

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY CONSCIOUSNESS IN ALICE WALKER'S THE THIRD LIFE OF GRANGE COPELAND

DR. MANASI G. SWAMI

Jawahar Arts, Science and Commerce College,
Anadur Dist. Osmanabad

ABSTRACT:

Alice Walker is American author whose novels, short stories and poems are noted for the astute treatment of Afro-Americans and focus predominantly on women issues championing racial and gender equality. She was conferred one of the honourable The Pulitzer Prize and The American Book Award for her one of the most popular novels, The Color Purple (1982). The present article tries to analyse one of her early novels The Third Life of Grange Copeland published in 1970 which is about the survival of whole Afro-Americans and the difficulties and issues of oppressed Afro-Americans of the 1920s in the present novel. It is to understand, how three generations of observe the lives of the patriarch and the protagonist, Grange Copeland come together to create Ruth's identity. They go through definite alterations despite of racial and economic suppression in the South America. The novel depicts the pains and sufferings of a poor black family in Georgia from the 1920's through to the 1960's that is of three generations.

Introduction:

Alice Malsenior Walker was born 9 February 1944 at Eatonton, Georgia, U.S. She is an American writer whose novels, short stories, and poems are noted for their astute treatment of Afro-American. Her notable writings include novels- *The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Meridian, The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar, Possessing the Secret of Joy, By the Light of My Father's Smile*; two collection of short stories, *In Love and Trouble* and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*; two collections of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and *Living by the World*; and five volumes of poetry, *Once, Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning, Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems, Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful, and Her Blue Body Everything We Know* focus predominantly on women issues championing racial and gender equality.

Walker has received Guggenheim Fellowship, the Lillian Smith Award the Rosenthal Award for Fiction and the Radcliffe Medal. Her book *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973) was nominated for a "National Book Award". Walker was honoured with O. Henry Award in 1986 for her short story *Kindred Spirits* (1985). The Newswomen's Club of New York awarded its annual Front Page Award for Best Magazine Criticism in 1976 for her essay *Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor*. She has also been honoured with the Townsend and Lyndhurst Prizes. She was conferred one of the honourable

The Pulitzer Prize and The American Book Award for her one of the most popular novels, *The Color Purple* (1982). Davis, in his essay “Dictionary of Literary Biography” comments:

“Walker writes best of the social and personal drama in the lives of familiar people who struggle for survival of self in hostile environments. She has expressed a special concern with exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumph of black women.”

(Davis, 64)

The present article tries to analyse one of her early novels *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* published in 1970 which is about the survival of whole Afro-Americans and the difficulties and issues of oppressed Afro-Americans of the 1920s in the present novel. It is to understand, how three generations of observe the lives of the patriarch and the protagonist, Grange Copeland come together to create Ruth’s identity. They go through definite alterations despite of racial and economic suppression in the South America. The novel depicts the pains and sufferings of a poor black family in Georgia from the 1920's through to the 1960's that is of three generations. Walker aims at creating a just society which is liberated not only in political term, but in personal transformation through identity consciousness of the Afro-American race.

In the present novel under study, the three generations of Copeland’s family fights for an identity throughout their life. They go through specific alterations in spite of racial and economic suppression in the South America. The author endeavours to uncover the truthful stories of Afro-American women's metiers and faults. The novel is set around Grange; Copeland and his wife Margaret work on an estate owned by a white landlord. At the end, Grange apprehends that there is no liberation from the suffering and pain due to paucity, deprivation and poverty. He plans is to escape to the North America where there is liberty and hope for the humane life.

In the course of the novel, Walker not only discloses the oppression by the Whites towards the Blacks but also by the Black men towards Black women- it is about the violence, brutality and injustice against the innocents. The novel revolves around Grange who was struggling for survival who can hardly provide for his family’s basic needs and is forced every day to watch his wife, Margaret and son, Brownfield suffer. Every day, Grange comes back home drunk and threatens his wife Margaret and son Brownfield to feel of power through his feelings of suppression; to seem powerful to someone weak and the mechanisms of oppression have dehumanized him. Blacks are essentially slaves of the plantation owners and the oppressive society and prospect is taken away by the whites. The blacks cannot dare to dream or to set higher goals than mere survival like animals. Walker symbolises silence using the imagery of forest; she intensely describes the silence of the oppression in the character of Brownfield. He listens to the silence around his hut in the middle of the forest;

“Forest full of animals and birds. But they were not large animals or noisy birds and days passed sometimes without a sound and the sky seemed a round blue muffler made of wool.”

(Walker, 1970, 5-6)

Eventually; Margaret commits suicide due to Grange's exploitation to escape the unbearable conditions. Brownfield also wishes for suicide; he keeps that in his mind. He wanted to liberate himself and prays for a decent work. Walker underlines the dynamics of oppression, which turns into a brutal violence. Brownfield also becomes a victim of the system like his father Grange and suffers through the unspeakable cruelty and violence. His crushed desires compel him to raise violence against his wife and be cruel like wild animals; he beats her brutally.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland explores the whole Southern life of slavery and oppression and exposes the cruelty and brutality suffered by the Afro-Americans in the South. It is also about the spiritual change as about social change and endeavours to focus the importance of conserving the individual's identity in the community by surpassing the harsh conditions of a racist society.

Walker portrays the Black people's vague search for an identity through the characters of Grange, Brownfield and Ruth. Grange struggles for an identity throughout the three phases of his life- his years as an abusive father and husband' his period of crime and violence in the North' and his parenting of Ruth. Brownfield signifies southern life, which is ruthless, cruel, malicious and adversative to advancement of the blacks as a human being. He has been hindered by south of his capacity to love Ruth. Ruth's experience of family with Grange nurtures a love for life and the spirit to explore. The three generations of Copeland family fight for an identity and individuality throughout their lives. However, they undergo certain transformations in spite of socio-political and economic oppression in the South America. Brabara Christian rightly comments,

"Societal change is invariably linked to personal change that the struggle must be inner- as well as outer directed."

(Christian, 460)

The three generations of Copeland family combat forcefully to change their lives despite the brutal atmosphere of violence to make their existence meaningful. They go through the terror and misery, anger and revolt and also the serenity and compassion in the search for identity. Unfortunately, Brownfield doesn't succeed as he follows his father's footsteps into the mire of the white man's sharecropping system. He turns his wrath against his wife and children after feeling defeated and trapped.

Grange becomes silent and becomes compassionate by trying to make peace with Brownfield, by teaching Ruth, and by realizing his own lack of control over the situation; he tries to change Brownfield. He not only defends Ruth but also helps her to survive and concentrates on maintaining her decency and ability to forgive. He is somewhat envious of Ruth's purity, her innocence teaches him a message about compassion that is more valuable. The cycle of physical, emotional, mental and sexual oppression is broken only when Grange runs away from sharecropping Georgia to New York to define his manhood.

Conclusion:

Walker exposes that the subtleties of subjugation have a number of distinct outcomes which work against the possibility of an individual and a community's search for an identity. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* published in 1970 which is about the survival of whole Afro-Americans and the difficulties and issues of oppressed Afro-Americans of the 1920s in



the present novel. It is to understand, how three generations of observe the lives of the patriarch and the protagonist, Grange Copeland come together to create Ruth's identity.

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