Abstract

Title of Study : A Study of Racism, Sexism, and Poverty in the novels of Alice Walker

Major Field : English

The most significant writer of the post fifties is, Alice Walker, internationally acclaimed as a writer of fiction. The poet, novelist, short story writer, critic, and essayist, is essentially an apologist for African American women. The under-current of all genres of writings is indicative of her concern for their lives. Probably and most importantly, throughout the collection of her essays, Walker refers to black people as a community and thus consisting of men and women, both equally important. She has published seven novels, The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970), Meridian (1976), The Color Purple (1882), The Temple of My Familiar (1989), Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992), By the Light of My Father’s Smile (1998), and Now is the Time to Open Your Heart (2004). Her short stories have been collected in two volumes – In Love and Trouble (1973) and You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down (1982). Walker’s publication of poetry has kept pace with her novels: her collections are Once (1968), Five Poems (1972), Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems (1973), Good Night, Willie Lee, I’ll See You in the Morning (1979), and Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful (1984). She has published two important collection of her own essays – In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens (1983) and Living by the Word (1988); a significant collection of the writings of Zora Neale Hurston; and a young adult biography of Langston Hughes.
Alice Walker is a womanist and actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement, fighting against the hidden forces of racism, sexism and heap of other problems faced by African Americans. Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) uses the term ‘womanism’ to refer to African American feminism or of the feminism of women of color. The two terms, black ‘feminism’ and ‘womanism’ can be seen as interchangeable because both are concerned with the struggle against racism and sexism by black women who are themselves part of the black community’s effort to achieve equality and liberty.

The life of African Americans in America in 1920s is full of struggles. It is often ravaged by discrimination in the name of race. It becomes much more horrid, if they belong to the poor class and female gender. Their struggle to live in the society and lead a dignified life makes them think inferior and leaves them desperate and psychologically mangled. Their humiliation and espair destroy their hope and ruin their confidence. As a result, they turn into disgruntled wretches, when their attempts to measure up to the white middle class patriarchal system evade their reach and baffle their aspirations. The socio-economic and political transpirations affect their psyche, and their disappointments and failures manifest into unknown fear and unreasonale anger. The simmering anger erupts with a volcanic catastrophe in their relationship among the members of the family. The analysis of this dissertation, *A Study of Racism, Sexism and Poverty in the Novels of Alice Walker*, focuses the struggles of African American black women in general, and specifically on the problems of racism, sexism and poverty.
Black American novelist, short story writer, poet, and editor, Walker is a highly regarded writer of powerfully expressive fiction. Her works consistently reflect her concern with racial, sexual, and political issues, particularly with the black woman’s struggle for spiritual and political survival. The purpose of this analysis is to study the lives of African-Americans, who are suffering in the hands of political injustices like racism, sexism, and poverty and also the predicament of African-American women’s struggles for equal existence with the white race, and their male counterpart, the unique duel oppression of racism and sexism in which black woman suffers. This study analyses and evaluates Alice Walker’s ideology about and black racism, sexism, and poverty from the womanist perspective. Her work has consistently reflected a concern for the plight of the black American families. In the process, this study also traces the milieu of the African-American literature and Alice Walkers’ novelist ventures, from the point of view of a African American woman writer.