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## **WOMEN STRUGGLE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMAN AT POINT ZERO AND THE COLOR PURPLE**

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### **Abstract**

*Women across the globe face the discrimination based on gender which not only leaves a physical scar on their bodies but a mental scar as well which is hard to erase. Women have realised their importance and they have been fighting for their rights from long back and it is still prevalent as it has not been achieved yet. The discrimination against women is an old story now and it differs from country to country. Emma Watson, a well-known English actress in her UN speech initiated a new step by launching a campaign known as He or She campaign as according to her it is important to include men for the fight of women emancipation. This wave of feminism is prevalent across the world including the Third World countries as well. Nawal El Saadawi in her book *Woman at Point Zero* beautifully portrays the condition of Egyptian women particularly Firdaus who is the main protagonist of the novel. This novel is based on a true event where Nawal met Firdaus in a jail who was a criminal and was soon to be hanged for the murder which she has committed. The interesting thing was that Firdaus was not appealing for life time imprisonment instead of death penalty and demanded death. Nawal got very curious to know about her life and finally Firdaus narrated her whole life story which was full of sufferings and struggle done to her by the men in her life and the society. Actually Firdaus was tired of this male dominated society and death was the only source of emancipation for her. On the other hand Alice Walker, a well-known Afro American writer in her book *The Color Purple* depicts the life of Celie who is an*

*African woman whose life was also full of hardships and discrimination. But Celie survived all the harsh situations of her life which included mostly her domestic life and finally found her emancipation. The researcher in this paper by using comparative and analytical methodology is trying to build a bridge to fill the gap that women no matter of what country or race belongs, is connected to each other through the pain which is caused discrimination based on gender. It is interesting to note that both the protagonists through the end found their emancipation in their own ways.*

### **Keywords**

African Culture, Egyptian culture, Feminism, Women Emancipation, Women Discrimination.

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## **1. Introduction**

Woman plays such a vital role of nurturing the future generations, but the irony is that woman is mostly degraded and dominated on the basis of gender. Feminism which is one of the most burning topics across the world is still not achieved yet. Feminism in a layman language is giving equal rights and status to the women. Unfortunately, women across the world are deprived of their basic rights. The woman is always considered as a “Secondary Sex”. The fight for women rights is not a new thing and women have been fighting for it from a very long time and it continues even today. The actual wave of feminism is considered to be started by two key philosopher viz. Mary Wollstone Craft and John Stuart Mill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the term feminism was used first by a socialist Charles Fourier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mary Wollstone craft is often considered as the mother of feminism. She is in her book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* argues that women's education is one of the fundamental requirements of the world. She insisted that women are not merely the wives but instead they help in the building of the nation as they are the companions to their husbands. According to Mary Wollstone Craft, women should be given equal rights and status as they are not only the ornaments or a commodity that is to be traded in the marriage but instead a very important part of the society. And her main focus was to aware women about the education so that they should be well aware of their rights.

Elaine Showalter, an American feminist traced the history of feminism and divided it into three phases. She called the first phase ‘the mute phase’ or the feminine phase (1840-1880) where the women were mute only and fight only for the basic rights. The second phase

(1880-1920) is called 'the protest phase' of the feminist phase, which was more aggressive and the women in this phase fought for suffragettes. They demanded the right to vote so that their voices should also be heard. The last phase (1920-till now) is the phase of self-discovery. This phase demanded self-autonomy.

But whatever the feminism in the world was, it was all about the white ladies and the third world women were ignored. The Third world women realised that their part was missing in feminism and came forward to fight for their rights as well. Alice Walker, a well-known writer focussed on the word 'Womanism' or 'sisterhood' instead of feminism. According to her, this word denotes the feminism of the world and believes that if we consider all the women of the world as sisters, only then feminism can be achieved. If we trace back the history of black feminism than Bell Hooks' book entitled *Ain't I a Woman? : Black Women and Feminism* is definitely a bench mark. In this book, Hook's talks about black feminism and the struggle of black women. Hooks argues to end sexism and racism in respect to women. This book took her 7 years to complete it. She explains in the book that women during the slavery suffered most of the discrimination and sufferings. Not only black but women across the globe came forward to raise their voice for rights.

Now women across the world, no matter European or African or Asian, all are coming forward to fight for their rights and status under the umbrella term of feminism. Not only the philosophers or thinkers or writers are fighting for the women rights but today even celebrities have come forward to contribute their part in this wave of feminism. Emma Watson, a well-known Hollywood star has also come forward and she started a campaign #HeForShe campaign where she compels males to be on the side of women to fight for their rights. She is totally against the definition of feminism being anti-males. Instead she appeals to the males to come forward and help women to achieve equal rights and status. "This is the first campaign of its kind at the UN. We want to try to mobilise as many men and boys possible to be advocates for change." Even Mitchell Obama is also a very strong figure contributing to this feminism. Her speeches are often very famous regarding women emancipation.

In this paper, the researcher tries to explore the pain and struggle which women suffer living in two different parts of the world, but representing almost all the women of the world through the books *Woman at point Zero* written by Nawal El Saadawi and *The Color Purple* written by Alice Walker.

## 2. Literature Review

All these books i.e. *Woman at point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *The Tiger Ladies* by Sudha Koul and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker are well acclaimed books and are appreciated by other writers and critics. These books are cherished by the readers especially the female section as it depicts the sufferings and emancipation of their particular gender. These three different books depict the four different nations depicting their own culture, tradition, religion, race and region.

Nawal El Saadawi an Egyptian writer has always been a controversial writer. This book “Women at Point Zero” has gained her good name and fame. This book depicts the fight of an Egyptian woman Firdaus who is in prison for the crime of murder. But Firdaus didn't appeal for the life time imprisonment instead of death penalty as she takes this punishment a relief and a step towards salvation. She has suffered all her life and each man who came in her life used her only for his sexual gratification. Nawal el Saadawi has beautifully shown the suffering and the agony of the common Arab women who becomes the victim of patriarchal society. Saadawi is often said to be the spokesperson for Arab women. She is often called the ‘Mother of Arab feminism.’

Saddik Gohar in an article entitled *Empowering the Subaltern in Woman at Point Zero* (2016), talks about how women are marginalised by the males. Saddik explores that *Woman at Point Zero* is not only the story of Firdaus but it is the story of every girl particularly living in the Egyptian society. The researcher in the article argues that Firdaus all her life was exploited physically as well as psychologically. “Firdaus suffers from humiliation, rape, incest and violence, and the text reinforces her identity as an abused subaltern” (184). Saddik explains that how this sexual exploitation made Firdaus hate the relation between man and woman as the society had made this relationship no less than that of a prostitute and the client. Firdaus according to the researcher finally at the end finds her herself by murdering the pimp by knowing her powers and hurting her hunter. “By the end of the narrative, she is located in a position to rebel the forces of oppression and exploitation. She is not powerless anymore contesting and confronting an entire tyrannical system”(185).

Talking about this concept of prostitution, Nenden Syahbana M and Ali Mustofa in their article *Dismantling Prostitution as an Institution in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero* (2014) says that there has always been a negative image attached to prostitution. But according to them *Woman at Point Zero* depicts it differently. It is regarded as equal to

marriage, social institution rather than deviant. They studied it by applying the theories of deconstruction and Foucault's power relation to dismantle the discourse of prostitution as an institution in the novel. According to them, prostitution here proves to be a source of emancipation for the fallen woman in order to get her success, protection, respect while at the same time they actively play the role as subjects.

GA Fwangyil in her article *Cradle to Grave: An Analysis of Female Oppression in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero (2012)*, takes up an issue of female suppression in almost all walks of life by their male counterparts. According to her, this female oppression is deeply rooted in the culture of the societies and because of this only female do not liberate themselves. This article is based on the patriarchal moulded structures which keep women in slavery only. Basically the researcher explored the oppression of women from her infancy to adulthood and the measures taken to free themselves from the shackles of male domination and oppression. This article beautifully explains how Firdaus who was struggling from her childhood and was subjugated in almost all parts of her life finally attained emancipation.

To talk about Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, then it would not be wrong to say that this book gained writer the worldwide recognition and won her prestigious awards and honours. Alice walker was awarded Pulitzer Prize for fiction and National Book award for the fiction for this book. Other achievement of the book was that it became so popular that it was adapted into movie not once but twice. Alice Walker became very popular writer after the publication of this book and now she is counted among the best writers of her country.

Rose Gladney in an article entitled *The Color Purple. Alice Walker. Harcourt, Brace (1982)*, observes that women are now breaking their million years silence to emancipate themselves. But according to her the women rarely speaks the truth not even their diaries. She also states that women are not even trying to answer the questions of their real identity. But according to her, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* reached a new horizon as this book actually speaks the truth. The major theme of the book is the struggle of black women to search for their identity in relation to sex, race and most importantly their own self. She appreciates this book by stating that in this book, the black women try to create her own identity or her being with or without black men. In order to free their selves, Celie the protagonist and the other black women find their voices which have always suppressed by the black men. To free themselves completely, they should speak whatever they feel and should develop new thoughts based on their perception. She must also replace the image of God as

male as in this novel, Celie used to write letters to God thinking of Him as a male. So basically in her thoughts she was complaining against male to God whom she considers a male only. All her thinking and personality change with the entry of Shug Avery who ironically was the beloved of her husband. Even though sharing such a complicated relationship with Shug Avery but still, she proved to be a turning point in her life to develop her into a strong and a free individual.

Talking about the voice, Ritgrerdttil and Sigurum Tinna Sueinsdottir in their article *The Search for a Voice in Alice Walker's The Color Purple (2012)*, speak about the breaking of silence of the black women. According to them, *The Color Purple* is a story of a woman who has always been suppressed and subjugated by the males in her life and the society where she lives in. Her life was full of misery right from the childhood only when the person who is known to be her father used to rape her and also made her pregnant twice. The researchers talk about Celie, the protagonist and other women who are subjected to silence and how they finally achieve emancipation. According to the researchers, a society should give equal voice to both the genders. The whole article is divided into 3 parts- the first part shows how Celie and other black women are silenced and how they try to break it to be free. Celie from her childhood only is silenced by her so called father Pa who while raping her used to say that "You better shut up and git used to it" (3). Her sister Nettie also has to face the same thing. But with the coming of Shug Avery, a ray of hope comes in Celie's life. The researchers in the second part point out that the source of silence is the men, society and God. To come out of this suppression, education and the proper understanding of God are very important to claim for independence and personal freedom. The last part of the article focuses mainly on Celie and her emancipation.

Patricia Harris Abrams in her article entitled *The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1985)*, explains that this book is a gift not only to black literature but the entire world. She explains that Alice Walker writes about all those things which are a taboo for the other Black writers. She explores that Alice Walker writes about lesbianism-the relationship of Celie and Shug, male concept of God which she eradicates in the novel by using 'It' for God instead of 'Him', and many other things which was very sensitive and always controversial for the other writers. But the researcher explains that Alice Walker had already argued in one of the interviews with O'Brian that whatever she is writing is the real

thing which has happened to her and it's a part of not only her life but other black people as well.

### 3. Woman at Point Zero

Woman at Point Zero is a novel written by Nawal El Saadawi who is often called the mother of Arab Feminism. This novel is based on the true event where the writer meets Firdaus, the protagonist of this novel in a jail in Egypt. The writer got very much attracted towards Firdaus as she was the only person she has ever met in her life who wanted to die. She didn't even appeal for life time imprisonment instead of the death sentence. She was a very quiet girl who just had one wish to die. The writer got so enchanted to know her story, but Firdaus refused to meet her like she refused to meet others. But the writer never gave up the wish to meet her and finally she got the chance as Firdaus agreed to meet her. Firdaus's life was full of struggle and sufferings caused to her by the males in her life. This made her hate men so much that she just wanted to die to free herself from this society which is patriarchal. "But with each of men I ever knew, I always overcome by a strong desire to lift my arm high up over my head and bring my hand smashing down on his face"(112).

Firdaus narrated her story to the writer by putting light on various aspects of life prevalent in the society which dominates women at every step.

#### 3.1 Female Mutilation

Female mutilation is one curse present in the society which is prevalent in almost all the African and Middle East countries. This practice is nowhere present in Islam but the irony is that it is conducted around the world in the name of Islam and the women being ignorant accepts it without hesitation as they think if they will speak against this practice, they will go against their religion. This is the monopoly of the males to dominate the women so that they should not consider themselves superior to the males. According to UNICEF's report entitled *Changing a harmful social convention: Female Genital Mutilation* in Innocenti Digest, it is argued that every year almost 3 million girls are subjected to this cruel practice which is often life threatening to them. This report also stated that this practice is not even prevalent in Islam.

Same happened with Firdaus also. She was just a child and one day her aunt came and just cut her clitoris and she being a kid only thought that she did some mistake and her mother gave her punishment. She cried all night in pain but there was nobody to take care of her. This is very sad. The mother who has gone through the same pain makes her daughter also to suffer the pain.

### **3.2 Education**

Education is one of the most important issues raised by feminists across the globe as when women will get education; they will be aware of their rights and can stand on their own as independent women. But the irony is that girls are mostly deprived of education and made to believe that women and education are not meant to go together. This is also a monopoly of the men to make women realise that they are inferior to the males and cannot match their standards. Mary Wollstone Craft, a great feminist in her book *Vindication of the Rights of Women: With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* speak about how much education is important to women for their survival and emancipation. She states that education is very important for the women as well as the nation to empower it.

Firdaus was also deprived of education initially and the shocking part is that she got education only when her parents died. Once she asked her uncle to take her along with him to Cairo. He asked her what she will do there and when she replied that she will study in the university, to which her uncle laughed and said, 'University is only for men'. This is what males do to women making them feel that they are inferior. And this leaves a great mental scar in the mind of the girls in the form of inferiority complex. Firdaus got her education after the death of her parents when her uncle took her with him to Cairo and she even passed her secondary education. She stood second in the school and eighth in the state in her secondary school examination but the irony was that nobody was there for her. She wanted to continue her education and wanted to achieve her dream of going to university but her uncle's wife stopped her education and wanted her to get married as soon as possible. 'Woman is another woman's greatest enemy' is a very common phrase and her aunt proved this thing. Just for the sake of money they got her married to a man who was almost thrice her age and was a widower with a deformity. Marriage in these countries is a business which let a girl's parent or guardian to earn money.

Firdaus was a girl who wanted to do something big in her life, but as she was dependent on her uncle she had to surrender. Initially she protested by running away from the house but as soon as she was in the streets she was chased by a man and this was so frightening to her that she does not remember that how she got back home and how she got married.

### **3.3 Mahr**

Mahr or the marriage gift, according to the Islam belongs to the woman only but the irony is that it is taken right away from her family and basically marriage is just a business. It



is narrated in The Holy Qur'an in Chapter 4 Surah An-Nisa that a man is forbidden to inherit a woman without her will and the women should not be treated with harshness and Mahr should not be taken away in any case and if the man dislikes or hates the woman then he is hates the thing in which Allah has put abundance of goodness. "Nor should you put constraint on them (women) so that you take away part of what you have given" (Surah an-Nisa, 4:19). But what happens in reality is a different thing. Most of the men ill-treat their wives and moreover a girl is hardly asked about her will of marrying a man and the worst part is that the Mahr is also taken away by the family. And the same happened to Firdaus as well. She was married against her will and her Mahr was taken away by her uncle and now the worst thing was coming to her in the form of domestic violence.

### **3.4 Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is the most burning topics which are prevalent in almost all parts of the world. This domestic violence is the most dangerous thing which a man does to his wife. This domestic violence leaves the women not only physically hurt, but mentally hurt as well. This violence distorts the identity of the woman and she began to think that she is inferior to the man in almost everything. In a report entitled *Spousal Violence in Egypt* (2010) by Ibrahim F.Kharboush, Farzanah Roudi-Fahimi, Hanna M.Ismial, Heba M. Mamdouh, Yasmine Y. Muhammad, May M. Tawfik, Omnia G. El Sharkawy, and Hassan N. Sallam in Population Reference Bureau explored the conditions in which the Egyptian women suffer this domestic violence done to them by their spouses. This report defines the concept of 'domestic violence' according to the UN which states that, "Any act of gender based violence that result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (pp.2). This report argued that one third of Egyptian woman faces this domestic violence, according to the 2005 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey.

Firdaus was also suffering the same domestic violence. Firdaus's husband didn't love her; he just used to do sex with her without caring about her feelings. Firdaus felt nothing. She was living a life of a girl who had no dreams and ambitions left in her life. He used to beat her and Firdaus used to take it without resistance because once when she went to her uncle's place after being beaten by her husband, her uncle turned her down and sent her back. This is the reality of the society, after marriage the girl's parent think as if she is dead and doesn't support her especially in case of leaving her husband. But Firdaus was not like other

girls, she stood against her husband and one day when he was beating her in front of the society, she just ran away with her secondary school certificate in order to fulfil her dreams.

### **3.5. Prostitution and Self Emancipation**

But destiny was still not in favour of her and she met Bayoumi, who bluffed her in the name of job and took her to his home and started caring for her. Firdaus was so innocent that she thought he loved her and they develop physical intercourse. Every night he used to come in dark and do it. But one day she realised that the body was very heavy and when she asked him who he was, she got the reply that how does it matter to her? This is so pathetic. Bayoumi made her a prostitute and used her for money without even letting her know. He even used to lock her in the apartment in the day time when he went out and also used to beat her a lot. She was all trapped but one day she ran away from there with the help of the neighbour.

But this was not the end of her sufferings. As she was sitting on the bench near river Nile, thinking about her life, she met a woman who looked very elegant and from an aristocratic class. The woman's name was Sharifa and she asked her who has done this to her? Firdaus was amazed as when she was taking the names of men, she even said Bayoumi. She took her to her apartment and made her realise that her body is not for free and she can earn a lot of money with it. Sharifa actually made her a high class prostitute and Firdaus also didn't resist to it as she got enchanted with money and the comfort which Sharifa showed her. But in reality Sharifa was also using her only for the money which she realised when a man named Fawzy came and told her the fact. She ran away from there as well and when she reached the street, it was night and as a girl walking alone in the street, man will chase her and the same happened to Firdaus and the irony is that the man who chased her was not a common man but a policeman. And the worst part was that he took her and promised her to give her money but didn't give her anything. This was the time when she realised that she can be a prostitute on her own and can earn her living without depending on anyone. This is the perfect example of fifth wave feminism which makes women to believe that prostitution is not a curse but just like other professions to earn a living. Firdaus became very popular and started demanding more money than other prostitutes. She lived in a big apartment, ate good food and learnt the ways of materialistic life that everything can be achieved with money. She even made friends and the best part was that she had a library in her apartment and whenever she felt like reading she could do that without any barrier. But one day again destiny played its role and her friend who was a journalist told her that she was not a respectable woman.

This affected her so much that she was hurt deep inside and now her new aim in life was to be a respectable woman. She left this prostitution and applied for a job with her secondary school certificate and finally she got one and lived in a very small apartment just to earn respect. During her job she realised the condition of employed women was very bad. They were always chased by the men and the worst part was that they were given very low wages even though doing the same amount of work. But Firdaus protected herself from all these men and did her work honestly. And finally she fell in love with a man in the same office who used to appreciate her and finally her dream of getting married and earning the status of a respectable woman was to be achieved soon. She was very happy but again destiny played its role and the man married the chairman's daughter only to get a promotion. This left a deep scar on her mind and broke her completely. Now she gave up the idea of being a respectable woman and started her profession of prostitution again. This was the time when she realised that prostitution was better than being a wife as wife was doing sex with the permit of marriage. She is always enslaved and cannot do anything on her own. At least prostitutes have their own lives and decided what she wants. She again became a very successful prostitute and lived her life according to her wish. But a woman can never live successfully in the society and the same happened to her also. A man named Marzouk who was pimp came into her life and forced her to keep her pimp. When she refused, he gave her threat and when she went to the police for help, there she realised that Marzouk being a man had more contacts than her and she had to submit her wish to him. He started earning more and used her only for money and one day he wanted to develop physical intercourse with her and when she resisted, it turned into a fight and finally she murdered her with the knife. She was shocked, but at the same time she was so relaxed by killing Marzouk that she felt that she took the revenge from the men of her life who only used her. She went out and again as walking alone on the street attracts men, a car came and took her to a palace. He was the son of the king. He developed intercourse with her and when he tried to give her the money, she cut the money into pieces as if she was tearing all the money which she even earned in her life. She told him the reality that she is a murderer and he started laughing and didn't believe her. She slapped him and he got so scared of her and finally the police came and took her to the jail.

The most interesting part was that Firdaus narrated the story to the writer on the day of her execution when she knew that the writer cannot help her. She just wanted to be free from this male dominated society and wanted to go to a place free from all the men. It is very

sad to note that Islam being such a great religion giving equal rights and status to women is manipulated and portrayed as it deprives women from these rights. And it is the fault of all the men who manipulate religion according to their convenience to dominate women. And thus, to break such male chauvinism women like Firdaus has to take such decision in her life.

#### **4. The Color Purple**

The Color Purple by Alice Walker is a beautiful book which gained the writer worldwide recognition. This book depicts the story of Celie an Afro-American girl living in Georgia. This book portrays the journey of a woman towards her emancipation after suffering so much in her life. This book is in the form of letters which Celie wrote to express her pain and emancipation.

##### **4.1 Bitter Childhood**

Celie in her life struggle a lot right from her childhood only. She was raped by the person whom she called her father and the worst part was that she was only 14 at that time. She was threatened by her father not to tell it to anybody, so she started writing letter to the God as she can express her feelings only to God. This was not the end of cruelty. Her father even though he was her stepfather impregnated her twice and took away both her children in the forest. This is really sad and shocking. But still Celie was a strong woman who wanted to do something big with her life, she was a very bright student and wanted to study but her father didn't allow her to study as he got her pregnant and didn't want to let her go to school with a big belly. The innocence of Celie lies when she thought that she is getting fat and this was the reason why her father was not allowing her to go to school. As they grow up, Nettie, her sister had a boyfriend who wanted to marry her. But the problem was that he was already divorced and even had kids. When he came for the marriage proposal, her father showed him Celie instead of Nettie and even told him that Celie can be a good wife as she can do lots of work and can handle his children as well. "But I can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh though, but I specs you know that. She spoiled twice (pp.9). Her father was the one who impregnated her twice and the way he was saying this to Mr\_\_ was quite surprising. This is complete hypocrisy of her father. He even warned Mr\_\_ that, "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 man" (10). And finally they got her married to Mr\_\_ without even asking her. She accepted this and thought may be after this marriage her life will change, but her wedding day went running from the oldest son of Mr.\_ He was not in favour of his father getting married again and in anger he threw a rock on

Celie's head. The irony was that Celie was so bleeding but still her daddy just told him not to do it and that too only once. The husband is supposed to be the protector of his wife but still he took it lightly.

Celie had a very good relationship with her sister. She loved her dearly even though Mr\_\_ wanted to marry Nettie only. Nettie once visited Celie after running away from the house because she can't take the cruelty of their father. When Nettie came there she realised that Celie is not having any respect in the family. Even the kids used to call Celie by her name. Nettie made Celie realise that she needs to fight for her rights and should stand for it but Celie was so innocent, she simply replied, "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive"(pp.18). Mr\_\_ was always trying to impress Nettie and when Nettie rejected his advances and tried to encourage Celie to fight for her rights, Mr\_\_ kicked her out of his house. This had a great effect on Celie as if she was left all alone but Mr\_\_ hardly cared about his wife.

#### **4.2 Marriage and the Struggle**

A wife's life is most difficult in almost all parts of the world. A wife should feel protected and most importantly respected in her husband's house. But the irony is that the wife is always considered as an outsider and in this case of Celie it was even worst. Her husband didn't love her, and did not even respect her. She was simply playing a role of maid all day and at night the role of a sex partner to her husband. She never actually felt that warmth which a wife deserves in her life. And the example of hypocrisy was when Mr\_\_ used to beat her and when his son Harpo asked him why he beats his wife, to this Mr\_\_ replied, "Cause she my wife, plus, she stubborn. All women good for-he don't finish"(pp.23). Who talks about his wife like this and that too to his own son? This is the mentality of almost all the men around the world. They think that beating their wives is a very proud thing which makes them men. And Celie had accepted this domestic violence as her destiny and it was very sad how she reacts to this.

He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. He says, Celie, git the belt. The children are 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. Thats how come I know trees fear man." (pp.23)

#### **4.3. Influences of Celie, Lesbianism and Her Emancipation**

This book not only portrays the women who are submissive like Celie, but Alice Walker has portrayed 2 strong women, namely, Sophie and Shug Avery, in this novel who helped in the emancipation of Celie. Sophie is the wife of Mr\_\_ son Harpo. She is a very strong woman. She got pregnant before the marriage and when Harpo brought her to meet his father, Mr\_\_ was not happy at all. He saw her stomach and right away asked him who the father was? When she replied Harpo, Mr\_\_ was not convinced and said, “Young women no good these days, he say. Got they legs open to every Tom, Dick and Harry” (31). This is really what most of the men think about the strong and independent women. But Sophie was a strong girl. She didn’t take this insult from Me\_\_ and replied,

..What I need to marry Harpo for? He still lives here with you. What food and clothes he git, you buy....She say, Naw. I ain’t living in the street. I’m living with my sister and her husband. They say I can live with them for the rest of my life. She stand up, big, strong, healthy girl, and she say, Well, nice visiting. I’m going home.” (pp.32)

This is what Celie can never do. She was amazed to see this. And when Harpo got married to her, Mr\_\_ didn’t want Celie to be with her as he was afraid that Celie will become like her. And Mr\_\_ even convinced his son Harpo that he should control his wife, “Wives are like children. You have to let’em known who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound eating” (pp.35). But Sophia was not that kind of girl who will take the beating from her husband. If he tried to beat her, she used to beat him back and this made Harpo helpless. Sophia was the perfect example of fighter in Celie’s life. All her life she had been fighting, first with her daddy, then with her brothers, cousins and uncles. “A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men” (pp.39). The question is this only. Why can’t a girl be safe in the family of men? The men in the family are supposed to be the protector of the girl, but it is mostly wrong and the protector turns out to be the hunter. She even told Celie how she got tired of Harpo as Harpo doesn’t love her now much and think only to make her work.

“I don’t like to go to bed with him no more. Used to be when he touch me I’d go all out my head. Now when he touches me I just don’t want to be bothered. Once he got on top of me I think out how that’s where he always want to be.”(pp.63)

Sophia supported Celie and tried to persuade her to fight against the ills of Mr\_\_. But still she could not build the confidence in her which was build by Shug Avery. Sophie took a very bold decision in her life which Celie could not ever think of and that was leaving her husband. She was a very bold girl. She cannot take if anything would go against her. One fine example of this is when the Mayor's wife asked her to work for her and to this she said "Hell No". This made Mayor very angry and slapped her. As Sophia was a very strong woman, she knocked her back, which landed her to jail. But the condition of the women prisoners is very bad which actually broke Sophia. But still somehow Sophia managed to survive in the jail and finally she was released from it.

Shug Avery played a very vital role in Celie's life and the irony is that she was the girlfriend of Celie's husband. Shug Avery was a very famous person in the town. She was basically like a rock star and this was the reason why Mr's father didn't let him marry her. This is the real face of the patriarchal society. A girl is defined by the profession and not by her character. But after so many years, Shug Avery was back in the town and the rumours were that she was very sick. This was the life changing twist in Celie's life. Mr\_\_ brought Shug home without even asking Celie. But Celie didn't even mind it and the interesting part was that Celie herself wanted to meet Shug from the day she heard about her long back before her marriage. When Shug came to the house, initially she didn't talk to Celie much and was not even giving proper interest to Mr\_\_. But Celie without even objecting to her attitude did all her work, from bathing her, feeding her and what not. The day Shug starting talking to Celie, she realised that Celie was not given much importance in the family. She was not given any recognition in the family and she was there like nobody. Shug started to make Celie realise her importance.

A notable feature of lack or African feminism is lesbianism and the same was happening to Celie. She was getting attracted to Shug as she was the only person who understood her and in return Shug also got attracted to her. Celie started expressing herself to Shug and told the truth about her marriage, "Mr\_\_ marry me to take care of his children. I marry him because my daddy made me. I don't love Mr\_\_ and he don't love me" (pp.61). They even developed sexual intercourse and Shug build a deep confidence in Celie's life. She made her feel the pleasure through sex which Mr\_\_ never made her feel. Why two women come close to each other and develop a lesbian relationship. The answer is beautifully explained by Barbara Smith in her essay, *Towards a Black Feminist Criticism* in which she tells us that when two women feel the same pain, they get connected to each other and finally

build a lesbian relationship which is the outcome of trust which they have for each other. Same happened to Celie and Shug. Celie even told her that Mr\_\_ used to beat her. To this Shug promised that she won't leave the house until Mr\_\_ stop beating her. Celie almost shared everything with her even how her father used to physically exploit her. "It hurt me, you know, I say. I was just going on fourteen. I never even thought out men having nothing down there so big. It scares me just to see it. And the way it poke itself and grow" (pp.102).She felt secure sharing things with her because she was the only one who listened to her. She discussed how she felt all these years as she was all alone and who even she loved was taken away from her.

My mama die, I tell Shug. My sister Nettie ran away. Mr\_\_ come get me to take care his rotten children. He never asks me anything out myself. He clam on top of me and fucks and fucks, even my head bandaged. Nobody ever lives me, I say. (pp.103)

Shug played such a vital role in her life and even showed her the letters of Nettie, which Mr\_\_ had been hiding from her. She showed her that her sister always wrote and missed her whom she thought of being dead. Through the letters, Celie came to know about her children who were from his father and were still alive. These letters from Nettie made Celie hate her husband who only used her for work and sex. Finally Shug decided to take Celie along with her to Tennessee and started her business of tailoring and sewing pants. She became independent woman and lived her life freely. But one day she went to Georgia for the visit where she came to know about the condition of Mr\_\_ that he had changed a lot and had become a better person who was left all alone. Finally Mr\_\_ and Celie reconciled and lived a happy life which she always wanted and got only when she believed in herself and became self-independent.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper explores how women living in two completely different countries suffer the same pain of discrimination based on gender. This paper explains that no matter of what race, region a woman belongs to, she has to suffer the same pain based on gender discrimination. A woman has to suffer only if she is born with a tag of woman. This paper also explores that these two books not only portray the pain and sufferings of women, but also the emancipation which they achieved through their journeys. Even though the emancipation of Firdaus may not be acceptable as she choose to die to free her from this male



dominated society, but on the other hand Celie shows us the real emancipation by being self-dependant and making her life free and happy. But the reason for Firdaus choosing such a decision may be because she was not having a strong support like Celie had in the form of Shug Avery. But it was explored that both these women suffered a lot in their lives and they depicted the lives of almost all the women across the world. This paper provides a comparative study of two different cultures, religions and regions which show the subjugation of women and they grow out of it to achieve their emancipation. This paper also explores that women who are subjugated should consider Firdaus and especially Celie as their motivation to raise their voice against their domination and should work for their emancipation. In short, even though feminism is not a new term, but still women are fighting for their rights depending upon their particular regions and cultures but this paper explored that women across the globe suffer the pain which is same.

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