

**SHIFTING SHADOWS AND SHATTERING BOUNDARIES:
EXPLORING GENDER DYNAMICS IN SARITA MANDANNA'S
TIGER HILLS AND ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE***

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Abstract

Gender dynamics refer to the social, cultural, and economic inequalities and discrimination that individuals face based on their gender. These issues can arise from stereotypes and prejudices that exist in society. Thus, the representation of women undergoing such issues has been depicted in the given research paper. The research paper here is a comparative analysis of the gender analysis in Sarita Mandanna's Tiger Hills and Alice Walker's The Color Purple. Using a feminist literary analysis, the paper examines the narratives of the feminine characters from the novels. It investigates how the characters struggle to establish their identity, resist patriarchal oppression, and challenge gender norms. The paper also examines the ways in which the male characters in both novels represent the masculine trait and how their behaviour reinforces the patriarchy. It analyses the themes of Western dominance on the mindset of the masculine trait, quest for identity, and masculine supremacy will lead to the contributions to the ongoing conversation about gender dynamics in literature and offers a nuanced understanding of the intersections between gender, culture, and power. It also offers insights into the ways in which literature can be used to critique dominant power structures and promote social change. The paper argues

that the novels provide important insights into the ongoing struggle for gender equality, and that their themes remain relevant today.

Keywords: *Masculinity, Feminism, Western Dominance, Quest for Identity, Discrimination, Culture, Tradition, Stereotypes, Inequality, and Gender.*

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Introduction

Sarita Mandanna and Alice Walker effectively explore feminism, and civil rights by delving deeper into gender dynamics and male anxieties and human relations in their literature. Their bodies of work critically demonstrate how they have operated in shaping modern discourse. They re-examine the dimensions of gender interactions, masculine anxieties, and human relationships in general that form the rhetoric of contemporary discourse in literature, feminism, and civil rights. Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills* entices the readers with her beautiful storytelling and the vivid exploration of love, loss, family, and identity crises in her works of short fiction. Cultural identity and immigrant experience remain one of the themes explored in her work. She is one of the American novelists and activists who have used lyrical prose, along with associated symbolism, to fight against issues like domestic violence, civil rights, and cultural identity in the face of racism and sexism. *The Color Purple*,

is centered on racial and gender inequalities based on life under segregation. Walker also broadened the scope of her activism by coining a term to identify a Black feminist perspective and more broadly for racial and gender equality

Tiger Hills by Sarita Mandanna and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker are two powerful novels that explore themes of love, resilience, and personal growth within the context of complex social and cultural landscapes that binds the women in stereotypes and transcend them subsequently. While the settings, time periods, and cultural backgrounds of the stories differ significantly, both novels captivate readers with their engaging narratives and the profound journeys of their central characters.

Tiger Hills is set in the picturesque region of Coorg in India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The novel deals with the life of Devi, a young girl born into a coffee plantation-owning family. Through her trials and triumphs, the novel delves into themes of identity, social expectations, and more specially the impact of choices on one's life. It is a story of enduring love, intergenerational conflicts, and the pursuit of personal fulfilment. Mandanna beautifully portrays the lush landscapes of Coorg, immersing the readers in the rich tapestry of its culture and traditions. As she narrates:

The one thing I knew for certain was that I knew for certain was that I wanted the setting to be Coorg – not only because there's this deep personal connection, but because it's such a beautiful, diverse, rich in historical detail part of India. (Sarita Mandanna)

On the other hand, *The Color Purple* is set in rural Georgia, United States, in the early 20th century. The novel is an epistolary narrative that chronicles the life of Celie, an African American woman who endures immense hardship and abuse. Walker's powerful storytelling explores themes of racism, sexism, and the power dynamics within relationships. The novel's strength lies in Celie's transformation from a voiceless victim to a resilient woman who finds her voice and asserts her autonomy by shattering the boundaries set by the traditional set up. Walker's depiction of the African American experience during a time of racial segregation resonates deeply

with readers, shining a light on the endurance and resilience of marginalized communities.

While the cultural contexts of the novels differ, both *Tiger Hills* and *The Color Purple* depict the challenges faced by their female protagonists within the limitations imposed by society. Devi and Celie navigate oppressive systems, confront patriarchal norms, and strive for self-empowerment in their respective worlds. Both authors highlight the strength and resilience of their female characters, emphasizing their journeys of self-discovery, personal growth, and the reclamation of their own identities. Love and relationships are also central themes in both novels. They examine the transformative power of love, its ability to inspire growth and heal wounds.

Another important aspect in the novel that pertains in study is Male anxiety. Male anxiety refers to the psychological and emotional distress experienced by some men due to societal expectations, gender roles, and pressures related to masculinity. While both men and women can experience anxiety, male anxiety often stems from the challenges and pressures associated with traditional notions of masculinity. Society often expects men to conform to certain stereotypes and roles, such as being strong, independent, and in control. Men may feel pressure to exhibit qualities like stoicism, dominance, and competitiveness, while suppressing emotions and vulnerability. These expectations can create internal conflicts and anxieties as men strive to meet these ideals and fear the consequences of falling short. The Novels *Tiger Hills* and *The Color Purple* portrays male anxiety at par, and it reasons out most of the actions done by the males from both of the novels. Their acts are a mere reflection of the society they live in. Their indifferent behaviour towards the female sect is an example of their social teachings and their controlled mindset. The naive attitude and conservative thinking are an outcome of some obligations they have learnt to follow right from their childhood. Their behaviour is just the usual manner of treating a woman in the family. Children are taught to look through their lenses and thus learn from their surroundings. The conceptual behaviour of Devanna and Mr.

Albert are the product of the teachings they got from the society. In the novel, Albert reflects this when he asks Harpo, did he ever beat his wife...

You ever hit her? Mr _____ast.

Harpo look down at his hands. Naw suh, he say low, embarrass.

Well how you specs to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.

(Walker 35).

The respect of the females is all lost in the patriarchal or male dominated society. When Devanna out of frustration rapes Devi, he just wants to portray out his strength on Devi and make himself feel better that he is not weak and he can take whatever he wants. Similarly, Machaiah's son Appu selfishly had a fling with Ellen and left her there itself when his needs were satisfied.

Her mascara had smudged along one cheek, giving her the look of a frightened clown. 'Dags?' she asked woozily. 'Dags?' she asked again, her voice now high with alarm. 'What's going on? What... Where are you going? (Mandanna 382)

His actions denoted that such kind of thinking can only emerge when you continuously see similar stuff on your end or in your daily life. Gundert gave away the thought of confessing his love for Olaf because of the naïve, conservative attitude of the society. They used to call them "faggots" and they snatched away the life Gundert could have spent with Olaf happily. The culture did not allow anyone to give respect or give similar treating's who were a little indifferent or were breaking stereotypes. Society has a mindset that a man is only masculine when he has a big mustache controls his wife, dominates over arguments, beats his wife, can produce a male child, can earn, and never let his wife work. They wanted all the males to treat their wives like this and never let them have any individuality of their own. Thus, under the name of masculinity, such kind of toxicity is prevalent in the society, and

because of this the males are the victims here and they too suffer. Their suffrage is visible when they find it hard to make the wrong decision. A decision which is good for them but at the cost of ruining a girl or an inferior gender's life.

The concept of identity crisis pertains to a state of uncertainty and confusion surrounding an individual's self-perception, encompassing aspects such as personal values, beliefs, interests, and goals. Within the narratives of Sarita Mandanna's *The Tiger Hills* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the characters Devi and Shug Avery experience identity crises that persist throughout the stories. This phenomenon is a common occurrence where individuals may feel a disconnection from their authentic identity or encounter difficulties in defining themselves. Devi, hailing from an exceedingly conservative village, exhibits remarkable resilience in overcoming challenges, surpassing even the male characters. Despite her physical attractiveness, she undertakes arduous labour to generate income, settle debts, and tend to her ailing husband, eventually resembling the workers she toils alongside. This transformation triggers a sense of distance within Devi, as she realizes she no longer identifies with her affluent family but rather perceives herself as a common working woman. Consequently, she experiences a profound detachment from her roots, rendering her unable to relate to her land or people. The shift can manifest at various life stages and involve processes such as introspection, seeking support, exploring new experiences, embracing change, practicing self-compassion, and potentially seeking professional assistance. It constitutes a journey of self-discovery and personal growth, wherein individuals strive to attain a clearer understanding of their genuine selves. Celie is portrayed as a timid character who initially pays little regard to societal norms but subsequently experiences regret for her past decisions. However, she ultimately manages to liberate herself from the constraints imposed upon her, courageously presenting herself to the world. This can be seen when she finds a companion in Mr. Albert, her husband who was not previously appreciative of her. She writes to Nettie

A whole lot of the men that come before the first man was men, but none of 'em didn't know it. You know how long it takes some mens to notice anything, I say.

Tookme long enough to notice you such good company, he say. And he laugh.

He ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to. (Walker 250)

This transformation demands immense courage and self-confidence. Similarly, Appu, the son of Macchiah, undergoes a comparable dilemma when he engages in an affair with Miss Ellen, subsequently losing his sense of belonging. Despite harbouring ambitious dreams, Appu must adapt to a society that persistently perceives him as an outsider. He makes various attempts to assimilate, eventually adopting a more Westernized persona, diverging from his initial naively Indian mentality.

The experiences of these characters exemplify the multifaceted nature of identity crises, highlighting the significance of self-reflection, resilience, and adaptation within the process of identity formation. The identity crises can contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges individuals face in constructing and reconciling their sense of self, thereby informing strategies for supporting individuals undergoing such a transformative journey that shifts the shadow and shatter the boundaries.

The portrayal of stereotypical dominance and its impact on the characters is a significant aspect in both *Tiger Hills* by Sarita Mandanna and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. The novels exhibit similarities in their exploration of the influence of Western culture on the lives of the characters, which has been pervasive since their childhood. This influence can be attributed to various factors, including the presence of missionaries and the mindset of characters. In contemporary society, there is a prevalent fascination with Western ideology, leading individuals to adopt and incorporate Western elements into their lifestyles, such as clothing, cuisine, and music. Consequently, Western influence has permeated various aspects of society, significantly reshaping cultural identities of individuals by shrieking away the

old ones and crossing the boundaries set by the culture, tradition and at times by patriarchal order.

The novels depict characters such as Mr. Albert, Appu, Shug Avery, Devi, and Sofia, who embody both positive and negative Western traits. Some characters embrace Western ideas as a means of fighting for their rights and personal growth, approaching the Western ideology with an open and broad perspective. They welcome these ideas as they believe they can enhance their lives. However, other characters deviate from this path, misusing the power derived from exposure to Western culture and undermining the sanctity of their relationships. Appu and Albert, for instance, succumb to the allure of casual dating, flings, and extramarital affairs, distorting the true meaning of commitment and belonging. These acts are indicative of the transformation among the characters.

Shug Avery, despite being admired for her bold and strong nature, also suffers from excessive attraction to Western culture. Her pursuit of her own identity leads her down a path where she sacrifices elements of her well-being, indulging in alcohol, cigars, and other vices that ultimately lead to an incurable disease. This dependence on external validation highlights the sacrifices individuals may make when pursuing fame and recognition, potentially compromising their own personal integrity.

Sofia, a character in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, demonstrates a positive response to Western influence within her society. Despite belonging to the same societal context as other characters, Sofia actively rejects a naive mentality and adopts a broad and open perspective in shaping her own identity. Even when she becomes pregnant with Harpo's child, Sofia faces false accusations from Albert, who insinuates that she may have conceived with someone else. Despite the potential damage to her reputation and the societal stigma associated with being an unmarried mother, Sofia remains resolute and asserts her independence by expressing her willingness to raise her child without Harpo's involvement.

She say, What I need to marry Harpo for? He still living with here with you. What food and clothes he git, you buy. (Walker 32)

Sofia's determination to assert herself in the face of adversity is particularly noteworthy. Despite the challenges she faces, including the judgment and gossip from others, she firmly stands her ground. Her refusal to tolerate physical abuse from Harpo indicates her rejection of the traditional submissive role expected of black women during that time.

They fighting like two mens. Every piece of furniture they got is turned over. Every plate look like it broke. The looking glass hang crooked the curtains torn. The bed look like the stuffing pulled out. They don't notice. They fight. He try to slap her. What he do that for? She reach down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him cross his eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates. He roll on the floor. he grab her dress tail and pull. She stand there in her slip. She never blink a eye. He jump up to put a hammer lock under her chin, she throw him over her back. He fall bam up against the stove. (Walker 37)

This displays Sofia's adoption of the empowering aspects of Western ideology, which have undoubtedly influenced her self-perception and the choices she makes in her life.

Sofia's ability to navigate societal expectations and assert her autonomy despite the prevalent cultural norms of her community highlights the transformative power of Western influence. Her actions challenge the prevailing gender and racial dynamics of her environment, suggesting that individuals can draw upon external ideas and values to reshape their lives in ways that empower and liberate them.

This depiction of Sofia's journey in *The Color Purple* offers valuable insights into the potential benefits of embracing aspects of white ideology within marginalized communities. It demonstrates how individuals can draw strength from external influences to challenge oppressive norms and assert their own agency. Her story serves as an inspiring example of how

individuals can navigate cultural boundaries and shape their own identities in the pursuit of personal empowerment and freedom. The experiences of characters like Appu and Albert demonstrate how they are allured by dominant society that can lead them to forsake their cultural identities and jeopardize meaningful relationships. Appu forsakes his old identity in pursuit of power, neglecting the true essence of love and commitment. Similarly, Albert, captivated by the beauty of Shug Avery, abandons his original culture and perpetuates a patriarchal mindset, mistreating his wives. Both *Tiger Hills* and *The Color Purple* shed light on the profound impact of dominance on the lives of characters. The novels underscore the complexities surrounding the adoption and adaptation of Western ideals, revealing both the positive growth and destructive consequences that can arise from such influences. These literary works offer valuable insights into the challenges individuals face in navigating cultural identities and the potential consequences of succumbing to external pressures on one side and on other the make a sharp shift from their old identity to the newer one also by uprooting the set gender dynamics.

Conclusion

Sarita Mandanna and Alice Walker suggest quite vivid presentations of patriarchal norms that have deeply shaped societies. The novels depict how societal expectations are deep-rooted, not just in women but in men as well, thus reducing the smelly damage caused to harmful stereotypes that both genders have undergone. The strict definitions of masculinity, such as when Macchiah sported his beard, and Kambeymada scolded Devanna for not being interested in hunting, and Harpo for being tolerant towards his wife, reflect the fact that men are also forced to adhere to gender norms. Moreover, women face double kinds of exclusion because they have to suffer social pressures in addition to physical and psychological violence. Devi, Shug Avery, and Sofia eventually become resilience icons defying the restrictions they face, asserting their freedom. Mandanna and Walker express the dynamics of the social reformation process with the identity of individualization, mainly the aspect that Westernization, despite its being viewed as liberalization, further consolidates existing inequalities. They prove

that a person's gender is a social construct, and the real strength to one's identity rests in the self. Such transformative journeys on the part of these characters confirm the strength of the human spirit, which can withstand even the pressure of society. It shows the after-effect of social change, how urgent it is to question mores that have been taken for granted, building a world that is more just and equal. In fact, the provocation of these novels is for readers to ponder identity nuances and societal expectations using the novels as both a lens toward introspection and as a means toward greater social change.

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