



Examining Black Feminism through Alice Walker's Poetry

Fazan Ahmad Lone¹ and Suresh Kumar²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, The Glocal University (Uttar Pradesh), India.

²Assistant Professor, The Glocal University (Uttar Pradesh), India.

(Corresponding author: Fazan Ahmad*)

(Received 09 February, 2024, Accepted 15 April, 2024)

(Published by Research Trend, Website: www.researchtrend.net)

ABSTRACT: The poetry of Alice Walker captures the spirit of black feminism by focusing on the particular struggles and hardships that African American women encounter. She addresses issues of social justice, womanhood, and identity in her poetry. Walker's poetry frequently challenges preconceptions while highlighting the accomplishments and tenacity of black women. Through her poetry, Walker confronts issues such as racial injustice, sexism, and the intersection of these oppressions. She emphasizes the importance of self-love, empowerment, and solidarity among black women. Walker's distinctive voice and poignant language make her a significant figure in the realm of black feminist poetry, as she continues to inspire and advocate for the rights and recognition of black women in her literary works. This paper presents different ideological perspectives that Alice Walker thought to be important to counter throughout her life.

Keywords: Ideology, Discourse, Black Feminism, Intersectionality

INTRODUCTION

African Americans are treated as inferiors despite having the same access to material goods and participating in the same historical events as the majority society; this is blatantly unreasonable. Walker acknowledges racism and sexism as social constructions in his poem "These Days." Walker talks to her daughter Rebecca about how racism and sexism are interrelated issues. Walker pardons the white folks for their racist deeds at the conclusion because, "it is the way they are raised, /not genetics, / that causes their bizarre, / death-worshipping / behavior" (214-18). With reference to the knowledge of her forefathers, Walker raises an intriguing issue.:

"If we were raised like white people,
to think we are superior to everything else
God made, we too would behave the way
they do," say the elders." (219-222)

Her humanistic presumption that all humans are fundamentally the same serves as the foundation for her thesis. Walker also recognizes the significance of parents' educational involvement in raising their children.

Walker's frequent use of color symbolism in her poems implies that the topic of race is one of her main concerns. Walker places a lot of attention on the imagery of color because skin tone is a characteristic that is indicative of a person's race. In the poem "Johann," in which Walker considers the idea of falling in love with a blond German, the obvious contrast between skin tones is examined. She investigates the drawback of this contrast.: "Blond / And Black; it is too charged a combination" (19-20). When Walker looks at her lover's physical attributes, these hues can be interpreted as either positive or negative, depending on the viewpoint :

"I shudder at the whiteness
Of your hands.
Blue is too cold a color
for eyes.
But white, I think, is the color
of honest flowers,
And blue is the color
of the sky." (30-37)

Walker explores women's relationships to themselves and to their past and present partners in her poem "To Be a Woman" from her most recent book of poetry, *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth*. In the poem "To Be a

Woman, "Walker advocates the appropriateness of feminine look since being a woman "Does not mean / To wear / A shroud" (2-4). In spite of the new millennium's unisex period,

"The Feminine

Is not

Dead

Nor is she

Sleeping". (5-9)

Due to the persistence of sexism, the "Feminine" has persisted since the Civil Rights Movement. Because racial and sexist oppression never ends, there is always something to fight for. Thus, the woman is:

"Angry, yes,

Seething, yes.

Biding her time;

Yes.

Yes." (10-14)

Walker's memories of her involvement in the fight against black women's subjugation are evoked by the emphasis on "yes," which also conveys the intensity of the ongoing struggle. This never-ending struggle is really significant. It expresses the internal pain that Black women go through with fierceness. Walker is able to capture the fury of a woman who has been marginalised by being forced to the periphery.

The female-male dynamic in marriage is another area where Black feminists voice their dissatisfaction, since African American communities are predominantly patriarchal. Given her designated role at home, where she manages the family and raises the kids, it is implied that "physical limitations on Black women's mobility" (Collins 105). In addition to social discrimination, women experience physical and psychological violence at home. Their disillusionment and eventual divorce typically follow their opposition to their submissive posture.

The intersection of racism and sexism is a significant feature of sexism in African American communities. Bell Hooks contends that "extreme expressions of sexism, misogyny, made visible by overexploitation of women by men, become in [the men's] minds a dysfunctional response to racism" ("Feminism" 1227). Sexism in African American communities is a reflection of how women are viewed in the US's dominant society, where "subjugation is presented as 'natural,' already in place, not something black men can create, only something they exploit" ("Feminism" 1227). McCall claims that this exploitation is frequently excused because "a common response to oppression, or abuse, is to become an abuser" (qtd. in "Feminism" 1227). Regardless of how absurd this presumption may be, most men hold it to be normal.

There are two aspects to African American women's oppression in marriage: emotional and physical violence. To emphasise their inferior status, these two domains of male dominance over women frequently converge. Walker cautions her female readers in the poem "Warning" against psychological abuse, which is prevalent in many marriages since:

"To love a man wholly

love him

feet first

head down

eyes cold

closed

in depression." (1-7)

Walker wants her readers to understand women's place in marriages by illustrating and expressing their irrational submissiveness. She tells the women to look up, turn to face their partners, and stop keeping quiet. Walker argues in her defence that these are the guys she has met, despite the fact that her works are frequently criticised for portraying too negative pictures of male characters. (Danielle).

Another part of the male tyranny over African American women is their physical violence. Since then, African American women have tackled the issue of violence in numerous works "rape and other acts of overt violence that Black women have experienced, such as physical assault during slavery, domestic abuse, incest, and sexual extortion, accompany Black women's subordination in a system of race, class, and gender oppression" (Collins 177). When discussing the sexual abuse of African American women, one important factor is frequently left out—"the fact that most Black women are raped by Black men. [...] the unfortunate current reality is that many Black men have internalized the controlling images of the sex/gender hierarchy and condone either Black women's rape by other Black men or their own behavior as rapists" (Collins 179).

Walker examines both the good and bad aspects of a female-male connection in his poetry about love. Women are frequently restricted to their bodies, which men can take from them whenever they like. Walker makes the argument that a marriage can experience sexual assault as well. In the poem, such exploitation is examined. "The Thing Itself"

as her husband mocks her after she refuses to make love with him. He says: "Now I am going/to rape you" (1-2), assuming that she mockingly opposes his violent act since according to him "all 'real' women/really/like rape" (17-19). As though the tough guys truly believed that what they were doing was justified. In this poem, Walker delves deeper to uncover the causes of men's twisted conviction that women take pleasure in suffering. Walker recalls the days spent with her grandmother and discovers that:

"There was no
pornography
in her world
from which to learn
to relish the pain." (30-34)

The objectification of a female body in the pornographic industry, which is the phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century, distorts a notion of sexual perception and self-respect (Walker, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* 42).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Alice Walker stands as a trailblazing figure in the realm of Black feminist poetry, using her words as a powerful tool for social change and self-affirmation. Through the rhythmic verses of her poetry, Walker weaves a tapestry that vividly captures the nuances of Black womanhood, addressing issues of racism, sexism, and intersectionality. Her poems not only serve as a reflection of the struggles faced by Black women but also act as a testament to their strength and resilience. Walker's unique voice amplifies the experiences often marginalized in mainstream narratives, fostering a sense of unity and empowerment among her readers. In the vast landscape of American literature, Alice Walker's Black feminist poetry serves as a poignant reminder that art has the capacity to ignite conversations, challenge societal norms, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future. Through her eloquent expressions, Walker leaves an indelible mark on the poetic tradition, inspiring generations to come with her unwavering commitment to justice, equality, and the celebration of Black identity.

REFERENCES

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Danielle, Chris. *Living By Grace*. 1999-present. 8 Sept 2006
<<http://members.tripod.com/chrisdanielle/alicemain.html>>. Davis, Thadious. "Poetry as Preface to Fiction." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 44 (1991). Rpt. in *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry L. Gates. New York: Amistad, 1993. 275-83.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman. Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto P, 1981.
- Walker Alice. *Her Blue Body Everything We know: Earthling Poems 1965-1990*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1991.
- You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.