

Significance of Purple Colour in *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*

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Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, is a groundbreaking and influential novel that explores themes of oppression, empowerment, and resilience among African American women in the early 20th-century American South. The story is told through the eyes of Celie, a poor, uneducated black woman who endures severe abuse and marginalization at the hands of the men in her life. Through a series of letters written to God and later to her sister Nettie, Celie recounts her harrowing experiences and gradual journey toward self-discovery and empowerment.

Set against a backdrop of racial segregation and patriarchal dominance, *The Color Purple* addresses significant social issues such as racism, sexism, and the legacy of slavery. Walker's narrative shines a light on the systemic injustices that African American women faced and highlights the importance of female solidarity and community in overcoming these challenges. The novel is renowned for its rich character development, particularly the transformations of Celie and other key female characters like Shug Avery and Sofia, who defy societal norms and assert their independence.

The Colour Purple is also noted for its innovative use of the epistolary form, which creates an intimate and personal connection between the reader and Celie's innermost thoughts and feelings. This narrative technique, combined with Walker's powerful prose and vivid storytelling, has earned the novel critical acclaim and a lasting impact on literature and social discourse. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award, and its themes and characters have resonated

with readers worldwide, solidifying its status as a classic in American literature.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, published in 2003, is a poignant and evocative novel that explores themes of family, faith, freedom, and political turmoil in postcolonial Nigeria. The story is narrated by fifteen-year-old Kambili Achike, whose affluent yet oppressive household is dominated by her devoutly Catholic and authoritarian father, Eugene. Set against the backdrop of political instability and societal change, the novel chronicles Kambili's journey from silence to self-expression, highlighting her struggles and growth in the face of familial and societal pressures.

Purple Hibiscus delves deeply into the complexities of Nigerian life, contrasting the rigid, oppressive environment of Kambili's home with the more liberal and nurturing atmosphere of her Aunty Ifeoma's household. Through this dichotomy, Adichie examines the impact of domestic tyranny and religious fanaticism, while also celebrating the resilience and strength found within familial bonds and community support.

The novel's rich narrative and complex characters provide a window into the intersections of personal and political identities, making *Purple Hibiscus* not only a story of personal awakening but also a broader commentary on the quest for autonomy and justice in a postcolonial society. Adichie's masterful storytelling and keen insight into human emotions and social dynamics have earned *Purple Hibiscus* critical acclaim, solidifying its place as a significant work in contemporary African literature.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the significance of the color purple in two prominent literary works: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. By exploring the symbolic meaning and thematic implications of the color purple within these texts, this study seeks to elucidate how it contributes to the overarching narratives, character development, and cultural contexts presented by the authors. Specifically, the paper will examine how the

color purple represents themes of resilience, transformation, and identity in the face of adversity, and how it bridges the cultural and temporal gaps between the two novels.

The present paper aims to study the significance and importance of purple colour in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In both the novels, colour remains symbolic and never really emerges. Since purple colour symbolizes bravery, femininity, spirituality, courage, etc. Purple colour is related to the life and development of Celie in *The Colour Purple*, how she is abused and dominated by her stepfather first and then by her husband. She is constantly fed on bad-mouthing and humiliation. She met an empowered and strong lady named, Shug and bonded with her, she realizes she can fight back and have a voice of her own. She tastes freedom and courage through her female friendship. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili, who lives a life of silence, as she doesn't speak deliberately to avoid physical abuse of her father. Her father is very strict and controlling. Every little decision in her family and home is taken by her father. She seems shy but chokes on words and stays invisible. She visits her aunty and experiences freedom and free will. She lives a normal life for the first time in her life which most of the teenagers live. This paper analyses complexities in lives of Celie and Kambili through their fathers, which remains a trauma but both of them rises confidently and bravely. Use of descriptive paragons helps us understand thoroughly.

Introduction to Color Symbolism in Literature

Color symbolism in literature is a widely studied topic, reflecting how colors convey deeper meanings and emotions beyond their visual appearance. Scholars have explored the significance of various colors in different cultural and literary contexts, noting that colors can symbolize themes, moods, and character traits. The color purple, in particular, has been associated with themes of spirituality, royalty, and transformation. This literature review examines the existing body of work on color symbolism, with a focus on the significance of the color purple in Alice

Walker's *The Color Purple* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Alice Walker's The Color Purple

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a seminal work that has been extensively analyzed for its use of color symbolism. The novel, set in the early 20th century American South, follows the life of Celie, an African American woman who overcomes severe adversity. Scholars have interpreted the color purple in Walker's novel as a symbol of pain and suffering, as well as a representation of beauty and spiritual growth. According to Jennifer Gillan (*The Color Purple: The Color of Transformation. 1999, pp. 345-367.*), the color purple signifies the bruises and physical abuse Celie endures, while also symbolizing her spiritual awakening and personal growth as she learns to find beauty and love in her life .

Shirley Stave (*The Colour Purple: A Reading of the Novel.2001.*) argues that the color purple in Walker's novel represents a form of resistance and empowerment. The color emerges in moments of transformation and liberation, such as when Celie begins to assert her independence and self-worth. Stave suggests that the color purple acts as a narrative device that marks Celie's journey from victimhood to empowerment.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, set in postcolonial Nigeria, uses the color purple to explore themes of freedom and oppression within a complex socio-political context. Scholars have highlighted the symbolic importance of the purple hibiscus flower, which represents rare beauty and the possibility of change amidst a repressive environment. According to Susan Andrade (*The Purple Hibiscus: cultural and Political Symbolism. 2008, pp. 123-145.*), the purple hibiscus in Adichie's novel symbolizes the fragility and resilience of the characters, particularly Kambili and her family, as they navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity.

Andrew Armstrong (*Floral Imagery in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*. 2010, pp. 89-105.) notes that the purple hibiscus flower serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's growth and maturation. The flower's rarity and beauty mirror Kambili's own journey towards self-discovery and liberation from her father's authoritarian rule. Armstrong suggests that the color purple in Adichie's novel is intricately linked to the theme of personal and political transformation.

Comparative Analyses of Purple Symbolism

Several scholars have undertaken comparative studies of the color purple in both *The Color Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*. These studies often emphasize the thematic parallels and cultural specificities that shape the use of the color in each novel.

For instance, Anne-Marie O'Connor (*Comparative Colour Symbolism: Analyzing The Colour Purple and Purple Hibiscus*. 2012, pp. 205-229) compares the symbolic function of the color purple in both novels, noting that it serves as a marker of trauma and healing in different cultural contexts. O'Connor argues that while Walker uses the color to highlight personal and spiritual growth within the African American experience, Adichie employs it to comment on socio-political issues in Nigeria, such as the impact of colonialism and the struggle for personal autonomy.

Cultural and Historical Contexts

Understanding the cultural and historical contexts of *The Color Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus* is essential for a nuanced interpretation of the color symbolism in both novels. Scholars have explored how the authors' backgrounds and the socio-political environments of their respective settings influence their use of the color purple.

In the context of Walker's novel, critics like Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2000,) have examined the intersections of race, gender, and class in the American South, arguing that the color purple reflects the compounded oppression faced by African American women and

their resilience in overcoming it. Similarly, in Adichie's novel, scholars such as Ato Quayson (*Postcolonial Nigeria in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*. 2009, pp. 741-768.) have analyzed the postcolonial Nigerian context, highlighting how the color purple symbolizes the complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and political instability.

The literature on color symbolism in *The Color Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus* reveals a rich tapestry of meanings associated with the color purple. Scholars have highlighted its dual role as a symbol of suffering and transformation, personal and political liberation, and spiritual and cultural resilience. This literature review underscores the importance of contextual and comparative analyses in understanding the multifaceted significance of the color purple in these two influential works. By situating the color within the broader themes and cultural contexts of each novel, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation on the symbolic power of colors in literature.

Purple is a colour associated with royalty, nobility and wisdom, and it plays an important role in the novel *The Colour Purple*, by Alice Walker, and the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In both the novels, purple is used as a symbol of strength, power, and freedom, as well as a representation of beauty and hope. In *The Colour Purple*, the significance of the colour purple manifests in two main characters in particular, Celie and Shug Avery. Celie is described as wearing a "purple dress and a purple scarf," representing her inner strength and resilience in the face of her oppression. Walker uses the colour purple to represent Celie's strength and potential for liberation. Shug Avery is described as "wearing a purple dress," representing her power and influence in Celie's life. Shug is Celie's mentor and confidante, and her presence in Celie's life symbolizes a new beginning and a reclaiming of Celie's power and dignity.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the colour purple is used to represent the main character Kambili's, growth, potential, and journey of self-discovery. Kambili is described as wearing a "purple T-shirt," which symbolizes her transformation from a timid girl into a brave, confident young woman.

Kambili's purple shirt represents her newly found freedom and courage as she begins to explore the world outside her home. In addition, the purple hibiscus in the novel is a symbol of hope, beauty, and new beginnings as Kambili's journey of self-discovery begins.

The colour purple holds great symbolic significance in both the novels. It is used to represent notions of power, liberation, spirituality, and transformation. Purple, a colour that straddles the line between red and blue, is often associated with royalty and luxury. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the significance of the colour purple can be seen in the form of a hibiscus flower. The hibiscus flower in *Purple Hibiscus* represents freedom, growth, and the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery whereas it is used as a symbol of female empowerment and resilience in *The Colour Purple*. It is worth noting that the significance of the colour in both the novels extends beyond its literal representation. It's not simply an aesthetic choice, but rather a powerful symbol that reflects the themes and struggles of the characters. Purple is a powerful colour that holds great significance in both these novels.

In *The Colour Purple*, purple is a symbol of empowerment and liberation. It represents the transformation and growth of Celie, the main character, as she finds her voice and asserts her identity. Purple also represents spirituality and connection to the divine, as Celie finds solace in her letters to God. Additionally, purple signifies the bond between women, as Celie forms deep connections with other female characters who support and uplift her. Similarly in *Purple Hibiscus*, purple represents rebellion and defiance against oppressive systems. The purple hibiscus flower which blooms despite harsh conditions, symbolizes the resilience and strength of the main character, Kambili. The purple colour is also associated with Kambili's aunt, Auntie Ifeoma, who challenges the strictly religious and political ideologies imposed by her father. Purple becomes a symbol of freedom and individuality as the characters break free from societal expectations. Both novels use purple to convey the idea of self-discovery and personal growth. The characters' journey towards finding their true selves and embracing their uniqueness signifies that one's identity should not be confined by societal norms or expectations.

Purple serves as a reminder of this important truth. Through the use of purple, both novels explore the themes of personal growth, artistic expression, and the power of individuality.

Furthermore, purple represents creativity and imagination. It is often associated with artistic expression and unconventional thinking. In both the novels, purple serves as a catalyst for the characters' artistic endeavours. Celie expresses herself through her letters, while Kambili discovers her passion for writing and storytelling. Celie uses purple ink to write her letters, which becomes a form of creative self-expression and a means of connecting with others. Purple represents the power of storytelling and the ability to shape one's narrative. On the other side, Kambili's passion for writing and storytelling is symbolized by the purple notebooks she uses to record her thoughts. Purple becomes a conduit for their imagination and a way to explore their identity. Purple inspires them to explore their creativity and find solace in their art. In *The Colour Purple*, literature becomes a form of liberation and self-expression for the protagonist, Celie. Through her letters, she finds her voice and shares her experiences, allowing her to reclaim her identity and assert her existence. The act of writing becomes a transformative and empowering form of art for Celie. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, art specifically painting, serves as a means of escape and self-discovery for the main character, Kambili. Through her aunt Ifeoma's encouragement, Kambili begins to explore her creative side and finds solace and freedom in painting. Art becomes a way for Kambili to express her emotions and challenge the oppressive environment in which she lives. These creative outlets become sources of empowerment, personal growth, and resistance against oppressive forces.

One of the special aspects of these novels is the connection between purple and spirituality. In *The Colour Purple*, purple colour is associated with Shug Avery, a character who embodies freedom, sensuality, and a non-traditional approach to religion. Purple represents the spiritual liberation that Celie finds through her relationship with Shug. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, purple is linked with Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili's grandfather, who practices a traditional Igbo religion. Purple symbolizes

the spiritual connection to ancestral traditions and the freedom to worship outside of the constraints of Catholicism. Another connection is from femininity. In *The colour Purple*, purple is closely tied to female empowerment and the reclamation of one's identity. Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery all find strength and liberation through the colour purple. It represents their resilience and ability to rise above societal expectations.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, purple is associated with female strength and rebellion against patriarchal norms. Kambili and her mother, Beatrice, both challenge traditional gender roles. We see the symbolism of purple as a colour of royalty and power. In both novels, purple represents a sense of reality and authority. In *The colour Purple*, purple is associated with Sofia, a strong and independent character who refuses to conform to societal expectations. Her resilience and defiance against oppression are reflected in the colour purple, which symbolizes her royal spirit. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, purple is used to depict the wealth and influence of Eugene, Kambili's father. The purple robes he wears, and the opulence of his lifestyle represent his status and dominance within the family. Purple also symbolizes transformation and growth in these novels.

In *The Colour Purple*, purple flowers and plants are often mentioned, representing the beauty that can emerge from struggle and adversity. The colour purple becomes a metaphor for personal growth and the ability to overcome hardships. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the purple hibiscus flower itself represents transformation. Despite the oppressive environment, the flower blooms, symbolizing the characters' ability to find beauty, potential for growth, and strength in difficult circumstances. Just like the hibiscus flower, Kambili and Jaja undergo a transformation despite their oppressive family environment.

In both novels, God and spirituality play significant roles in the characters' lives. They provide solace, and a sense of purpose. In *The Colour Purple*, God is depicted as a compassionate and loving presence. Celie, the protagonist, finds solace in her letters to God as a way to cope with the abuse and hardships she faces. Through her correspondence, Celie develops a personal relationship with God, which helps her navigate her

struggles and find inner strength. The novel also explores the power of female spirituality through the character of Shug Avery, who challenges traditional religious beliefs and encourages a more personal and inclusive understanding of God. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the portrayal of God and spirituality is influenced by Nigerian culture and Catholicism. The protagonist, Kambili, comes from a deeply religious family, and her father is a devout Catholic. However, as the story unfolds, Kambili begins to question the strict and oppressive nature of her father's religious beliefs. She discovers a different kind of spirituality through her aunt, Ifeoma, who embraces a more open-minded and inclusive approach to faith. Through Ifeoma's influence, Kambili learns that spirituality is not confined to rigid rules but can be found in acts of love, compassion, and personal freedom. Both novels explore the complexities of faith, highlighting the ways in which spirituality can be a source of healing, liberation, and personal growth. They challenge traditional religious institutions and encourage a more personal and inclusive understanding of God.

In both *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*, self-discovery is a central theme. In *The Colour Purple*, Celie embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Through her letters to God and her growing relationship with Shug Avery, Celie begins to question societal expectations and finds her own voice. She learns to love herself and embrace her identity as a black woman, breaking free from the oppressive forces that have controlled her life. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili also undergoes a process of self-discovery. Raised in a strict and abusive household, Kambili's worldview is initially limited. However, as she spends time with her aunt Ifeoma and her cousins, she begins to question her father's authority and the rigid beliefs that have governed her life. Kambili discovers her own voice and learns to express her thoughts and desires, ultimately finding the freedom to be herself. Both novels highlight the importance of self-discovery in overcoming adversity and finding personal liberation. They show that by questioning societal norms and exploring their own identities, the characters are able to reclaim their agency and live authentically.

The novels explore the dynamics of gender roles and the experiences of men and women. In *The Colour Purple*, the novel delves into the oppressive gender roles and power imbalances faced by women, particularly black women, in the early 20th century. Celie and other female characters endure physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of men. However, the novel also portrays the strength and resilience of women as they navigate these challenges. Through their relationships with each other and their own personal growth, the female characters challenge societal expectations and find empowerment. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the novel explores the patriarchal society of Nigeria and its impact on women. Kambili's father, Eugene, is a domineering figure who enforces strict gender roles and suppresses the voices and agency of women in his family. However, the novel also presents alternative perspectives through characters like Kambili's aunt, Ifeoma, and her cousin, Amaka, who challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for gender equality. Both novels shed light on the complexities of gender roles and the ways in which they can be oppressive and limiting. They also highlight the resilience and strength of women as they navigate and challenge these societal expectations.

The theme of separation plays a significant role in the narratives. In *The Colour Purple*, separation is explored through various relationships. Celie is separated from her sister Nettie when they are young, and this separation causes immense pain and longing throughout the novel. Additionally, Celie's separation from her children and her own sense of self isolates her emotionally. However, as the story progresses, these separations are gradually overcome through the power of love, forgiveness, and connection. In *Purple Hibiscus*, separation is depicted through the strained relationship between Kambili and her father, Eugene. Eugene's strict and abusive nature creates a divide between him and his family, leading to emotional separation. The novel also explores the separation between different social classes in Nigeria and the impact it has on relationships and understanding. Both the novels highlight the emotional and physical separations that character's experience and the ways in which these separations can be overcome or reconciled. They

emphasize the importance of connection, understanding, and reconciliation in overcoming the pain and isolation that separation can bring.

The novels explore the themes of violence and suffering. *The Colour Purple* depicts the harsh realities of physical, emotional, and sexual violence experienced by the characters, particularly women. Celie, for example, endures abuse from her stepfather and later her husband, which leads to immense suffering. The novel also addresses the systemic violence and racism faced by black people during the time period. However, amidst the suffering, the novel also portrays the resilience and strength of the characters as they find ways to heal and overcome their pain. Similarly, *Purple Hibiscus* delves into the theme of violence and suffering within a family context. Kambili and her brother, Jaja, suffer under the oppressive and abusive rule of their father, Eugene. The novel explores the consequences of this violence on their mental and emotional well-being. It also touches on the broader societal violence and political unrest in Nigeria, which further contributes to the suffering experienced by the characters. Both novels shed light on the impact of violence and suffering on individuals and communities. They also emphasize the importance of resilience, healing, and finding one's voice in the face of adversity.

Race and racism are important themes explored in both *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*. In *The Colour Purple*, the novel addresses the racial discrimination and prejudice faced by black individuals in the early 20th century. The characters navigate the challenges of racism and strive for self-empowerment and equality. The novel highlights the resilience and strength of the black community in the face of systemic oppression. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the characters confront the effects of racial and ethnic tensions in Nigeria. The novel explores the discrimination faced by the Igbo people, as well as the consequences of these divisions within society. It delves into the complexities of identity and the impact of race on personal relationships. Both novels shed light on the destructive nature of racism and the importance of challenging and overcoming it. They emphasize the need

for empathy, understanding, and solidarity in creating a more inclusive and just society.

In both *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Colour Purple*, the authors intentionally incorporate language errors and grammatical mistakes to reflect the unique voices and perspectives of the characters. These errors and mistakes serve as a form of literary technique, showcasing the characters' backgrounds, education levels, and cultural influences. By portraying language in a raw and authentic manner, the authors capture the nuances of speech and add depth to the characters' narratives. It is important to note that these language errors and grammatical mistakes are intentional and should be understood within the context of the story and the characters' experiences. In *The Colour Purple*, the author, *Alice Walker*, uses language errors and grammatical mistakes to reflect the vernacular speech of the characters. For example, *Alice Walker* through Celie, the main character, often uses nonstandard grammar and spelling in her letters, such as saying "I ain't" instead of "I am not" or "I be" instead of "I am", "got" is "git", "ask" is "ast", "about" is "bout." (*The Colour Purple*. 2019.) These language choices give Celie's voice an authentic and relatable quality. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the author, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, incorporates language errors and grammatical mistakes to represent the characters' Nigerian dialects and backgrounds. For instance, Kambili's father, Eugene, speaks in a formal and precise manner, while her aunt Ifeoma's speech is more casual and colloquial. She is outspoken and open-minded. *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* writes a scene when Eugene visits Kambili's school, she points out the change of talking style of her father and says – "Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious." (*Purple Hibiscus*. 2003, pp. 46.) These variations in language usage help to distinguish the characters and reflect their unique perspectives. By using these language errors and grammatical mistakes, both novels capture the richness and diversity of language, showcasing the characters' identities and cultural backgrounds.

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