

Abjection to Accession: A Study of Racism and Empowerment in Sharon Draper's *Stella by Starlight*

¹A. Mutharasi, ²R. J. Pranav, ³P. Mano

¹ Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Department of English, Sri Sarada college for Women, Tirunelveli, India

² Tamilnadu Teachers Education University, Department of English, N.VK.S.D College of Education, Kanyakumari, India

³ Tamilnadu Teachers Education University, Department of English, ST. Joseph College of Education, Tenkasi, India
Email :- a.mutharasi.ammu@gmail.com, pranavmsnu40@gmail.com, manoplrm99@gmail.com,

Abstract: This research analysis the African people suffered by Americans through the study of racism and empowerment in *Stella by Starlight* is an autobiographical novel written by an American writer and socialist worker Sharon Draper. The work revolves around the pathetic conditions undergone by the African Americans over a period of time. The socio economic growth of America and the communal conflicts are the core elements that highlight the work. The struggle for existence is the motto hidden in the masterpiece. The paper brings out the life style of the blacks centuries ago and it throws light on the brutal practice imposed on the African Americans. The hardships and the revolts for their own identity and their basic rights make their creative work a unique piece of art. The hidden truths in the life of the oppressed community and the shattered hopes of the children in the marginalized groups and scheduled community impose a sense of awakening in the minds of the people. The selfless struggle of the African Americans created a revolution in the history of America. It creates distress among white societies in America. Their determination to excavate the issues based on colour, race, ethnicity, gender and socio economic growth is remarked ironically in the research paper.

Key Words: *Disparage, Bigotry, Accreditation, Prerogative, Empowerment.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Racism is the marginalization and oppression of people of colour based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people. It may also mean prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity. Modern variants of racism are often based in social perceptions of biological differences between people. Racism is the belief that different inherent traits in racial groups justify discrimination. In the modern English language, the term "racism" is used predominantly as a pejorative epithet. It is applied especially to the practice or advocacy of racial discrimination of a pernicious nature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Ella Fitzgerald (2015) published a review in Reading Rumpus book about this novel can serve as a starting point for discussions about fear, humanity, and bravery. Storytelling, oral traditions, writing, and song can help people come together, think about social injustices, and live a full life. Draper is a fantastic writer. Family and friend rhythms and steady beats point to larger truths for all of us. Don't pass up this opportunity. (Fitzgerald, 2015)

Sarah Jane Coleman (2015) reviewed in Good reads about when the Ku Klux Klan makes an unwelcome reappearance in Stella's segregated southern town, bravery triumphs over prejudice in Sharon Draper's Depression-era tour de force, *Out of My Mind*. Stella lives in the segregated South, more specifically in Bumblebee, North Carolina. She has access to a few stores. Some stores she cannot enter. Some people are extremely pleasant. Others are considerably less so. To Stella, it all balances out, and the Klan hasn't bothered them in years. But one late night, later than she should ever be up, let alone wandering around outside, Stella and her little brother see something they're never supposed to see, something that is the first flicker of change to come, unwelcome change by any stretch of the imagination. Stella decides to fight fire with fire as her community - her world - is upended. And she discovers that ashes do not always denote the end of something. (Coleman, 2015)

3. RACISM AND EMPOWERMENT IN SHARON DRAPER'S WORK:

This research explains the Racism discloses the oppression and attacks faced by the community of blacks in North Carolina. Racism continued in the schools and the black children were not permitted to enter in the school of the white children. Separate mode of education was granted to the blacks in North Carolina. Stella shares her desire about the white children's school to her friend Tony, a fast runner. "Sometimes, at night, I go and run at the track of the white school." As Stella gaped, he hurried on. "It's honest to goodness cinder, you know? It's so much better than running on our lumpy dirty road .On the white school track, I feel like an eagle or something "(13) .They engaged in a conversation about the Olympics and Tony regarded that World records were given only to the white community.

"I guess so. I read in Carolina Times back in August." Tony began bouncing from step to step again. "I' m gonna run in the Olympics one day," he declared. But we don't even have a track team at our school, never mind a place to practice. Yeah, but the white school does. That's why I use their track at night. (14)

Stella shared all the pathetic incidents she faced in her life. As they talk about Dr. Hawkins the only black doctor in North Carolina, Tony made his opinion on Dr. Packard the white doctor in Bumblebee. Tony remarked that Dr. Packard won't even lay a hand on a black patient even if they are dying .Stella remembered the bitter experience she and Mama had with Dr. Packard . One day Stella and Mama were walking down to Mrs. Cooper's Candy store. Stella was jumping on the sidewalk and unfortunately she stepped on the shoes of Dr.Packard and got some mud on the shoes.

"Yep, I did. I apologized over and over, and so did my mother .She even bend down to wipe off the mud with her handkerchief. But he pushed my mom away .She almost fell and then he reached down and whomped me as hard as he could. I remember his green eyes as he sneered at me. Then he called me stupid and careless and some other stuff" (19).

Minority students continued to be concentrated in high-poverty, low-achieving schools, while white students are more likely to attend high-achieving, more affluent schools. Their status was lower compared to the white children. The neglect ion in the schools even forced the children to discontinue their studies. Most of the children left school to enter the world of work, or to stay at home and help look after younger siblings. Out of school hours, many children helped with household chores, ran errands and looked after the younger ones in the family as families tended to be much larger. In the village of Bumblebee there were also whites who supported the blacks. Every day Stella and her friends stop at the Cathy's Candy Store owned by Mrs .Cathy Cooper a white lady.

"As they crowded into the store, Stella waved at Mrs. Cooper. She had to be the nicest white lady in Bumblebee, not just because she sometimes gave them free candy, but because she didn't shoot them to the back door like most of the other store owners in town did. It felt kinda good to walk in the front like everybody else" (36).

In School, the teacher Mrs. Grayson attempted to distract the students from the cruelty of the Klu Klux Klan by preparing for the Christmas pageant, which was still weeks away. Afterward, they began working on writing research paper, which Stella loathes. Mrs. Grayson, however, believes that Stella had great potential. Mrs. Grayson announced an essay contest sponsored by the Carolina Times newspaper. She asked all students to submit a story, and Stella was incredibly nervous. Tony encouraged Stella to write about the Klan. She wrote a powerful essay comparing the Klan to dragons. Mrs. Grayson announced her selections for the essay contest, and Stella was not chosen.

Stella felt incredibly sad that her work has not been selected. Mrs. Grayson announced that Helen Spencer was the winner of the essay contest. Stella realised the fact that the society never accepts the truth. Though she had research paper about the realities hidden regarding the brutal attitude of the members of Klu Klux Klan community, her writings were expelled. Even the school authority failed to support Stella in the publication of her essay. The people in American society were trained to raise their voices in favour of the whites. They regarded the blacks as weak potential fewer individuals without the assistance of any prior groups. Stella also shared an incident which Papa faced during his teen. In 1914 during the First World War the local folks made a big deal about wanting boys from around the country to participate in the war. Somebody told newspaper reporters with cameras would be at the recruiting office to snap a picture of the first young man from North Carolina. Papa who had turned eighteen got up before daylight and walked to the town. He was the very first in line. Papa won the first place even though twenty two men included in the same day. When the reporters saw the colored boy stood first in line, they pushed him out of the way and said he was in the wrong line.

"The newspaper people snapped their bright camera bulb and took dozens of pictures of Jimmy Winkle man, a white boy instead. He had stood second in the line behind Papa. They would not let Papa be in

the army. So he walked back home, so very sad. It's strange to imagine for Stella that her father being so young and hard to think about him being so sad". (149)

The sense of thought remained stubborn in the minds of the people which force them to neglect the cruelty imposed on the blacks by the white community. Jojo consoled Stella as she feels sad that her work was not selected. He pointed out that perhaps her writing about the Klan was too dangerous for publication, which made Stella feel slightly better.

"Uh – huh." "You think maybe she didn't send your essay because it was too, too _ I don't know _ uh, dangerous?" he asked. Stella stopped short and looked at her brother." Gosh, I never even thought about that! You're pretty smart for a kid, you know". "I know." Jojo made as if to fling the mud ball at his sister, but aimed for the third graders in front of him instead. Stella looked up at the dark clouds still scudding across the sky. (273)

In one of the occasions at home, Stella and Jojo couldn't find Mama. They searched for her everywhere. They chased after dusty through the backyard, through the woods, and towards Kilkenny Pond. Slowly, carefully, she told him, "Go get Dr. Hawkins and tell him Mama's got snakebite. It's bad. Then go find Papa fast. You know where the apple orchard is. Run!" (275). Jojo runs to get the doctor while Stella treats mama's wounds as best as she can. Stella first poured the cold water on the wound, watching as the oozing blood turned pale pink. Mama's eyes opened wide, registering shock, but Stella just kept rinsing the holes in her mother's leg. "The next thing I'm gonna pour might hurt a little more," she whispered, "but I got to clean it best I can" (277). She has no idea about she is right or wrong. Stella opened a bottle of whiskey and she sloshed most of it on her mother's ankle. She held the pale blue dress up to her face.

The cotton had been worn soft from dozens of wearing and washings. Stella ripped it into wide strips, which she wrapped loosely round her mother's leg. "Jojo returns with Papa, who says that Dr. Hawkins is out of town. He had to go to Raleigh for medical conference and so Stella does to Dr. Packard in an attempt to get help. Stella had no choice. Just as Dr. Packard was closing the door, Stella pressed her hand up against it. "Uh, excuse me sir," she began" (283). Stella felt hesitated to approach him but she had no other remedy before her. Dr. Packard's eyes were such an odd colour green, cold like fish scales. He was the only person she had ever encountered with eyes just that color.

"Stella noted those eyes from that afternoon so long ago when she had been only five. Stella blinked fast and shook her head. Then she blurted out, "My mother has been bitten by a rattle snake! Copper head, we think ..." (284). Stella requests before Packard but he angrily tells Stella he treats white patients only.

Stella being talented faced many hindrances in her career the school authorities rejected her essay for mentioning the cruelty of the Klu Klux Klan members. Her passion to write was not encouraged even by her family member's. Mama feared her writings would summon trouble to their community. But opportunities approached Stella in a vivid manner. She was intelligent and brave enough to face any obstacles. The Klu Klux Klan members burned the house of Spencer for registering to cast their vote .The barbarism filled panic in the mind of Hazel. Mrs. Spencer announces she can't find her daughter Hazel, Stella rushed into the woods and found Hazel in a secret hiding spot. " A wee little voice called out from inside the labyrinth of roots , a tangle that had, Stella now saw ,a hidey hole in its center . " There's red fire everywhere! I'm not coming out!" A tiny head, hair going every which way, poked out from the roots. Hazel was crawling on her hands and knees towards her. Stella kept coaxing her forward, and then pulled the girl into her arms. She had never felt so relieved in all her life" (188) .The next day in church, Pastor Patton makes an example of Stella and directly praises her bravery.

Stella was embarrassed, but her parents were incredibly proud. Donations began to stockpile for the Spencer family, and one day Mrs. Spencer arrived to gift Stella an extra pair of shoes, some new dresses, and a typewriter. Stella was thrilled about the typewriter and began using it to writer her stories. Stella at a far distance found the polling location, which in Bumblebee was the sheriff's office, looming ahead. Everyone in the crowd went silent and slowed. But Papa, Mr. Spencer and Pastor Patton continued forward. The three men walked through the door and disappeared into the darkness of the office. They are waiting for the three men have voted. Stella noticed something else and nudged Carolyn. Some of the white townspeople who had come to vote didn't leave when they were through voting. They stayed and joined the group standing outside the sheriff's office. Mrs. Cooper's, the candy store owner, Mr. Bobbs, the bait salesman. Mr. Stinson, the mail man and many other white members never uttered a word against the blacks.

"The sheriff scowled at the scene, and then abruptly disappeared inside the office. Twenty minutes later just as Stella thought she was going to collapse with worry and anticipation, Papa, Pastor Patton and Mr. Spencer emerged from the polling station. There were smiles lighting their faces. Now Stella saw what she had expected to see earlier in Mr. Spencer's eyes. The eyes of Spencer were on fire" (234).

In this time for proved their confidence. This development coincided with huge uprisings with a significant Black population. The people in the village of Bumblebee desired to start a new beginning in their history. The awakening of African American community filled pleasure in Stella and she decided to project all sorts of pain, hatred and the empowerment of her community through her writings to the public. She started her own personal newspaper, “STELLA’S STAR SENTINEL” to document the day and beyond. This intention of the protagonist turned to an outbreak in the life of the blacks in North Carolina.

STELLA’S STAR SENTINEL finally how to make all capitals .Still can’t fix mess-ups. This things needs to be able to erase Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the new president. He won in a landslide. Landslide makes me think of rocks and dirt falling down a mountain. Not sure what there has to do with an election. But maybe it does. My Papa voted. He is a pebble. Lots of pebbles make a landslide, right? Is vote counted? Roosevelt will move into the White House and will have a fine supper to celebrate, I guess. Papa had cornbread and buttermilk and beans with his friends at my house. I bet Papa enjoyed his celebration more. (237)

The people though had voice; they remained to be dump and duff witnessing all cruelties imposed on them by the white community. Their voices were restricted to come out of their mind. None dares to listen to the words of the African Americans. The blacks in North Carolina lacked the content of self confidence till the publication of Stella’s newspaper. They had no hope in their lives. The people dreamt that their lives would be the same as in the past forever. Though they had desires and dreams they never presented it before the public. The inferiority of the African Americans hindered their way of approach towards life in the American society. As they were not respected, the blacks thought they were born to do manual jobs and to be the servants of the whites. Stella brought out her visions for her community in the form of articles in the newspaper. The ideas of the blacks, their desires, needs, emotions and their feelings are reflected in Stella’s writings .The African Americans were ridiculed by everyone in the white community once .Their obligations were known to the American society through the publication of Stella’s newspaper .With a history of racial brutalization and self-denial, Black Americans were rediscovering their history and culture and exuding pride in their Blackness. Society recognises the conflicts faced by the blacks for their survival. Stella’s newspaper served as the voice of the blacks. It created distress among many white societies in America. They wished to put an end to the publication of Stella.

Not long after Election Day, Jojo became ill and Stella was sent into town to retrieve medicine for him. She walked with Tony into town, and after they ran their respective errands, Tony was attacked by two adult white men. Though he was ultimately safe and relatively uninjured, Stella is stunned by the attack. The whites threatened Stella to terminate her publication. Stella could not bear the harassment towards her community anymore .She was determined not to stop her publication. The menacing of the white members made Stella even brawnier. She began to write against the white community mentioning all the mischievous actions done by them. In an edition of her newspaper STELLA’S STAR SENTINEL .Stella pointed the notes how the attack has left Tony a quieter and more reserved person. Her newspaper received appreciation in North Carolina.

Stella gnawed on her pencil as Mrs. Grayson put on her reading glasses, slid away the twine from the package, and snapped the wrapping open. One typed sheet of paper and several newspapers fell out; they looked like the Carolina Times. Stella watched the teacher read the letter, and then pick up one of the papers. Mrs. Grayson read each page with careful deliberation, even stopping to take notes on an article she seemed to like. She allowed a hint of smile to show on her face as she turned to the last page of the paper. Even though she knew she was not part of this competition, Stella switched to chewing on her fingernails. She glanced at Carolyn with a smile, with what she hoped was a look of encouragement. (269)

Sharon Draper brings the element of hope in the concluding part. She follows the same pattern in almost all the works. Draper mentions all the discriminations in the society in the beginning but concludes it with a positive note. The African Americans were bold enough to face any challenges in their life. Fear faded away from the faces of the blacks in the village of Bumblebee. Instead retaliation filled their minds. The agony in the faces of the blacks was replaced by anger. Happiness began to step in to the life of African Americans in North Carolina. In the school Mrs. Grayson announces happy news to the students. A large box of books had been donated to the Riverside school from the Mountain View School. Mrs. Grayson also reads a letter from the Carolina Times to the students.

Mama recovered from the snake bite. Stella’s approaches were rejected by Dr. Packard who ridicules her by telling he enquires only white patients. Stella returned home to find neighbourhood women tending to Mama. Soon, Mrs. Odom arrived with Dr. Hawkins in tow. She drove to Raleigh and back in one night so that he could get the antivenin to Mama in time. Mama lives and begins to recover. Papa was working hard to earn extra money. The African Americans moulded their personality and made up their minds not to permit anyone anymore to surrender them. The

symbol of Christmas arrivals indicated the new start in the lives of Bumblebee people. There was no sense of paranoia as everyone comes together in celebration at home and at the school Christmas pageant.

Papa gulped down the rest of his coffee and began placing his boots. "I ' all see you all tonight," he said. "Looking ' forward to seeing' that pageant of yours." Putting on his hat and taking the corn bread with him, he headed out for the three miles walk to the mill, where, Stella knew, he'd be lifting and sweeping sawdust all day long. Mama dozed while Stella washed the dishes, swept the house and both porches, and peeled potatoes for supper. When Mama woke up her eyes glowing. "Hey, you two! Let's decorate the Christmas tree!" "Pop! Pop -pop! Pop - pop -pop -pop-pop!" Jojo sang along with the popcorn as the kernels exploded into delicious bits of fluff. When she took the top off the pan, he cheered. (310)

The African Americans developed a sense of care towards their own families. They began to work hard to support their children. The people of Bumblebee never wanted their generation to surrender themselves before the whites. The novel concludes with one of Stella's essays, in which she ensure the reader that she intends to do great things and look beyond the boundaries of her small town and the small-minded people who live there. Finally, the novel ends with a message of optimism for the bright future ahead.

Race or Colour determined the status of an individual in the American Society. It was a period where hierarchy was granted based on the racial discrimination. The African Americans were talented but they were degraded by the whites in America. There should be a sensible awakening among the whites. Even in the present era clashes takes place among blacks and the whites. Though the blacks enjoy freedom, the people in the white community still have the spirit of neglect ion towards the blacks hidden in their minds. They should develop a heart to treat the African Americans as their braver. The uprising of the African Americans created enlightenment in their lives. The people were determined to build a sustainable future with all glories. They narrowed their ideas and visions which promoted their upliftment. The spirit of empowerment among the blacks remarked a feasible future in the lives of the African Americans in the United States.

4. CONCLUSION:

In the research article *Stella by Starlight* Sharon Draper also tries to bring the conflicts of the racial discrimination in the society. This research papers explains about the racial conflicts in an elaborate manner through the lives of people in the village of Bumblebee in North Carolina. The black community people were not granted their basic rights. It is an autobiographical work where Sharon represented the life and pathetic conditions of her grandmother through the portrayal of Stella. Internalised racism is the content discussed in the research paper. Empowerment is the uprising of an individual or a community against the oppression and the neglect ion faced. The African Americans were no longer determined to surrender themselves before the whites. They wanted their basic rights to be granted to them in all means. The African Americans desired to begin a new start in their career. They never wanted the history of suppression to be replicated again. The African Americans in North Carolina longed for their children to attain better education and reach heights incomparable to the community of whites. The blacks in America where determined to prove their intellect and this reasoning created remarkable figures who even modified the history of America before the whites from the African American community. Years proved that the blacks held the superiority rank even in the American Parliament. The African Americans confirmed that the assiduous hands could rule the nation. The African Americans established a career of their own in the American society. But still the elements of racial discrimination remain hidden in the minds of the whites. Though the blacks enjoy total freedom and equality, in some occasions the brutality of the whites takes hold the upper hand towards the blacks in America. In this research ideology uprooted in the minds of people should be changed. The future generations must withhold the principles of unity, equality and fraternity. Marginalization and the discriminations must be excavated from the society in the future.

REFERENCES:

1. Anonymous. "Stella by Starlight by Sharon M. Draper." *Ella Fitzgerald*, 25 July 2022, barb-middleton.blogspot.com/2015/05/stella-by-starlight-by-sharon-m-draper.html.
2. Draper, Sharon. *Stella by Starlight*. Reprint, Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016.
3. "Stella by Starlight by Sharon M. Draper." *Sarah Jane Coleman*, www.goodreads.com/book/show/22546133-stella-by-starlight. Accessed 25 July 2022.