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## MERIDIAN: REFLECTION OF WALKER'S LIFE

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Black people through Walker's novel *Meridian*. Walker encompasses contemporary racial issues of African-Americans and hopes to transform the situation for their bright future. Walker's ideological position stresses revolution and liberation of African-Americans and specific social and political issues of her homeland, Georgia in South Africa. In particular, her fiction depicts her concerns towards the Black people and the survival of the race. She depicts the histories, cruelty and discrimination of the Black lives in her writings as her honest effort has always been to free the Black people from white people's domination. She has not only focused issues of racism but also issues of the Black men and women. Walker's characters are responsible for their individual oppression and racism that has become their fate.

*Meridian*(1976) demonstrates institutional racism that prevailed through the 1960s. Walker's novel is the story of the Black woman's

### ABSTRACT

**M**eridian, Walker's second novel is set against the chaotic background of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It is the story of the Black woman's struggle in the Civil Rights Movement. The novel expands from the history of the Black people in South up to a peak period in the 1960s. Walker presents a vibrant and connected personal and collective history rather than a generalized account of the sixties. Walker strives hard for African-Americans' democratic values. *Meridian* demonstrates the power of Alice Walker who vividly states her concern for the Black women. It

protests against the racist and segregationist policies that restricted and shaped the lives of African-Americans in the South. The novel exhibits the rising power of social activism united in the face of racist and segregationist policies. It traces the rise of the protagonist, Meridian Hill from her spiritual and physical pain to her abilities and inner wealth.

**KEYWORDS:** Racism, Subjugation, Liberty, Brutality and Equality.

### INTRODUCTION

The present research paper attempts to highlight African-American ethnicity, history and the lives of the

struggle and the relations of Blacks and Jews in the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. Walker demonstrates the violence and repression of Black women and moves through the violent protest to institute change and alter perceptions. Walker endeavors to depict the issues of Black women that are set against the chaotic background of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The novel is about people who abuse and who are abused stimulating and exciting presentation of race and love. The conflicts of gender and race cause social discomfort for African-Americans. The novel expands from the history of the Black people in South up to a peak period in the 1960s.

In the history of African-American literature, Alice Walker explores herself as a poet, novelist, short story writer and apologist for Black Women. She has remained the beacon light for Black community in rural Georgia who suffer from racial issues. Alice Walker as an inspirational fighter struggled against social injustices of Black Women and Men. Walker strongly condemns the painful social system that she fought herself as an activist in her lifetime. The special identifying mark of her writing is sexism and racism, which is a major theme of her novel *Meridian*. In her poetry, novels, short story, essay and reviews her main preoccupation has been the Black Women and their problems.

Walker's life gives a vivid picture of the South where African-Americans struggled at the difficult job of tenant farming. Her writing paints the roots of slavery and subjugation of African-Americans in rural Georgia, South Africa. Walker highlights the issues of Civil Rights and oppression of African-American Black people in the white society. The true terror of the Black people is within the mutilation of the body and spirit than the external facts and figures of subjugation. Walker deals with the external realities of poverty, exploitation and discrimination in her novel. Her stories, novels and poems highlight on the intimate reaches of the inner lives of her characters. However, the commitment, energy, inner strength and beauty in her parents' lives are found in her fictional characters. Walker remembers her mother as the source of her own strong sense of purpose. Evelyn White noted Walker's expression in the following:

*I grew up believing there was nothing, literally nothing, my mother couldn't do once she set her mind to it. So when the women's movement happened, I was really delighted because I felt they were trying to go where my mother was and where I always assumed I would go.*

(White 22)

Walker's view of herself and her world was profoundly altered at age of eight years when she was shot by her brother in the right eye with BB gun. Walker's partial blindness made her to pay more attention to the things and people around her to record the observations. The incident made Walker confident about her physical and intellectual attributes. After her eye accident, her abortion, divorce, writing was her therapy. Alice Walker's artistic dream is based in the economic adversity, racial violence and folk insight of African-American life and culture of the rural South. Walker's essay *Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self* narrates her experience of blindness in Susan Fawcett's *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing with Readings*:

*I realize that I have dashed about the world madly, looking at this, looking at that, storing up images against the fading of the light.*

(Fawcett 612)

Walker became involved in politics after leaving Spelman College in Atlanta. She protested the White House during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and moved to Mississippi to strengthen her resolve to write out of a social and moral consciousness. In Mississippi, Walker worked in voter registration while writing fiction along with poetry and collecting African-American folklore. These activities brought her into close contact with older African-American women. Walker visualized the creative work of Mississippi women in everyday activities as emblematic of the unrecognized creativity of the Black Women past and present. Walker believes that women get freedom of thinking when they acquire economic independence and it renders complete freedom to a woman to do things as per her own wish and desires.

Walker attempts to depict the universality of the human experience and misery. Many individuals from different backgrounds share a common history of exploitation, anguish, guilt, brutality, liberty and triumph. Walker focuses *Meridian's* caring relationship with her father and her spiritual union with him. It is through her relationship with her father that helps her in her spiritual growth like Walker herself in her life. *Meridian's* spiritual and physical transformation is triggered by her inherited illness as Walker BB gun accident. The sickness leads her to paralysis, blindness and hair loss that unites her directly with her father and great-grandmother, who suffers

from the same kind of pain. The anguish, misery, unhappiness and depression have obsessed her throughout her life.

Walker's autobiographical elements are mirrored in her novel *Meridian*. The study of the novel depicts that Meridian's life is a reflection of Alice Walker's own life experiences where Walker has herself been a Civil-Rights worker. Like Walker, Meridian has opportunities by means of a scholarship from a Black Women's college in Atlanta. Walker finds herself engrossed in the activism of the 1960s as reflected in the protagonist of novel *Meridian*. Meridian involves herself into movements and attempts to bring social and political change through nonviolent means. In the same way, Walker engaged herself during her summers in Georgia and Mississippi. Meridian's bravery and laborious position epitomize the determination and courage of the novelist herself.

Walker portrays the life stories of African-American women who have struggled to discover themselves. The discovery gives them the ability to survive in the world of slavery. The cultural background of the novel deals with both gender and race that affect the identities of the characters. *Meridian* is considered a continuation of Grange Copeland where a young woman returning to the South for the same cause that Grange Copeland had left. *Meridian* highlights the Civil Rights Movement and the brutality imposed on Civil Rights workers. It also reveals the issues beyond racism and social evils in small communities in Alabama and Georgia that individuals face throughout the novel.

Meridian's active participation in the Civil Rights Movement and her campaign to register African-American voters is a replicate of Walker's struggle for equality and justice for the Black people. Meridian is dependent upon a specific racial, cultural and socio-economic background and her community's patriarchal institutions suppress her freedom. She is presented as physically and psychologically abused and her periods of lost consciousness and paralysis indicate that she is a woman without an identity. She recognizes that her power lies in her unique bravery like Walker herself. In this regards Marge Piercy writes:

*Walker deals with the issues of tactics and strategy in the civil rights movement, with the nature of commitment, the possibility of interracial love and communication, the vial and lethal strands in American and black experience, with violence and non-violence and selfhatred.*

(Piercy9)

Meridian Hill fights hard to showcase her true identity to the world around her. She strives to reaffirm her own humanity and that of all her people and deals with people as individuals rather than by stereotyping them. She struggles to maintain her self-confidence and strikes a balance between the Black people's need for survival and her own. Walker depicts the Black people's misadventures, ability and inability to love or forgive each other. Meridian's most difficult struggle is to forgive herself for her apparent faults. Walker writes about Meridian's love for her people in the following words:

*She interacts with people as individuals, rather than by stereotyping them. A halo like light surrounds her head as she thinks of the history of her people and of her role in that history.*

(Meridian, 126)

Meridian's courage and willpower result in the sustaining and rising self-awareness. She involves herself into the Civil Rights Movement, which gives strength and impulsion during her young adult years. She struggles with her own sense of commitment and devotion to the cause of human rights as Walker. Meridian strives hard to bring meaningful change in the lives of Southern Blacks by returning to her roots and working and living in often-impoverished and rural communities. Meridian is a wrecked and spoiled individual mourning for a love and loss. In the course of the novel, her struggle for the rights of the Black people appears powerful and healthy. Meridian ultimately realizes that external factors are helpless in her fight for the Black community instead she turns to her inner self.

Meridian exhibits Walker's remarkable toughness while facing pressure and opposition in real life situation. She tries to recognize pains and difficulties that hinder the progress of a community as a whole. Walker intends to free an individual from blind devotion to religion and social taboos. Meridian also courageously faces all those restrictions that obstruct her flourishing independence and self-awareness. She discards the traditional women's roles of dutiful daughter, wife, mother, and lover. She devotes and risks her heart and her life to render equal opportunities to the Southern people. Equal opportunities were given to the Blacks but the system of segregation continued. Walker's works are the song of the people, celebrating and preserving each generation.

Walker's tradition and history offer a means for knowing the modern world in which her characters live.

Walker asserts:

*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.*

(Meridian, 205-206)

Meridian explores the relationship between a movement for social transformation and the personal growth. The novel highlights Walker's analysis of the history and philosophy of the Southern Blacks, who were the foundation of the movement. Meridian and other activists fought to change and alter perceptions through vicious protests. Silence becomes justifiable method of protest and it inspires Meridian to defy the system that denies her individuality. Meridian begins a process of individual transformation through personal fight and Civil Rights work. Her self determination and transformation blend the human beings around her. Meridian's urge has always been to remain at the center of the movement. Walker sets Meridian's battle for individual change as an other option to the political developments of the 1960s. As Karen Steins composes:

*... the novel brings up that the Civil Rights Movement regularly mirrored the harshness of patriarchal private enterprise. Activists only turned political talk to their own closures while keeping on subduing unconstrained singularity. To defeat this ruinous tendency, Walker goes after another meaning of upset. Her desire for an equitable society inheres not only in political change, but rather in individual change.*

(Stein, 130)

### CONCLUSION:

Walker changes her focal point from the present to the past to paint the lives of African-American people. Throughout *Meridian*, Walker stresses the universality of the human experience and suffering. Many individuals from different backgrounds share a common history of exploitation, anguish, guilt, brutality, liberty and triumph. Walker focuses Meridian's loving relationship with her father and her spiritual communion with him. It is through her relationship with her father that helps her for her spiritual growth as Walker's relationship with her mother. Walker depicts the significance of articulating her own new Southern Black women's identity. She asserts her right as a Black Southern Woman to claim the space as her own in African-American Community.

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