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## Title

**Women's Resistance and Empowerment in Nawal El Saadawi's  
*Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*  
(1982)**

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is lovingly dedicated,

*To our beloved parents,*

Thank you for your encouragement to reach this success.

*To our dear brothers and sisters,*

The reason of what we became today. Thank You for the great support and motivation.

*To our friends,*

For their unwavering support and patience and for sharing the dream with us.

## **Abstract**

This research is a comparative study between Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). The aim of this work is to demonstrate the women's resistance with the various issues they face in Afro-American and Egyptian societies in both novels, focusing on the two protagonists Firdaus and Celie. For this purpose, we have relied on Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), as a frame theory. At first we have studied the difficulties that women face in both novels, we have explored women's experience of oppression and violence in African American and Egyptian. The second chapter, we have discussed women's fight and struggles against society. Through this study, we conclude that Nawal El Saadawi and Alice Walker defended women's rights in their works, they make them stand against racism and patriarchy, and raise their voices opposing the issues of violence they face.

**Keywords:** *Nawal El Saadawi, Alice Walker, Simone De Beauvoir, Patriarchy, Society, Resistance, Racism.*

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# *General introduction*

## **I. Introduction**

The role attributed to women in the world has always been relative and limited. In the past, women were under the control of society's pressure, imposing things on them that restricted their freedom, and took away their most basic rights. They were considered servants under the control of a patriarchal society, devoted to fulfilling the desires and requests of men, but nothing more. This made women live the most horrible life, in which mercy and humanity were absent, as they were treated in the worst way by men, who considered them as a disgrace in society. The famous Greek philosopher Socrates said: "The presence of women is the greatest origin and source of crisis in the world". Women are considered inferior to men in society. They are weak and believed to have been created to be under the control of men.

The feminist movement started in the nineteenth century, it is a movement calling for women's rights in society and adopting women's issues in the world. The demands of the feminist movement are represented in the demand for women's rights, including: voting, public office, work, equal wages, ownership, education, freedom in their choices and respect for their value in society. Finally, women interacted and faced male domination to show their worth in society. This research is concerned with the study of women's resistance and empowerment in the African American and Egyptian in the two novels Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). We are going to show how the two authors portray women's resistance in patriarchal societies and how they are achieved their freedom.

In Egyptian societies, women suffered a lot from the domination and control of the men in society. Men considered themselves as different, privileged, and powerful race in contrast to women who were servants at their disposal; this is what made them suffer from



the reality of marginalization and exploitation. Women have been exposed to violence, injustice, inequality, and not enjoying their rights under unfair laws imposed by men. They did housework and raised children under men's directives to them, while men lived without submitting to anyone. In addition, women in the Egyptian families were forced to marry a stranger, and they had no right to refuse or have an opinion among the males of the family. Women were treated in their house like servants, and when they got married they were treated in the same way in their husbands' house. In ancient time, when an Egyptian woman refused a decision issued by a man, she was abused and tortured without mercy. They were not able to complain about all these suffering or raise their voice in front of men's persecution of them.

Similarly, Afro-American women are suffering from the same issues. They were unable to cry and remove the accumulations that made their insides erode. Indeed, Afro-American women did not have the opportunity to study and obtain certificates despite their abilities and knowledge. In fact, they were not able to resort to study because society rejected the idea of women studying or working. There are still many barriers that hinder the advancement of women. So, for men, their only role was to take care of their homes.

In Egyptian and Afro-American societies, Women's worldly desires were curbed, their freedom restricted, their rights robbed, and they were silenced from speaking. In the beginning, when women were unable to confront the male, of their society, they succumbed to suffering. Women's circumstances were more than what they could bear without men's presence, because at that time they needed shelter and a place to take cover in. For that, they could not raise their voice for fear of being beaten.

After a long struggle and fight, women in Afro-American and Egyptian, were able to make the men of their societies understand that women are human beings just like them, God

created them to populate the earth and to be a caliph in it. A woman can depend on herself and her thinking and opinions away from what her father, brother, and husband see, and her personal life should not be linked to a man or anyone else, but only to her. In the end, women succeeded in making themselves free in a world that was for them as a dark prison by uniting among them. Today, women can enjoy most of their rights and live in peace, women together fight, and they are able to build equality in different sectors. As Malala Yousafzai says in her speech at the United Nations: “I raise up my voice –not so I can shout but so that those without voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.” (Malala, 2013). Afro-American and Egyptian women are able to get rid of the majority of the restrictions of societies, to bloom in the spring of their freedom.

In these contexts, we can situate Nawal El Saadawi and Alice Walker, the writers of the works under study. Thus, the primary goal of this research is to analyze women’s resistance and empowerment, focusing on the Black and Arab women. Our main concern is to examine the experience of Black and Arab in Afro-American and Egyptian in patriarchal societies.

In this dissertation, we will deal with women’s issues in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), including patriarchy, forced marriage, fear, and oppression. In addition, we will discuss women’s resistance in both novels relying on Simone De Beauvoir’s theory *The Second Sex* (1949). We will study the female characters, exposing their suffering and their fight for freedom and independence.

## **Review of the literature**

Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* are two literary works that deal with women's issues in African American and Egyptian societies, using feminist characters. They have attracted a great deal of attention in the

domain of literature. From our review of the previous literature, we have noticed that both novels have received much criticism from different perspectives.

To begin with, Alice Walker has been subject to range of criticism for her feminist writing. For example, in her book *New York Times: Sexism, Racism, and Black Woman Writers* (1986), Mel Watkins praised Walker's skillful writing and its portrayal of the challenges faced by black woman struggling for independence in the face of male domination, as she stated "the role of male domination of the black woman's struggle for independence was clearly the focus of what was a striking and consummately written novel" (1986, p.7). But according to her, the work received many critics about the negative and harmful portrayals of black men in the novels,

But, for some, Miss Walker's skill as a writer was partially obscured by her one-dimensional portraits of black men. And, even at that time, there were murmurings and complaints about the alarming increase in stereotypical fictional. (1986, p.1)

Watkins concludes that *the Color Purple* is a groundbreaking work that has a significant impact on the representation of women in literature, and she suggests that the controversy surrounding *The Color Purple* can be seen as an evidence of the power and importance of Walker's work in challenging of black women.

As Linda Seltzer, in the essay *Race and Domesticity in the Color Purple* (1995). She discusses the criticism of Eliot Butler Evans towards the novel's epistolary form. According to Seltzer, Evans believed that this form marginalized the larger history of African Americans and focused too much on the individual experiences of Celie. Evans argued that Celie's restricted view point limited the novel's ability to explore racial issues in depth. Seltzer explains: "Evans suggests that Celie's personal story takes precedence over the broader political and social issues that affect African Americans." In other words, the private life of Celie takes priority over the larger public struggles of black people. Overall; Seltzer's

essay presents Evan's criticism of the *Color Purple* and provides an analysis of how the novel's form and viewpoint contribute to its themes and meaning.

No doubt that *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) by Nawal El Saadawi has also received much criticism. As an example, we can cite Saddik Gohar in his work *Empowering the Subaltern in Woman at Point Zero* (2016). Saddik explores the life of Firdaus, and how she is exploited physically and psychologically from her childhood to her youth, and how women are marginalized by males of her society. He points out that Firdaus depicts the difficult life that Egyptian women go through. He assumes that El Saadawi challenges the dominance of a society that conforms to tradition and is a patriarchal society supported by religion. He adds that throughout the eyes of Firdaus, El Saadawi refers to the power of religion as an instrument of oppression and one of the subjugating pillars of male-dominated societies (2016, p.16). He argues that the novel depicts the sad life of women in a patriarchal society that relies on religion to define women and restrict them. The author contends:

El Saadawi underscores the subtle manner in which women are victims of male oppression, and violence in a society shaped by inequitable class relation and reinforced by an androcentric gender system and by a government that has been unable or unwilling to address the needs of the poor. (Saddik, 2016)

Gloria Ada Fwangyl, on the other hand, devoted her work *Gradle to Give: An analysis of Female Oppression in Nawal El Saadawi* (2012). To investigate how women are subjected to male oppression. She examines how women suffer from men, and how they are discriminated, and subjected to all kinds of physical and sexual right and equality. She asserts the need to eradicate male oppression against women and to give right and equality to women in the society.

Another interesting review *Interrogating the Male-Female Gender Dichotomy in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero* (2021) is written by Benon Tugume. The analysis focuses on Firdaus as the protagonist. The writer focuses on class oppression and male domination. The author argues that the justice system, which is directed towards males,

criminalizes Firdous and grants her the death penalty to silence her and thwart her struggle for liberation. He contends:

Nawal el Saadawi states that men and women should discuss religion, class, and gender frankly without fear of being condemned and branded by religious fundamentalists as atheist, irreligious, and immoral or being called communists or man hates (2021, p.3).

It is clear from the previous study of the literature that both Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) have received much critical attention from different standpoints. Indeed, they have been studied from different perspectives. Thus, the main purpose of this work is to analyse and compare the two novels.

### **Issue and working hypothesis**

From the previous study of the literature written on the works *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and *The Color Purple* (1982), we can conclude that both novels have received a great deal of criticism. Our research is therefore, to compare between the African-American and Egyptian works, which sheds light on the themes of women's resistance and empowerment in both novels. Both Nawal El Saadawi and Alice Walker portray the female characters that fight to achieve their freedom in the patriarchal society.

Therefore, this research purpose is to analyse the ways of resistance and empowerment developed in both novels. Nawal El Saadawi and Alice Walker employ different ways of resist the oppression and patriarchy, even they are belonging to different origins and cultural environments; however, this did not prevent them from writing on the same topic in their works. In our dissertation, we aim to study the difficulties that American and Egyptian women experience in patriarchal societies, in addition to the way women

struggle for their rights and freedom. The two writers give voice to women to show their strength by rejecting male domination and their struggle to free themselves from patriarchy oppression.

To achieve our goal, we rely on the feminist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Which debates the issues that are related to women and highlights the discrimination and oppression they face? We will borrow some concepts on feminism from the book.

This research gives insight to the barriers that the characters faced as women in a society that is dominated by men, highlighting the rights and needs of women that should be valued and respected in society as men and women live in the same community. However, Nawal El Saadawi and Alice Walker have revealed the revolt of African-American and Egyptian women against male oppression in order to gain their own freedom.

## **Methodological outline**

At the methodological level, our research paper employs the IMRAD research method. We have divided our research paper into four sections. In the first section, we have started with a general introduction in which we provided a general presentation of our topic by displaying the issue of our dissertation, and state the problematic. Then we have moved on to choosing the authors and novels that are in line with our topic, followed by the purpose of our study, and then we have offered a review of the novels *The Color Purple* and *Woman at Point Zero*.

The second section will be assigned to the Materials and Methods. In the methods section we will provide an overview of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and we will borrow some concepts from the book. As for materials we will deal with a short

biography of the authors and a brief summary of the novels. In the results, the research findings will be revealed. As for results section, the research's findings will be exposed.

The discussion section is divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, we attempted to explore some of the issues that women face in their societies in both novels. The second chapter will be devoted to women's resistance to oppression and violence, and their fight for freedom. At the end of our research paper, we will conclude our assumption and summarize our research and findings.

## II. Methods and Materials

### 1. Methods

This section of our dissertation is an illustration of the theory that supports our research and helps us to fulfill our need to better understand some women's issues. It intends to explain the Feminist theory of Simone De Beauvoir as she writes it in her work *The Second Sex* (1949). This being said, we will only borrow the concepts of, 'the other', 'gender', and 'women's resistance'.

#### **Simone De Beauvoir's feminist theory: *The Second Sex* (1949)**

Simone De Beauvoir is a French feminist writer and philosopher. She wrote works of novels, memoirs, essays, short stories, and journal articles. Her best work is *The Second Sex* (1949); it is an important book in the emergence of feminist movement.

Simone De Beauvoir discusses in her work *The Second Sex*, which is an important book on the emergence of feminist movement, first published in French in 1949, the situation and the reasons that led women to be "the other" in society. According to Beauvoir, women have always been treated as 'other'. They are formed and shaped by the society as they want them, without giving women their rights. In this book Beauvoir suggests that women are always the other and the subject, while men are always the 'seer'. Women are suffering from series of beliefs that condemn them to the discouraging service role as a caretaker and protector of the family, while men are independent, self, and active role in society. In this case Simone De Beauvoir contends that women are the essential as opposed to the essential. He (Man) is the subject, he is absolute ...she is the other (1949, p.15). Women in society are a weak being, their rank is lower than the male gender, society imposes their authority and domination over her. Simone De Beauvoir contends,



One is not born, but rather becomes, women. No biological, physical, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (1949:283)

This is De Beauvoir's belief. For her society allows women to define themselves as they think they are. For that she defines women in her book as the "second sex" because they are inferior to men.

Simone De Beauvoir uses the terms of 'female' and 'male' in her book *The Second Sex*(1949). The male is considered free and independent, communicating freely with the world, with his complete freedom to control himself, while the female is the opposite of a male, she is full of restrictions, she is controlled by man, where she is a part of a man's property, he has the right to decide her fate and future. De Beauvoir in her book explained the reason why a woman is just a 'female', although she is a gender as a man, this is due to the presence of biological differences between the sexes, which defined the concepts of 'male' and 'female' by genital organs .De Beauvoir was not convinced by this definition of the female, and the differentiation between the sexes based on this deficiency .Beauvoir argues that gender is a social construct, she says: "If the feminine issue is so absurd is because the male's arrogance(De Beauvoir,1949). She rejects this idea, as insufficient to define the two sexes. Simone De Beauvoir adds,

A man considers his own body as if it were an independent being that communicates with the world freely and submissive to his own will. Didn't Plato say: "A female is a female because of a lack of attributes "Humanity in the man's definition is a masculine thing, as he considers himself representing the real human race. As for the woman, she is representing the "other" sex.

Despite all these concepts used by Simone De Beauvoir, she concludes her book by emphasizing the various demands that aim to liberate women from all these restrictions. She also calls for equality between men and women, by giving women the opportunity to regain

their personality and status in society. De Beauvoir calls for women's independence and encourages them to define their identity. She argues: "Self-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can supply the courage to fight for it." From this quotation, it is clear that Simone De Beauvoir made sure that women are able to choose like men, and they can elevate themselves and reach transcendence.

## **2. Materials**

### **2.1. Biographies of the Authors**

#### **A. Nawal EL Saadawi's Biography**

Nawal El Saadawi is an Egyptian writer, doctor and militant, born in a small village called Kafr Tahal in Egypt on October 27, 1931. She is the daughter of middle class family, Zaynab (Shoukry) El Saadawi and Al-Sayed El Saadawi. She was educated at Cairo University in 1955, Columbia University in New York in 1966 and Ain Shams University in Cairo in 1972-74. In 1955 she received honorary doctorates from the universities.

Nawal El Saadawi wrote numerous books on Arab women's problems. She began to write over 25 years old the equivalent of 30 books, focused on women, especially Arab women. In 1972 she published her first work, *women and sex*, which dealt with the subject of women and sexuality. Other works include *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1977), *God Dies by the Nile* (1985), *the Circling song* (1978), *Searching* (1991), *The Fall of the Imam* (1987), and *Woman at Point Zero* (1975). Saadawi wrote in several fields between novel, story, play and biography, some of them have been translated into many languages.

Saadawi died on March 21, 2021, aged 90, at a hospital in Cairo after a bitter struggle with illness.

## **B. Alice Walker's Biography**

Alice Malsenior Walker is a famous author, activist, and poet known for her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Color Purple*. Born on February 9, 1944, in Putnam county, Georgia. As a child, she grew up in a poor African American family, and she was the eighth child in her brotherhood. The daughter of sharecroppers. Walker had a terrible accident in her childhood that blinded her eye, a turning point in her life that made her talent for writing afford her scholarship to Spelman College in Atlanta.

Despite the many challenges she faced growing up, Walker was a brilliant and exceptional student. She was transferred to Sarah Lawrence College, where she graduated in 1965 after earning her master's degree in creative writing. After graduation, Walker moved to Mississippi and became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She also started teaching and writing short stories and essays.

Three years later, Walker published her first collection of poetry "*Once*", in 1966, which marked the beginning of her successful literary career. Her first novel, "*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*", appeared in 1970 and was followed by several other works, as well as "*Meridian*" (1976) and exclusively "*The Color Purple*" (1982).

For her third book, *The Color Purple*, Walker was nominated in the 1982 Pulitzer Prize for Literature. In the years that followed this outstanding accomplishment, she produces two collection of writing: "*In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*" in 1983, and "*Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful*" in 1984. Along with children's novels and non-fiction writing, she also released "*The Temple of My Familiar*" (1989) and "*Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (1992).

## 2.2. Summaries of the Novels

### A. The Summary of *Woman at Point Zero* (1975)

*Woman at Point Zero* is a novel written by Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi, published in 1975. The events of the novel take place in Qanater prison, Egypt, in 1974. It discusses the forms of man's oppression of women through Firdaus, the female character. Firdaus, an Egyptian woman, was arrested for murder and will be executed; she killed the last man standing in front of her freedom, she refused to submit to the man and be under his complete control.

The story begins with Nawal El Saadawi's meeting with Firdaus. After a long insistence, Firdaus tells her about her difficult experience, her rape by her stepfather and some men in her community, her exposure to all kinds of violence, her forced marriage at a young age for an old man, even her life on the streets as a vagabond and how she became a prostitute. Firdaus in this novel tells about her harsh experiences within a tyrannical and unjust male society; she is a symbol of women's suffering in Egyptian society. Firdaus was strong enough to bear this oppression.

Throughout the novel, Firdaus is exposed to suffering, oppression, and the social control that suffocates her. But despite that, she did not surrender to all these issues that deprived her of her freedom, but rather confronted them and stood against every man trying to steal her freedom; this is what prompted her to kill a man in defense of this freedom.

At the end of the novel, Firdaus decided to fight for her freedom, regardless of the punishments and difficulties. Her only concern is to be free from the restriction of the patriarchy, and she preferred death rather than submitting to masculine authority.

## **B. The Summary of *The Color Purple* (1982)**

Alice Walker's novel, "The Color Purple" is a powerful work of literature that explores themes of oppression, abuse, survival, and self-discovery. The novel is set in the early twentieth century in rural Georgia and follows the life of Celie, an African American woman who endures unimaginable suffering throughout her life. The color Purple is a compelling tale of resilience and the transformative power of love and forgiveness.

The novel begins with Celie, a fourteen-years-old who is repeatedly raped by her father and then forced to marry an abusive man named Albert, who she refers to as "Mister". Celie's life is one of unending pain and suffering, and she is forced to endure physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband. Despite her circumstances, Celie finds solace in her relationships with other women, particularly with Shug Avery, a blues singer who becomes her lover and helps her to discover her own worth.

Throughout the novel, Celie's journey of self-discovery is paralleled by the transformation of those around her. Mister, who is initially portrayed as an abusive and cruel man, gradually becomes a more sympathetic character as the novel progresses. Shug Avery, who initially appears to be a selfish and promiscuous woman, becomes a caring and nurturing figure in Celie's life. Through their interaction with Celie, both Mister and Shug undergo significant transformation, illustrating the novel's central themes of growth and redemption.

Walker's portrayal of the African American experience in the early twentieth century is unflinching and unapologetic. The novel explores issues of racism, sexism, and economic inequality that were prevalent during this time period. Through Celie's experience, Walker vividly depicts the brutal realities for African American women in the south, including the limited available to them.

### III. Results

This part of our research presents the findings we have reached after our study of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*(1975), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*(1982). We have used for this purpose Simone De Beauvoir's theory *The Second Sex*(1949).

After our thematic study, we have concluded that both authors deal with the same issue despite their different nationalities, different cultural environments, and writing in two different languages. These women have nonetheless agreed on the subject of writing. When Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi wrote on the subject of women, they used their pens to write and get their ideas out into the world. Their works explore race, gender, the patriarchy, and the oppression of women. Their common goal was writing, in order to liberate women from the restrictions and control of men, and raising awareness of their conditions and various issues related to them. Both writers have similar viewpoints, especially since they lived in a time when women were considered inferior to men.

In addition to this, we reached another observation regarding the two primary sources; the novels are both about women's issues and resistance. The female characters in these two novels are both tormented by a male centered society; they both stood against injustice and fought for their freedom. The two novels have similar themes such as gender and power, oppression, and male-domination.

Regarding the issue of our dissertation, through our study, we discovered that both novels are similar in several aspects and the most important of them is that both dealt with one issue, which is about woman. Firdaus and Celie represent the perfect and strong women, who faced hardships with strength, did not surrender, and continued to fight for independence and their freedom, despite the difficult experiences they went through in the

patriarchal society. Firdaus faced death with open arms after surpassing males, while Celie found her inner strength to finally find her happiness.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Women have always been considered a disgrace in society, despised by the male sex, because they have been considered just as a gender that has no value without men, although the value of men without women does not diminish anything of them. But women did not fall with all this taming and violation, rather they confronted men and they all had self-confidence, so they fought for their identity and freedom. Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi used the pen as a means to explain the injustice of society on women, they shed light on some obstacles and challenges to which women have been subjected to, then about women's self-affirmation, and freedom in their works. This part of our work will be devoted to the analysis of women's issues such as patriarchy, forced marriage, domestic violence, and fear found in both novels *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and *The Color Purple* (1982) as the first chapter. In the second chapter, we will explore the reaction and the resistance of the two protagonists Firdaus and Celie against these issues and how they faced them, and struggled for freedom and stood courageously, rejecting oppression and male domination in the two novels. Indeed, we will try to collate between main female characters in the novels, Celie in Alice Walker's novel, and Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi's novel, then we will deal with secondary female characters. All in all, we will discuss all this with reference to the feminist theory of Simone De Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949).



*Chapter One:*

Women's Issues in Nawal El Saadawi's  
*Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice  
Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982).

***Chapter One: Women's Issues in Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero (1975) and Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982).***

***1. Women as Victims of society***

In patriarchal societies, women have no status and are treated as mere servants without rights. Men have looked at them with humiliation and contempt; women have been the weakest link in society, and have become subject to ridicule and insult. A lot of social injustice has been and continues to befall women, where the role and function of women in society has been defined to be like a commodity that is bought and sold, used to satisfy instinct and lust, and thrown away when they are no longer needed in society.

The image that Afro-American and Egyptian society has of women is negative. They have been ranked lower than men at all levels, as they have been ill-treated, in addition to being subjected to the injustice that is imposed on them. Society distinguished between men and women, and this made them marginalized socially, politically, and economically. Society's view of women has been characterized by contempt, alienation, and arrogance. Women have been considered inferior; weak for that they are subjected to male power, without regard for their most basic rights. Women have always been a problem and hindrance to society. As Nawal EL Saadawi and Alice Walker have been shown it in their novels.

Indeed, the issue of women has been considered as one of the issues that are related to human existence, as women in Afro-American and Egyptian societies face problems and challenges that hinder them from having a greater role in society. Among the essential issues that El Saadawi and Walker illustrated in their novels, we find the phenomenon of *patriarchal society* where women have been subjected to the authority of the male sex in the family who control women behavior and their fate without women's interference. Andrea Dworkin contends,

Under patriarchy, no woman is safe to live their life, love, or mother her children. Under patriarchy, every woman is a victim, past, present, and future. Under patriarchy, every woman's daughter is a victim, past, present, and future. Under patriarchy, every woman's son is her potential, betrayer and unavoidable usurper or exploiter of another woman. (Andrea Dworkin, p.58)

In addition, forced marriage is another issue. It is forcing a woman to marry without her consent; pressure and abuse have been used in order to force women to agree, and to consummate the marriage. Moreover; women also have been subjected to physical violence. It is one of the most harmful forms of violence against women. In fact, 'violence is a weapon of the weak', women, in society, have been hostages to men because they have been considered powerless. All in all women's issues in society are innumerable, because society views women as mere commodities that belong to men.

To conclude, the female characters in *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Color Purple* have experienced many forms of violence, alienation, and oppression by men in their societies.

### **A). Patriarchy and Violence in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)**

Patriarchy and violence are among the most important themes introduced by Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi in their works. Women in patriarchal societies suffer from oppression and the constant torture by men, in a world where women are viewed as incapable as men. Thus, they are exposed to patriarchal control, where they are abused in the worst way, without having any right to speak and defend them. Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* writes: "women are not born, they are made." (Beauvoir, 1949). That is, women are not born inferior, powerless and dependent on men, but society is a man's rule, they govern, and men are considered more powerful and Superior to women. Women are not

the ones to blame for this situation but men. Women's duty is only serving the males in the family. This is well illustrated in *The Color Purple* and *Woman at Point Zero*.

The two protagonists in the novels, Celie in Alice Walker's novel and Firdous in Nawal El Saadawi's, are exposed to various types of matters, including evils of patriarchy and violence. The two heroines are being tamed and oppressed by the males in their families; they cannot express themselves and their vision of things. The males' authority control Celie and Firdaus behavior, studies, and work, drawing a failed career and a miserable life which exposes them to great suffering. The same suffering is experienced by the other female characters in both novels. Simone De Beauvoir believes that patriarchy is one of the ways in which women are oppressed because that leads to restricting their freedom. For Simone De Beauvoir,

Humanity is a male and male defines woman not in herself but as relation to him. Man can think of himself without women, she cannot think of herself without man. She is simply what decrees, thus she is sex, absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (1949, 12)

The above cited quotation shows the fact that women are an integral part of men. Without men, women are nothing and cannot think of themselves without thinking about men, contrary to men who are considered free and do not need women to think, they are an essential and effective element in society.

Alice Walker is among the women writers who has taken the issue of black women seriously and has written about the injustice and oppression that women are subjected to daily in society. In her book *The Color Purple*, she writes about women's experience from misery, violence, brokenness, and injustice, through the female protagonist Celie. Celie's world is

full of fear, loneliness, and torture. She used to write letters to God asking him for help, so she shares her worst experience in her frightening world as letters addressed to God; she has no one else to help her.

Accordingly, in *The Color Purple* the protagonist Celie is treated with the worst treatment, her father always abuses her, and she is only a young, active child not more than five years old. Celie's father always tells her that she is stupid and evil, and she is only suitable for house work. "He acts like he can't stand me anymore. Say I'm evil and always up to no good." (1982, p. 10). The pain Celie encounters cannot be tolerated by a girl of her age. She lives with restrictions as if she has two wings that were broken by her compulsory submission to her father, so she can no longer fly, and then she took over the housework after her mother fell ill and raised her brothers.

At that time, the role of Egyptian women surrendered to men without saying a word. They are only maids serving the men of the family, they achieve their needs, and do not raise their voices despite their torture. Egyptian societies instilled fear within them. Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* says, "Woman is shot up in a kitchen or in a boudoir, and astonishment is expressed that her horizon is limited. Her wings are clipped, and it is found deplorable that she cannot fly." (1949, p.574). This quote shows that the powerlessness of women is due to the authority of men who lock them in their circle and control every step they take, then call them disabled, suitable only for housework. Society gives men the right to dominate women, and made them as they want. In the end, women are their right, a piece of them treated as a mere machine.

In addition, without any mercy Celie's father, whom she refers to as Pa, raped her sexually and permanently. She is killed from the inside several times; Celie is indeed a victim of sexual abuse by her stepfather at young age. She became pregnant with two children. The stepfather killed the first child and sold the second. In her first letter to God, Celie admits that

her stepfather, whom she trusts, has raped her when her mother was ill and could no longer provide for her husband's needs. Celie has taken her mother's place by force. "He started to choke me, saying you better shut up and get used to it. But I don't ever get used to it. And now I feel sick every time I be the one to cook." (p.11) in all these painful experiences that Celie went through, she complained only to God, the one who is able to help her. "But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive". (p.17) what makes Celie suffer more is the realization that Alphonso is not her real father, but her stepfather. Although she is a good little girl, she suffers a lot. "I am fourteen years old. I am, I have always been a good girl." (P.3), that makes Celie consider most men similar, and not different. They have the same desires and only impose their authority.

In this period of patriarchy and violence, women in Afro-American and Egyptian societies were tortured heavily by the men of their families, especially their fathers. With all this suffering, in the end, they were forced to marry without giving importance to the age of women. Forced marriage is a serious abuse of women's rights and a harmful exercise of power and control. William Shakespeare writes: "For what is wedlock forced but a hell, An age of discord and continual strife? Whereas the contrary bringeth bliss, And is a pattern of celestial peace." (2004, p.247)

And yet, Celie is married to a man named Mr. M who beats her up and takes her as a maid for him and his children. He treats her brutally and abuses her continuously. "I was forced into marriage, as if my life is nothing but a tool in their hands. Those corrupt forces I thought had the power to rule over my destiny". Celie's suffering is indescribable, for she is nothing but a tool to serve her husband. She has no right to refuse his requests for fear of him. She suffers from the control and strict rules of her abusive husband, even his children are unbearable, as they are not different from their father. Celie is treated by her husband as an animal, as if she has been just a body that does not contain a soul, like a machine made for

service and obedience, nothing more. Even when Mr. M has sex with her, he does not treat her as a human being. In her work *The Second Sex*, Simone De Bouvoir, points “With the invention of the tool, maintenance of life became the activity and project of man, while motherhood left women rivaled to her body like the animal.” (p.75)

In her book *The Will to Change : Men, Masculinity, and Love*, Bell hooks has written extensively on patriarchy and its effects on society, highlighting submission over suffering and oppression, discrimination and gender inequality.

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently superior to anything and everything deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (2004, p.18)

In fact, Bell hooks believes that patriarchy is a system that enhances male dominance and power over women, making them less valuable in society. Patriarchal authority kills women’s role in society and prevents them from developing, putting them inside a closer room unable to interact with world.

Another female figure who is mentioned in the novel is Nettie. She is the little sister of Celie. Who is closer to her. In fact, Nettie is like a light to Celie in her dark and cruel world. Unfortunately, their father has separated them; he separates between two loving souls. After Celie’s marriage, her father begins to harass Nettie, who is like his youngest daughter. He also beats her and treats her in the worst way. He imposes his authority on her and almost forces her to marry a man older than her, had it not been for the intervention of her sister Celie, who saves her from a failed marriage. “I ast him to take me instead of Nettie.” (p.7) Celie wants to get married instead of Nettie to protect her.

Celie’s stepfather is also violent towards her mother “Ma”, beating her without mercy. Her mother suffers from difficult circumstances, she is always subjected to injustice and physical violence by her father, who forces her to marry at an early age, and her husband

used to impose his authority on her and mistreats her. This makes her feel oppressed and marginalized. “He was pulling in her arm. She says it too soon, Fonso, I ain’t well. Finally, he leaves her alone. A week goes by, he pulls her arm again. She says “Naw, I ain’t gonna.” (p.8)

In addition, another female character “Squeak” (Mary Agnes) in turn, is subjected to ill-treatment, as the patriarchal system affects her life and restricts her freedom; she has always been forced to comply with orders that subject her to oppression and injustice. She gets raped by her uncle. As well as, Shug Avery who is the love of Celie, she always been rejected and dominated by her father. She goes through difficulties that prevent her from enjoying her rights as a woman. The men of her society impose her identity on her, because she is known as a ‘bad woman’. In the eyes of society, she is an immoral woman.

Celie and the rest of the female characters in *The Color Purple*, live the struggles that women face in societies, and make them feel isolated and imprisoned. Women in such societies do not have the right to be independent or have a special identity. Rather, they are under the control of men. They live their life as if they are in a prison, with orders that must fulfill or be punished with the harshest punishments. Simone De Beauvoir argues in her work *The Second Sex* that women are framed as “the other sex”. In her succinct words, “He is the subject, he is the absolute. She is the other” (1949, p. 6).

Nawal El Saadawi, in her turn, also deals with women’s issues and writes about the experiences that many women went through, including the imprisoned Firdaus in her novel *Woman at Point Zero*. Firdaus’ story is not much different from Celie; she is also subjected to the patriarchy that she suffers from. She has always been beaten again and again by her father, as she is just a weak woman in relation to society. She has no right to live freely. She lives according to the rules of her selfish father who deals with her cruelly and ferociously. Firdaus portrays the tragic life of Egyptian women in a patriarchal society, portraying them as women



bound within a brutish system with no voice, considering them a great burden. This makes them 'other' in society. In turn, Firdaus feels betrayed and disappointed by a trusted person. Her father, who should have made her a princess in his kingdom, makes her a servant who obeys his orders without mercy. This makes her father like the rest of men, not different from them. Nawal El Saadawi writes, "Sometimes I did not recognize my father among them, he was so similar to them that I did not know that he was my father." (p.20)

Despite Firdaus' age, she suffers a lot because of her father. She always does the housework, the washing and the cleaning; she is just a servant who attends to her father's needs. Firdaus is a woman chained within the confines of a brutal patriarchal system, where she lives at the expense of her father not at the expense of her desires. As a main character, Firdaus is one of the victims of the patriarchal system; she suffers from many conflicts because of her restriction, marginalization, and deprivation of her freedom. Simone De Beauvoir writes, "The most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women." (p.24)

After the death of Firdaus's father, she has been adopted by her father's brother. Firdaus is unable to continue her studies, although she is getting the highest rank in school, but her uncle's authority has killed her ambition, her uncle's says, "To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh a man of religion like myself sending her niece off to mix in the company of men?!" (p.37). Her uncle's status is more important than her ambitions and desires. Traditions and religion prevailed at this time, which made women not study or dream of education, but rather clean in her father's house. He does not only destroy her ambition to study, he also forces her to marry an old man.

Forced marriage makes a woman wither like a flower, and live without a soul. Firdaus, who did not have a happy childhood, and after traumatic experiences, her youth is killed by

her forced marriage to an elderly man in the sixties by her uncle. So, her present and future are destroyed through a failed marriage. Firdaus is deprived of choosing her life partner by herself, and is married to the one chosen by her uncle and his wife. Her uncle's wife states,

My uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, is a virtuous man. He has a big pension and no children, and he's been on his own since his wife died last year. If he marries Firdous she will have a good life with him, and he can find her an obedient wife, who will serve him and relieve his loneliness. Firdous has grown, your holiness, and must be married. It is risky for her to continue without a husband. She is a good girl but the world is full of bastards. (p.37)

Although Sheikh Mahmoud is too old for Firdaus, her uncle supports his wife in her decision. He says, "I agree with you, but Sheikh Mahmoud is much too old for her". (p.37) his wife responds by saying: "who said he is old! He is only on pension this year, and Firdous herself is not that young." (p.38) Firdaus's uncle decides to marry her to the Sheikh without thinking about her decisions and approval. She is married off to an old man against her will, and the poor woman remains silent for fear of this decision. They steal her dream in front of her without mercy. She is exposed to her uncle's authority; and she is unable to confront.

After her marriage, Firdaus experiences suffering and conflicts with her husband, whom she never loves. She does not feel happy with him, but always disgusted with him because of his cruel and bad treatment of her. Poor Firdaus does not recover from her father's wounds, until her husband's wounds begin to cover the body. She is constantly beaten, raped, and cursed by her brutal husband. Firdaus, for her husband, is nothing but a body that satisfies his pleasures, without mercy. To illustrate from the novel,

At night he would wind his legs and arms around me, and let his old, gnarled hand travel all over my body, like the claws of a starving man who has been deprived of real food for many years, wipe the bowl of food clean, and leave not a single crumb behind. (1975, p.45)

Firdaus suffers a lot from social pressures and violent relationships. She faces many difficulties and challenges imposed by a conservative society. She suffers greatly as a result of the patriarchal authority that her husband has exercised over her. She is always forced to comply with him and his orders and live under his authority. A man who forces his wife to have sex with him while she refuses, cannot be considered as a man but an awful beast. The little Firdaus is subjected to physical violence without mercy. Women at this time were thought to please their husbands and obey them, and that religion permits them to beat women, while wives have no right to complain. Firdaus ' uncle, who loves her and is her only hope in her tragic life, does not defend her, but justifies suffering in the name of morals and religion. Firdaus says: "So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husbands beat their wife" (1975, p.63). She adds: "The uncle's wife says that the precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband (1975, p.63).

Firdaus escapes from the filth of this life, she is sick of her husband's injustice. She becomes a homeless person in the streets whose residents looked at her with disgust and coldness. Firdaus cannot bear all that suffering. She finds no solution to leave her husband's house to escape from his oppression. She chooses the streets that appear to her more merciful than staying with a man who tortures her. Firdaus complains,

One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle's house. I walked through the streets with swollen eyes, and a bruised face, but no one paid any attention to me. (1975, p.47).

This quotation indicates the many pressures that Firdaus goes through. Because of this patriarchal authority, she has been destroyed and turns into a vagrant to eventually become a prostitute in society. After she suffered mentally, now she suffers physically. She endures a lot and, in the end, ends up without a family to protect her from the ugliness of society. Her

uncle, who is like her father, tortures her to death after imposing his authority on her, to be emotionally killed again by her husband, who should have been the way to her peace. Firdaus is let down by the males of her family and becomes a prostitute.

El Saadawi, in this novel, depicts not only the forms of violence and persecution that women are subjected to. She also tells us how respectable women are transformed into dirty prostitutes. Firdaus is exploited because of her weakness, and the main reason makes her a prostitute is her family. Firdaus contends: "I am not a prostitute, but my father, my uncle and my husband trained me from the beginning to be a prostitute" (1975, p.66). Firdaus obtains her secondary school certificate, and she wants to work honorably. After great challenges, she does not succeed, and finds herself on the streets without shelter or food. The first man she meets is called Bayoumi, a gentleman at first, he treats Firdaus well, but the man's instinct cannot be changed. Bayoumi rapes Firdaus and beats her daily. Worst than that, his friends also rapes her, she turns for men a doll to enjoy.

Firdaus ran away again to the street, she saw it as a safe place. To justify this, Firdaus says: "The street has become the safe place to which I run, and throw all my soul into it." (p.41). While she is on the streets, she meets Sharifa, a prostitute who exploits women to collect money. Firdaus is one of her preys; she makes her a prostitute who serves her free so she gets the money. As usual, Firdaus gets the pain. Sharifa's story remains mysterious, and we do not know of the tragedy that led her to become a prostitute. Daa is one of Firdaus's customers who tells her that she is ill-mannered. He says: "you are disrespectful" (p.52). This makes Firdaus stop working as a prostitute to find a decent job for herself after Daa's words hurt her. The last man, Firdaus meets in the whoredom business, is Marzouk. He is a powerful pimp with many connections and acquaintances, a manipulative and exploitative character who controls her life and exposes her to abuse.

In some countries, women can be exposed to rape every day, rape is a form of sexual violence, as it transgresses a woman's dignity and her right to decide what happens to her body. Although Firdaus is raped many times, the cruel society does not defend her. So she becomes a dirty prostitute in their eyes, meeting their needs and enjoyment.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Nawal el Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* are two literary works that summarize the actual lives of women around the world through feminine characters who have experienced difficulties and challenges. The two protagonists in both novels have gone through almost the same experiences, their stories are similar. Both of them are exposed to patriarchal control, they are forced to marry, and are raped by the males of their families. They both are abused and beaten in societies that do not care about women's rights or their pain, as women are nothing but servants who meet the demands of men.

Simone De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, presents and explains the oppression of women. Man is the only one who can control society, while the woman has no value in front of him, the male is the 'seer'. She writes, "This world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons for this have ever seemed sufficient." (p.71)

However, the two stories are different in some points. Firdaus's experiences are more sensitive than Celie and the rest of the characters. Her exposure to the biggest issue against women drags her into a brothel to become a dirty prostitute who is raped daily, and kills a man, to be a criminal in the eyes of society. We do not mean that Celie and other characters were not sensitive to their case, but Firdaus is the most vulnerable to pain.

## **B). Fear and Silence in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)**

The theme of fear and silence is prevalent in feminist literature, illustrating the oppressive realities women face in various societies. In the novels *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, this theme is explored with remarkable power and depth. These captivating literary works offer unique perspectives on how fear and silence can be used as tools of domination and control, while also demonstrating the resilient strength of women who fight for their freedom and emancipation.

In *The Color Purple*, fear and silence permeate the lives of the female characters, shaping their experiences in profound ways. The novel depicts the journey of Celie, an African-American woman living in the early 20th century, who endures a life of hardship, abuse, and deprivation. From a young age, Celie is silenced by the oppressive forces around her, starting with her own stepfather, who violates and impregnates her, leading to the birth of two children she is forced to give away. This traumatic experience instills a deep fear within Celie, silencing her voice and suppressing her sense of self-worth. Celie's stepfather threatens "you better not never tell nobody, but God. It'd kill your mommy." (p.11).

Celie's life is marked by fear of male authority figures, especially her abusive husband, whom she refers to as "Mr. M." His oppressive and violent demeanor further stifles Celie's voice and perpetuates her silence. Mister's dominating presence instills in Celie a constant state of anxiety and fear, making her hesitant to express her thoughts and emotions openly. She withdraws into herself, finding solace only in her letters to God, which become a form of cathartic release and a way to navigate her inner turmoil.

The societal norms of the time also contribute to the fear and silence experienced by Celie and other women in the novel. The novel portrays a deeply patriarchal society where

women are expected to be submissive and obedient to men. They are taught to fear questioning the status, even when it perpetuates their suffering and subjugation. This pervasive culture of silence stifles the voices of women, preventing them from asserting their autonomy and challenging the oppressive structures that bind them.

Despite the stifling fear and silence that surrounds her, Celie's spirit remains unyielding. Over time, her relationship with Shug Avery, Mister's mistress, becomes a source of empowerment. Shug encourages Celie to find her voice and embrace her true self, challenging the notion of submission and self-sacrifice that she has internalized for so long. Through her friendship with Shug, Celie discovers her worth and starts to confront the fear that has held her captive.

As the novel unfolds, Celie's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment becomes a powerful testament to the strength of the human spirit. She begins to find her voice and stand up for herself, defying the expectations that society has imposed on her. In doing so, Celie not only liberates herself but also empowers the women around her to break free from the chains of fear and silence.

*The Color Purple* masterfully illustrates the ways fear and silence can be used as tools of oppression, while also showcasing the indomitable human spirit's ability to transcend these barriers. Alice Walker's portrayal of Celie's transformation from a silenced and fearful woman to a resilient and empowered individual serves as an inspiration and a reminder of the importance of breaking the silence and confronting fear in the journey towards personal liberation and social change.

In the same way, *Woman at point zero* by Naawal El Saadawi, fear and silence are also major themes that are incarnated by women. The protagonist Firdaus fears the men who exploit her, the societal norms that restrict her, and the consequences of trying to challenge

the established order. As a woman living in a patriarchal society, she faces constant threats to her safety and dignity. The fear of violence and punishment keeps her from speaking out against the injustices she faces.

Additionally, Firdaus is made to keep quiet by the men in her life who use their authority to hush her. She has grown up believing that her worth is only about looking good and pleasing men. This makes her lose her own voice and feel like she's helpless and unimportant. Firdaus starts to believe she should just stay quiet and not complain or ask for respect. In her story, being quiet is linked to being afraid. She learns to keep her thoughts to herself because she thinks her voice doesn't matter in a world controlled by men. She learns to go along with what's expected of her and believes that speaking up will only bring her more pain.

Firdaus sees gender inequality and how women are treated badly in her society from a young age. She sees her mom putting up with her abusive dad, which sets an example for her. As she grows up, she realizes the limits put on her as a woman. The fear of being silenced and not taken seriously drives her to resist the unfair rules around her. In her own words, Firdaus says, "It's better to be alone than be with people who stop you from moving forward."

In her quest for independence and self-determination, Firdaus evolves in a world that tries to stop her at every step she takes. She is confronted with sexual harassment, objectification and exploitation by men who see women as mere objects of desire. Fear of being branded promiscuous or disobedient forces Firdaus to remain silent, hiding her pain and anger behind a stoic facade. As Firdaus enters adulthood, she experiences different forms of subjugation in her roles as servant, dancer and prostitute. In each case, fear of social judgment and condemnation prevents her from openly challenging the oppressive systems that exploit and dehumanize women.



Despite her resilience and determination, Firdaus struggles to free herself from the suffocating grip of fear and silence. However, a pivotal moment in Firdaus' life occurs when she meets a mentor who enables her to embrace her identity and resist the chains of societal expectations. This mentor gives Firdaus the strength to break her silence and confront the injustices she has endured. With this newfound courage, Firdaus defies the fear that has held her captive for so long, and takes control of her own identity.

In *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi, fear and silence play significant roles in shaping the lives of the female protagonists, Celie and Firdaus, respectively. In *The Color Purple*, fear and silence primarily arise from the oppressive forces of a patriarchal society, where women are expected to submit to male authority and endure abuse silently. Celie's fear is rooted in the violence and control imposed on her by male figures, shaping her voice and self-expression.

On the other hand, *Woman at Point Zero* explores fear and silence in the context of a deeply misogynistic society that exploits and marginalizes women. Firdaus faces fear and silence as tools of control throughout her life, perpetuating her subjugation and forcing her into a life of silence as she navigates a world that exploits and defines her as a woman. While both novels indicate the devastating impact of fear and silence on women's lives, they do so in distinct cultural and societal settings, shedding light on the universal struggles faced by women while emphasizing their unique battles for liberation and self-empowerment. Aligning with de Beauvoir's theory of women as the "Other." The female protagonists, Firdaus and Celie, grapple with the internalized fear of challenging male authority and societal norms that dictate their subordination.

Firdaus, in *Woman at Point Zero*, endures a life of exploitation and mistreatment, which instills a deep-seated fear within her. The fear of speaking out against her oppressors

and the silence imposed on her by societal expectations are both consequences of her position as the "Other." De Beauvoir's theory emphasizes that women's subordination is a result of their societal categorization as different from men, leading to their internalized fear and silence. Firdaus' silence, in this context, becomes a manifestation of her marginalized status, as she is conditioned to believe that her voice is insignificant and her experiences are unworthy of being acknowledged.

Similarly, in *The Color Purple*, Celie's fear and silence stem from her position as a marginalized woman within a patriarchal society. Her traumatic experiences of abuse and mistreatment by male figures, as well as the societal norms that disempower women, contribute to her fear of expressing herself openly. De Beauvoir's theory posits that women's silence often emerges from their role as the "Other" in relation to men. In Celie's case, her silence becomes a response to the social order that silences and oppresses women, perpetuating the cycle of fear and subjugation.

African American women suffers a lot in the past , and the female characters in the novel *The Color Purple* are a depiction of the suffering that women are subjected to in patriarchal societies , from domination and violence . Celie, as a basic feminist character, shows the worst experiences that is eliminating women's role in society and restricting them, from enjoying their rights. Likewise, Firdaus in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* depicts the difficult life of Egyptian women, which make them suffer from the domination of men. All the female characters in the two novels suffer a lot and go through difficult challenges on them by society , but they all remain silent for fear of their fate .They are unable to react against injustice , remain silent , fulfilling the demands of men and accepting their violence.

De Beauvoir's theory also sheds light on how the fear and silence experienced by both characters are interconnected. The fear of challenging the established norms and the silence

imposed upon them by society reinforce each other, making it difficult for Firdaus and Celie to break free from the oppressive constraints that bind them. Their silence becomes a means of self-preservation, protecting them from further harm and maintaining a semblance of safety in a hostile environment.

In conclusion, applying Simone de Beauvoir's theory *The Second Sex* to the theme of fear and silence in *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Color Purple* reveals how women's subordination and objectification in patriarchal societies contribute to their internalized fear and enforced silence. Firdaus and Celie's experiences epitomize the struggles faced by women as the "Other," making it essential to challenge the structures that perpetuate gender inequality and create a space for women to break free from the chains of fear and silence

*Chapter Two:*

*Women's Resistance and Empowerment in  
Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero  
(1975) and Alice Walker's The Color  
Purple (1982)*

## **Chapter Two: Women's Resistance and Empowerment in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple***

### **1). *Women's Resistance against Society***

Despite the difficult experiences and challenges women have faced in male dominated societies, they did not give up. Rather, they have faced these difficulties, committed themselves to their rights, and demanded equality regardless of gender discrimination. Women have fought everything that hindered their way towards their freedom, so they have challenged the world with work, education, and creativity to paint a strong picture describing their importance as an essential element in all societies.

Women have always been brave and strong in the face of society's injustice to them. More than that, they have proven themselves in a patriarchal society that looks at them as weaknesses. Their ability to withstand the challenges of life from raising children, serving their husbands, and working to support their families, is an evidence of their creativity in a society that marginalizes their distinguished role. Women have stood bravely defending their rights and freedom; they have risen in the space of challenges, rejecting the idea of marginalization and gender roles, steadfast in the face of society's contempt for them as a female. Madeleine K. Albright says: "it took me quit a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent." (She told Huff Post Living in 2010) No one can silence a woman anymore, she is no longer that weak, she has killed her old fear and her roots have sprouted strength and courage.

Women have proven their strength and potential through their effective role in building society, as they are the ones who give birth and raise, and praise the man, they meet his needs and cannot be dispensed with. They focus in their studies and work to benefit

society, and have helped change it for the best, as they are the basis for the development and advancement of civilizations.

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, the female characters have faced numerous challenges and obstacles as a result of societal norms and expectations that have limited their opportunities and voice. However, despite these challenges, the female characters in both novels demonstrate remarkable resilience and strength in their resistance against societal norms. They use a variety of forms of resistance to fight against the oppression they face.

### **A. The Raise of Voice against Patriarchy in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)**

Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi were not satisfied with describing the violence that of these women in their novels, by presenting the image of strong women, steadfast in society's cruelty. In both Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, the female characters face oppression and abuse at the hands of patriarchal structures. However, in both novels, the female characters find their voices and fight against patriarchal norms, ultimately finding empowerment and self-determination

In *The Color Purple*, the female characters use a variety of forms of resistance to fight the oppression they face. Celie, the protagonist, begins the novel as a silenced and oppressed character, but over time, she finds her voice and empowers herself. She resists the abuse she suffers by speaking out against it and ultimately leaving her abusive husband. She also resists societal norms by pursuing her own dreams and desires, such as her relationship with Shug Avery who guides Celie and teaches her how to make herself feel good. She even encourages

Celie to smile. “Miss Celie why you always covering up your smile? Show me that pretty smile.” Always she stands by her side and encourages her to smile.

Similarly, Sofia resists societal norms by refusing to be submissive to the white supremacist society in which she lives. She is punished for her resistance, but she never gives up her strength or her voice. She fights against her father and brothers, she refuses patriarchal domination. Celie initially remains silent in the face of abuse and oppression. However, over time, she begins to find her voice and speak out against the patriarchal structures that limit her opportunities and voice. Through her resistance, Celie finds her voice and her power. She says, "I'm poor, I'm black, I may even be ugly, but dear God, I'm here. I'm here". (Walker 1982, p. 198)

Similarly, in *Woman at Point Zero* Firdaus, the protagonist initially faces numerous challenges and obstacles as a result of patriarchal structures. However, she refuses to accept the limitations placed on her as a woman and fights for her own self-determination and empowerment. She resists the abuse she suffers by standing up against her abusive father and husband, ultimately taking control of her own fate. Through her resistance, Firdaus finds her voice and her power. She observes, “I was no longer afraid. Nothing in the streets was capable of scaring me any longer.” (p.82) Firdaus in the novel gives a voice to the voiceless, as she is a symbol of strength and resistance.

What made Firdaus discover her abilities and strength was the death of the only last man she killed, who used her as a tool of enjoyment, standing in the way of her freedom. She killed the disgusting man who wanted her as a toy to satisfy his pleasure. She turns into a brave woman who no longer fears men, but men become afraid of her. She decides to stand against injustice and face it with all determination, insisting on achieving justice without thinking

about the consequences she would face. With time, Firdaus gets used to her new life based on resistance. She controls her fear to escape the brutality of men.

Firdaus now realizes that she is a woman who is able to fight her abusers. The personality of Firdaus indicates that the woman who controls her fears has the ability to resist and fight against men who abuse her. Men are afraid to stand up to the woman who resists them, because they realize the danger of a woman's power, they will not be able to control her if she discovers her inner strength. She says,

They condemned me to death not because I had killed a man -there are thousands of people being killed every day- but because they are afraid to let me live. They know that as long as I am alive they will not be safe, that I shall kill them. My life means their death. My death means their life. (Saadawi, p.110)

This quote indicates a man's fear of a strong woman, as he sees her as the more powerful. She becomes able to put an end to the men's control over her. From her fear of men, Firdaus gathered her strength to fight for truth and freedom. She contends: "When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife. That is why they are afraid and in a hurry to execute me." (Saadawi, p.112)

The rise of voice against patriarchy in *The Color Purple* and *Woman at Point Zero* is a powerful theme that is central to both novels. In both novels, the female characters are initially silenced and oppressed by the patriarchal structures in their societies, but they eventually find their voices and fight back against their oppression. One of the key ways in which the female characters resist patriarchy is through their use of language. In *The Color Purple*, Celie initially struggles to express herself verbally, but with the help of Shug Avery, she learns to use language as a tool for self-expression and empowerment. Similarly, in *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus uses language to assert her independence and to challenge the patriarchal norms that limit her opportunities and voice.



In addition to language, the female characters in both novels also use physical acts of defiance to resist patriarchy. Sofia, in *The Color Purple*, refuses to be submissive to the white supremacist society in which she lives. She fights back against those who try to oppress her. She always quarrels with her husband who tries to impose his control over her; she refuses to submit to him and fights for freedom as a woman deserving respect. She is not a slave or just a housewife, but a human being like other men. Celie says: "He tries to slap her, what he does that for? She goes down and grabs a piece of stove wood and whacks him across the eyes." (p.39) .

In addition, the character of Shug Avery rejects the traditional females. She is a successful and confident woman. She uses her language as an artist to express herself and goes against patriarchal society. Shug creates her own life, and fulfills all her desires. She shows that she is a brave woman with a strong personality. "She makes so much money she doesn't know what to do with it. She got a fine house in Memphis, another can she got one hundred pretty dresses." (p.114)

Similarly, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* resists her abusive father and husband by physically standing up to them and ultimately taking control of her own fate. Despite the consequences they face, such as punishment, ostracism, and even death, the female characters in both novels continue to resist patriarchy and find empowerment through their voices. Their resistance is a powerful reminder of the importance of challenging patriarchal norms and fighting for gender equality.

Throughout history, patriarchal structures have been deeply ingrained in society and have limited women's opportunities and voice. However, in *The Color Purple* and *Woman at Point Zero*, the female characters demonstrate a remarkable rise of voice against patriarchy. Both Celie and Firdaus initially face oppression and abuse, but they refuse to accept their

situations and find their voices through their resistance. They challenge patriarchal norms by speaking out against abuse and pursuing their own dreams and desires. Through their determination and courage, they ultimately find empowerment and self-determination. As Celie expresses,

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child isn't safe in a family of men, but I ain't ever thought I'd have to fight in my own house (Walker, p. 1).

Similarly, Firdaus declares, "I am a woman who has never belonged to a man. I am a virgin, and I am a whore" (Saadawi, p. 45). These quotes demonstrate the rise of voice against patriarchy in both novels. Firdaus is a symbol of strength and courage, a determined woman who fights for her rights and raises the banner of strong women in a male-dominated society.

The rise of voice against patriarchy in both novels is not without consequences. Celie and Sofia in *The Color Purple* are punished for their resistance, with Celie losing custody of her children and Sofia being imprisoned for standing up to a white man. Similarly, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* faces numerous challenges and obstacles as a result of her resistance, including imprisonment and social ostracism. However, despite these consequences, the female characters in both novels continue to resist and find empowerment through their voices.

From the book, *The Second Sex*, we can notice that Simone De Beauvoir is concerned with the issue of women's liberation. She believes that the entire society must be changed. De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* states, "The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hand, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that nation of power." (Beauvoir, interview by Claudia Card .2003).

She also believes that men and women must be equal and independent, and women must work to achieve their freedom. Women must get out of the cage of patriarchy if they

want freedom they must challenge the world with all of its difficulties. She states: “Men do not like tomboys, nor bluestocking, nor thinking women; too much addiction, culture, intelligence, or character frightens them.” (Volume 2: Lived Experience, Part one: Formative Years, Chapter 2: The Girl)

The role of community is also important in both novels. The female characters find support and strength through their relationships with other women who help to reclaim courage and confidence that they are able to achieve victory against patriarchal society who sees them as nothing more than “the other race”. Celie finds support from Shug Avery and Nettie, who help her find her voice to react against injustice. She finds her purpose in life cause of friendship then she discovers love and faith. Nettie says,

Oh, Celie, there are colored people in the world who want us to know, to grow and see the light, they are not as mean as Pa and Albert or beaten as Ma was. Corrine and Samuel have a wonderful marriage . Their only sorrow in the beginning was that they could not have children. And then, they say, God sent them Olivia and Adam. (p.124).

This declaration shows Nettie encouraging Celie to discover the outer world and to create a strong personality. Similarly, Firdaus finds support from other female prisoners and from the women in the village where she grew up. In both novels, when women are oppressed, other oppressed women defend them and face the issues they suffer from. They form one hand fighting hard for freedom; this union between women allows them to resist oppression. Malala Yousafzai in her book *I am Malala* writes, “We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced.” (p.186) from their silence, they gather strength and brought out their inner voice to the world, rejecting the dominance and control of the male society, bad treatment, and their contempt. However, women refuse to remain silent, but rather raise them voice, demanding their freedom.

The female characters in both novels face severe consequences for their resistance, including imprisonment and social ostracism. However, they continue to resist because they

believe in their right to self-determination and empowerment. Through their resistance, they challenge patriarchal norms and demonstrate that change is possible. Simone De Beauvoir puts it: “Capacities manifest themselves clearly only once they have been realized.” (Beauvoir. 45\_46). Through the series of challenges and confrontation that Celie, Firdaus, and the rest of the female characters, it is portrayed and shows how women can be strong and able to achieve their freedom and rights, even if a man stands in front of them and fights them violently and does not allow them to move forward, even if society stifles them, they stand firm and fight.

### **B. The Struggle for Independence in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982)**

The pursuit of independence has been an enduring theme in literature, reflecting the arduous journey of individuals striving to break free from oppressive circumstances and reclaim their autonomy. These two important works, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, vividly depict the struggles for independence endured by their respective protagonists. Set in distinct contexts and written by authors from vastly different cultural backgrounds, the novels provide profound insights into the challenges faced by women seeking liberation from systemic oppression and societal constraints. Martin Luther King Jr wrote in his essay *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*: “Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed”. (Martin Luther King, 1963)

The main female characters in both novels, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero*, and Celie in *The Color Purple*, embark into a journey of fighting for freedom and independence from the evils of patriarchy. Both Celie and Firdaus endure extreme levels of oppression and abuse throughout their lives. Celie, in *The Color Purple*, faces physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from her stepfather and later from her husband. Firdaus, in *Woman at Point Zero*, suffers from

poverty, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation. Their experiences of trauma and mistreatment fuel their determination to liberate themselves from their oppressors. Both women are initially denied control over their own bodies and lives due to the patriarchal structures of their societies. Celie's early life is marked by powerlessness, forced silence, and a lack of agency. Firdaus, on the other hand, faces societal expectations that view women as objects of male desire, denying her control over her own body and autonomy. They both strive to reclaim ownership of their bodies and destinies, seeking to break free from the societal norms that restrict them.

Despite the daunting challenges they encounter, Celie and Firdaus display remarkable defiance and resistance in their quest for independence. Celie finds solace in writing letters to God, through which she discovers her own voice and gradually gains the strength to assert herself. Firdaus, in her imprisonment, remains unyielding, refusing to be silenced by a system that seeks to suppress her. Both women demonstrate a tenacious spirit to confront their oppressors and advocate for their own rights.

Throughout their respective journeys, Celie and Firdaus encounter mentor figures who provide them with guidance and inspiration. Celie's relationship with Shug Avery, a strong and independent woman, exposes her to new possibilities and empowers her to envision a life beyond subjugation. Firdaus on the other hand, finds guidance in the Sheikh, whose insights help her challenge the hypocrisy of the society around her. These mentorships play a crucial role in shaping their understanding of independence and self-worth.

The two protagonists Celie and Firdaus undergo a process of self-discovery, embracing their identities as individuals deserving of respect and autonomy. Celie comes to terms with her own worth and finds strength in her relationships with other women. Firdaus, through her experiences, recognizes her own agency and refuses to be defined solely by her

circumstances. Their journeys lead them to a profound understanding of their intrinsic value, which fuels their desire for independence.

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the life of the protagonist Celie begins in silence and suppression, marked by sexual abuse and societal expectations that keep her submissive. However, her transformation into a powerful, independent woman unfolds through a series of significant relationships. Nettie and Shug Avery serve as catalysts for change, with Nettie's letters providing Celie with a means of empowerment and connection, and Shug Avery influencing her self-esteem and self-discovery. Nettie says to her sister: "Don't let them run over you ... you got to fight." (p.18) Celie's letters become a vital medium for self-expression and therapy, challenging her silence. As she says: "I am poor, I am black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice says to everything listening. But I'm here." (p.10)

From the book of Simone De Beauvoir, we can observe that for De Beauvoir, a woman must change the image in which men see her, she must choose between her desire to achieve freedom or her acceptance of submission to men. She claims: "Every person works to assert himself in a real and tangible way through projects and goals, and he does not achieve his freedom except through continuous progress." (De Beauvoir, 1949). Beauvoir means by this quote that freedom is obtained through action and resistance.

Her successful pants-making business further defies gender norms, leading to economic independence and enhancing her self-worth. In confronting her abusers, including Mr. M, and her stepfather, Celie's newfound voice empowers her to stand up against oppression. Her evolution from a silenced and oppressed individual to a self-empowered woman holds broader implications, shedding light on the intersections of race and gender in society and leaving an enduring mark in African and American literature.

Celie's story is not just about how she changes as a person; it is also about the bigger issues in society. Her journey challenges how people used to view women and black people in the early 1900s. It shows how these groups faced many problems together and oppressions. Celie's story teaches us that even in darker moments and times; people can handle it and stay strong, express themselves and stay strong. Her act of writing, particularly heartfelt letters to Nettie, becomes a therapeutic passion that helps her confront her painful past moments and emerge in a path of healing emotionally and morally.

Additionally, Celie's revolt and standing up against her abusers, particularly her defiance to Mr. M, marks an important moment of liberation of her fears, also a pivotal moment of empowerment, demonstrating her growing assertiveness and inner strength. Celie's story, from a voiceless victim to a self-sufficient, empowered woman is a reminder of the power of human spirit. *The color purple* remains a relevant literary work that continues to inspire about the complex intersexions of race, gender and identity in American society.

Similar to Celie's experiences in *The Color Purple*, Firdaus faced enormous challenges on her journey to independence. She struggled with poverty and homelessness, but she held onto her freedom as the most precious thing in her life. The world proved to be harsh and unforgiving, but Firdaus kept perseverance and didn't give up. She refused to submit to rules that society and her abusive father imposed to her. Throughout her hard journey, she encountered both enemies and allies, each contributing to her transformation into a strong woman, unafraid to challenge established norms.

Firdaus' story is a symbol of the rules and restrictions that women had to follow in society. Born into a place where women are viewed to be submissive, obedient, and silent, from a young age, Firdaus decides not to follow the rules and confronts these restrictions. Her determination starts like a small inner spark telling her to rebel against the imposed societal

constraints. As time goes by, this feeling grows strongly and turns into a powerful desire to be free and independent. Eventually, she resists the chains of a forced marriage, choosing instead, embracing the unknown, and running away from her abusive and oppressive own father.

As Firdaus faces her numerous challenges and hardships, she discovers her inner voice, which had been suppressed for a long time. This voice now emerged with newfound freedom, much like a liberated bird taking flight. Her interactions with other women who have experienced the harshness of oppression created a deep sense of unity among them. During these times, Firdaus started expressing her thoughts, wishes, and dreams, and the world started paying attention.

Through her struggle for independence, Firdaus raises her power and finds her voice; Firdaus begins to believe in her own independence. She says. "I am a killer, but I've committed no crime, like you, I kill only criminals." (P. 199)

In conclusion, the stories of Celie and Firdaus emphasize the universality of the struggle for independence among women. They teach us that regardless of the unique challenges each woman faces, the journey towards self-discovery, empowerment, and liberation is a shared experience. Through their stories, we see the victory of the human spirit against inequalities, and they inspire us to continue the fight for gender equality and women's independence in our own lives and societies. These characters serve as sparks of hope and determination, reminding us that even in the darkest of circumstances, there is always the potential for growth, change, and the reclamation of one's autonomy.



## *General Conclusion*

## V. Conclusion

This research has dealt with the most difficult issues that women face in societies in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Our study has examined various issues that women suffer from around the world under the domination of men, and discusses women's struggle against societies. In this piece of research, the two works have been studied in the light of the concepts developed in Simone De Beauvoir work *The Second Sex* (1949)

We have started our work by analyzing the main women's issues that draw a link between the novels. We have found out that in patriarchal societies, women have experienced many forms of violence, alienation, and oppression by men. These issues have been expressed differently by the two authors, each of Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi has expressed women's issues in their own way. The female character in the novels is a way to express women's oppression that prevails in American and Egyptian societies. The two authors showed the extent of society's contempt for women, and that remained silent to all this persecution at first for fear of their fate and of the customs and tradition upon which society is built.

Then we have dealt with women's resistance in both novels. In which we discussed women's fight and struggle against male domination. Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi reveal their female side by defending women's rights in their works; they make the female characters in their novels stand against oppression and patriarchy, and raise their voices against the issues of violence they face. Throughout the two novels, we discover how women can stand against those who deprive them of their freedom and rights, women are no longer those weak and despised in societies that treat them unjustly. The two writers conveyed a message through two main characters "Celie" and "Firdaus" that women will no longer be

afraid of injustice and refuse to remain silent about their rights. Firdaus and Celie represent the perfect and strong women, who faced hardships with all strength, did not accept surrender and continued to fight for independence and their freedom, despite the difficult experiences they went through in the patriarchal society.

Indeed, both Alice Walker and Nawal El Saadawi use their writing to present a strong female voice that calls for independence and freedom from the restriction of a ruthless society. They both tried to free women from the prison of customs and traditions that society imposes on them and that control their destiny. Alice Walker represented a strong American black female voice that tries to bury the curse of color and gender that haunts women. Nawal El Saadawi was an Egyptian feminist, who fought to achieve justice and equal human status for women.

At this final age, our study of Nawal EL Saadawi and Alice Walker novels, led us to conclude that even the two authors, from different nationalities, different cultural environments, and writing in two different languages, but they use their pen as a means to liberate women from social restrictions, and gives them a voice to express themselves. *Women at Point Zero* (1975) and *The Color Purple* (1982) share common attitude towards oppression, patriarchy and violence, even though they are from two different writers, they are agreed on the subject of writing.

To conclude, in our present research, we did not deal with all women's issues, we focused on the most important issues. The novels can be studied in more depth, as they are two striking novels that can be studied from several aspects and need further investigation.

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