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THE THEMES OF *THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR* BY ALICE WALKER

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ABSTRACT

Alice Walker is a much renowned personality who portrayed 'Black Women' as independent persons when the historical scenario didn't favour them. The entire study is separated into two chapters. The first chapter gives a detailed description of African American literature and also a deep study of life of Alice Walker. The second part details on the themes of *The temple of my familiar*. The themes gained prominence in this study are racism and oppression of men over women.

Keywords: African American literature, Racism, Black women, oppression

INTRODUCTION

Alice was born in Eatonton, Georgia, where she learned the value of looking within the hidden spaces of human experience. Walker graduated from High School as a Valedictorian of her class and in 1961, she entered Superman College. Walker completed her studies at Sarah Lawrence College and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1965. On 17th March 1967, she married Melvyn Roseman Leventhal, a Jewish civil Rights lawyer.

Although Walker gained some measure of success as a writer during her marriage to Leventhal, the pressures of racial prejudice prevented many readers from appreciating her creative genius. Walker's concern for spiritual wholeness and cultural connectedness completely ascended the Physical in her fourth novel, *The temple of my familiar* (1989), a story that takes the reader into a time before the apparition of physical perfection and ownership began to dominate the mind of humanity. In her novel 'The temple of my familiar', Alice made use of different themes such as Racism and slavery, Oppression, depiction of black women. It is said that 'The temple of my familiar' is an extension of the color purple in terms of themes.

The various themes will be detailed in the second part.

African American literature

It is defined as a literature written by American of African descent. The first published works of African American literature came about in the Eighteenth century, at a time when the United States was just coming into being and when nearly recognized citizens with clearly defined rights and freedoms, owned slaves. Conditions of slavery produced a different genre of writing, which can be described as Slave narratives. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jim Crow policies led to enormous discrimination and violence in the South but novelists were able to produce some of the most notable works of fiction. As the abolitionist Movement gained support in America, a number of narratives about slavery provided important evidence for political advocates. For example, *Narratives of the life of Frederick Douglass* immediately sold thousands of copies. After the Civil War ended, Reconstruction offered a brief respite from the violence of racism. In the 1910s and 1920s, Black writers grew more prominent in Genre of Fiction and poetry. After emigrating from Jamaica, Claude Mackay quickly became a renowned voice in

modern poetry. In 1920s other notable figures include Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer. While some of these writers' works are set in Harlem many move their readers into far reaches of the deep South to trace the paths of institutionalized racism. The history of African American literature is vast and varied.

Themes of *The temple of my Familiar*

Racism and slavery

The main themes of Racism is conveyed through Miss Lissie's monologues. For centuries, Black women have been called the "mule of the world" and "slave of a slave" and they had the position of the wretched on the earth. Black women wanted to reclaim their humanity and Womanhood. Linda Brent says, "Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women; supper added to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering and mortification particularly their own. The word „Black“ refers to the race and feminist means the one who understands that the patriarchal hegemony is the factor of exploitation of women. The distinctive voice in Walker's novels is the voice of a woman immersed in her blackness. Racism and slave trade is an aspect which is portrayed by her in the novel. The African women were humbled to the life of restrictions regarding their race and sex. The blacks as a group was relegated to an underclass by their virtue of their race. They were confronted by all sides of racial and sexual discrimination and had so many societal restrictions.

For ex. Lissie tells us that she along with other slaves were dragged to a ship. At the plank that led upon to the deck their last remaining garment, the strip of cotton around their hips and they were forced on to the ship bald and naked. It is important to give voice to the black women and the exploitation of them, must come to an end.

Oppression of men over women

Walker places women in traditionally male role and her goal is to provide stories with role models who will help women transcend the gender stereotyping inherent in patriarchal culture. Walker describes the history of woman since the days when human civilisation began and she explains how the society which was based on the egalitarian principles was transformed into a society of male

dominance and according to this view she projects in *The temple of my familiar*, her own vision of harmonious and healthy body and expansive soul in which it makes her as a leader of the black race. Women were denied room and they were made to work hard on the fields. They were continually abused physically and mentally and they would not have been able to tolerate their torturous lives.

For ex. Fanny comes to know men's oppression of women which she herself feels in her own life. She also gives insights into the oppression of women, black women by black men, who should have...."(259-60).

Conclusion

The entire study brushed the minute details of Alice Walker's life and African American literature. It was also known that it had a genre named as Slavery Genre. Alice Walker like, her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *THE COLOR PURPLE* has also made the temple of my familiar with the stress upon racism, slavery and oppression. It is also considered as a sequel to *The Color Purple*.

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