



‘THE EMERGENT WOMAN’ IN ALICE WALKER’S ‘MERIDIAN’

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“They have a saying for people who fall down as I do: If a person is hit hard enough, even if she stands, she falls.”
Alice Walker

Abstract

The paper titled: “*The Emergent Woman*’ in Alice Walker’s ‘*Meridian*’” highlights how black women are triply burdened and attempts to examine Walker’s attitude to life, love, sex, marriage, men and spirituality against the background of her powerful work, within the context of a racist, sexist and capitalist society. The focus is on spiritual survival- the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, the paper is committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women.

The paper is categorized into three parts-

Part 1 discusses Walker as a ‘Womanist’ and defines in Walker’s terms what the womanist tenets imply. It also justifies the selection of the novel ‘Meridian’ and explains how ‘Meridian’ in the first part of the novel is introduced into ‘Initiation.’

Part 11 discusses Meridian’s active participation in the Civil Rights Movement after the ‘Renunciation’ of her child.

Part 111 focuses on the final chapter ‘Ending’ and on Meridian atonement and ultimate release from bondage thereby concluding that Meridian’s growth and emergence of a strong woman is successfully constructed.

Conclusively, the paper justifies Alice Walker’s celebration of blackness, black roots and the aspirations of black womanhood and presents a balanced picture of black womanhood. It also describes the task of Alice Walker as a writer –to give back to black woman their own black woman self, their beauty, physical and sexual strength, motherhood, sisterhood and wifehood.

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Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s ushered in a new renaissance in the field of Literature by Black writers. Black woman writers celebrate black womanhood in their writings. Their intensity of feeling and discrimination are discernible in novels like Alice Walker's 'Meridian' (1976) and *The Colour Purple*²(1980); Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye' (1970) and 'Sula' (1973); Gloria Naylor's 'The Women of Brewster Place' (1982). These three women could easily be called the colossal giants of 'The Civil Rights Movement.'(1960) as they express their quest for Justice and Equality through the medium of fiction.

K.G.Ranver (1990) in his article 'Where There's Man There's Trouble' believes that Black women in America are 'triplely burdened'; they are victims of 'racism, sexism, and classism, 'and are forced to occupy a very marginal place in male-dominated America; as a result, their humanity and the black women are denied both by white men and also by their own people, particularly black men. This makes them feel unimportant, impersonal, submissive and devoid of self. The obligation of returning their rejected humanity and their womanhood rests upon the shoulders of 'these black womanist writers.'¹(45-47)

Alice Walker is one of the most passionate of these pioneers who championed the doctrines of black women. The term 'womanist' has been described in detail by Alice Walker (1983) in 'In Search of Our Mother's Garden'. She writes that the word 'womanist' has four characteristics:

- i) The transformation of women from 'womanish' (opposite of 'girlish' i.e., frivolous, not serious.) to 'black feminist.'
- ii) A woman who loves, respects, appreciates, and prefers woman's culture, space and women's emotional flexibility, and strength.
- iii) Sometimes loves individual men, sexually or non-sexually and are dedicated to the existence and wholeness of the entire people, male and female.
- iv) Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender² (xi-xii).

For over two decades and more Alice Walker has been a "womanist" on the American fictional scene. She prefers to call herself a "womanist" because womanist is better than feminist, based on the four characteristics she has mentioned above. Walker explores relationships between black women's past tradition and societal change as crucial to a woman's search for freedom and wholeness. She probes many aspects of interrelationships of sexism, racism and classism in the American society and, in her fiction; she seeks to transform "suspended" women into "emergent" black women. Mary Helen Washington (1977) in her article, "Teaching Black-Eyed Susans: An Approach to the Study of Black Woman Writers" analyses Walker's personal construct of the history of black women and states how "suspended" black women characters in literature emerge as 'The Emergent Women.'⁴ (p.22)

The Objective:

- i) The core preoccupations of Alice Walker's fiction is clearly stated in John O'Brien's, (1973) book: "Interviews with Black Writers." He argues that as a writer Walker's preoccupations are with "the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women"⁵ (192)
- ii) This study aims at defining the pains and struggle of black women to achieve liberation and establishes their self-dignity and self – concept not as a woman but as a human being.

Methodology:

The paper: "The Emergent Woman in Alice Walker's Meridian" is systematized into three major parts:

Part 1 focuses on the protagonist's Meridian's 'Initiation' (naivety) into the Civil Rights Movement where she is "womanish -girlish, and frivolous."

Part 11 describes Meridian's active participation in the Civil Rights Movement after the 'Renunciation' of her child; pain and suffering brings about her growth and maturity.

Part 111 deals with the independent, free and emergent woman she becomes in the last chapter 'Ending' Meridian concentrates on her amends and release.

Literature Review:

At the outset let it be stated that the Literature reviewed here deals specifically with the literature on Alice Walker's 'Meridian' and critical literature relevant to the study undertaken.

Nancy Hoffman, (1977) *White Women, Black Women: Inventing an Adequate Pedagogy*, gives valuable insights into how white women can approach the writing of Black women. Darwin T. Turner, (1971) *In a Minor Chord: Three Afro-American Writers and Their Search for Identity* "says that masculine oppression is the sole reason of the miserable condition of black women. John O'Brien, (1973) ed., *Interviews with Black Writers* champions the wholeness and survival of all marginalized people. Robert Bone, (1958) *The Negro Novel in America* speaks about the reasons for this exploitation, where the White man's denial of education to black women exhibits his desperate to project his power. Ranver, K.G [1990] "*Where There's Man There's Trouble*", and Darmawanti D.F (2012) study depicts the problems of exploitation of black women at the hands of the Whites and Black men and concludes that men both White and Black are responsible for their marginality and oppression. Smith, Barbara. [1982]. "*Towards a Black Feminist Criticism* fights towards a vision of movement that involves freedom and non-violence. Aziz Mohammad, F. (2014) study reveals how Meridian, the protagonist tries to escape from her condition with the help of her education and fights for wholeness and against sexual and racial discrimination. Bhagyathara, D. (2015) tells us in "*Alice Walker and her Womanist Aesthetics*" that Walker's works contain the elements of class, gender, oppression, race, survival, wholeness and womanist aesthetics. Divya. E. (2016) depicts in her paper the quest and determination of black women which helped them to acquire their true identity and respectable position in the society. Kumar.E (2014) research article '*Racialism, Violence and Cruelty in Alice Walker's works* observes 'that Alice Walker focuses on the pain and problems of black women. She has exposed the violence, exploitation and harassment done to black women and has innovated the term 'womanism'. They can't even protest, they find solution to their problems in the revival of their communal values. Sejal Patel (2015) in Alice Walker's '*Meridian: A Depiction of Consequences of the Civil Rights Movements*' focuses on black people's experience and struggle for civil rights through the autobiographical work '*Meridian*'.

So Alice Walker became their spokesperson through her novels and sacrificed her life love, child and family for their equality and upliftment in all walks of life. She tried to improve the condition of black women by engaging in The Civil Right Movements and committed her writings also for this very purpose. Her novels present the life of black people in a realistic way. They are full of the themes of violence and slavery. This study also aims at the two ironical roles of black women as "The betraying mother" and "the betrayed daughter." The study explores the horrors of women from being disfigured in the name of tradition, religion and patriotism.

This study titled: "*The Emergent Woman in Alice Walker's 'Meridian'*" focuses on empowerment, fulfilment and liberation through *Meridian* which has been chosen for exploration. The focus in this paper rests on the process of personal and social growth which is a motif that characterizes *Meridian*. Walker's previous concerns about the "the spiritual, the survival whole of black people, "her commitment to exploring the oppressions and triumphs of black women in relation to their mothers and the relationship between struggle and change gain a prominence and become more visible in this study of *Meridian*. As the struggles to reclaim her past and re-examine her relationship to the black community continues, she gains internal strength to endure hardships.

Discussion and Analysis

Part 1 – The Initiation (The Naive Woman)

Tate 2(1983) tells us that Walker positions the story in the novel in "a crazy – quilt story" (p: 176) form. The narrative elements, complex in structure, jump back and forth-in time. and work on many different levels .The

personal histories of Anne-Marion Coles, the Wild Child, Meridian's father's grandmother, Feather Mae and the legend of The Sacred Tree Sojourner are intermingled with the past of Meridian's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hill, all of which provide the reader with perceptions into the various layers of black experience. The chapter "Indian and Ecstasy" focuses on "Meridian's love relationship with her father and her spiritual communion with him. This spiritual experience down the Serpent's side that gives Meridian "the feeling of flying"⁶ (p.58) is their palpable association to the past. It is through her relationship with her father that the seeds of her spiritual growth is sown.

Within this narrative presentation of the complex material, the initiation experiences of Meridian are described, which are trying and painful. What experience or schooling can a child of twelve have with men, and sex? Daxter, the in-charge of the funeral home, pursues Meridian. She was just twelve. She sees his assistant's seduction of another schoolgirl. Still she is unaware of her physical defencelessness and attains a young boyfriend, Eddie. She marries her lover and awaits the birth of her son. Her whole life is changed by an experience she did neither understand nor enjoy. Meridian uses sex as a "sanctuary. "Once in her sanctuary Meridian wonders if she could "look out at the male world with something approaching equanimity, even charity; even friendship" (p.62). Her marriage with Eddie breaks because she feels that as a wife her life will always be empty and she cannot diminish her "self." Besides, Eddie, like his name, "would never be grown up" (p.70).

Motherhood is the centre of Meridian's story. Walker presents a cultural context in which motherhood becomes a vehicle for revolution for Meridian. She employs two structures: i) Culture, Tradition and the Black society leaves the African women with few substitutes to the asphyxia and sacrifice of traditional wifedom and motherhood.

ii) The inner structure is the past family life of the Hill. She realises from the example of her own mother that motherhood is "being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick." Her mother makes her feel guilty for "shattering her mother's emerging self" (p.51). Her girlhood and young adulthood represent periods of emotional poverty. Meridian's process of initiation into this new responsibility of motherhood, her pregnancy, came as a total shock. She knew she did not want the child. After the birth of her son, he did not feel like anything to her but "a ball and chain" (p.69). Nurturing the needs of the child was "slavery" (Ibidem). She craved for freedom and felt as though something perched inside her brain was about to fly. She does not want to raise her child in a society "where children are not particularly valued" (p.174).

It is not easy for Meridian to break free from the shackles of the socially fabled image of motherhood. The chapter "Battle Fatigue" analyses Meridian's confrontation with her mother and her inner conflict. At seventeen, Meridian, is already an abandoned wife and a mother, becomes aware of the past and present of the larger world in 1960, she decides to give away her child for a better her life at Saxon College. Meridian's perpetual conflict with a degraded self-image, because she could not live up to "the standard of motherhood that had gone before" (p.91) results in her illness and the "spiritual degeneration" in herself (p.92). Like an initiate she awaits healing so that she can study at Saxon and actively participate in the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian overcomes her illness, her recurring dream of death and her own feelings of inadequacy and "primeval guilt" (p.96) when she is reconciled with her mother in a dream and whispers: "Mama, I love you. Let me go" (p.125). Miss Winter, who treats Meridian as if she were her own child, forgives her and makes it possible for her to encounter the hostile world with renewed strength. When she renounces her child and leaves the small Mississippi town to attend college in Atlanta, Meridian Hill begins the first journey toward wholeness.

Saxon college symbolizes white values that have been seeped into the thinking of middle class blacks. The college was a training ground for capitalists and for ladies." Meridian, Anne Marion and other like-minded friends decide that they have two enemies: "Saxon, which wanted them to become something – ladies – that was obsolete, and the larger, more deadly enemy, white racist society" (p.95). Meridian despises capitalism and by her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the Atlanta Movement she wants to seek social justice, she wants black women to be "accepted" as equal.

In the movement she meets “the vain, pretentious” (p.99) activist and artist, Truman Held. While demonstrating against segregated facilities both Meridian and Truman are arrested and beaten. During this struggle for their rights Meridian realizes that she loves Truman and that “they were at a time and place in History that forced the trivial of fall away and they were absolutely together” (p.84). But even such an experience of union with Truman is charged when she conceives his child and has an abortion because Truman becomes involved with a white student, Lynne Rabinowitz. To Meridian it seemed “doubly unfair that after all her sexual experience and after one baby and one abortion she had not once been completely fulfilled by sex” (p.115).

Part 11. The Renunciation

Meridian realizes that in order to retain her wholeness she must rise above bodily claims. Abortion and sterilization symbolize her anger and frustration against Truman, pregnancy and motherhood. It is a metaphor for rooting out sexual weakness because Meridian wants to meet Truman at an equal level. It is a key event that pushes Meridian forward to act on her own. In fact, Meridian’s “pilgrimage” cannot be complete until she transcends sexual, maternal and racial categories through her participation in the revolution and her commitment to “re-create” the world where black children may thrive without thorns of guilt.

Walker creates a naïve, large hearted, protagonist persistently in doubt, but who progresses towards self-confidence. She is a product of The Civil Rights Movement, young and growing, uncertain but idealistic, and possesses qualities beyond her individual character. In the face of human failure along the way, she ultimately is successful because of her absolute fortitude and will power. *Meridian* abounds in complicated human relationships. Love and lust, hope and despair, purpose and indifference become the stuff that Meridian is made up of. No Individual is greater than the cause of the African –American cry for Equality.

Meridian’s quest for equality and freedom is reflected in her active involvement in the The Civil Rights Movement. Meridian, guilt born, though not responsible for her predicament, suffers an inward sickness that is symbolized by the loss of her hair. When enlightened dawns upon her and she finds her release, her hair begins to grow again, symbolizing her rejuvenation and change in attitude to life and womanhood. Black women in relation to their mothers and the relationship between struggle and change is a major theme dealt with in all Walker’s novels and is distinctly highlighted in ‘Meridian’. Meridian Hill is involved in the search for selfhood by discovering meaning in her roots and traditions. She continues the struggle against the oppression of black women which Ruth in Walker’s first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) dreams of. As she struggles to reclaim her past and re-examine her relationship to the black community, she gains internal strength to endure hardships. These anxieties are also evident in Walker’s second novel, *Meridian* ³ [1976] (1986).

Walker then pauses to focus on the complex relationship of Meridian, Truman and Lynne. She analyses how sexism and racism work to influence black woman- black man-white woman relationships. Truman marries Lynne because he wants a woman who is perfect in all the eyes of the world, an ideal woman, and the white woman is the closest thing to power he can get in white America. But the other black revolution-arises, like Tommy Odds, view Lynne as a white “bitch” and Truman suffers under the “pressure of Ostracism form the group” (p.138). He muses whether Lynne is guilty of “whiteness” or he is guilty of marrying a white woman. Truman finally returns to Meridian three years after he married Lynne and confesses that loving Meridian makes him feel “healthy, purposeful” (p.140). Meridian’s love for Truman is “purged.” It was not sexual, “it was forgiveness” (p.173). Lynne gives him back to Meridian and returns to the South.

Meridian is something of a mystic, retreating from time to time into trancelike states from which she emerges stronger than ever perhaps her most distinctive characteristics is her spirituality. Her rejection of materialism is another sign of her spirituality. Whenever Truman visits Meridian, he discovers that she has fewer and fewer possessions, until she is left with only the clothes on her back. Like many mystics, Meridian leads an ascetic life, denying the needs of her own body. All of these indicate her separation from the ordinary restraints of life. Supporting her spirituality is her affinity to the past, her literal kinship with Feather Mae, her great-grandmother, and her figurative one with Louvinie, a Saxon slave. Following Feather Mae’s example, Meridian invites ecstasy,

and discovers “that it was a way the living sought to expand the consciousness of being alive. . . .” She gains a larger understanding of her world, one not bound by trifling concerns. Louvinie’s example is equally important, for from her story Meridian learns about the need for expressing oneself, the value of a tenacious spirit, and the power of creativity. Other qualities in keeping with her spirituality are Meridian’s introspection, her ferocious will, and her inability to give her word without full moral commitment. Since her decisions are often painful, and since they conflict with accepted moral traditions, readers should pay special attention to the relentlessness of her introspection. In the tradition of spiritual leaders, she suffers for her choices, but she finds this a necessary stage of growth.

EIaine Showalter,⁵ (1975) in "*Literary Criticism*," tells us that very few black novelists “have treated white characters with the keen intelligence of Walker”. Lynne is no simple stereotype; she is a naively idealistic reformer caught in the spirit of the times, a defiant and courageous woman who risks all of her personal ties, a guilt-ridden and terrified victim of the people whom she has tried to help, a confused and resentful woman who gradually awakens to her own mistakes. In several ways Lynne represents what Meridian might have been had she married Truman. Lynne’s experiences, fortunately, do not destroy her. At the end of the novel, she shows signs of recovered strength and a newly detected sense of her ability to endure alone. Walker’s understanding of Lynne’s motives for her involvement in the Civil Rights movement, her ability to characterize Lynne’s ambivalent moral and social position, her sensitive dramatization of Lynne’s losses, and her refusal to simplify Lynne are notable.

Meridian is the record of a black woman’s life as it unfolds itself towards self-realization and freedom. It examines what the concept of feminine freedom means to Meridian, a Black Civil Rights worker in the rapidly changing cultural climate of the 1960s and how her quest for holistic personality comes full circle, only when she is able to redefine her role which has been handed down to black women through tradition and society. The novel opens with Meridian’s encounter with Truman, her old comrade in the Civil Rights Movement. He observes her leading the black children of the town of Chicokema to see Marilene O’Shay, a mummy of a dead white woman, and tells her: “when things are finished it is best to leave.” Meridian replied “And pretend they were never started?”(p.27) is the introduction to a journey back in time. The author exploits a stream of consciousness technique and moves backward and forward in time exploring not just Meridian’s recent past but also her mother’s past to introduce the theme of her growing up.

Justice delayed is justice denied seems to be the main theme in the novel. This fight takes its toll on those fighting for Justice but it does throw light on the premise that even those who appear to have a cause towards which they are working towards, even those freedom fighters have an ace up their own sleeve. *Meridian* is not driven so much by plot, sub plot, themes and stylistic devices; it is more than an honest account of history. It is “a character-driven novel portraying the emotions of fear and failure of its major characters. The paper tracks Meridian’s experiences from college to her self-determining but lonely self; as a considerate person who is unattached and free to love without the burdens of sex, abuse, and institutional baggage.

Part 111: The Release

In the chapter titled “The Last Return.” Meridian is described as being extremely ill, which causes her to fall into unconsciousness. During her protests at The Civil Rights movement, Meridian, the protagonist, suffers physical beatings and torments. Both her condition and the violence meted out to her by policemen and others who do not believe in her cause, serve as powerful threats that frighten and demoralise Meridian, shattering her identity and stability. Meridian’s words: “They have a saying for people who fall down as I do: If a person is hit hard enough, even if she stands, she falls.” 6 (p.21) No matter how strong she is in the face of misfortune, hatred and violence take away her dignity, and resolve, and her belief in herself. Meridian realizes that she has inherited this legacy of “racism” and “peculiar madness” from her great-grandmother and her father as well. Meridian’s life is exploited with this irresistible genetic inheritance, just as her daily life is affected by segregation, which dehumanize those who are subjected to it. No matter how strong her resolve, Meridian’s body and psyche bear the scars of the physical and emotional assaults that she must constantly repel.

The old changeth yielding place for the new Meridian .She leaves behind a message on the wall which displays a gigantic tree stump with a tiny branch growing out from one side .Beside it is a message from Meridian's best friend at Saxon, Anne-Marion. It reads: "Who would be happier than you that The Sojourner did not die?" The Sojourner was the huge Magnolia tree in the centre of the Saxon College campus. During the protests and riots that occurred as a consequence of the Saxon College administration's rejection of the 'Wild Child,' the huge Magnolia Tree had been hacked down. This is symbolic of Meridian's soul being hacked to pieces and her inner confidence and sense of herself totally destroyed; the tree's resurrection and rebirth are emblematic of Meridian's rejuvenation. When Truman arrives for his last visit to Meridian, she is brought home like a corpse after she has defied an Army tank to protect the Rights of children. She describes herself to him as a woman in the process of changing her mind.

In a flashback Walker briefly mentions Meridian's experience with the revolutionary group in New York, nearly ten summers ago. She was forced to answer the question "will you kill for the Revolution?" "with a positive 'yes. 'As they were waiting for her to speak, she recalled a past experience. She remembered her mother and the day she lost her. Her mother's love was withdrawn when she was thirteen. Her sense of alienation and isolation had deepened. Knowing that she was not whole, because at thirteen she had not come to grips with the whole truth about herself, she began a search for freedom. Coming back to the present, she replies like a true revolutionary that she would reject violence as the approach to change. She prefers non-violence because she is "held by something in the past: by the memory of the old black men in the South...and the sight of the young girls singing in the country choir, their voices, the voices of angels." (Pp.27-28).The authorial comments: "And so she had left North and come back south... remaining close to the people-to see them, to be with them, to understand them and herself"(p.31) foreshadows the direction of Meridian's pilgrimage in search for genuine values

Anne-Marion had accused Meridian of being a coward because she would not say that she would kill for the Revolution; that she cannot promise that she will shed blood, so she leaves and returns to live among the people of the South. Anne-Marion stays behind: She becomes a successful poet and writes poems about her two children. She has sent Meridian several of the sheets of paper on her wall. Beside them, Meridian has placed her own poems, in which she says that she wants to put an end to guilt and shame; that she wants to love and forgive, to heal and to re-create herself.

In the last chapter, Meridian's elusive qualities and her mysterious, difficult-to-summarize nature are brought to the forefront. Meridian searches for meaning and acceptance in the civil rights movement, but she finds that even though her ardour comes naturally and she is able to make significant contributions, the group's sensibilities do little to resolve her struggle for self-acceptance.

"Your ambivalence will always be deplored by people who consider themselves revolutionists, and your unorthodox behaviour will cause traditionalists to gnash their teeth," said Truman, who was not, himself, concerned about either group."⁸ (p. 164)

At a gathering in New York City, Meridian refuses to avow her willingness to kill for the cause, despite being taunted, and Truman affirms that the thought of Meridian killing someone is ludicrous. Meridian finds she must extricate herself from such radical factions and pursue her own brand of social activism, returning to her roots in rural communities in Alabama and Georgia. Her methods of resistance are still unconventional, and she garners a sort of cult following as people feed and care for her. Her social actions are eventually labelled as "performances," akin to a spiritual revival, in which Meridian concludes the event by collapsing from emotional and physical exhaustion, her illness once again sapping her strength. In the end, though, it is this unconventional and fiercely independent spirit that leads Meridian to self-salvation, health, and wholeness.

Meridian, like a phoenix, has emerged whole and restored after facing various trials, and her transformation is quiet yet triumphant. Now Meridian packs her meagre belongings and moves on to the next town and the next challenge, armed with her newfound strength and resolve. In her stead, Truman is struck with her mysterious illness, falling to the ground after reading the words of Meridian's poem in which she finally forgives him. The poem goes on to say that she loves him and that their innocence and purity have given way to wisdom and healing. Regaining

consciousness after his spell, Truman wakes to find his cheek resting on Meridian's cap, the covering she no longer needs since her hair has grown back in. She can now expose herself to the world, no longer oppressed by her shame and guilt. In her absence, Truman becomes Meridian's surrogate. She has gone before the others and paved the way to self-acceptance and self-knowledge. At the conclusion of the novel, it is Truman's turn to embark on a similar, albeit difficult, journey toward the same goal.

"He . . . wondered if Meridian knew that the sentence of bearing the conflict in her own soul which she had imposed on herself—and lived through—must now be borne in terror by all the rest of them." 9(p.187)

The author takes a visionary leap in the final section of the novel. Meridian stands as a witness to the common lot, a survivor of the movement. She, who had not wanted to kill people in the movement, is converted to a new approach to revolution. She has reached a point in her life where she is no longer evasive. Listening to the old music, she is moved by the beauty of the black church. Her contribution to the revolution will be her "memory songs." For it is "the song of the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost, the people suffer and are without soul"10 (p.201). In order to transform their society black people must understand their own heritage and transform themselves. It is in the process of attempting social change through the movement that Meridian discovers her own personal path. This discovery is itself the core of the novel. Truman atones for hurting Lyne's feelings. When Truman asks Meridian if her love for him is changed, her response "No, I set you free . . ." 11(p.216) shows that she has released herself from the sexual bonds and she intends to pursue her own wholeness.

Meridian's search for wholeness can be defined as her attempt to express the totality of self and how that self is related to the world. It is a search for freedom, joy and contentment in being a woman, a search for self-love and a yearning for communal love. In keeping with the black literary tradition it is a search for escape from the body and freedom for the soul by discovering "the truth" in the darkness. Walker suggests that Meridian is "Free at last." Her ties are not with a man, a family or with a specific community. Motherhood for her includes not only rearing of children but also nurturing life, the continuity of life. She sees her existence as inseparable from all black people and writes:

There is water in the world for us
Brought by our friends though the rock of mother and god.
Vanishes into sand
And we, cast out alone to heal
And re-create ourselves (p.123).¹²

It is in this sense that Meridian's search for self-affirmation and wholeness acquires a mythic dimension. Meridian embraces her black heritage, her woman's heritage and reaches out to her people. She is a liberated black woman who knows what she should take from the past to create a new future. Truman knows that in her "pilgrimage" Meridian would return to the world "cleansed of sickness." He would never see "his" Meridian. "The new part had grown out of the old"¹³ (p.219). Thus, Meridian's incorporation into the community is, in essence, a new birth into spiritual wholeness.

The treatment of the theme of 'self-discovery' is perhaps one of the most complete and well-orchestrated theme in Alice Walker's treatment of Meridian. Walker brings Meridian to come to terms with major social realities like alienation, colour prejudices, racism, class, and gender issues; while simultaneously highlighting the connotations that dominate the nurturing and over protection in the Mother-Daughter relationships. Alice Walker deals with these themes in the most normal and pragmatic style and established that early motherhood is a barrier to self-discovery. One of the most fascinating strategies of Alice Walker as a novelist is that she creates her characters, not only to overcome these gender and racist barriers she pushes them to walk that extra mile and move towards, in a historical sense, to bring about a better tomorrow, by looking at their racial past and present to create a tomorrow for the entire human race on an equal and independent respect for both the Blacks and the Whites.

Conclusion

Meridian is a maturing novel, an examination of Meridian's growth, and her emergence as a strong woman. Claudia Tate ¹⁴(1983) in *Black Woman Writers at Work* observes that Walker successfully paradigms for her protagonist a lonely pilgrimage that incorporates elements of the universal monomyth: initiation, renunciation, atonement and release. Throughout the book the liberating goal of the pilgrimage is emphasized by symbols and images related to slavery and freedom. The quest is for self-knowledge, for wholeness that leads to transcendence, as Meridian finally discovers herself and her relationship to the world at large. ¹⁵(p123.)

Meridian is a long journey in the saga of Black Womanhood. 1982 observes that "the black woman has found the freedom to love her race, her family and herself." ¹⁶(p.164) The novel is a modern Odyssey of the Black American Woman. The major preoccupation of black woman writers is the black woman and Alice Walker vividly creates the image of the black woman with her complexity, diversity and depth in this novel. Wan hade, D.B.¹⁷ (2015) stated in his research article '*Alice Walker as Novelist of Colour Consciousness and Multiracialism*' that Walker is a courageous writer who gave voice to the racial oppression, and cultural life of black people through her novels. She also presented the consciousness and identity crisis of black women. She explored the relations of blacks and whites and the exploitation of coloured people on each and every level.

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