

# Fourth World and Women: Black Literature

## Abstract

After the subterranean learning and research on the three worlds, literature has its stir towards the fourth world. The fourth world literature discusses the issues related to the oppressed people of a land which is underprivileged, under developed. The researches revealed that the term had already been used by scientists and other artistes of humanities to describe the conditions of various nations less states within larger nations under developed nations. The present circumstances are such that the people in their home lands are devoid of the basic needs and their rights. The study and research of these oppressed people forms the content of the fourth world literature. It is not only limited to India. The extension of this category encompasses the globe. It is a globalised issue to be dealt which the writers have tried to pour out, through their writings. The writers of the age have written much about the stipulation of the people who are deprived of common needs in their own native lands. The fourth world literature extensively talks about the rise of inequality, poverty, social misery and their respective relationship to production and relative quality of life throughout the world. The study of black literature comes under this enclosure; it refers to the literature written by black writers about black people. Afro American literature comes in to explore the issues of black people. The literature is also termed as black literature. Afro American literature is a body of literature written by Afro American descent. Discourse about black literature is valuable but it becomes misleading if pressed too far. Talking of black literature takes the discourse to the deprived black people of the underdeveloped nations. The fourth world literature offers hope to the oppressed, to the deprived. The present paper is going to attempt a study of female characters of black literature. The studied novels are *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. Celie of Walker and Sethe created by Morrison face a miserable life in their own homelands. The actions taken by the characters make an essential impact on the readers. The writers have even challenged the conventional beliefs relating to the patriarchal society. Sethe of *Beloved* who was a slave escapes her work place to settle a peaceful life. The struggle she underwent is astonishingly portrayed by the writer. Alice Walker's Celie encounters her own relations troubling her. She is shown as submissive girl who takes up the challenge of a difficult life with the help of the sister community. The characters explore the fourth world literature issues of poverty, inequality and social misery. The paper will attempt to highlight the plight of black women in the fourth world struggling for their identity and existence in their own homelands. The level of their marginality can be observed through their being black, being poor and above all being woman.

**Keywords:** Fourth World, Aborigins, Indigenous People, Socio-Political Realities, Women Liberation, Marginality.

## Introduction

Fourth World literature pertains to the written work of native people living in a land that has been taken over by non-Natives. Nevertheless, "Fourth World" is a phrase that came into use following the configuration of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in 1972. Fourth World people are the original indigenous (native) inhabitants who existed before Europeans. Native people of America, Aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, First Nations of Canada, Dalits / Tribes of India are considered as people of Fourth World. George Manuel (1921-1989), the most significant, powerful and revered indigenous leader of Canada advocated the political unification of indigenous people across the globe by the formation of the Fourth World movement and gave prominence to the concept of Fourth World. Mr. Manuel in his book, "The

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Fourth World: An Indian Reality", calls it as the literature of Indigenous people, descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly dispossessed the right to their own territories and riches. The term 'indigenous people' can even be understood as the poorest and the most under developed states of the world; it includes in itself the internationally unrecognized states that are struggling hard to get identity in their own homeland. Through the sources of Wikipedia, Fourth World is an annexure to the 'three world model', used variably to refer to sub-populations socially excluded from global society. It can denote nations without a sovereign state, emphasizing the non-recognition and barring of ethnically and religiously defined people from the politico-economic world system. The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castell is credited with having made the term, 'Fourth world' acceptable and popular. Mbuto Milando, first secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission in Canada thinks Fourth World as, "When Native peoples come into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions that will be the Fourth World." (Nityanandam 27) The existing journals related to the concept and meaning of the fourth world talks of it as a world embracing all the nations having population of under twelve million count, inhabitants, groups working for their independence at all levels from the neighborhood to the nation. It takes in its enclosure the minority groups, women liberation, peace, ecology, economics, energy resources etc. No specific definition can be given as to what exactly fourth world literature means. The studies claim that it discusses the oppressed, poor underprivileged and marginalized people of any nation. It actually deals with socio-political realities of existence and identity. Some of the important issues dealt with are social expulsion and discord, racial discrimination, untouchability, colonization etc. The Dalit and the Tribal literature of India, the Igbo literature of Nigeria and the Black literature come under the study of Fourth world literature.

#### **Full Text of The Paper**

Black literature debates the roots of African American writings; it has its pedigree deep in the historical circumstances of slavery. In fact whether born in slavery or not, most of the writers of African American literature before World War I launched their literary careers via some form of the slave narrative. African American literature can be described as a documentation of the multi faceted nature of oppression. Protesting against the commonly accepted sub human status of the black people and the idea of the Old Negro a servile, docile and puerile, much of the literature of the period of enslavement was an assertion of the humanity of the blacks. Most of the writings have the autobiographical expression. These kind of narratives carried the subtitle "written by Himself/Herself," not only to hold up the claims of truth but also to emphasize the competence and humanity of these slaves, whose illiteracy was often measured as badge of their lowliness.

In 1973 the National Black Feminist organization was established to reinstate the voice of

the voiceless weak sex of the society. The decade of the 70s represented another renaissance in black women's writing. The issues that were attended included gender, sexism, black womanhood, black female identity, mother daughter relationships, sexual orientation, black heterosexism, domestic violence, etc. "African American women writers have always made effort to assert the exclusive nature of their experiences, which they felt were distinct from the white women's situation, since they had to fight for many other fronts; white patriarchy, against white women's racism and against the sexism of Black men. With Black women refusing to be silenced, they raised their voices in some of the fieriest writing of the era. (Sinha 25) Their struggle was aided by writings and work of progressive black artists who focused on destroying the myths and images which had crippled and degraded black people and the creation of new myths and images that would liberate and empower them. The new writers promoted a revival of interest in the Afro- American Folk heritage and the African past. Black women's writing is based on reconstructing the development of the character's individual personality in relation to the historical forces that have shaped the migrations of her race and the struggles of her community.

The idea of culture gives substance to this writing, because it is a body of work devoted to the retrieval of the African American tradition. Initially back feminist writing used the form autobiography to explore the evils of a patriarchal, slave holding society in which even white women, while subjugated, were still as oppressive as white men. Further on, these writings articulated the sufferings of African American women and the entire African American community in a sexist, classical society. Traditionally women's lives have been organized and manipulated by patriarchy in all ages, cultures, all countries by establishing values, norms, roles, gender perceptions, and idealism that prescribes unequal means, methods and routes to achieve the so called wholeness for women.(28) The fourth world literature expresses the desire and actions taken by these strata of all societies, for their existence. What patriarchy demand from women is quite different from what women demand from women. The society expect and paints a woman in the form of mother or wife and when women try to come out of this frame, the battle is seen raged in the patriarchal society. It is observed that not only men some part of women population is also of the belief that women should be for hearth and not for field. Initially women writers, realizing that they must narrate their stories else others would do it in a wrong way, were interested in determining and picturing the lives of women, as they wished to or have imagined to, but now they seem to be concentrating on, "how women can live afresh." (Rich 35) Toni Morrison and Alice walker portrayed their female characters different from the monolith image of the women. Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* design the life style of their protagonist as initially fragmented, disorganized. *The Color Purple* is the story of Celie, who eventually administers to revolutionize the time-honored explanation of good

and evil in relation to women by emphasizing that she subsists principally as and for herself and not merely to be a mother or the lover of man. Celie starts her life as a physically and psychologically oppressed young girl raped by her stepfather and later, becomes the wife of Mr. Widower with three children and a beautiful mistress Shug Avery who also continues to exploit her in various cheap ways. From near complete degeneration, she fights against sexist and racist definitions of herself and enables the other women to realize that the entire black community's attitude towards women needs to be revised and revealed. The interesting point of the novel is Celie's' process of regeneration that begins with an overt exploration of sexual relationships with Shug Avery, friendly and at times not so friendly, but definitely constructive. Celie finds no other option, after being muted and silenced by the patriarchal society, than speaking to God. She can no longer consider herself as a "good girl." (1) Her experiences as a daughter are also not good. The dying mother had died "screaming and cursing" (3) her because she is 'big' with the child in her womb. Soon after she is married to the rancorous Mr. \_\_\_ who marries her because she is a good worker, he can do anything with her and she has a cow to take as a part of the dowry. (12) She leads a horrible life by being bullied by her step children and her cruel husband who beats her up because "she my wife. Plus she stubborn. All women good for" (23) her sister advises her to fight but

Celie says, "I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive," (18) Alice Walker through an convoluted intend of the plot, exposes repeatedly Celie's distressed condition. She visibly portrays the picture of woman performing the role of a daughter, wife and mother. In fact woman is more equated with animals than with humans. She is crippled by a sense of "inferiorization" (Gilbert 7) Celie considers herself good for nothing and because she is ugly. Being unaware of the inherent creative power of women, she is made to act as a stereotyped female. Celie's process of rehabilitation starts with the entry of Shug Avery, her arch-rival, and Mr. \_\_\_'s mistress. Walker had given an interesting twist to the story by indicating that 'the other' woman is always not an enemy to the wife as conventionally written by male writers of fiction. Celie's life changed with the arrival of three strong women of the community: Shug, Nettie (Celie's sister) and Sophie. Sophie acts as a catalyst for Celie's transformation. Despite all odds she refuses to succumb before Harpo's beating. In fact she stands alone to pay him back. Later Sofia comes to know about her plight and advise her to get rid of her husband, "You got to bash Mr. \_\_\_." (44) Walker suggests clearly that a woman should learn to respect the "self" before she demands respect from others.

Sethe the protagonist of Morrison's *Beloved*, despite the double enclosures of racism and sexism, begins her life quite normally in Sweet Home, plantation, as a slave worker. She was tortured by the nephews of the owner of the Sweet Home. She

somehow manages to escape from the place and begins a new life at her mother in laws house at 124 Bluestone Road. Sethe is no ordinary woman as Celie. She doggedly escapes to the free zone of

America leaving her husband Halle behind and considers him a failure in fulfilling his responsibility as a husband. Morrison through Sethe challenges the concept of a traditional husband; she consciously questions the idea of marriage and married life. For twenty eight days, after the shattering experience of escape Sethe remains fragmented and gradually begins to settle herself. She has no repentance of her deed of killing her own child because she is confident that she has done the right thing for her, "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe," (201) Sethe was abandoned by the community because of her pride to go all alone. With the help of her daughter Denver, Sethe is brought back to the fold; she regains her peace and stability. Sethe is positively supported by her mother in law Baby Suggs who repeatedly advice Sethe to, "lay 'em down; Sethe, sword and shield." (105).

#### Conclusion

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker through their novels *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* exhibit that women are not only envisioned as sacrificial goats, they have equal potential and right to live their lives in their own. In both the novels it is noteworthy that the protagonists rise from the condition of nothingness to the position of self empowerment. It is no miracle which is imagined but a gradual change and reorganization of the broken strings. It brings out a pattern that is meaningful and worthwhile. There are many other writers writing for the fourth world literature and portraying women as no puppet in the hands of destiny or men. They strive hard to go through their subtle ways of transformation. Writers like Barbara Christian, Margaret Atwood, Jamaica Kinkaid, Maya Angelou and Gloria Naylor have written so much for black women, especially those most marginalized by race, caste and class to have their voices heard and histories read.

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