

Dual Burdens and Emancipation: An Examination of Black Womanhood, Resistance, and Self-Discovery in Alice Walker's Meridian

G. Rajalakshmi¹, N. Geethanjali²

¹Research scholar, Department of English, Thanthai Periyar Government Art and Science College (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Trichy, Tamilnadu, India.

²Associate Professor, Research Advisor, Department of English, Thanthai Periyar Government Arts and Science College (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Trichy-23, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

"Meridian" shows how black women are double-burdened the article depicted the concept of racist, sexist, and capitalist's society's unjustified acts. The paper also wants to look at the abuse, madness, loyalty, and successes of black woman Firstly the article is about Meridian's hatred toward motherhood responsibility because of her early marriage and husband's forsaken attitude. Later the article trace's Meridian's about active involvement in the Civil Rights Movement after she "renunciate" her child. Through Meridian and Truman's relationship the author portrayed Meridian unreliability toward men in society. The research depicted Meridian, Truman, and Lynne's complex relationship and how racism and sexism affect relationships between black people and white people. The article tries to show the transformation of Meridian's life goes as free as bird being black woman and knows what to learn from the past to build a better future. Finally, the paper gives a fair picture of black womanhood and explains why Alice Walker celebrated race, black roots, and the hopes of black women.

Keywords: Alice Walker, Black womanhood, Double burden, Racism, Sexism.

Introduction

"Meridian" highlights the double burden that black women face. An illustration of the notion of unjustifiable acts committed by capitalist society, racists, and sexists was provided in the article. In addition, the article intends to investigate the mistreatment, insanity, determination, and achievements of black women. Initially, the piece is about Meridian's aversion to the duty of parenting, which she attributes to her early marriage and the attitude of her husband, which is one of abandonment. Following the "renunciation" of her kid, the piece goes on to recount Meridian's engagement in the Civil Rights Movement and how she became actively involved in the movement. It was via the interaction between Truman and Meridian that the author demonstrated that Meridian is unreliable when it comes to males in society. The research illustrated the complicated relationship that exists between Meridian, Truman, and Lynne, as well as the ways in which racism and sexism influence the relationships that exist between black people and white people. This article aims to illustrate how Meridian's life has become as liberated as that of a bird, despite her identity as a black woman who recognises the lessons from her history to forge a better future. In conclusion, the essay provides an honest representation of black femininity and clarifies

the rationale for Alice Walker's celebration of race, black ancestry, and the ambitions of modern black women.

Background for Civil Rights Movements

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement initiated a renaissance in the literary contributions of Black individuals. Black women authors, throughout their oeuvre, exalt the essence of black womanhood. Consequently, both white men and their own community, particularly black men, repudiate their humanity. They experience feelings of insignificance, apathy, subservience, and a lack of self-identity during these occurrences. These black womanist authors are accountable for reaffirming their humanity and femininity. Alice Walker was among the most fervent early advocates advocating for the rights of Black individuals. Alice Walker's book *Meridian* "The study emphasizes how the Civil Rights Movement frequently served as a mirror for the iniquity of a man-centered, capitalist economy" (Abbot 518).

Meridian's Marriage Life

The narrative oscillates temporally, complicating the storyline. The narratives of Meridian's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hill, are interwoven with the personal experiences of Anne-Marion Coles, the Wild Child, Feather Mae, Meridian's grandmother, and The Sacred Tree Sojourner, providing the reader with a multifaceted perspective on black life. The researcher examined the chapter "Indian and Ecstasy," which focusses on, Meridian's spiritual connection with her father. The friendship she has with her father is what helps her grow spiritually. Later when the story moves the researcher spoke about her marriage and break down of the marriage. Meridian was only twelve, she gets a young boyfriend named Eddie.

"She was expelled from school because of the pregnancy" (Walker 58). She gets married to her boyfriend and waits for her son to be born. Her whole life has changed because of something she didn't understand or enjoy. "After she gave birth to Eddie Jr, Eddie left her alone" (Mohana et al, 2394).

Meridian asks herself if she could "look out at the male world with something approaching equanimity, even charity; even friendship" once she was in her safe place (Walker 62). She breaks up with Eddie because she thinks that being a wife will make her life empty and she cannot lower herself. "Meridian eventually hands over her baby to the mother in law and is freed from the responsibility of the child. Mrs. Hill dislikes her daughter for not raising the child. Even though Meridian's mother did not want children, she dutifully raised them with utmost responsibility" (Handibag and Mathpati 171).

Meridian's Sufferings

When she was a girl and when she was a young adult, she felt emotionally poor. Meridian was completely shocked when she found out she was pregnant and had to start taking care of a baby. She was sure she didn't want the child.

Her first pregnancy she became distracted from who she was. As divided in her mind as her body was divided, between what part was herself and what part was not. Her frail independence gave way to the pressures of motherhood and she learned much to her horror and amazement that she was not even allowed to be resentful that she was "caught." That her personal life was over. (Walker 40).

Meridian finds it hard to break free from the publicly idealised idea of being a mother. The researcher highlights women's suffering through Meridian's fight with her mother and the problems she is having with herself. Meridian is already a mother and an abandoned wife when she is seventeen years old. In 1960, when she learns about the past and present of the bigger world, she chooses to give up her child so

that she can have a better life at Saxon College. Meridian has a bad opinion of herself because she couldn't live up to "the standard of motherhood that had gone before" The research pointed out motherhood's responsibility with examples of how being mother Meridian hates her motherhood role because of her early marriage and attempted to pursue her dream.

She abandons the child thinking that it will be best for the child and for herself. She fabricates her own illusions about motherhood and goes against the wish of her mother and community. She expresses her passion to achieve certain goals and she is ready to sacrifice anything for the fulfilment of her goals. She becomes alone and is separated from the black community and the world. (Aggarwal 14).

Saxon College stands for white ideals that have crept into the minds of black middle-class people. The college was a place where both businessmen and ladies could learn. Meridian, Anne Marion, and their friends who share their views. Through this process the researcher pointed out her progress of independent women.

Meridian's Civil Rights Movements

Meridian hates capitalism and wants social justice. She joined the Civil Rights Movement and the Atlanta Movement because she wants black women to be "accepted" as equal. "Meridian is semi-autobiographical as it is based on some of Walker's personal experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian, like Walker, completes her education on a scholarship and later participates in the Civil Rights Movement and the drives related to voter registration" (Jan 71).

There, she meets Truman Held, an activist and artist who she calls "vain and pretentious" (Walker 99). When Meridian and Truman protest against separate facilities, they are both jailed and beaten. Meridian realises that she loves Truman during the fight for their rights. "They were at a time and place in history that forced the trivial to fall away, and they were absolutely together" (Walker 84). For example, when she gets pregnant with Truman's child and has an abortion because Truman is seeing a white student named Lynne Rabinowitz, it makes her feel bad. Meridian thought it was "doubly unfair"

It enraged her that she could be made to endure such pain, and that he was oblivious to it. She was also disgusted with the fecundity of her body that got pregnant on less screwing than anybody's she had ever heard of. 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. (Walker 115).

Abortion and sterilisation are ways for her to show how angry and frustrated she is with Truman, pregnancy, and being a mother. Rooting out sexual weakness is what it means because Meridian wants to meet Truman on an equal level. Through her action in the revolution and her promise to "re-create" a world where black children can grow without the thorns of guilt, Meridian's "pilgrimage" will not be complete until she goes beyond sexual, mother, and racial categories.

Walker Writes about Naive

Walker writes about a Naïve, kind main character who always doubts herself but grows in confidence over time. She was born during the Civil Rights Movement, is young and still growing, is unsure but idealistic, and has traits that go beyond who she is as a person. Even though other people fail her along the way, she succeeds in the end because she has unbreakable resolve. Meridian is full of complex connections between people. Heartbreak and happiness, hope and hopelessness, a sense of purpose and apathy make up Meridian. No one person is more important than the African American cry for equality.

Meridian's Commitment to the Civil Rights Movement

Meridian's commitment to the Civil Rights Movement shows how much she wants freedom and equality. Meridian feels bad about herself because she lost her hair, even though she isn't to blame for her situation. Walker through the novel, set way back during times of the Civil Rights Movement, projects that black leaders in America need to create a cognizance about the being and the living conditions of the black population, and help them better their living conditions and life styles, to create a harmonious equilibrium in American society. (Hasanthi 139).

When she becomes educated and free, her hair starts to grow again which was lost in her previous days. This is a sign of her renewal and new outlook on life and being a woman. Walker's novel all have a lot to say about black women's relationships with their mother and the link between struggle and change. "Meridian" makes that point very clear. Meridian Hill is part of the search for herself finding meaning in her family history and roots. Walker then stops to think about how Meridian, Truman, and Lynne's connection is complicated. She looks at how racism and sexism affect relationships between black women and black men and between black women and white women.

Truman marries Lynne because he wants an ideal woman. He also wants a white woman because she is the most powerful person he can find in white America. But Tommy Odds and the other black revolutionaries see Lynne as a white "bitch," and Truman feels "pressure of ostracism from the group" (p.138). He thinks about whether Lynne is guilty of "being white" or whether he is guilty of marrying a white woman. Three years after getting married to Lynne, Truman finally goes back to Meridian and tells her that liking Meridian makes him feel "healthy and purposeful" (p.140). Meridian is "purged" of her love for Truman. It wasn't physical; "it was forgiveness" (p. 173). Lynne sends him back to Meridian and then goes back to the South. Meridian is a bit of a mystic. She goes into trance-like states from time to time and comes out better than ever.

Feminine Freedom

The novel Meridian tells the story of a black woman's life as it moves towards freedom and self-realization. It looks at what Meridian, a Black Civil Rights worker in the 1960s, means when she talks about "feminine freedom." It also looks at how her search for a complete personality comes full circle when she is able to change the role that society and tradition have given black women. "Walker explores relationships between black women's past tradition and societal change as crucial to a woman's search for freedom and wholeness" (Pink 1518). The main idea of the book seems to be that justice delayed is justice lost. Although this fight is hard on those who are fighting for justice, it does show that even people who seem to be working for a good cause, like freedom fighters, have a secret they're keeping from you. Meridian isn't just a story about history; it's also about ideas, plots, and literary techniques. It's "a character-driven novel that shows how the main characters feel when they are afraid and fail." As the paper goes on, Meridian's experiences from college to now show her as a thoughtful, single person who is free to love without the weight of sex, abuse, and societal baggage.

Meridian's Physical Violence

"The general pattern in Alice Walker's works shows that the woman community is specifically plagued by verbal and physical violence in both the public and domestic domains" (Abar et al.88). Meridian, is beaten and tortured while she protests during the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian is afraid and

demoralised by the threats of violence she faces from police officers and other people who don't support her cause. These threats break her identity and security.

Meridian knows that her great-grandmother and her father had the same "racism" and "peculiar madness" that shows in her. This unavoidable genetic trait takes advantage of Meridian's life, just like segregation takes away from the humanity of those who have to deal with it. Meridian's body and mind are scarred from the physical and mental attacks she has to constantly fight in her life.

Walker says that Meridian is "Free at last," which means she doesn't have any ties to a man a family, or a certain group of people. For her, being a mother means more than just raising kids; it means taking care of life itself. There is water in the world for us, brought to us by our friends through the rock of mother and God. This is how she sees her relationship with all black people. Leaves us alone to heal and make a new life for ourselves .In this way, Meridian's search for self-affirmation and health takes on a mythical quality. Meridian is proud of being black and a woman, and she reaches out to her people. She is free as a black woman and knows what to learn from the past to build a better future. Truman knows that Meridian would come back to the world "cleansed of sickness" after her "pilgrimage." He would never see "his" Meridian again. "The new part had grown out of the old"¹³ (Walker 219). Meridian's joining the group is, in a way, a spiritual birth into health. The way Alice Walker writes about the theme of "self-discovery" may be one of the most full and well-arranged themes in Meridian. Walker makes Meridian deal with big societal problems like loneliness, colour prejudice, racism, class, and gender issues. At the same time, he shows how caring and overprotective parenting can have negative effects on relationships between mothers and daughters. Alice Walker writes about these issues in a normal, down-to-earth way, and she shows that becoming a mother at a young age can stop you from finding out who you are. One of the most interesting things about Alice Walker's writing is that she pushes her characters to do more than just get past gender and racial barriers. She also looks at their racial pasts and presents to make a better tomorrow for all people, with equal respect for Blacks and Whites.

Conclusion

Meridian is a book about growing up. It shows how Meridian changes and becomes a strong woman. Claudia Tate (1983) in *Black Woman Writers at Work* says that Walker does a good job of showing her main character on a lonely journey that includes parts of the global monomyth, such as initiation, rejection, atonement, and release. There are many symbols and pictures in the book that refer to slavery and freedom that stress the goal of the journey, which is to free people. The quest is to know oneself, to be whole, which leads to enlightenment as Meridian finds out who she is and how she fits into the world. Meridian is a long trip in the story of being a Black woman in 1982. "The black woman has found the freedom to love her race, her family, and herself." (Walker 164) The book is like an updated version of "The Odyssey of the Black American Woman." Black women writers are mostly interested in the black woman, and Alice Walker does a great job of showing how complicated, varied, and deep the black woman can be in this book. Walker was a brave writer who used her books to speak out against racism and highlight black people's cultural life. She also talked about black women's identity and awareness crises. She looked into the relationships between black and white people and how black people are used in every way.

Works Cited

1. Abood, Mugdad Abdulimam, and Muna Ali Abdulrahman. Critical Analysis in Alice Walker's Meridian's Novel. Research gate, 2022, www.researchgate.net/publication/370033170.

2. Chitra, V B, et al. “The Color Purple: A Journey of African American’s Woman Identity.” *Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal (Special Issue)*, vol. 12, no. 2, 5 July 2022, pp. 1057–1060, www.researchgate.net/publication/361760784.
3. Dhavaleswarapu, Ratna hasanthi. “The Black Woman as Leader in Alice Walker’s Meridian.” *International Journal of Academic Research*, vol. 3, no. 7, July 2016, pp. 2348–7666, www.researchgate.net/publication/344510524.
4. Kaur, Sukhvinder, and Jit Pal Aggarwal. “Contextualizing Trauma of Meridian Hill in Alice Walker’s Meridian.” *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR)*, vol. 5, no. 4, Nov. 2018, pp. 11–16.
5. Mohana J E, et al. “The Cataclysmic Experience of Dehumanization in Alice Walker’s Meridian.” *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2 Feb. 2021, pp. 2392–2395, www.ijcrt.org.
6. Ms. Trupti S. Handibag, and Dr. Sudhir P. Mathpati. “A Study of Alice Walker’s Meridian as an Eponymous Protagonist’s Journey from Ignorance to Self- Actualization.” *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, vol. 9, no. 7, July 2024, pp. b169–b174.
7. Pink, Hyacinth. “The Emergent Woman” In Alice Walker’s “Meridian.” *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, vol. 8, no. 8, Aug. 2020, pp. 1517–1526.
8. Suraya Jan. “Journey from Powerlessness to Empowerment in Alice Walker’s Meridian.” *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 4, no. 3, 31 Aug. 2019, pp. 70–75, <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2019.4.3.10>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2023.
9. Walker, Alice. *The Meridian*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.
10. Waham, Jihad Jaafar. “Patriarchal Oppression and Gender Discrimination in Selected Novels of Alice Walker.” *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 3, May 2020, pp. 85–92, www.researchgate.net/publication/341266226.