

Dr.S.MANIKANDAN

Assistant Professor of English

Shree Ragavendra Arts and Science

College in Chidambaram

Cell: 8220893412.

Email: [manikandanbvg@gmail.com](mailto:manikandanbvg@gmail.com)

### *An Epistolary Term of Writing in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple**

Alice Walker is accepted as one of the energetic voice among the African-American women writers. She has outputted highly praised body of works including novels, poetry, short story, essay and criticism. Her works are sounded an insightful and reverting portrayal of black life as well as the experience of black women and racist society. Walker is the role model of contemporary writers. She has won lot of awards for her workers, notably the National Book Award. The lives of the African-American Black women have been affected by sexism, classism and racism. The Color Purple was published in 1982, which became the work that propelled Alice Walker into the position of one of the best known contemporary African-American writers. It was a success with both critics and the reading public, and it earned Walker the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983.

This novel has been modified to film in 1985, directed by Steven Spielberg and to the less common form of musical theatre in 2004, both extremely successful. It was met with criticism in some African-American home, on the other hand, particularly for what many saw as an overly negative portrayal of black men that played into racist stereotypes (particularly that of the black rapist), and for a heroine that was criticized for being unrealistically weak in the face of her misfortunes. Some also accused Walker of having done little more than to write a novel that was a modern, African-American imitation of the sentimental novels of the eighteenth century. The lives of African- American women have been seriously affected by racism, sexism and, classism, which are system of communal and psychological control. The racist, sexist and classist structure the American society compartmentalizes its various ethnic groups, denigrates the colored as inferior and characterizes males and females as center and margin respectively. Just as black as groups are relegated to an underclass by virtue of their

race, women are related to a separate caste by virtue of their sex. Black women are related to a separate caste by virtue of their sex. A system of unequal power and privilege where humans are divided into groups with asocial rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification. Variations of racism include institutionalized racism, scientific racism, and everyday racism. Black Feminism is the acknowledgement that women of color have been broken by sexism and racism, that there was a failure to recognize and address these issues in the Feminist Movement and the Black Liberation Movement, and that women of color have their own agenda that neither movement can take on. “Black Feminism focuses on the experiences, needs, and desires of women of color” (193).

This article outputs on Alice Walker’s an effective management of the epistolary term of writing and the poignant tale of a women’s straggle. *The color purple* is an epistolary fiction which appeared during the Restoration periods which portrays the psychological nature of human life. Alice walker says: “we must fearlessly pull out ourselves and look at an identity with our lives. The living creativity of some of our great grandmothers were not allowed to know” (24).

The term epistolary, drawn from the word “epistle”, means that the novel is made up of letters and diary entries. We read letters written to Celie by her sister Nettie in Africa, and letters written by Celie directly to God. One of the advantages of writing a novel using this form is that the reader experiences the voices of the characters directly, reading their thoughts in their own words. This style can also give a sense of obscurity to the story, since events may not be related fully (since we are seeing only one character’s point of view and only learning what that character knows), and may not be presented in chronological order. The epistolary style has a long record, reaching all the way back to the Bible: the letters written by the Apostle Paul are a major part of the New Testament. The first epistolary novel is generally agreed to be *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, published in 1740. By the 1700s, the level of literacy in the general public was increasing. Letter writing was popular, and many manuals were published instructing writers in the proper form and etiquette of letter writing. These kinds of manuals are still published today, giving correct forms of address, and even suggestions for the content of a wide variety of business and personal letters. The letter form was also used in writing for a broader audience, such as travel essays, which were popular with a public curious about the wider world. Samuel Richardson got the idea to use letters as the basis for his novel *Pamela* while he was writing a letter manual. This style became

popular because letters were an easily recognizable form of communication: reading a character's letters made that character seem like a real person. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the epistolary style was becoming less popular. Jane Austen originally wrote *Pride and Prejudice* using the epistolary form, but then changed her mind. She rewrote the story using a different device that the third-person omniscient narrator: the reader is told the story by a narrator who is not a character in the action, and who has access to the inner thoughts of all the characters. Adapting a novel into a play or musical presents certain challenges: the playwright usually cannot use narration or description. He or she has to primarily use dialogue what the characters say to one another. In a musical, songs can also reveal the characters' inner thoughts. Because the epistolary novel is made up entirely of the characters' own words and thoughts, it is related more closely to theater than other types of fiction.

African-American women writers know that they are strong and intelligent, who concerns on enabling the whites to recognize their abilities. They argue that black women's inner self could be defined, accepted and celebrated. In fact, they are the voice of the millions of voiceless of black and women. Celie is the protagonist who writes letters to god in whom she tells about her life and roles as mother, daughter, wife and sister to us, while disclosing her story in which she tells her feelings. Walker has deliberated the epistolary technique through in this work, because it presents an intimate view of the character. Additionally, American women writers often prefer epistolary form in order to convey their ideas freely by their writing. Celie and Nettie are imaginary characters but they act so real because they communicate very naturally and the best way of communication for them is through letters. Celie addresses her letter to god: "Dear God, Dear Stars, Dear trees, Dear Sky, Dear people, Dear everything, Dear god" (292). Through this letter, she discloses her inner self feelings to society. The horrifying account of her sexual abuse is sad commentary on the andocentric cultures which condemn women to a subordinate state. Celie is unable to share her trauma with the members of her family, Celie stop father is Alphonso who denies her education, rapes her repeatedly and brutally which shatters herself-confidence. Celie is ill-treated by her husband where Nettie runs away from their house. She goes to Africa with a team of black missionary who has an opportunity to understand the African culture and her people. Nettie gives a complete account of the life style and traditions of Olinka Tribes.

They believe that someday the whites will: "Kill off so much of the earth and the color that everybody gone hate them just like the hate us today. Then they will become new serpent"

(233). The main concept of all African American writers is defense of the black culture. Sofia is another character of this work. Walker has created new role who serves as a foil to the suppressive culture for women. Her argument with the white officers foregrounds issues of race and class. She is imprisoned for twelve years in the jail who is beaten mercilessly, humiliated by society. Walker herself has been quoted saying that her sense of activism as a writer, against the plethora of violence against women in the form of gender discrimination, imperialism in Africa and racism in America is voiced in her works such as *The Color Purple*.

To wind up, it can be said that the perpetrators of violence in the novel are themselves victims of sexism and racism. For instance Harpo beats Sofia only after his father implies that Sofia's resistance makes Harpo less of a man. Mr. \_\_\_ is violent and mistreats his family much like his own tyrannical father treated him. And the characters are largely aware of the cyclic nature of violence as can be seen in Sofia's rejection of Eleanor Jane's son Reynolds and the white race as a whole, which is caused by her deep sense of pain and hurt being separated from her children for twelve long years after which they hardly recognize her. She says, "I don't have nothing to offer him" (272) Richard K. Prieb, in an article Literature, Community and Violence: Reading African Literature in the West, Post 9/22 remarks how representations of violence in any literature as in life, does three things, in broad human terms: They may overcome us with a sense of banality of violence, they may impress us our capacity for the demonic, or they may serve to leave us with some sense of the inspiring. And we can see *The Color Purple* doing all these things. The novel examines violence and its potential to act as a destabilizing agent of identity, subjectivity and selfhood and it also shows how the lines of discrimination between perpetrators, victims and observers are blurred in the face of sadism.

## Works Cited

Badode, Ram. *Contemporary American Literature, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors*. 2000.

Kne, Mathew, Alice Walker: *The Color Purple*. <<http://homepage,nt/world.com>. 2003.

Prieb, Richards.K. *Literature, Community and Violence: Reading African Literature in the West*. Post. 9/11.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Simon and Shuster Inc., 1985.