm done. They cry their selves to sleep. But I don't cry. I lay there thinking bout Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe (TCP, 1982:13). It shows that Celie does not have free time to actualize herself. As a wife, she spends all her time to take care all households. Her daily activities in Mister's house are not like a wife but a slave.

At that period, the women must follow the culture's role that is valid in the society. Their fashion is so limited. Women cannot choose clothes that they want. They cannot follow trend fashion at the time. They must wear dress. Because if women use tight clothes or pants that is not reasonable in the society. Men and women do not suppose to wear the same thing, he said. Men suppose to wear the pants (TCP, 1982: 278).

3) Women's Right

All of humans have right. Men and women absolutely have same rights. Actually they have same right to life, to get education, to get occupation, etc. Women also have rights to get freedoms in family and society. Feminist appears to gain the democratic right of women, such as education, politic, economy and occupation. So today, women can do anything which suitable with equality rights in the world. In The Color Purple novel, Celie has been lost her rights since she was child. It begins when her step father rapes her several times. Her father impregnates her twice and also takes away her children after they are born. She also loses her right to study because she gets pregnant. And then, her step father sells her to Mister/ Alphonso. Well, next time you come you can look at her. She ugly. Don't even look like she kin to Nettie. But she'll make the better wife. She ain't smart either, and I'll just be fair, you have to watch her or she'll give away everything you own. But she can work like a man (TCP, 1982: 9). After marriage, Celie's suffering does not stop yet. She loses her right to freedom and becomes what she wants because of men in her life. She spends her time to take care of Mister's children, house, and works in fields. I spend my wedding day running from the oldest boy. He twelve. His mama died in his arms and he don't want to hear nothing bought no new one. He picks up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breasts. His daddy says Don't dothat! But that's all he says. He got four children, instead of three, two boys and two girls. The girls hair ain't been comb since their mammy died. I tell him I'll just have to shave it off. Start fresh. He says bad hick to cut a woman hair. So after I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner? they have a spring, not a well, and a wood stove look like a truck? I start trying to untangle hair. They only six and eight and they cry. They scream. They cuse me of murder. By ten o'clock I'm done. They cry themselves to sleep. But I don't cry. I lay there thinking bought Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe (TCP, 1982: 13).

4) Women's Participation

The participation and opportunities of women are very fewer than men in public life. Women still have lower position than men. In the public life, the participation of men is important than women. It is caused men still think that women are weaker than them. These conditions make women are not appreciated in the working place too. They often get lower paying and position jobs than men in working place. Based on the feminist argues, women should be equal with men. They should not only in domestic area but also in public area. So, women also have similar participation to men in public area such as in social, politic, economic and etc.

In The Color Purple novel, the participation of women is limited. Women are not permitted to speak up their mind. They cannot share their opinion in the public life. Men think that women's speaking are not important to hear. Therefore, when women are speaking men ignore their face. There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not "look in a man's face" as they say. To "look in a man's face" is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own

behavior around Pa (TCP, 1982: 168).

IV. DISCUSSIONS

In *The Color Purple* Celie intends to attain this linear time of progress and improvement. *The Color Purple* deals with Celie's fight for progress and individuality. She intends to enter society, follow her dreams and achieve them. In Kristeva's words, women should revolt if they intend to have pleasure, as they achieve happiness by "confronting obstacles, prohibitions, authority, or law that allows" them to realize themselves as "autonomous and free" (Kristeva 2000, p. 7). Here, Celie should confront patriarchal system which confined her for long time. Moreover, the revolt transforms invisible Celie into visible one. In fact:

The Color Purple, Alice Walker's novel of black feminist awakening, is a model for the reconstruction of a black feminist literary tradition. If the existence of such a tradition had previously been marked by the "white page" and historical silence, Walker subverts the space by embracing the absence. (Hall, 1992, p. 1)

Alice Walker puts black invisible women, who are absent from classical literature and history, into the spotlight and permits them to speak and take action.

As the novel unfolds, Celie's stepfather, whom Celie considers as her biological father, warns her not to tell anyone about the fact that he rapes her. As a result, Celie is obliged to remain silent, but she needs to tell someone; therefore, she writes letters to God and explains all the misery which has been forced upon her. Language is in the hands of men and they dominate women with it; men decide what, to whom and where women can express themselves, as Kristeva holds, women are "excluded from the single true and legislating principle, from the Words" (Kristeva, 1993, p. 21) because without words, women cannot have independent personality. Men force women not to use language as speaking helps them to gain a sense of identity. In fact, "no person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow" (2012, p. 1). Therefore, men intend to silence women as they are afraid of women's progress and improvement. The act of writing is a kind of revolt, as Celie must not tell anyone about the rapes. In fact, Celie experiences male bullying and domination when she is raped at the age of fourteen (Hankinson, 1997, p. 321). Besides, as Kristeva notices, "there is no time without speech"; and in this novel, Celie should start using language to attain linear time (Kristeva, 1993, p. 35), individuality and social role. She intends to write in order to express her desire and ambitions within language and ask for her social rights.

When the stepfather grows tired of Celie, he encourages Mr._ to marry her. After their marriage, one day, Tobias, Mr.'s brother, visits Celie and Mr._, and Shug, Mr.'s former lover. They talk about different women. Shug holds that "all women not alike, Tobias" (Walker, 2004, p. 55). This speech emphasizes the fact that although women may have the same sex, they are different in their thoughts, feelings and desires. Each individual woman has her own desires and fights for them. However, in patriarchal families, women's desires are not respected.

In *The Color Purple*, female characters help each other to live a comfortable life and follow their feminine desires, e.g. as Shug understands that Mr._ beats Celie, she says that she "won't leave" until she knows that "Albert [Mr.] won't even think about beating" her (Walker, 2004, p. 72). The women bond together and ameliorate each other's situations. If men force women to obey them and restrict their freedom, women provide each other with liberty and love. They know how to support, encourage and help each other. As women have been ignored, misrepresented and mistreated in literature and history, in this novel, Walker intends to highlight women's suffering and show how they can get rid of the misrepresentations by proving their abilities, and how they gain power through relationships with other female characters.

V. CONCLUSION

The writer presents two conclusions that relate to the results of the analysis. It is drawn as follows: First, from the structural analyzing of *The Color Purple* novel shows that Alice Walker makes the elaboration of the structural analysis in good unity. The unity of the characters, plot, point of view, and style are related to build the theme of the novel that is "Unfair treatment will always result rebellion". It can be seen from the suffering that is faced by women. All of elements are successfully related one to another. Second, based on the feminist approach, *The Color Purple* novel contains many facts that are revealed by Alice Walker reflected women's position, women's role, women's right and women's participation. Walker wants to express that African-American women face many problems their life. They are subjected unfair by whites and African-American men in their society. This condition makes women suffer physically and spiritually. Through this novel, Walker not only gives African-American women's voice but also inspires them with a path to struggle and emancipate their life to get freedom.

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