

A Study of Slave Psychology as a Result of Slavery in The Context of the Color Purple

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Abstract

Slavery is an issue of great importance in American history. It affected black generation very badly and imprinted unforgettable impacts on their lives. Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982), Pulitzer Prize winner novel is a remarkable work which has been written in Afro-American scenario.

Present study aims to investigate the psychological effects of slavery on behavior of slaves and their imitation of their oppressors. Current study signifies the basic psychological impacts produced by oppression and gives information about slave psychology. The prime importance of present work is that it draws a relationship between literature and psychology, and describes the significance of literature for studying human mind and behavior.

In accordance with current research work Frantz Fanon's theory of Alienation and Psychology of Oppressed (1961) has been followed. Qualitative mode of paradigm has been used and data has been analyzed textually. Present work has found that slavery has immense affects on slaves'

mind set. They unintentionally imitate their masters and try to become tyrant like them and show their violence towards weaker.

Key Words: Slavery, psychology, oppressed, behavior.

Introduction

Slavery is considered as one of the most cursed and devilish evil observed by human history. It has its deepest roots all over the globe. American society has been affected very badly due to slavery and its aftermaths. Slavery left painful physical and mental scars on the American victims of slavery. Mental health and cognitive capabilities of slaves turned downcast. Slavery affected each and every sphere of life of Black Americans.

According to Fanon (1961) a shift took place in behaviors of slaves. As a result of slavery the oppressed slaves were affected mentally to an extent that they also became violent in spite of being victimized by oppressors they brought out their frustration by harming those individuals who were weaker than them and tried to imitate their oppressors to become dominant. Afro American women slaves were their target specifically as they were weaker than men physically.

Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* is a string of this chain, it has variety of concepts about slavery and it has discussed the life style of slave women and behaviors of slave men towards colored women. Present study aims to focus on psychological impact of slavery and discuss the behavior of slaves and their unintentional imitation of their oppressors.

Current study follows Frantz Fanon's (1961) theory of 'Alienation and Psychology of Oppressed' which argues about slave psychology and changing in their behaviors and their unintentional imitation of their

oppressors. Present study is based on Qualitative mode of inquiry due to its subjectivity.

Statement of the Problem

Slavery and its effects on oppressed race are focused in this research. Present study focuses on tracing out the effects of oppression on slaves. The concept that how the oppressed nation or race gets damaged morally and imitates its oppressors while being brutal and senseless to the weaker individuals (especially women) around them. On the other hand this study tries to find out the impacts of their oppression on their attitudes. in the novel *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker.

Research Objective

To investigate the behavior of slaves as imitators of their oppressors.

Research Question

What are the ways to which oppressed classes acquire the behavior of their oppressors?

Significance of the study

The purpose of present research is to find out the basic psychological effects that are produced by oppression, racism, brutality and sexism to dehumanize mankind. The Afro Americans have been oppressed and enslaved by the whites for centuries.. History reveals the fact that the enslaved people acquire the behaviors of the oppressors and become ruthless towards those who are weaker than them. It is quite a psychological phenomenon at a stage slavery makes the men senseless and cruel. Mostly every oppressor had been living as the oppressed in one or another form in history.

The current study will analyze how mankind has been suffering due to ruthless slavery and oppressions. The generations are depressed because of

the depressed laps. This study provokes to think that what strategies should be adopted to eradicate slavery from world and how to mitigate the psychological issues which create imbalance in human society due to every kind of harassment, oppression and exploitation and helps to know how a better world having equality, harmony, social tolerance and peace beyond all differences with the help of literature. This study also provides information to researchers and scholars about psychological impacts of slavery. The novices of field of psychology can also study this work as it also deals with psychological issues.

Delimitation

This research study is delimited to only one novel of Alice Walker. Novel *The Color Purple* (1982) is a large novel it contains variety of subjects and different themes but the present study only focuses on one aspect that is psychological aspect.

Literature Review

Slavery left unrecoverable scars on human history. Engle (1884) in his work 'Theory of the origin of patriarchy' comments that slavery and each type of suppression is the outcome of patriarchy. Different types of oppression and slavery are usually formed and developed by powerful and slavery was a legal trade in which people were considered personal property.

Crucial and brutal form of slavery was a part of American history and Europe during 17th and 18th century slavery was a flourishing business in America. Slavery in America started when the first African slave was brought to North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. Slavery was practiced in America and American colonies in era of 17th and 18th century while the abolition movement has its roots in 1861-1865 after American civil war which played the role of 'first great awakening' Though

the previous forms of slavery are vanished but it effected human psychology a lot it has a great impact on mental health of people who were in slaved and it influenced their behaviors towards other as well.

Frantz Fanon (1961) in his theory of 'Alienation and Psychology of the Oppressed' addressed the same issue while analyzing on Fanon's specific theory, Jinadu (1986) said that in a particular point mental violence becomes a type of cultural imperialism in perspective of the colonial condition. While Fanon (1961) himself argued that alienation of the locals may take a shape of amalgamation and assimilation cultural identity will lost as a result and the native who are oppressed copy their owners or oppressors. Same dimension in 'The Color Purple' (1982) has been found Walker depicts the abusive and senseless nature of colored men who lack values and sensitivity at times.

Their psychological drawback is shown boldly in the novel. The behavior and attitude of colored men towards black woman is described very effectively that how strong specie (colored man) showed his violence towards weaker one (black woman) this act is nothing but an imitation of white masters who oppressed Black community without the difference of their gender.

Caute (1970) argued on Fanon (1961) theory of Alienation and Psychological oppression that there is a similarity between Marx and Fanon, Marx talked about alienation in class system and labor division while Fanon's concern was imperialist division, about exploiters and exploited monarchs and ruled. Fanon is considered as a great revolutionary psychologist his theory has an important resemblance with Marxism. Both Marxism (1859) and Theory of Alienation and Psychological oppression (1961) are based on division either division of labor or division of societal class in other words division of oppressed and oppressors.

Perinab (1983) comments that Marx also talked about alienation like Fanon he described alienation a causing agent of self fulfillment, the oppressed class select violence for their fulfillment .Fanon insisted that alienated persons recover their mental loss and lacking of spirituality by showing violence.

Onwuanibe (1983) further argued on Fanon's theory that alienation of the local people may shaped in to assimilation, they loss their identity their cultural norms and imitate the rulers and suppressors. An oppressor is an ideal for oppressed, he tried to copy his master and when an oppressed lost his identity and mingle with foreign culture then they idealize their masters, they show violence towards weaker class either on the basis of gender or racial group for taking out their frustration and self relaxation.

Kaplan (1999) discussed that Fanon's views of trauma make people understand about phenomenon of trauma, revolution and Psychology. Fanon is considered the one who knows the psychology of slaves and further impacts of slavery, trauma is one of them he analyzed the nature of trauma and mindsets of slaves. Fanon's view of oppressed regarding imitating of oppressors is actually influenced by Sartre. In translated version of Sartre's 'Note books for an ethics' (1992) it has mentioned that in order to change the situation oppressed people should also take refuge in violence they must use violence against violent.

Theory of alienation and psychological oppression (1961) has its roots in views of Sartre, where he said that for avoiding harsh effects of violence, oppressed tried to find out his ways by using violence for making himself satisfied and dominant and he thought use of violence might protect himself and he used it as a tool of protection.

In *Color Purple* (1982) same dilemma has been portrayed that protagonist of the novel faced violence from her step father. Though they both belonged from the same oppressed ethnic group but physically weaker one, the protagonist faced sexual violence by her step father. Beside the fact that her step father was an African Black and victim of slavery but he showed violence which shows his imitation of his oppressors. When this fact is observed widely it also throws light on behavior of Black men towards Black women. The attitude of Black man (stronger) has a reflection of behavior of his masters and they showed their violence and made their female (weaker) to suffer from mental trauma.

Henson (1876) described his personal experience about slave psychology and their use of violence as an act of imitation of their masters. He said his parents were owned by the same master and when his mother was raped she cried and his father showed brutal physical violence towards rapist and abused him harshly. Though he described his father light hearted and good man, previously. An individual's traits and personality can be affected by slavery. Slavery brings non removable prints on minds and behaviors of slaves. Though slaves themselves were victims but they tried to victimize others specially the weaker ones to fulfill their need of psychological satisfaction.

Bhuvaneswari and Jacob (2012) in their research paper 'An ecofeminist study of Alice Walker's the color purple' stated that the novel shows seminal views and ecological awareness and safety of atmosphere in accordance with ecocriticism and feminist criticism.

It is said that the connection between women oppression and damaging nature by patriarchy confining women and nature commercially. In perspective of ecofeminism Walker urged the maintenance of symbiosis in

which there is no patriarchy and harm for environment. Bhuvanewari and Jacob (2012) concluded that ecofeminism is anti dualistic in its nature and it does not believe on concept of dualism. It denies superior excellence and follows immanence and subjectivity with nature, therefore ecofeminism tries to change the men who are prior reason of oppression.

Jackson (1998) in her research essay 'The color purple: Historical and political insight' claimed that the novel contains a societal message which is about social struggle of women, and their efforts for freedom in a male dominating society where they were considered inferior. Equal treatment of genders is a vital issue in Walker's life and it is depicted in her novel too. Walker was influenced by historical step of USA's supreme court in 1970 court started a process of amendment which dealt with government act of discrimination based on gender.

Jackson (1998) concluded that the civil rights movement and war of USA against Vietnam influenced the writings of Walker.

The historical and political events have a great influence on society and Walker and her literary works are also influenced by them. Either gender issues or views of resistance against both aspects are found in 'The color purple' which has its roots in social and political history.

Amira (2010) in her research thesis 'Celie's emancipation process in Alice Walker's The color purple' signified the salvation process of the novel's protagonist through the protagonist woman specially Black woman and her efforts for emancipation are focused. Walker suggested the woman to fight against evil of male dominance and sexism. Though Celie the protagonist was sexually abused but she transformed herself made herself economically independent and mentally strong. Amira (2010) explores the Feminism in

Walker's 'The color purple' the crisis, tragedies and endurance of pain in a woman's life are discussed along with her efforts and story of her success.

Present study exhibits a novel angle of the novel *The Color Purple* (1982) it depicts the behavior of black men towards the black women. The study also shows the behavior of slaves their unintentional imitation of their masters and provides information about slave psychology and its aftermaths. Previous works on the same novel didn't address this psychological aspect. Therefore, current research work fills this gap and help the future researchers to study from this scenario.

Mode of Inquiry

Qualitative mode of inquiry has been opted in present research work due to subjectivity in its nature.

According to Cresswell (2013) Qualitative research depends upon text and have exceptional steps regarding analysis of data, and represent on various design. The result of Qualitative research informs personal elucidation in its procedure.

Research Design

Cresswell (2013) defines Research Design as a system and plan that examine the data through extensive assumptions and thorough methods. Different decisions are concerned in investigation of procedure and specific methods of collecting data, analysis and the way of explanation.

Present study is kind of descriptive Research, as it focuses on identifying, documenting, and knowing through interpretation of world views, values, thoughts, beliefs and specific phenomena under investigation. While working on the topic the behavioral changes of characters are critically analyzed. Present work has deductive approach.

The text is analyzed textually on the basis of the theoretical framework focusing on Alienation and psychology of the oppressed (1961) in order to answer the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The following theory examined this research study. Slavery as psychological violence and its further impacts on oppressed is explained by Frantz Fanon's (1961) theory of Alienation and Psychology of the oppressed. According to this theory the hostility of the native may take the shape of integration, the loss of the cultural identity or its distraction, through which the social class imitate the oppressors.

This theory has been taken for analysis of slave psychology and psychological effects on oppressed race. It explains when a slave imitates his master then he tries to develop his mind set according to his owner and show his violence towards weaker one (woman).

Analysis

Present study focuses on slave psychology and slave's unintentional imitation of their masters more over, it gives information about slavery as a psychological violence. It also explores the attitude of colored men towards colored women, the inner change which took place in black women and her self acknowledgement and positive relationship of black woman with other fellow women and with her community. The data has analyzed through content analysis and reading lines which are closely related to the objectives of the present study.

“Last spring after little lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say it too soon, Fonso, I ain't well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of these children” (p.7)

The color purple (1982) beautifully depicts the the behavior of slaves and their imitation of their masters. And the use of violence and force which they show towards weaker ones. These lines explain the same condition that how the one stronger character who is physically more powerful shows his forceful attitude towards his wife and how he compels her for physical relationship it also depicts the behavior of colored men towards color women.

“He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say you gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t. first he put his thing up his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying you better shutup and git used to it” (p.7)

These lines are reflecting the misery of black women and the ruthless attitude which she faced from black men the element of violence shows the slave psychology and their unintentional imitation of their owners these lines are specifically depicting the sexual violence and vigorous tyranny and victimization of colored women.

“He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don’t think he kilt it. I think he sold it to a man his wife over Monticello” (p.9)

This a description of other child of the the protagonist these lines show the mental condition of slave and their inhuman attitude they can even sell their own children this event remind the history when slaves themselves were sold to others. Slaves copied their masters and did the same shameful act.

“He beat me dressing trampy but he do it to me any way” (p.13)

When slaves imitate their owners they tried to be dominant just like them for that purpose they use violence and tyranny even without any reason they tortured the weak ones. Celie was victim of her step father she suffered

occasionally with or without any reason and her step father satisfied his false ego by beating and tormenting her.

“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 bout no new one. He pick up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breasts. His daddy say Don’t do that! But that’s all he say” (p.15)

When slaves started copying their masters they become senseless like them they never care for those who are suppressed, in perspective of novel it has shown when Celie was physically hurt by her step son her husband did not try to save her rather he became senseless and let his son to hurt Celie.

“Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr.---- say, Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for--- he don’t finish. He just tuck his chin over the paper like he do. Remind me of Pa” (p.21)

Slaves developed brutal harshness in their behaviors and they show it time to time. For taking out their frustration and for sake of prominence they brutally behaved with weaker without any reason when Celie’s step son asked his father why he beat Celie he simply said because she is my wife. It means by following their masters slaves expressed brutality towards others.

“You ever hit her? Mr----ast.

Harpo look down at his hands. Naw suh, he say low, embarrass” (p.28)

Its an important fact that usually stronger ones try to dominate over weaker and for this purpose they can adopt any way. Slaves were badly influenced by their masters they tried to imitate their way and expressed their violence against those who were weaker than them. In the same context of the novel the colored male charcter physically and sexually harmed black women, it was considered shameful to avoid beating women.

“I can’t believe it, she say. She sit down on the bench next to me real hard, like she drop.

What he beat you for? She ast.

For being me and not you” (p.47)

Slaves were inspired by their oppressors they used violence for no reason. Celie told Shug that her husband beat her because she is not like Shug she is not that much attractive and beautiful, she is not as strong as Shug. But these reasons does not have any sense but still her husband beat her and tortured her physically and mentally.

Findings and Conclusion

Present study focused to investigate the slave psychology, impacts of slavery and behaviors of slaves and their unintentional imitation of their oppressors. The data which has been analyzed is based on the content present in the novel "The Color Purple" in order to answer the research questions. In the light of the analyzed data the findings of present study explored that slave unintentionally imitate their rulers in order to get dominancy and to overcome their mental frustration. Moreover, it has proved that men slave victimized female women and violated them physically mentally and sexually.

Slavery has various impacts on a person who suffers from it. It affected the enslaved in two major ways. First they tried to become like their oppressors and the second impact is very sensitive regarding mental health. It makes a sufferer incompetent emotionally and makes them feel worthless. It snatched self esteem of slaves they become depressive some times for whole life.

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