
ADDRESSING SEXISM IN INDIA - THROUGH SOFIA'S LENS IN THE FILM THE COLOR PURPLE

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First most, when we think of sexism, what do we mean? One might typically say gender based discrimination that pertains in our society but is it just that? Sexism is something that does not just exist in a particular society, but throughout all societies and all over the world and its effect has been felt over years and years. Particularly in India, sexism persists at its peak due to intersections of caste, class and patriarchy. The Color Purple is a musical adaption of the 1982 novel written by American author Alice Walker which is based on an African-American teenager Celie who is the main character of this film, and how she transitions from being and feeling oppressed all her life in and for different ways to finally speaking up for herself. Through the lens of Sofia's journey, who is also one of the very influential and strong characters in this film, this essay will examine her journey of being empowered then exploited for standing up for herself and facing discrimination on not just the basis of her colour but also her gender and trying to protect her children from it to eventual liberation which can be explored in order to address and combat sexism and dismantle rigid gender roles in India.

So, to introduce the character of Sofia, one would have to use words such as self-reliant, self-efficient, outspoken, powerful, independent and bold. Sofia is the definition of someone you would look up to just like Celie did. When her husband, in the beginning of the film, tried to use violence to control her just like he'd been taught by his father and grandfather, she resisted instead of feeling intimidated and responded with just as much force which was a crucial component of her personality. Further, she rejected the patriarchal idea of women being obedient and constantly accepting toxic male authority and wanted to protest which she did. This self-assurance as well as rebellion most definitely encouraged the other female characters in this film.

For example, in Nivedita Menon's reading of *Seeing Like a Feminist*, a feminist perspective was articulated just like here which highlighted how gender norms are in fact socially produced and upheld to protect the so called 'patriarchal power'. Just like Menon's feminist viewpoint, Sofia sees herself as someone who is living and functioning outside of this conventional gender

binary. She also expresses her agency in her marriage and absolutely does not follow and support the various submissive conventions that limit and oppress women in so many ways. However, both in society and inside her home which lashes out on such women who challenge these norms and resist oppressive behaviour by men, Sofia's empowerment is met with resentment and this dynamic illustrates how societal and institutional backlash targets Indian women too, particularly those who question and want to fight back for the same conventions.

Now that we've talked about her background, it is further shown in the movie how Sofia was exploited and oppressed. The incident in which the Mayor's wife randomly asks her to be her maid and Sofia resists till things get violent and just the fact that the Mayor's wife could not see how someone who is supposedly "submissive" and is bound to say yes could say no and fight against this for which she was brutally beaten and was later imprisoned. What happened with Sofia was a pure situation of racism and gender discrimination. Even after setting her free after several years, the Mayor's wife made sure she still worked as her maid and insisted Sofia to be appreciative of her "kindness" which shows how institutionalized power systems manipulate and take advantage of Black women which is very similar to the social framework in India where women, especially those from lower castes are very much seen as people who can be compelled to work with few prospects of advancement.

Relating the same with the concept of intersectionality, which basically is the interconnectedness of various social categories such as race, caste, creed, one's ability, etc. According to the Combahee River Collective Statement, which is part of the course manual, to understand a Black woman's oppression, one has to take into account the interconnections of sexuality, gender, class and race. Just like how women in India experience intertwined caste, gender and economic discrimination which further contributes and worsens their oppression situation. For instance, how there's a wide difference between someone who is a Dalit and someone who is not in India and to be a Dalit women will mean twice the discrimination just like Sofia faced above and how they're exploited just because of their so called social background and are placed at the bottom of society.

This film further focuses on Sofia's liberation and how despite the whole Mayor incident which deeply affected her mentally due to obvious reasons, she did not stop there and let it get to her and her path did not end in oppression despite all the hardships faced. There was also support of her community especially Celie where in this one incident of their dinner when Shug came

over with her husband and talked about taking Celie with her and how for the first time in years, she could gather the courage and speak up in front of mister seeing which pushed Sofia to try to get back to her old self after the tragedy. They're also trying to show females standing up for females and how powerful it can be like how Celie is the one who helps Sofia reunite with her family and ultimately break free from Miss Millie's controlling influence.

Sofia's freedom demonstrates the potential for change in our system and how there is so much potential through the smallest of movement which can start simply by not being tolerant of unnatural discriminative behaviour. Although it isn't really that simple, with the help of the right people or the will to bring change, one can most definitely bring changes in the society. In the book *If Men Could Menstruate* by Gloria Steinem, it is shown how patriarchal cultures so frequently minimize women's bodies and experiences while simultaneously implying that regaining bodily autonomy might be a potent act of resistance and this unity is extremely crucial to fight against the battle of sexism in India. The Gulabi Gang is a group of rural women who fight against gender based oppression and domestic abuse which is honestly a great initiative and start towards strengthening of group action and opposing of caste based patriarchal violence.

Some Supporting Arguments to Address Sexism in India-

- 1. Educational reforms and creating awareness:** in order to bring a change in societal attitudes, it's very necessary to ensure that good values and societal normal are instilled from a very young age through education as that created the very foundation of ones mindset. This can be done by teaching children/teenagers or students in general about equality, and how discrimination is not okay.
- 2. Community based support:** As mentioned above, Sofia was ultimately led to the path of liberation through the help of her community! It determines a lot and the importance of social support in order to combat a certain issue needs to be emphasised. In India, there were various community based initiatives that help empower women economically and lend support such as self-help groups (SHGs). Setting up of more such groups based on the same idea can be effective.
- 3. Legal protective measures and structural reforms:** Betterment in our legal framework is something that's really crucial and could be really helpful in combating

the same issue. Although laws like Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) have been implemented, their enforcement is often lacking and societal attitudes remain deeply patriarchal. As seen in the film where Sofia's disobedience results in state-sanctioned violence which is similar to how Indian women who defy social conventions encounter similar institutional obstacles. Therefore, it's crucial to put in place more robust safeguards against sexual harassment, domestic abuse and discrimination at work.

To conclude, in order to fight sexism in India, we need to think and act on many fronts. There's a need of laws that actually help in protection of women, schools that teach equality and communities that lift women up. And it's not just about changing some minds- it's about reshaping how we live and work together. Sexism is not just one person's problem but something that persists throughout the society. Just like how Sofia's story in the film mirrors the real struggles of countless women in patriarchal societies including India. Her journey from strength to suffering and back to strength sets a very motivational example. By standing united and pushing for change by empowering one another, we sure can create a world where every Sofia can thrive, that too free from the chains of gender expectations and that's a goal worth fighting for.

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