

## Predicaments of blacks in the novel 'Meridian' by Alice Walker

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### Abstract

The present paper focuses on the sufferings of black women in the society. This paper deals with Alice Walker's second novel Meridian. It is the story of steadfastness and personal suffering portrayed at the background of 1960's Civil Rights Movement. Meridian's movement from a small town girl to a legendary political activist is discussed. The novel represents a shift from a preoccupation with commemorating black women's suffering to a concern with probing an individual black women's situations for its roots and possibilities.

**Keywords:** predicaments, blacks, abuse, degeneration, women, etc.

### Introduction

Alice Walker was named a distinguished writer in African American Studies at the University of California at Berkeley in 1992. She deals with many issues, most of which concern historical and race problems in America. She brings to national attention the cruelty and inhuman abuse that African Americans have endured. Her novels also discuss race, sex and class on all these categories, blacks are considered inferior this is reflected in economic and political conditions. She received National Book Award, Lillian Smith Award, Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award.

Meridian is a classic novel. The heroine, Meridian is a black woman from a southern town. The protagonist, Meridian Hill marries black Truman Held. She is an educated woman. They both have joined in Civil Rights Movement. She marries, has a child, gets divorce, sends her child away and ends up in working in a voter's registration campaign, encouraging African Americans to register.

Meridian is different from her co-workers in that she interacts with people as individuals, rather by stereotyping them. For example, while others lecture black families about the importance of voting, Meridian sits and talks with them, trying to address their basic needs.

### Seizing of the land by white people

In this novel, we see Meridian's father owning a land of sixty acres gifted to him by a Red Indian, Mr. Walker Long Knife. Life goes on without any disturbance until the white men's interference. One day the white men enter the land premises and solemnly announce that the government will take over the whole place to convert into a public park. Meridian's father went to the court to fight it out legally but justice was rendered by way of meager payment as compensation and a note of strict warning not to enter the place as it is meant for the public. Ironically, the whites are the public. Meridian is unable to bear the shock as the land has been whisked away by the government, of course, the white's government.

Another racial discrimination is the side of the lining of the blacks in the telecast. The TV announcer asks for the local blacks

as the volunteers in the voter's registration but the announcement is given by white young man. She is shocked that no black man is shown on the TV. Alice Walker says that the blacks commit some crime it is highlighted in the TV.

Meridian is caught in the conflict between traditional African American values handed down through slavery and the controversial revolutionary arguments adopted by Black power movement. In the novel, "The trauma is that of the Afro American past and physical pain manifests itself in / on Meridian's body, with the hysteria staged in public acts of atonement for the suffering of the people "(Maria Lauret 127).

### Reckless of the government

Another incident, a black boy loses life because of the callous attitude of the white civil authorities. In the hot weather, the black children wade in the ditches behind their houses. The city authorities without warning flush the reservoirs of excess water. This washes away the children who play in the water.

Mr. Raymond is a professor in Meridian's college who helps Meridian buys books and other daily needs. He is a kind of man does not like black men or women to work or mingle with whites. This shows him to be a racist. He thinks that black women can be easily attracted by white men because of their colour and creed. Lynne, a white girl after marrying black Truman Held received many threats and the people begin to curse her and threaten her, attacking her physical for her inter-racial marriage. This describes how blacks want to maintain the identity of their race Alice Walker says that the blacks commits crime it is highlighted in the television but " the black person or persons giving news conference was unheard of "(MER 67).

### Lack of success in marriage

Meridian has pitched her camp among the poor black people. Truman has come in search of her as he had done often during the past ten years. She protests against the continuing racial discrimination even after the legal abolition of segregation. This first glimpse of Meridian reveals her social commitment to the black community, her belief in non- violent resistance and her link with children.

Truman marries Lynne. Meridian has an abortion and gets her tube tied. After Lynne leaves Truman attempts to rekindle his love for Meridian but it fails. Meridian joins in a college at Atlanta. There she meets a vigorous black woman, Anne Marion. Anne Marion and other revolutionary women want Meridian to join their group which fights for the welfare of the black community. Meridian shows how people particularly alienated from the society due to psychological violence. Death and suicide seem to be the only solution to the problem faced by women. This is the destiny allotted to women in the literature produced according to the specification and expectations of patriarchy. Literature is here seen as a predominantly male construct imposing flexible on women. The concept of one life motivates Meridian in her quest towards physical and spiritual health, the societal evils which subordinate one class to another and one race to another. So that novel is built on the tension between the African concept of animism, that spirits inhabit all a life and the social forces that inhibit the growth of the living towards their natural state of freedom. Meridian would return to the world cleansed of sickness.

### **Overcoming the bondage**

Meridian frees herself from the clutches of bondage to define blacks. She abandons her child but later takes part in the troubles of poor children. She moves away from Truman but claims that she has set him free. Even her friendship with Ann Marion gets broken in the middle but follows her own way in fighting against the cruelties of black.

The growth of a young black girl into a adult with a clear vision of her identity and her role in life is presented in Meridian, through the structure of Bildungsroman. It embodies the ideals of feminism and presents a woman not as a passive creature but as an active agent; not as ruled by emotion, but as capable of rational choice; not as totally selfless or extremely selfish, but as discovering her own positive identity and individual role in life; not as one whose primary aim in life is only marriage and motherhood; as seen in the traditional image of women under patriarchy but as one who commits all injustice.

### **Portrayal of blacks**

Alice Walker's portrayal of blacks invariably follows her firm opinion on their beauty. She is fascinated by the lives of her ancestors. She wonders how they have managed to live the life as they have done. The old people, both male and female in her opinion continue to emanate beauty irrespective of their living conditions. Above all it is apparent that she is very much involved in the survival of the black people.

Alice walker uses her own experience to equate poor conditions of black women and there by suggests a way out. She has presented a unique quality of black women that has been neglected until recently. To her "Black" is beautiful and at the same time it is also human. She does not claim any super human powers in black women but drives home very firmly their potential to resuscitate from atrocious conditions.

Walkers individuality shatters traditional belief common in the world of men that the real problems of women are trivial and not worthy of scholarly attention. When women are struggling to articulate their unspeakable experience, she calls upon her readers to witness new formulations in her writings. She wrote about the unvoiced pains of blacks which where suppressing them for so many generations. The suppression these women brought degeneration in to the lives of black people. Walker

finds that degeneration is disease in the lives of blacks and they can be cured only by their vision of hope. Hence her characters regenerate with the help of hope and the regenerated characters become the models for the whole universe.

### **References**

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