



ELEMENTS OF MOTHERHOOD AND MARTYRDOM IN ALICE WALKER'S MERIDIAN

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ABSTRACT

In many different cultures, motherhood is seen as having a feminine connotation. To be a mother, however, is not something that every woman is psychologically or physically equipped to do. Motherhood is portrayed in the novel Meridian by Alice Walker as a role that is repressive and unpleasant, and it has the potential to restrict a woman's individuality. When confronted with traditional parental expectations, the protagonist chooses to disregard them and instead dedicates herself to experiencing a personal "martyrdom" for the sake of society reform. Meridian renounces her role as a mom in order to pursue a life that is more engaged and focused on the community. She redefines herself as an activist who channels her humiliation and adversity into political activism. Meridian, a victim of racism in white society, is subjected to repression by the whole patriarchal community throughout her life. She is beginning to see that she is more than simply a Black woman, a daughter, a wife, and a mother, despite the fact that she is experiencing this. It was at a young age that Meridian had her first taste of motherhood, and she considers it to be a kind of slavery. She gives up motherhood because she is dissatisfied with it, which causes her to feel guilty. As a result, she gives up her child and embarks on a journey to discover who she is outside of parenthood. Meridian is a maternal caretaker who is relied upon by the Black community, and she also becomes active in the Civil Rights Movement.

Keywords: *Motherhood, Expectations, Repressive, Dissatisfied and Unpleasant.*

Introduction

The act of becoming a mother is seen as a normal and expected component of being a woman in many different cultures. The assumption that a girl is intrinsically blessed with maternal characteristics and that her physical and mental make-up are especially built for reproduction is something that is instilled in her by cultural norms because of the way that they are seen. There is a long-standing tradition among Black American women that they are the primary breadwinners in their family, despite the fact that these are global expectations. Since the time of slavery, African American families have been operating with clearly defined roles for men and women. This is because the form of the family unit is always changing, and its dynamics are constantly shifting. When their husbands were sold off to other owners while they were being held as slaves, it didn't take long for Black women to get the realisation that they needed to be the rock that kept their families together. There were periods when slave communities who placed a high value on the concept of "family-first" looked to mothers as the glue that kept their children in captivity. It is possible that black women put a larger importance on motherhood because, according to White, "women earned for the slave family some security against sale and separation when they had and nurtured children" (without taking into account the fact that there were no males in the family unit).

Meridian, Alice Walker's 1976 second book, takes place in the United States at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The African-American family from which Meridian hails is from the South's middle class. A dramatic change occurs in Meridian's life when she falls pregnant at sixteen and marries the father of her baby. Throughout her teens, she playfully explores her own sexuality. The possibility to attend college in

Atlanta on a scholarship solidifies Meridian's life as an activist, and a fortuitous meeting with a group of activists who are in town to encourage people to vote affects her destiny even further. But there are many obstacles in her activist life as she seeks to understand her place in the movement and in society as large. A deeper dive into ecofeminism's past will help us make sense of Meridian's dualism by illuminating the complex relationship between women and the natural world. "Ecofeminism is a contemporary political movement operating on the theory that the ideologies which authorise exploitation and degradation of the environment are related to the ideologies which sanction based on gender, race, and class," writes Noel Sturgeon, describing what some experts consider to be the third wave of feminism. Due to their shared experience of societal oppression, women and nature are essentially one and the same. As a result, women have a deeper connection to and understanding of nature. The "ideal of motherhood has been used in the environmental movement to characterise the relationship between the Earth and its inhabitants," Lynn M. Stearney remarks.

Meridian, a young Black woman who is virtuous and innocent, navigates the hurdles of growing into her own right in the middle of the rapid cultural and social revolutions that occurred throughout the 1960s. During her time working for civil rights, she gained a deeper understanding of what it means to be free. She has been compelled to reconsider her viewpoint as a result of the patriarchal and racist society, and she continues to do so. The women in Walker's work "undertake radical swerves," as Al-Kadery puts it, in order to reinvent both themselves and the roles that they play in society. Additionally, Meridian is going through a phase of transition at the same time when social changes are taking place. She is a daughter, wife, mother, and

mistress, and she refuses to allow herself to be influenced by the expectations that come with being a regular middle-class woman. She engages in this behaviour in order to provide for herself.

The metamorphosis that Meridian goes through from being a weak and obedient Black girl to being an activist and a pioneer for the freedom of Black women is shown in the following sentence. She is celebrating her own life, the power of her will, and the potential she has by taking a stance against anarchy and all sorts of exploitation because she is doing so. From the perspective of her parenting, Meridian is confronted with the core of racism, which is the belief that a woman ought to sacrifice all for the sake of her children in line with the ideals of the African American community. Meridian is enslaved by the memories of the slaves who were forced to starve to death in order to provide for their family. Women of African descent could be unwilling to recognise their familial lineage. The decision that Mr. and Mrs. Hill made to be married is an example of a bad choice. When Mrs. Hill becomes pregnant, she does so in the expectation that this would offer her some happiness in her personal life.

As a result of the fact that being a mother requires her to give up both her identity and her teaching career, she finds that it is a hardship, which stands in stark contrast to what she had expected. Due to the fact that Mrs. Hill's marriage is not characterised by love, it is not surprising that Meridian and Mrs. Hill do not have the type of lovely mother-daughter bond that one would anticipate. Walker performs a profound transformation on both the mind and the life of Meridian. We have provided Mrs. Hill and her daughter with information on the benefits of motherhood; but, we have not provided them with information regarding the limitations that come along with it. The grief that she feels over the death of her mother is something that she emphasises to her daughter. In her interactions with her daughter, Mrs. Hill steers clear of discussing matters such as marriage and children. Consequently, Meridian is unable to have children of her own since she has learned about the challenges that her mother had while she was a parent. Her apprehension and discomfort arise from the concern that she may never fully embrace motherhood, with all its accompanying joys and challenges. She begins to contemplate the possibility of ending her life as a consequence. She holds the view that relinquishing her independence to become someone else's wife constitutes an unacceptable form of self-deprivation. Meridian has distanced herself from the external world, perceiving marriage as a sanctuary.

In this instance, Walker dismantles the idealised portrayal of a woman as a submissive spouse, along with the accompanying romanticised notions of marriage. As a Black woman facing the challenges of both race and gender, Meridian experiences a profound sense of necessity in her existence. She also asserts that "racist slavery" encompasses parental sacrifice. Afro American motherhood is traditionally regarded as a means of preserving Black heritage amidst the challenges posed by white cultural domination, as noted by Sengupta. Traditionally, society anticipates that women embrace motherhood, which often encourages a sense of selflessness for the welfare of their families and communities. After considerable internal conflict,

she relinquishes her role as a mother and embarks on an independent journey focused on self-discovery and advocating for social justice for her community.

Taylor makes the claim that the Black mother is a major and influential character, and finally comes to the conclusion that this is a fact rather than a mere fiction. Walker contends that this concept is little more than an urban legend, implying that black moms do not always exhibit a sense of dominance. As far as Walker is concerned, the black mother has been left out of the conversation, despite the fact that her partner has consistently failed to fulfill his obligations. The fact that she took on these tasks does not imply that she was especially eager to do so or that she considered those responsibilities to be enjoyable. The literature of Walker creates a representation of the genuine Black mother, who is defined by a complicated interplay of feelings that include feeling, worry, disappointment, and apathy. People who read Walker's *Meridian* could discover that they are unprepared for the two mother figures that are given in the book. Despite the fact that she is unable to grasp how it might be ascribed to her acts, Meridian admits that she feels a feeling of guilt for "stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self" (43). The clash that occurs between modernity and tradition is one that is both serious and powerful. Meridian is experiencing a feeling of suppressed conflict in relation to the birth of her kid. She expresses her dissatisfaction via vivid dreams that include the act of causing damage to the newborn. Meridian has a terrible sense of entrapment as a result of the obligations that come with motherhood, the chaotic surroundings, and the unending screams of the baby that prevent her from getting any rest. Additionally, the kid brings up horrible memories of slavery, which further contribute to the feeling of being trapped (65).

At various points during her childhood, Meridian came to the realisation that she had played a key part in sabotaging the process of her mother's identity formation. The emotions that she goes through as a young mother are consistent with the realisation that her acts were a contributing factor in the captivity of her mother. The situation that women in this society find themselves in is described by Meridian as "being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick." Meridian finally comes to the realisation that parenthood is not a route that she desires to follow as a result of the transgression that she committed against her mother and the ensuing loss of her family and community. "Black women face significant challenges in the context of racism," Das notes; nonetheless, Meridian recognises that in order to persevere, she must build her own identity, which leads her to reject the expectations that are imposed by racial and sexual social standards. During the course of Meridian's journey to uncover her actual identity and the complexities of the Civil Rights Movement, she comes to a critical realisation. As part of her efforts to achieve social justice and equal rights for women of African descent, she has decided to get involved with that cause.

Observing that "celebration encompasses more than just the acknowledgement of success or reaching a goal," Sharma makes the observation that "celebration involves appreciating each effort and confronting every challenge with courage." Meridian's efforts continuously lead her to moments of

celebration. The fact that Meridian believes she is not living up to the expectations that are connected with being a Black mother is what motivates her to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement and to work for the complete integration of the Black community.

As a result of her own personal experiences as a mother and the fact that she was brought up by her own mother, she has developed a more profound comprehension of the maternal role since she became Eddie's mother. By giving up her duty for Eddie's kid, Meridian is able to free herself from the limitations that come with being a mother and being of a certain race. She feels a complicated mixture of pride and guilt over her own performance as a mother since she has not been able to live up to the expectations that were placed on her in the past. Her focus shifts to the general well-being of the Black community as she continues on her path toward becoming a parent during the course of her trip. The mother characters in the novel exhibit resiliency and the capacity to handle life on their own, despite the fact that they are embedded inside a society that is discriminatory. Meridian and Lynne come together to combat the problem of racism in society, but Mrs. Hill continues to be dissatisfied and conforms to the traditional role that she plays as a mother by her actions. As a result of her experiences as a black mother, Meridian goes from being in a vulnerable condition to being in a place of empowerment. An homage to the essence of life that was given upon mankind by a superior power is articulated by Walker in the last words of the poem. At the same time, Walker depicts Meridian's transition into a woman who has come to enjoy, embrace, and adore existence.

Conclusion

Motherhood is often portrayed as a holy, unselfish, and emotionally redeeming role in literary and cultural traditions. In patriarchal discourse, motherhood is often romanticized as an innate and gratifying representation of femininity, something that most people find to be something that comes naturally to them. Rhetorical statements made by Black Nationalists throughout the 1960s and 1970s suggested that the fundamental function of women was to be mothers. According to Meridian, the reason for this devaluing of women is because Black women have had very little influence in the mechanisms that define how society views this aspect of women's potential. Meridian is of the opinion that motherhood is more of a notion than a personal issue since it is strongly established in the structures that society has in place. Meridian opposes the societal and patriarchal belief that the only way women can be identified is by their ability to fulfill the role of mother. By abdicating her parental obligations and being sterilized, she is recast as a "subversion of patriarchal discourse" and a rejection of the customary, subordinate stance. Both of these actions are not seen to be self-centered. The character and decisions made by Meridian are influenced by her mother, who was unfit for the role and hated the limitations of marriage and motherhood. This individual serves as a source of motivation for Meridian.

In Walker's depiction of the Black mother, the character's attitude toward her enormous responsibilities changes throughout the story. The women who play a pivotal role in Walker's life as mother figures are fiercely protective of themselves. Motherhood as a concept and phenomenon in transit from the African tribal communities to the twentieth

century Black American family has remained integral to the societal shifts between matriarchy and patriarchy. Meridian views her mother's generation as one that had not lived in an age of choice, where mothers were expected to be dead, living just for their children. Her mother, Mrs. Hill, resentfully gave up her teaching career for a family, leading to a life characterized by emotional detachment and abstraction. Her guilt over failing at traditional motherhood and her intense commitment to activism lead to bouts of hair loss, blindness, and death-like paralysis. Her healing is completed only when she reconciles her personal history with the collective struggle, eventually achieving wholeness that allows her to walk away from her self-imposed sickness. The pride and prominence enjoyed by the African mother within the inner fold of her family and the greater fold of her community is reiterated in literature and paintings on African culture. Meridian seeks to make people question a maternal lineage that doesn't fit with how they see themselves in society. None of the characters in this novel have ever been mothers or had any type of significant relationship with their mothers. Meridian recognizes the veneration of motherhood within African-American culture, while also contending that women need to be esteemed for their intrinsic qualities, rather than only for their capabilities. Being a mother is a way of thinking, not something you have to do to have kids.

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