



Alice Walker: A Voice of Black Feminine Literature

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Abstract:

The body of work created by Black writers, especially Black women, is a direct result of the systemic racism they faced in America. Their literature powerfully reflects experiences of oppression, humiliation, and subjugation. Oppression is a dominant and recurring theme in Black fiction, stemming from the intertwined forces of racism, sexism, and classism. These systems create profound societal and psychological barriers, resulting in a uniquely painful and dehumanizing experience for African Americans, especially women. In many names, Alice Walker is the leading figure to ascertain the place of black women in class, colour and racial complexities of America. Her literary outputs are necessarily the social critiques on contemporary issues and lives of black women as the most underprivileged section of society.

Key Words : Black, literature, oppression, movement,

Introduction:

African-American women literature is seen as a literature of societal consciousness. It emerged as a literature of the most unprivileged strata of the underprivileged society for the ask of justice, respect, positive approach and humanity. In world history, it's a truth that whatever movement emerged, they emerged out of necessity for life. Some movements were political, some others were social and rest of them were literary, with the might of pen. Afro –American literature was also emerged as a social critique to seek justice in life, to seek attention of the world towards the plight of a whole society, to strengthen the voice of their leaders who were fighting for rights and to ascertain their place and existence in the white society. With the similar motif sprout up the feminine black literature in America.

Afro-American Women's condition:

The conditioning of Afro –American women in world history made them most deprived section. It stems from gender discrimination, racial discrimination, colour and class discrimination. Black women faced the dual burden of gender discrimination, not only from white men but also from their own communities. Their feminist concerns often prioritized the collective well-being of their group and cultural preservation over individual or purely political agendas, emphasizing the unique cultural values of their own ethnic identity rather than a universal female experience. It is said that in the history of human race, no one has suffered more than the Black woman in a civilized country like America. From the moment of their arrival on American soil, Black women have faced relentless exploitation and oppression. They endured the horrors of slavery due to their race, and within a racist society, they were further subjected to economic exploitation,

relegated to the lowest-paying, most degrading jobs. This relentless oppression has eroded their sense of self-worth and humanity. Black womanhood has been systematically violated and degraded through racially motivated, sexually abusive, and inhumane acts perpetrated by both white and Black individuals. In due course of time, their plight became their life. Their social conditioning was too hard to rescue from the oppressive state. In addition to the shared struggles of all oppressed groups, Black women face the persistent burden of gender-based oppression. Within their own homes, they are often reduced to a position of double subjugation. In the words of Dr. Prasanta Kumar Padhi 'White men were able to use the economic deprivation of black women to their sexual advantage. Black literature is deeply grounded in the lived experiences and suffering of Black people, it resonates powerfully with a global audience. The Black woman's experience in America stands as a particularly stark example of human suffering within a supposedly civilized nation. A thorough examination of her history reveals a long and agonizing narrative of profound emotional trauma.'¹

Beyond the physical brutality of forced labor and whippings, enslaved Black women were also subjected to sexual violence by their white masters. They were frequently raped, and their resulting children were often sold away.

Harihar Kulkarni writes in this context: 'The brutal treatment that the black women received during slavery invariably left profound scars on their psyche. Their physical bondage ultimately turned into a psychological bondage causing mutilation and mutilations of their world. The external forces operating at the socioeconomic levels came to bear an unmistakable relationship to the internal fears, worries, anxieties and feelings of inadequacy and frustration.'²

Afro-American Women Literature:

African American women authors made such substantial contributions during the 20th century that it became a landmark era for their literary tradition. In the dark portrait of the Black woman, there appeared a ray of hope with the rise of feminism. Driven by their long history of suffering, Black women began to assert their voices through their own writing, playing a pivotal role in the Black literary movement. In the late twentieth century, Black women fiction writers actively worked to dismantle the harmful, predominantly 'masculine' stereotypes forced upon them. The miserable condition of Afro-American women has been depicted by Afro-American women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Harriet Jacob, and many others. Those literary works mostly depict sufferings faced by Afro-American women in American society. They sought to portray Black women as conventionally feminine, beautiful, virtuous, refined, and non-threatening, thus challenging the prevailing negative imagery. For the first time, these writers were able to express their authentic selves through their work, which became a testament to their personal growth, struggles, and achievements. They have given readers the clues to delve into grim issues such as race, gender and class, the trio that shattered the self being of African woman. Twentieth-century African American women writers were pivotal in shaping both African American literature and the broader American literary landscape. Their unique viewpoints spurred significant change within African American literature. By confronting both racial oppression and gendered abuse within their own community, they established a distinct space for their voices. Their influence extends beyond literature, profoundly altering the perspectives and experiences of African Americans, particularly women. In the words of Baker, "African American women

writers carry the weight of a deeply traumatic history. Their ancestors were forcibly removed from Africa and enslaved in America, enduring unimaginable torture, brutality, and exploitation. Upon arrival, their humanity was systematically and legally stripped away.”³

Black women bear the responsibility of reclaiming their full humanity and womanhood. They uniquely navigate societal issues and their own challenges, considering their relationships with both Black men and other Black women.

Twentieth-century African American women authors were pioneers, forging new literary paths and establishing a vital literary tradition. Their innovative work directly inspired the dynamic writers of the twenty-first century, who are currently revitalizing the literary landscape.

Alice Walker: A voice of the deprived womanhood

Despite a difficult upbringing in rural Georgia, including poverty, a physical disability, and the societal turmoil of the Civil Rights era, Alice Walker, born in 1944, rose to become a highly acclaimed African American author. She is a highly productive and diverse writer, working across various genres, from poetry and essays to novels and short stories. A central theme in her work is the affirmation of woman as the source of all creation, suggesting that all things are connected to the feminine. Alice Walker portrays Black women's journey as a movement from complete subjugation by societal forces and men to a place of empowerment and self-determination. In 1983, Walker coined the term ‘womanism’ to mean "A black feminist or feminist of color." The term was made to unite women of color and the feminist movement. She said, ‘Womanism’ gives us a word of our own’ Alice Walker utilizes her literary work to advocate for women's rights, with a particular focus on portraying the challenges

faced by African American women. Alice Walker's writing is recognized for amplifying the female voice, particularly by bringing to light the experiences of Black women previously absent from American literature. She portrays women who have endured physical and emotional exploitation and victimization, but who ultimately find strength and achieve a sense of wholeness. As a writer, she utilizes her literary work to advocate for women's rights and issues. She is particularly known for her extensive writing that highlights the challenges faced by African American women.

Walker's realm of creative writing gave new direction to the afro-American literature. She is best known for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983. Her other novels such as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) and *By the Light of My father's Smile* (1998) deal with the lives of the women as human and their sense of realization in the course of life towards empowerment.

African American women writers actively opposed the idea that literature merely reinforces existing, universal truths. They argued against the notion that universality was the sole measure of literary value. Their own work, long overlooked and considered "invisible," exposed how a dominant, oppressive society uses its literature to define and marginalize "others," specifically Black women. Alice Walker was the prominent voice among it.

Conclusion:

To sum up, Walker has created her own realm of literary world which seeks to answer the queries of Black women about their existence and the identity. The force that she has created became the movement of consciousness in American literature, given new perspective to the women's

movement in America and introduced new notions of feminism which the white women sis not speak about.

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