Chapter II

Discourse of Womanism in The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian
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2.0. Introduction

A number of African American writers have contributed a great deal to the American literature. Alice Walker is one of them, who has left her imprint on several generations of readers. She emerges on the African American literary scene in 1968 with her first poetry volume *Once*. She has tried her hand on almost all the genres of literature till date. One of the great contributions to the African American literature is her ideology of Womanism. The concept of Womanism is a variant for the concept of feminism. Feminism is taken to be insufficient to discuss the issues of black women and the women of colour. Therefore there was a need of an ideology that would present the issues of women in literature. Alice Walker coined the term to place the black women in history and culture. This concept has a great influence on the women or gender studies. This impact has reached to Africa and many women writers have accepted it as an analytical tool for literary studies. The reflection of Womanism can be traced in the works of Alice Walker.

The present research tries to analyse the discourse of Womanism in the novels of Alice Walker that are published from 1970 to 1980. In this period Walker has published her two novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) and *Meridian* (1976). Walker has given her definition of ‘Womanism’ in her *In the Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983. Walker has stated that it refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous and wilful behaviour of woman. Womanist is also a woman who loves other women and men sexually or non sexually. Womanist is a woman who appreciates and prefers women’s culture and their strength. She is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Walker has further stated that a womanist is not separatist, has all inclusiveness. She is different from the feminists, as purple is different from lavender. These are the key elements of womanism, that are present in the novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian*, written by Alice Walker. While studying these novels in relation to discourse of womanism, social contexts of the novels, cultural aspects presented and Womanist characters in the novels are discussed. This
study deals with the language and behaviour of the characters, sexism, struggle for the self respect, art of the characters and sexism. It also throws light on the concept of wholeness, inclusiveness, sympathy, forgiveness and motherhood or Womanist maternity of the characters presented by Alice Walker. The proposed study investigates the womanist elements as well as womanist characters in the novels under study.

2.1. Discourse of Womanism in The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian

The Third Life of Grange Copeland, published in 1970, tells a story of Grange, his wife, their son, Brownfield, his wife, Mem, and granddaughter, Ruth. Grange and his son Brownfield work as a poor share croppers. Grange is frustrated of his inability to pay off the debts and to improve his son’s life. His wife, Margaret, has sexual relations with a white man, Shipley. Grange cannot bear these things and runs to the North leaving his family behind. Brownfield also follows his father’s steps and keeps sexual relations with public prostitutes like Josie and Loren. After Grange runs to the North, Margaret poisons her child and commits suicide because she cannot live without Grange. Brownfield marries one of the prostitutes, Mem, who is educated and active. Brownfield and Mem have quarrels between them very often and one day he kills her. She dies leaving her three daughters, Ornette, Daphene and Ruth behind. When Grange returns to Georgia, he takes his granddaughter, Ruth’s custody. Brownfield takes this matter to the court and demands the custody of Ruth. Grange, in this quarrel, kills him and finally he also dies of police action.

Meridian is a novel about the role of women in the Civil Rights Movement. It also deals with socialism, women’s struggle, violence, relationships and wholeness of entire black community. Meridian Hill, the protagonist of the novel, is a student at Saxon College. She becomes active in the Civil Rights Movement. She marries Eddie but cannot live together for a long time. Further she romantically involves with a Civil Rights activist, Truman. He impregnates her but she aborts the child, due to this Truman marries another girl, Lynne, who is also an activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian further decides to be involved in the movement with her own philosophy of non violence. Truman tries to achieve personal and financial success, while Meridian continues to fight for issues she believes in.

2.1.1. Social Contexts
In the second half of the 19th century there was the sharecropping system in America. It exploited the poor, unskilled and illiterate slave workers. The land owners did not offer proper wages to the share croppers. They had to waste money on farming tools, seeds and other provision needed for farming. They often were in debts to the landowners. While explaining the plight of the sharecroppers Benjamin Quarles (1904-96) has noted as,

The (sharecropping) System offered no incentives to improve their lot in life; the harder and longer they worked and the greater their output, the less their reward.

(Benjamin Quarles, 1987: 246-47)

The land owners demanded that the sharecroppers should work in the fields as their families. They should not demand for the wages. They should remain on the land for the whole year without any strike. Thus the sharecropper system with racial segregation and oppression was an inhuman practice in America. The Copeland family in The Third Life of Grange Copeland is under slavery and a part of sharecropping system. The men of the family, Grange and Brownfield are oppressed by the white men. They turn their frustration on their women. The male domination prevails in the family, therefore the women become victims of verbal, physical, mental and emotional abuse. There is a belief of men in the contemporary society that their identity as men depends upon how much they threaten their women. They desire that women should be silent and obedient as they behave in front of their landowners. In the white men’s presence they would obey every order without any direct eye contact. In this regard Gerri Bates has noted,

In white men’s presence they respond to their queries with “Yassar,” prohibited from making direct eye contact and denied the privilege of demonstrating any intelligence on a level equal to them. They feel helpless and entrapped.

(Gerri Bates, 2005: 57)

This leads to oppression of their manhood. This oppression finds an outlet when they treat their women with an inhuman way. The Copeland men dominate their women fold with the same attitude as they experience in the sharecropping system. Through The Third Life of Grange Copeland Walker presents a realistic picture of the life in the sharecropping system. It is full of violence, frustration and anger. The novel throws light on relationships between husbands and wives, fathers and children, mothers and children and women and women. This novel presents an oppressive
sharecropping system which was in existence in 17th century colonial period. Walker shows that the effects of this system were very menacing on a group of people. These effects make the people frustrated and violent as shown in the novel. It is the story of the three lives of Grange from 1920 to 1960. These three lives are the first life in the American South, as a sharecropper; the second life in New York, as a labourer and the third life again in the South. He is the representative of African Americans in the South during the first half of the twentieth century. It can be taken as the representation of history of African Americans, a history of violence and oppression. While describing the socio-historical context of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Maria Lauret has written,

> Walker’s Copeland’s can, as such, be read not only as a microcosmic representation of the history of African Americans but of America as a whole, and it is, then a history of violence and oppression that is passed down a chain of racial, class, and gender supremacies from which education and the entry into modernity can provide only a partial release.

(Maria Lauret, 2001: 58-59)

The novel is a representation of African American history with race, class and gender issues. This novel sets a proper ground for Walker’s later novels.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is followed by *Meridian*. It examines the issues of sexism, sacrifices of women in the Civil Rights Movement and struggle for social change. The novel takes place in 1960s in America. It was the era of black protests, freedom rides, marches, assassinations and suppression. African American had to suffer of inferior roles, social inequality and poverty. African Americans were not allowed to enter the school system and social participation was prohibited for them. At the same time President John F. Kennedy had agreed to the Civil Rights Act. Because of this he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas in 1963. Martin Luther King Jr., one of the activists of the Civil Right Movement, was the victim of segregation in 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. All these mishappenings were seen and experienced by Alice Walker. She was an eyewitness of the tradition of resistance of the Civil Rights Movement. Oppression was her history and heritage. The issues of economic and political upheavals and racial segregation were the issues of late 1960s and early 1970s. *Meridian* is the presentation of inner workings of the Civil Right Movement
with the help of a woman, Meridian Hill. She becomes an activist to bring the change in American society that oppressed the women and African Americans.

*Meridian* reflects the issue of Civil Rights Movement with its significance and value. This movement leads Alice Walker to the humanity of African American people and the history of their struggle. While writing about the usefulness of the Movement Walker has written, “…. If it gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever. It gave some of us bread, some of us shelter, some of us knowledge and pride and all of us comfort.” (Alice Walker, 1983: 128) Alice had a great affinity for the people of the South; she has used the character, Meridian, attached to the South. In the struggle of Civil Rights, women had contributed a great deal, but they received a little recognition for it. The women, who struggled, were equally against of oppression. But they were less recognized for their contribution. Walker, while working in the South, has listened to the stories of women struggle. Therefore she has presented Meridian, the protagonist of the novel, as her option of choice. The novel throws light on the African American male leadership in the Civil Rights Movement and the ideology of Black Nationalism and wholeness. In the contemporary social life women had a second place. There was a culture of power in the African American communities. Along with this there was a culture of power in the African American communities. Alice Walker has given glimpses of all these issues through this novel. This novel can be treated as a historical document to be passed over to future generation.

2.1.2. Cultural Aspects

The way of life of a community formed by the values, beliefs, behaviours and material objects is called as culture. It is a sum total of intellectual creations, technical contribution, artistic aspects, physical and moral creation of human. This could be a culture of a nation but there may be a different segment differing from each other. A segment of a culture sharing characteristics which are different from the dominant culture is a called as sub-culture. African Americans share many aspects of the broader culture but maintain their own customs, values, norms and life style. They have their own cultural traits like language, religion, family customs and food. Race and ethnicity are commonly used aspects of African Americans. Race is dependent of physical appearance and ethnicity is based on the cultural differences. The people are
classified on the basis of racial distinctions. These people are singled out from the main stream because of their physical appearances and cultural characteristics. Those are considered to be the objects of collective segregation. Though African Americans receive a differential and unequal treatment, they prove their own ability and accept the challenge of survival in a racist society. They are culturally pluralists and try to maintain their racial, cultural and ethnic identity. They feel pride in being blacks. They observe all their cultural norms that include ideals, religious beliefs, manner of dress, language, folklore, customs, sense of time, humour, tools and material products and leisure pursuits.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* one can trace the cultural characteristics of African Americans. The Copeland family is a representative of their larger community in American society. Each member of the family tries to achieve individual recognition. Their racial identity asserts their place in American society. Though they are oppressed, they are connected to each other. When there is a quarrel in the family they become restless. While presenting this nature of the characters Walker writes,

> On Monday, suffering from a hangover and the after effects of a violent quarrel with his wife …, Grange was remorseful, sullen, reserved, deeply in pain, Margaret was tense and hard, exceedingly nervous. Brownfield moved about the house like a mouse.

*(Alice Walker, 1988: 29)*

The domestic violence is an issue of public discourse from the past. The Copeland family is not exception to this issue. The male characters and women characters also try to achieve their goals through violent means. This attitude is the result of economic enslavement of African Americans. This enslavement is the cause of the economic poverty of the Blacks. Grange is presented as the representative of all the oppressed black people in America. He is portrayed by Alice Walker with all issues given by history, such as rage, resentment, hostility, oppression, domination and invisibility. His son, Brownfield, is characterised as a stereotype of black men with traits of animalism, criminality, super-sexuality, childishness, poverty and lack of intellectual depth. Though the novel revolves around Grange and Brownfield, it is a presentation of black women suffering at the hands of black men. The women in the family are subjugated, dominated and abused by men. Each female character is a
presentation of dilemma of the black woman. All the women characters in the novel, Margaret, Mem, Josie and Lorene, represent the collective voicelessness of African American women. The Copelands and their community are presented in the novel with pessimistic view of the South. It leads to violence, male-female relationships and domestic violence among black women. Yet, the end offers African American potential of men for education, consciousness, caring relationships with women and potential for transformation. Thus the African American society is rooted in Western culture. Though this is the case, they preserve their culture which is different from European culture. In these relations Hugh Scott has pointed out as,

.....because more than one generation of African American was victimised by enslavement in America, certain values remain relevant from one generation to the next and become the ‘core values’ of the African American experience.

(Hugh J. Scott, 2005: 4)

These core values include nationalism, religious values, love, art, motherhood, integrity and wholeness. All these cultural aspects are present in The Third Life of Grange Copeland by Alice Walker.

Meridian is an important cultural novel by Alice Walker. It explains the African American Male leadership and the place of female in the Civil Rights Movement. It has a masculine agenda to neglect the women’s works. This masculinity in America had certain assumptions and beliefs that considered women as a second class and of second place. It was culture of power of the black men copied from the white male power structure. Through this novel Walker has presented this masculine power culture with the help of characters, like Truman and Eddie. Meridian is deserted by Eddie after their marriage and left alone with a child. She gets involved in the Civil Rights Movement and gets sexually attracted to Truman. Truman also leaves her for a white girl, Lynne. All these events present African American male culture of power. Thus the relationships of power are main concerns of the novel. Along with the issue of male leadership, music is also an important aspect of African American culture. Alice Walker has used music as a motif in the novel. Music is a major form of African American culture. This is a music that glorifies sexist, misogynist, patriarchal way of thinking and behaving. In the novel the church songs and music are discussed very often. This singing, at the black churches,
is a cultural aspect of the black Americans. During her work as an activist in the South, Meridian discovers her role in the liberation of her people from oppression. Meridian says,

I will come forward and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear. For it is the song of the people transformed by the experience of each generation that holds them together.  

(Alice Walker, 2004: 221)

The song functions as a primary symbol of genuine self expression in the novel. This is Meridian’s connection with her heritage. Thus music plays a cultural role in the novel. The novel is concerned with the position of woman in their family and social status. In spite of facing problems of unequal status, African American women derive satisfaction in one aspect of life that is motherhood. This helps them to face struggles in life. Because of this they move away from their slave past and struggle for spirituality and survival. Meridian goes against the cultural concept of motherhood and gives away her child to become an activist in the Civil Rights Movement. She struggles for self discovery, self definition and self affirmation. She faces a dilemma of choosing marriage, motherhood and education. She rejects marriage and motherhood to work in the movement and selects education. Her final resolve to be with the poor Southern black people shows her love for her community. This love for one’s own community is an African American cultural aspect depicted in the novel.

2.1.3. Character Analysis and Discourse of Womanism

Alice Walker coins the term womanism in the need of some powerful variant for feminism. It was needed to present the issues of black women which are neglected by feminism. Womanism has offered coloured and black women a space to formulate their policy. She has located womanism within the black culture. Alice Walker’s ideology of Womanism is reflected in her works. The Third Life of Grange Copeland is a story of the Copeland family. The family lives in the State of Georgia as sharecroppers on a white man’s land. They suffer from the effects of sharecropping system, racism and poverty. In this novel Walker portrays the family environment and their relationships. The protagonist Grange and his wife, Margaret are caught in a system, therefore they cannot get rid of their plight. He decides to remain away from his wife and son. This decision of Grange makes his family suffer from the lack of love of a husband and father. Both Margaret and their son, Brownfield are badly
treated by Grange. He runs away to the North where he becomes a criminal. He can do nothing in the North as he has desired. Therefore he returns to the South. This return is taken to be his third life in which his ideas and philosophy of life is changed. He decides to take care of and educate his granddaughter and Brownfield’s daughter, Ruth. In his Third Life, Grange begins his efforts to reclaim his life. He decides to use the rest of his life to try to create possibilities for her granddaughter, Ruth. He does the work of caring, guiding and loving. Maria Lauret says, “Mothering and Fathering go together in Grange Copeland’s development.” (Maria Lauret, 2011: 38) Grange takes the duties of mother and father of Ruth. This is a Womanist behaviour on the part of a male.

Walker presents Margaret, Grange Copeland’s wife, as a victimised woman. Margaret has her husband her boss and master. This means that he is free to treat her as he wishes. He also keeps another woman, Josie against the will of Margaret. She is tired and frustrated of the treatment she receives from her husband. She decides to give her husband a dose of his own strategy and she beds down with a white man, Shipley. Walker writes,

Her bewilderment has changed to a feeling of inadequacy and she had tried to play her husband’s game. She threw away on other man what she felt her husband did not want. And finally bedded down with Shipley, the man who had caused everything.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 249)

From this relationship she begets a child, which is a serious attack on Grange’s manhood. This led to his desertion of his family and finally the suicide of Margaret. Walker ideally represents womanist character through Margaret. She is a weak character as compared to Mem and Ruth. She realises that she is victimised of Grange’s mistreatment. To take revenge of her husband she sleeps with Shipley. According to Alice Walker’s definition of Womanist, Margaret’s behaviour is indicative of the Womanist character. She dares to do whatever she wants to do. Yet because of her husband’s behaviour she cannot live with her choice. She is devastated by Granges disgust with her, but he never apologises for it and declares that he will have his women. Therefore Margaret decides to take her own way. While describing this Gladys Willis writes,
Margaret’s behavior is outrageous, audacious and courageous’ only in that she does what a woman is never expected to do. Actually she does what men do and survive what woman can never do and survive.  
(Gladys Willis, 2006: 23)

The behaviour of Margaret is rebellious but she is not a best example of Walker’s womanist character. She behaves as she desires and leads to her own pain. She meets her end and her survival is ceased.

Mem, Brownfield’s wife, is another woman character presented in the novel has a womanist views. Mem is Josie’s adopted daughter who is educated and stronger that Margaret. Though she is an educated woman, she is forced to act as an uneducated one. She collects her strength and decides to face Brownfield’s bad treatment. His love has turned to hate and he is determined to treat her like a nigger and a whore. This treatment has changed the life of Mem. While describing the relations of Brownfield and Mem, Walker has written,

It was great ignorance that sent her into white homes as domestic, his need to bring her down to his level. It was his rage at himself, and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, although she was no part to any of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 79)

This treatment becomes the cause of failure of their marriage. As Grange cannot forgive Margaret for having a white looking baby. Mem also gives birth to a white looking baby and faces her misfortune. This affects the ego of Brownfield. He knows that Mem cannot be unfaithful to him, but he hates that Albino baby and kills it. He tortures Mem as he feels that she is too smart for him. He considers her a ‘nigger woman’ and believes that the only way to treat her is to beat her. Though she is bitterly treated by her husband, her performance is a fine job of presenting her womanhood and her ability to be a courageous and strong black woman.

In relation to the definition of the term womanist by Alice Walker, Mem’s demonstration of womanist idea is the example of first definition of the term. After getting tired of the tortures by Brownfield, she declares that she has found a house on rental basis and has signed a lease without his prior permission. She declares that she will move to the new house with children. She also says him to do what he wants to do, but she will not follow him. She tells him her final decision as,
You do exactly what you want and go precisely where you please. But I and these children going to live in that house leased. We ain’t living in any more dog patches, we going to have toilets and baths and 'lectric lights like other people!

(Alice Walker, 1988: 124)

She also clears that she has worked hard all her life, but that is over for her. She has worked harder than before to support her children. Further she says, “You ain’t only mean and evil and lazy as the devil, but you are a fool.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 124)

These words indicate that Mem is a new and assertive woman. She has shown her courage and exhibited no fear of Brownfield. She has developed her own strategy to fight her battle and struggle for the better future. As the response to Brownfield’s bad treatment, Mem becomes violent and pulls a gun on him and threatens to shoot him. He is frightened of the experience and Mem takes the charge of the household. She lays certain rules for Brownfield in the house which are to be followed strictly by him. He obeys her orders but is waiting for the chance to regain control over Mem. He gets such a chance when Mem falls sick due to pregnancy. One day when Mem is returning home, Brownfield “aimed the gun with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired,” (Alice Walker, 1988: 172) that causes Mem’s death. In this way Walker has tried to put Margaret and Mem in history and culture of African American community. This is the presentation of their community. Walker has tried to highlight the black women’s strength, capability and struggle for independence on the ground of gender separation.

*Meridian*, published in 1976, is a prose narrative presented in an episodic format dealing with the characters and events related to the Civil Rights Movement. It analyses the history of the South and the African Americans living there. Meridian Hill, one of the members of the South, is the protagonist of the novel. The novel is set in rural Georgia and narrates the events taking place at the place like Mississippi, Alabama, Atlanta’s Saxon College and New York City. It deals with the Civil Rights Movement, which gained force in 1960s, demonstrations, and protests against the racist and segregationist policies. Through this novel Walker has spoken about the horrors of domestic violence, sexual abuse and racial issues. By labelling herself womanist, Walker has presented her primary goal to free woman from oppression in America. This is a journey of the protagonist from loneliness, guilt and self doubt to self-acceptance, empowerment and love. Meridian takes to establish her identity.
against the background of social upheaval, sexual alienation and racial suppression. Meridian Hill, Truman Held and Lynne Robinowitz are major characters of the novel. Meridian, as a protagonist of the novel, is a rural Georgian resident and a student. Her relationship with her mother casts a shadow over her life. She struggles to overcome this obstacle. Meridian suffers of the guilt and sadness because of her mother’s emotional distance and disapproving nature. Therefore Meridian turns to the Civil Rights Movement. She struggles with her own understanding and dedicates herself to the movement. At the period of her teenage, she becomes pregnant and marries Eddie. She begets a baby boy and drops out of school. Her married life cannot last long, later the house, in which they live, is bombed and Meridian participates in the Civil Rights Movement. In the activity she comes in contact with Truman Held, an activist, and they fall in love with each other. In this period she gets an opportunity to attend college. She rejects motherhood and all its relations and attends college. Yet she wants to be connected to her people though the movement is over. She keeps her struggle with her philosophy of non violence. Gerri Bates writes,

> Meridian works through personal conflicts of the nonviolent ideal … A killer she is not; she is unwilling to kill for the “revolution,” but she has a willingness to die for the cause of freedom for her people.  
> (Gerri Bates, 2005: 84)

She has developed her own philosophy of non violence for the struggle. Non violence for her is more than an act or a reaction. This movement is considered to be a matter of personal and political transformation. In the course of time, her lover, Truman, deserts her for a white Northern Woman, Lynne. Meridian is disturbed by Truman’s choice, but continues her work in the South. Meanwhile Truman and Lynne return to South as their daughter Camara is murdered. They get separated from each other and their marriage becomes a failure. Both of them turn to Meridian for help and guidance. Meridian comes to know about the sexual and racial oppression that Lynne faces and shows more sympathy for Lynne. Truman requests Meridian to love him as she loved him once, she tells that she loves him but her feelings have changed. She leaves Truman behind and continues her work of discovery of self. She thinks that it is necessary to kill someone on the part of self protection and in the struggle for the rights of blacks.
Truman and Lynne are other major characters of the novel. Truman loves Meridian but when he comes to know that Meridian aborts their child and get her tubes tied, he comes in contact with Lynne, a white Jew student and they get married. Truman faces an inner conflict of women fixation but cannot commit to Meridian or Lynne. He believes in that the man is a dominant force in a relationship. Therefore he becomes a victim of the sexual attitudes, his world and time he lives with Meridian. He marries Lynne because of these views about gender role. Lynne shows sympathy for blacks and participates in the Civil Rights Movement. Yet her whiteness sets her apart and outsider. She is raped by Tommy Odds, a black man from the South. She does not resist him in the thought of atoning her guilt to marry a black man. After the murder of their daughter, Camara, Truman and Lynne get separated and both of them come to Meridian for support. Thus Lynne remains dispossessed, without any identifiable future.

*Meridian* is a womanist novel as it points out the audacious and courageous behaviours of the protagonist, Meridian. She has an ability to take charge of the movement for social change and liberation of the community. Walker presents Meridian as a womanist, acting womanish, that is like a woman. She refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous and symbolic acts of rebellion, such as carrying black child’s corpse to the Mayor’s office and leading the march for voting campaign. She wants to protest the town official’s negligence towards drainage repairs in black neighbourhood by this courageous act. Meridian is also considered to be womanist character on the basis of her wilful behaviour. At the age of seventeen Meridian becomes a mother of a child. At the Saxon college it is the rule that girls who are mothers are not permitted to study. Meridian wants to study and she gets an opportunity to complete her education. She puts her child up for adoption and rejects her motherhood. This is a wilful behaviour of Meridian to be a womanist character. Meridian has an experience that her friend Nelda wants to go to school but as she becomes a mother at the age of fourteen, she cannot finish her schooling. Meridian has a strong desire to do something extraordinary, she gives up her child. Lynn Pifer calls this behaviour wilful, she writes,

Meridian herself belongs to the “worthless minority” of mothers excluded by the tradition. Her own sacrifice of giving up her child is as painful and trying as any of the legendary sacrifices but according to
the code of tradition Meridians is not a sacrifice but a case of willful neglect.

(Lynn Pifer, 1992: 85)

Though Lynn calls it ‘neglect,’ it is a result of Meridian’s will or desire to do something for self discovery, survival and wholeness.

While describing the term womanist, Walker has stated, “Womanist- .... loves individual men sexually and /or non sexually.” (Alice Walker, 1983: xi) Meridian meets Eddie, a dark-skinned sportsman and develops love for him. They start dating and in the course of time she becomes pregnant. Due to pregnancy they get married. Meridian loses interest in sexual relation with Eddie therefore they divorces each other. She gives birth to a son. Further she comes in contact with Truman Held, while working in the Civil Rights Movement. They fall in love with each other and Meridian becomes pregnant with him and aborts the child. Meridian has love for Eddie and Truman. To love individual men sexually is an indicative of being womanist. Along with loving individual men, a womanist also “.... loves struggle, loves the folk, and loves herself. Regardless.” (Alice Walker, 1983: xii) Meridian, after suffering of weakness, thinks that she must undertake to love herself and to respect herself as her life depends upon self love and self respect. She has also developed love for folk traditions like stories and songs. She loves songs, music and food, to make French food, English tea and German music. She loves her folk much as she rejects motherhood for her education. She desires to have education for the Civil Rights Movement. This movement is totally aimed at upliftment of the black community. Meridian is a Womanist as she loves struggle. She faces a number of problems but she “....will not give up and resolve her problems by dying.” (Lynn Pifer, 1992: 87) She wants to keep up her struggle for survival. In order to survive, she tries to learn to value her own life and find a community to live with. Finally, she finds a living community in an unconventional church. This church preaches people to stand up for their rights. The hymns and lyrics help Meridian achieve a spiritual release and transformation. For this transformation she gets attitude to fight or struggle for the purpose,

For she understood, finally that the respect she owned her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own…
indeed she would kill, before she allowed anyone to murder [any one’s] son again.

(Alice Walker, 2004: 219)

As a Womanist, Meridian thinks, one should not kill anyone for the revolution. But further she changes her philosophy that she would kill to preserve life. This shows that Meridian loves to struggle for self and the community. Her love for men, her people, the food and music, for self and struggle make clear that the novel *Meridian* is a discourse of Womanism.

2.1.4. Language and Behaviour

African Americans have a connection to Africa, Mississippi and Chicago. All of them have come there with their folk tales, family history and language. They have the tales of desire, exploration, loss and awakening with the sense of violence, subjugation, exploitation, racism, sexism and segregation. To transmit this history from one generation to the next there was a need of a contact language. This contact language was needed also to explain the culture and society of African Americans. The American blacks started using English language with some modification to form their own dialect. This dialect is passed on generation to generation by the means of literature. This dialect portrayal begins with Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes in 1920s and 1930s. Nora Kelecsenyi has rightly described,

“These two writers of the Harlem Renaissance were the first to part with over a century old tradition of representing Black English primarily by means of graphic manipulation indicating the phonological features of the dialect.

(Nora Kelecsenyi, 1984: 71)

African American dialect has some grammatical and phonological differences that make it Black English. These differences can be stressed in some written forms such as poetry and novel. There are a number of grammatical characteristics of Black English, for example it lacks subject-verb agreement as ‘they was.’ In this language writers often use double negative, as in ‘I don’t want no room.’ Along with the grammar there are differences in some pronunciations. These features related to pronunciations can be explained as, ‘suh for sir’ and ‘git’ for ‘get.’ They also use their typical black vocabulary such as motherfucker, ofays and several slang expressions. Some of the writers spell some words phonetically, for example ‘da’ for ‘the’ and ‘kat’ for ‘cat.’ This writing style shows that the writers choose to write in a
realistic manner. This was the case of writing style up to 1960s. After 1960s the black women writers appear on the literary scene and add a new perspective to black writing. While depicting the difficulties and joys of female, black female writers have used all levels of Black English in their dialect presentation. This use of language can be traced in the works of Alice Walker.

The study of the novels of Alice Walker reveals that she is intensely aware of the potential of Black English. She is best known Black Woman writer of our time. It is noticed that her characters, according to their social position, speak or don’t speak their dialect. The characters in her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, use their dialect. She creates her characters, especially women with the ability to use speech variant or code switching. This language reflects the social values of the time. It stands for public voice that overlaps the style of an author. The readers see the power and beauty of non standard English language. It is very much interesting to see how Mem, a former teacher, acquires more non-standard language. It is the result of her husband’s treatment to her. She says, “I just done got sick and tired of being dragged around from dump to dump, traded off by white folks like I’m piece of machinery.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 114) This type of treatment makes her be like other people. She uses the language that others speak. That is a dialect of the people residing in the North. Walker has used the same non standard language in her novel. This language presents the social values and culture of African Americans. Margaret, Ruth and other women characters also speak the same language indicative of public voice. Walker has put this language into the mouth of other characters also. These characters want to make the connection between language and their identity. “This is a way to enable them (black people) to keep alive their own distinctive language, and self-confidence.” (Reid, E. Shelly, 2009:319) Thus, the African American English has its own power and beauty that can be traced in the novel.

In the novel, *Meridian*, Walker has presented the characters with certain powers and are pulled together into communities. Meridian and other characters speak Standard English that prevails in American culture. But Meridian is overtly silenced in the novel. In this relation Reid writes, “….the slave woman noted in Walker’s Meridian, whose tongue was cut out as a punishment, is overtly silenced.” (Reid E Shelley, 2000: 319) Alice Walker has put standard English language into the mouth of Meridian to relate her to the American culture. It is so because the main
theme of the novel is the Civil Rights Movement. Meridian is very much engaged with her duties as a part of the movement. It has become necessary to make the American Community understand the views and opinions of the activists. There is an intention in the mind of author to pull all the characters into the main stream. Meridian has become a student after rejecting all her responsibilities of a daughter, a wife and a mother. She takes education as a powerful tool for the upliftment of her own African American community. She wants herself to be accepted as a part of the main stream culture. This is an act of overcoming domination of the main stream.

Alice Walker has presented folk heritage, feature and customs of African Americans of the South. She has portrayed how African American women struggle for self realisation in a hostile social environment. These women in the novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Margaret, Mem and Josie face physical and emotional torture in their homes. They are the victims of sharecropping, slavery, violence and brutality. Yet, those are manifested as womanist characters. They have a solid inner power to face the pathetic conditions in the society. They cope with their own men’s brutality and ill-treatments. Margaret, wife of Grange Copeland, revolts against her husband’s because of his brutality. She becomes bitter and prostitutes herself to a plantation owner. By doing so, she cheats her husband as he remains unfaithful to her. This can be taken as a wilful and audacious behaviour of Margaret. Gerri Bates writes about her behaviour as,

> Emotionally scarred from the physical abuse she has suffered at Grange’s hands, Margaret exploits her own sexuality in retaliation for the treatment she receives from her husband.  
>  
> *(Gerri Bates 2005: 65)*

She transforms herself into a prostitute and takes many lovers. She also bears an illegitimate son of her wilful behaviour. She sleeps with Shipley because she wants to help her husband, Grange get out of debts. This shows that she is not a submissive and kind but bold and audacious. She has affairs with many men, yet she loves Grange. When Grange leaves his family to go to the North, Margaret commits suicide and poisons her illegitimate son, Star.

Mem is one of the prominent womanist characters in the novel. She is a well read and a quite woman, when she gets married to Brownfield. Their marriage can not
remain a happy one. She gets tired of beating and violence in the house. After a harsh beating, she revolts against her husband and pulls a gun and tells him,

….. you going to learn to eat your meals like a gentleman, you ain’t going to eat like no pig at my table. You going to use spoon and knives and forks like everybody else that got some sense.

(Alice Walker, 1970: 128)

This act of Mem is indicative of her audacious behaviour. In addition, she demands to be called Mem, Mrs. Copeland or Mrs. Mem R Copeland. This change makes Mem take charge of her household. She plays the role of family provider and makes Brownfield aware of his shortcomings. She also goes against the will of Brownfield to move to J.L.’s farm. She takes a house on rent in the town and declares to move with her children to the new house. This behaviour is audacious, courageous and outrageous that shows Mem is a Womanist character. Yet, on account of her husband’s sarcasm and dominant attitude she could not be taken as a perfect womanist character. Her behaviour towards her children is like a devoted mother but as a victim of gender role socialisation she pays the ultimate sacrifice and meets her own death.

Josie, a minor character, is also presented as a womanist character in the novel. She behaves in a way that womanist characteristics can traced in her. She becomes pregnant at the age of sixteen and faces her father’s disappointment. She tries her best to please her father by offering different gifts to him and for this purpose she gets into the profession of prostitution. Her efforts are not appreciated by her father. Therefore, she gets totally involved in the prostitution. She becomes a medium between downtrodden livelihoods and broken marriages of the males of her community. She comes in contact with Grange Copeland, before his marriage with Margaret, and maintains her sexual relations with him even after his marriage. After Grange gets married to Margaret, Josie becomes jealous of Margaret. When Brownfield, son of Grange Copeland, comes in contact with Josie, she begins her sexual relationship with him out of revenge against Grange. This behaviour of Josie is wilful, courageous and cruel, indicative of womanism. She stops her sexual relationship with Brownfield, when Grange returns from the North and gets married to Josie. In spite of her wilful, courageous, cruel and sexual behaviour, she remains powerless and helpless against Grange and Brownfield. Yet, she has great love for
Grange. She loves him sexually and non sexually. It becomes clear when she sells her 
Dew Drop Inn to help pay for Grange’s farm. At the end, she goes against Grange to 
gain Ruth’s custody and loses both Grange and Brownfield. She loses everything 
because of her wilful behaviour.

In the end the story of the novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, revolves 
around a minor but womanist character, Ruth. She is daughter of Brownfield and 
granddaughter of Grange Copeland. She is the most outspoken woman character. At a 
young age she opposes her father Brownfield, when he beats her mother, Mem. At the 
age of six, her mother, Mem, is killed by Brownfield and she is taken by her 
grandfather. She shows an older kind of wisdom and awareness about her family. 
After her father is released from prison, she refuses to live with him. She takes the 
side of her grandfather. This behaviour of Ruth can be taken as courageous and full of 
self awareness.

Different from women characters in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 
Meridian, protagonist of the novel *Meridian*, behaves in a courageous, audacious and 
wilful way. The novel deals with the theme of self discovery and self affirmation of 
the protagonist, Meridian. She behaves in a wilful way when she comes to make 
choice between marriage, motherhood and education. At an early age she gets 
marrried to a restaurant boy, Eddie and bears a son. Eddie, her husband leaves her 
after the birth of a son. Meridian feels a loss of selfhood on the birth of her son. The 
feelings of loss of selfhood and isolation make her outrageous or cruel. While 
discussing the plight of Meridian, Christine Gomez and Angeline M. write, “In 
isolation desperate thoughts haunt her; she therefore meditates on suicide and 
murdering her infant.” (Christine Gomez and Angeline M., 2011: 189) She considers 
looking after her son as a job of slavery, therefore she takes the decision to give her 
son for adoption and joins college. This is an outrageous and wilful behaviour of 
Meridian. This behaviour of Meridian does not get any appreciation from her whole 
community. Her mother, Mrs. Hill, becomes outraged at this impious act of her 
daughter. After getting married and having a son Meridian, “ Becomes obsessed with 
the horrible thought that Eddie [Rundi, her son], like his name, would never be grown 
up. She thought he would always be a boy. Not that she knew what a man should be; 
she did not know,” (Alice Walker, 2004: 66) Therefore she leaves her family, gives 
her son for adoption and attends Saxon College on scholarship. She tells her mother,
"This is the only chance I have, Mama." (Alice Walker, 2004: 85) Mrs. Hill reacts with a rage and opposes her to choose her own life. She not only leaves her husband and son, but rejects her traditional religion also. She gives importance to self affirmation.

2.1.5. Racism and Sexism

African Americans have a diverse range of culture from different countries. They commonly share a history of slavery and racial oppression. Yet, they share a rich and unique African American culture in America. African Americans are a group of people struggling for survival and self. They have a different way of life from that of whites. The American Negros are different from American Whites. They have their own history of slavery, distinct patterns of culture, speech, music, dance, self-expression and relationship. All these aspects of African Americans have been presented in different literary genres by almost all men and women writers. Alice Walker, an African American writer, has also presented these aspects of African American culture in her literary works. She has dealt with the racial segregation and sexism existing among African American men and women.

Alice Walker, while growing up in rural Georgia praises as well as hates the South. This dual vision of the South has found place in almost all her works. She remembers that the white world of the South pays her sharecropper father three hundred dollars for a year. She writes,

The hard work, in the fields, the shabby houses, the evil greedy men who worked my father to death and almost broke the courage of that strong woman, my mother.

(Alice Walker, 1983: 21)

She throws light on the nature of the white community in America that thrusts the hardship of the racist society on the blacks. The Copeland family in The Third Life of Grange Copeland is a small part of American society that is totally oppressed and devalued by the racism. They struggle for the self and identity. It is obvious that the community divided by the aspects of identity cannot have a sense of collective purpose and sense. Therefore the Copelands tried to remain connected to each other in the state of oppression. Walker puts forth the situation of the family as,
.... suffering from a hangover and the after effects of violent quarrel with his wife...., Grange was remorseful, sullen, reserved, deeply in pain.... Margaret was tense and hard, exceedingly nervous.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 29)

What happens with Grange affects his family members, but that cannot put them in action against oppression, they abuse each other. This shows that the racist practices have the devastating effects on the lives of rural southern African Americans. W. L. Hogue has presented the historical fact as,

The American social structure turns black man into a beast-suppressing his human qualities and accenting his animal tendencies. The Black man in turn, reflects his violent relation with his white land owner in his relations with his wife and son. He takes his anger and frustration out, not on the social system or the people who exercise its power but on his children and the black woman, who, as he does in the master-servant relation, remains loyal and submissive.

(W. L. Hogue, 1986: 49-50)

This racial discrimination prevents African American men from performing their roles of family provider and protector. Grange Copeland and his son, Brownfield, feel powerlessness, low self-esteem, ineffectiveness and insecurity because of racism. Both the male characters in the novel work in cotton field of Shipley, a white. They live in the house that belongs to Shipley. They have to work in his field to pay off Grange’s debt. Shipley treats them as his slaves. He exploits them for the economic reasons. This racism has put them in slavery. The shadow of slavery has ruled over black farmers and their families. They gain nothing but offer their labour to the production system. They do not receive money because of the sharecropping system. In this system it is decided that the crop, produced on the land assigned to the tenants, is divided between the tenants and the landlords. From this production the landlord cuts his investments in land, shelter, rations, seeds, tools, stock and stock feed. This is experienced by the Copelands, Walker writes,

On Wednesday, as the day stretched out and the cotton rows stretched out even longer, Grange muttered and sighed. He sat outside in the night air longer before going to bed; he would speak of moving away, of going to North. He might even try to figure out how much he owed the man who owned the fields. The man who drove the truck and who owned the shack they occupied. But these activities depressed him, ..... 

(Alice Walker, 1988: 13)
Same is the condition of Brownfield. He has the feelings of a combination of intense fear and hatred about his white master. When his master, Captain Davis, says that he is glad to keep him and his wife, Mem in the family, Brownfield has a thought in the mind, “I ought to stick feed knife up in him to the gizzard!” (Alice Walker, 1988: 118) Through this, Walker wants to make it clear that racial domination prevented black men and women from their traditional roles in their households.

African American females are victims of sexism as they are treated as the housekeepers and consumers. The men of their families, under the influence of racism, demand that their women partners should treat them like masters and show them respect. Because of severe racial discrimination the women become the victims of violence as well as emotional and sexual abuse in the black community. Grange and Brownfield adopt the strategies of violence, intoxication and sex. Both of them would go to Josie, a prostitute. Brownfield follows his father’s steps. Every Saturday night, like his father, Brownfield comes home full of whiskey, beats his wife Mem brutally and threatens to kill her. Grange and Brownfield want to see Josie every now and then. Brownfield has sexual relations with Josie and Lorene. This can be taken as a part of sexism in black community. Grange has sexual relations with Josie before his marriage to Margaret. After his marriage he keeps the relations with her. By being unfaithful to Margaret, Grange oppresses her very often. Every time Grange and Brownfield neglect their children along with their wives. Brownfield thinks that he would not be a man unless he is in charge of the house. This thought grows in his mind as he realizes that Mem is more educated, assertive and stronger than him. This realisation injures his pride and batters his ego. This make him violent to his wife. He wants to make it sure that Mem may not get any chance to control him. Therefore he starts to abuse Mem physically. Walker writes,

His crushed pride, his battered ego made him drag Mem away from school teaching…. It was his great ignorance that sent her into white homes as a domestic, his need to bring her down to his level! It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, ……
(Alice Walker, 1988: 73)

In relation to the treatment given to wife and children Brownfield is worse than his father, Grange. He treats his daughters in an inhuman way. Walker has stated, “He scolded Ornette, who had come a year after Daphne, with the language he would use.
Brownfield abused his daughters therefore they are afraid of him and gradually hate him for the abuse he does to them and their mother, Mem. She, being tired of his treatment, leaves his house and shifts to another house with her daughters. She makes this possible under a pointing gun. But, at the end she is killed by Brownfield to take revenge of all the past deeds and his total failure as a man.

Margaret and Josie, other minor womanist characters in the novel, are the victims of sexism and racism. Margaret was totally submissive sort of woman in the family. Whenever she is abused by her husband, Grange, she agrees with his views every time. Brownfield considers his mother, “was like a dog in some way. She did not have a thing to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 5) She always fights with him with the help of words only. When Grange behaves in a unfaithful way and meets Josie, Margaret feels it deeply and decides to take revenge. She beds down with a white man to make Grange jealous. But when Grange comes to know about this, he feels that Margaret has challenged his ability and masculinity. He decides to either kill her or leave her and he does both in the end. As Grange leaves her and runs to the North, Margaret becomes helpless and has to live alone in the oppressive condition. In such condition she poisons her baby and commits suicide. Unlike Margaret, Josie is sexually and physically abused by her own father. Because of this oppression and sexual treatment she becomes a whore by choice. She becomes a possessive woman by nature and maintains sexual relations with both, father and son.

In Meridian, Alice Walker has put forth the issue of a social revolution for racial equality in the 1960s in America. The protagonist, Meridian Hill, has a history of racism, exploitation and oppression. Meridian, as a womanist character, unknowingly gets involved in sexual relations with Eddie and becomes a mother of a baby. She is sexually oppressed by Eddie and left alone to look after her baby. She experiences an abortion, physical trauma and physical and psychological disorientation. In the beginning, Truman supports her in the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement, but in the end his sexual behaviour becomes oppressive in relation to Meridian. She is left alone once again by Truman for the reason of getting married to another woman, Lynne. She is a daughter of an African American father and mother, brought up among the conflicts of racism, patriarchy and suspicion of
maternity. Though the time of slavery is gone at the time of the novel, its effects are still present as black people are treated with lower social status. The men are getting all the facilities but women are prohibited from certain rights, like education. A number of people think that women should be inferior, dependent, and submissive. Because of this view they are more victimised and exploited. According to her father it is unnecessary for women to get education. Due to this attitude and because of her pregnancy Meridian Hill, at the age of seventeen, becomes “A drop-out from high school, a deserted wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 73) Though there is no trace of racism, sexism is in practice. Meridian becomes a victim of sexism. After she gives birth to a child, her husband leaves her and her child. People do not blame men for making their wives raise the children alone. But women are condemned and labelled a witch and a monster if they leave their children. Yet, Meridian finds a way out of all restrictions and social norms and leaves her child for caring. She starts her education and acts as a member of the Civil Rights Movement.

Meridian is born in the southern town of America in a African American family with the background of slavery. In the novel, Meridian, the little amount of racism is traced because the racism has been eradicated by the time that the novel talks about. Yet, as far as the Civil rights Movement is concerned, there are certain events of racism those are presented by Alice Walker. When Eddie, Meridian’s husband, leaves her with her child alone, she sits watching the television. It is the time of the Civil Rights Movement and a large number of black people are gathered at a house. It is a live programme broadcasted on the television. She watches,

The house she had passed was on. There was to be a voter registration drive ……. A group of young men made this announcement to a white newscaster who looked astonished ……. Black people were never shown in the news – unless of course they had shot their mothers or raped their bosses’ grandparents…..

(Alice Walker, 2004: 69)

This is the atmosphere of the Civil Rights Movement. It is shown in the description that the treatment given to the black is oppressive. The voice of people is suppressed. The next morning Meridian watches the early news and she finds that the house is demolished by firebombs. Walker writes, “The bombs, exploding, set fire to not just the house–the whole cluster of houses on the street. Three small children were injured – no, a flash at the bottom of the screen announced them dead; several grownups were
injured. One adult, missing, was assumed dead.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 70) The people, demonstrating and organising a voter registration, are suppressed and segregated. By this happening she becomes aware of her past and decides to get into the movement. In the past Meridian’s ancestors were slaves, therefore the history of slavery has been passed on to her. Her house is not peaceful because her father and mother have their own frustrations. Her father is in frustration because of the loss of his land, and mother was unsatisfied with the freedom she gets from her husband. Same sort of freedom Meridian wants, but she is burdened with the responsibility of her child. She does not like the role of a mother. Therefore she becomes rebellious against it. Walker puts it rightly as, “She began to dream, each night, just before her baby sent out his cries, of ways to murder him.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 65) She has the feelings of being exploited and victimised by the rules that bring better opportunities to men than women. These views and decisions make her a womanist character.

2.1.6. Struggle for Self

In the novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian*, the womanist characters struggle for self respect and self-identity. They desire to struggle for the womanist self and fight for the self-respect. In the novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker portrays a particular type of womanist characters. Margaret, a lonely woman and incapable of showing any love and affection for her son, struggles to cope with the problems in her life. She, as a womanist character, loves the members of her family. She has a great love for her husband who does not care for her and develops sexual relations with a whore. She desires to help him in any situation. In the will of helping him in paying his debts she sleeps with Shipley, the landlord. She keeps sexual relations with a number of people to take revenge upon her husband for his oppressive and unfaithful behaviour as a wilful woman. Though she is deserted by her husband, she does not leave her house. She tries to search her self-worth but both her husband and son deny her ever assertion of self-worth. When Margaret faces her husband’s brutality she uses her only weapon of words to fight back. Margaret tries to search for self and identity in her own ways. She does not react to her desertion by Grange because she takes it as something done for good. When Grange leaves her, she is incapable of being furious because she is more overwhelmed by her hopeless feelings. Walker writes about her indifference as,
“Well. He’s gone, his [Brownfield’s] mother said without anger at the end of the third week.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 26) She tells her grief plainly to her son, Brownfield. Finally, Margaret takes her albino baby, Star, away from the home, poisons it and commits suicide. Mem, Josie and Ruth are also presented by Alice Walker as women searching for self identity and self realisation. These women perform the actions that challenge the patriarchal ideology and racist society. They employ certain strategies of survival that challenge present day ideology of men society. They rise and fall because of the power struggle. Those are suppressed by the male ideology of power. Margaret, Mem and Josie struggle with society, their landlords and their husbands. They survive by taking the roles or behaviours belonging to men. Mem works as a teacher for the survival and for raising the standard of living of her daughters and her family. Like Mem, Josie rebels against the social standards after she is physically and sexually harassed by her own father. She starts earning by prostitution to make her livelihood. Margaret also employs her own survival strategies to challenge the patriarchy. She fights with the only means she finds. The readers come to know about Margaret’s power struggle from her evaluation by Brownfield. Walker narrates,

One day she was, as he had always known her, kind, submissive, smelling faintly of milk; and the next day she was a wild woman looking for frivolous things, her heart’s good times, in the transient embraces of strangers.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 24)

She has to deal with oppression, poverty and problems of her family at the same time. This indicates that she is a victim of multiple oppression but her attempts indicate if she has a sufficient support and means, she would fight and claim her identity and succeed to hold the family together. In the end she puts her weapons, when Grange abandons the family, she poisons her little son and commits suicide. As Margaret exists from the plot of the novel, Josie enters the scene.

Josie, abandoned by her own father, becomes the mistress of both, Grange and Brownfield. She uses the strategy of sexuality for survival and power. She makes her sex a weapon to fight her struggle with the rest of the world in search of her own identity and survival. Thus, she challenges the patriarchy, revolts against her subjugated position and tries to discover her identity. Her sex helps her to discover herself. Walker writes in this regard, “....she (Josie) had a reputation for toughness that earned her an abundance of respect from youngsters who hoped to grow up to be
like her.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 57) Though she earns an abundance of respect, she loses all part of her identity and her independence. She sells whatever she has to help Grange and Brownfield. She is considered to be a victim of patriarchal system of the African American community. Josie survives in spite of sexism and oppression and claims power, but she suffers because of her own dishonesty to Grange and self. Therefore she does not survive with her whole identity intact.

Mem, Josie’s niece and Brownfield’s wife, tries to gain control and employs male power mechanism for the betterment of herself and her family. She is introduced as having challenged the dominant male ideology with the help of her education. The same challenge is there for her daughter, Ruth, to face. Mem is educated, therefore her speech sets her apart from other black women. She challenges the patriarchal ideology of blacks. She assumes male behaviour in order to achieve her goals in the time of struggle. Her education and proper ways threaten patriarchal and racist ideology. It causes certain brutal attacks on Mem by her husband Brownfield. She searches for her power and identity with the help of her education, knowledge and speech. But Brownfield destroys her educated speech and she becomes silent in an attempt to defend herself and her daughters. Her silence stands for a choice of generosity and survival. This silence of Mem results in the loss of her identity. Thus silence stands for Mem’s powerlessness. But in the course of time Mem moves from silence to speech when Brownfield makes an announcement to move his family to another sharecropping cabin. Mem speaks with confidence for the first time, “I ain’t, Mem said. I ain’t and these children ain’t.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 108) This speech rejects the power and control of Brownfield. She wants to earn money and buy a house to leave sharecropping life. Her silence is her own survival strategy. After the marriage, Mem is struggling for the progress of her family. Her progress begins when she starts finding house. Brownfield rejects her announcement to leave the sharecropping life. But Mem realises that Brownfield has no right to oppose her. She says, “I don’t have to stand here and let this spit in my face, she thought more or less calmly and for the first time very seriously.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 115) She regains her power, identity and her self. She decides to go to another house with Brownfield, but she lays some rules for him. She takes her daughters and Brownfield to new house because she believes in wholeness and love for the community. With this act, she challenges the male dominated society for self-respect and survival whole. But,
Unfortunately, the time of power and freedom results short lived. Brownfield takes the advantages of her female biology and shots her dead and meets his own end also.

In *Meridian* the protagonist, Meridian Hill, struggles for the self through the Civil Rights Movement. She struggles for the search of self and her woman hood throughout the novel. In the novel, the subject of the self is explored with the help of racism and sexism. She is a young woman of high intellect. Unfortunately, her mother, Mrs. Hill, cannot perceive Meridian’s struggle to construct an identity for herself. Meridian finds herself pregnant and is forced to get married at the age of seventeen. Her marriage and child bearing put her out of her schooling. When she becomes aware of the fact that her marriage and motherhood hinder her education, she loses interest in her home life. She gets separated from her husband and gives her child for upbringing. She believes that to be uneducated is an obstacle in the way to freedom and equality. She tries to build up her strength by taking her own way. She starts attending Saxon College in Atlanta. She confronts the racial history of segregation as she is watching a bombing news on television “…..it was that one day in the middle of April in 1960 Meridian Hill becomes aware of the past and present of the larger world.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 73) Meridian feels the necessity of exploring the wider world. She finds that there is a lot more about the people and world that she needs to go through. She gets involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She becomes conscious of her responsibilities as a member of African American community. She decides to dedicate herself to do something meaningful and important for her poor community people. She knows that many African Americans are ignorant of their own rights and values. Because of this, Meridian fights very hard against this ignorance. She participates in the voter registration programme for the Civil Rights. While dealing with the movement, she has a love for whole human race. She rejects and opposes the destruction of human life and disapproves violence. She establishes her own identity as a non-conformist woman. She takes her own decisions and takes responsibility for her actions and shapes her own destiny. When she loses her husband, child and family life, she becomes courageous in her quest of self identity to overcome the loss. Though Meridian disapproves violence as a womanist, audacious, courageous and wilful, she becomes outrageous and wills to kill for the sake of revolution. She learns to depend on herself more and more. She aims for her freedom and ability to make her own choices. Along with her own freedom she demands
freedom for all her community. She confronts the white racists with the corpse of a
drowned boy in protest against segregation. She lives in the south among her people
and struggle for her own identity. She demands some action on the part of the
authority of Government. Walker writes, “It was Meridian who had led them to the
Mayor’s office, bearing in her arms the figure of the five year old boy who had been
stuck in the sewer for two days .....” (Alice Walker, 2004: 209) Such type of social
activities make Meridian self sufficient and the community accepts her for who she is.
Her selfless service, suffering and fighting nature support her to attain self-
acceptance. She rises out of her sick bed with a lot of confidence and gets involved in
her struggle with self assurance. She likes the struggle for herself and her people like
a womanist.

Meridian is selfless in her service to the community therefore she works very
hard with bravery and determination. This results in the emergence of calm,
sustaining and growing self awareness. Meridian is a broken and frustrated individual
at the beginning of the novel and in the end she emerges as a whole individual. Her
struggle gives her the much wisdom that she needs and regains her lost identity and
survival whole.

2.1.7. Black Artist

Alice Walker links the art with the development of the characters in almost all
her novels. She tries to present at least a character as an artist either from the
beginning of the novel or becomes an artist later on. To be an artist brings an ease to
become an integrated person. In the novel The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Mem
is presented with an art. She has a special attitude to adorn the house with flowers.
To maintain the house in a neatly manner is an art that Mem has. Along with the art
of maintaining house she is educated and has the ability to teach the children. She
takes a job of a teacher where her husband, Brownfield, attends her teachings. Her
voice and way of speaking is nice that Brownfield enjoys. After some years he starts
suspecting her and their family is disturbed. Mem decides to find a house on rent.
This idea is rejected by Brownfield. At the same time “He shoved her and she
knocked over her flower boxes.” (Alice Walker, 1988:101) These flowers mean the
power of identity of Mem as an artist. The garden, which she waters very often, the
quilt, and the song help her reclaim her art and her identity. Mem is associated with
Walker’s mother because Mem attempts to retain identity and pride in herself like Walker’s mother. As she has an attitude towards the garden and flowers, she is much interested in songs also. She tries to maintain a healthy atmosphere in her house. Walker writes,

Mem was the kind of woman who sang while she cooked breakfast in the morning and sang when getting ready for bed at night and sang when she nursed her babies, and sang to him when he crawled in weariness and dejection into the warm life giving circle of her breast.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 66)

This artist in Mem has a capacity to elevate her family up to a certain standard. But Brownfield does not understand her and destroys her.

Ruth, Brownfield and Mem’s daughter, and grand-daughter of Grange Copeland, is a womanist character and is an artist. Her mother, Mem, is killed by her father, Brownfield and Grange looks after her. Grange tells her the stories of their community and history. Grange and Ruth are presented as black artists as Grange sings songs and dances. Ruth accompanies Grange while dancing. They dance with each other on the occasion of Ruth’s tenth birthday. Grange sings songs those are his own and never heard sung over the radio. Walker writes, “They continued to dance, the music coming bluesy and hoarse from Granges straining throat.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 175) Grange is presented as an original artist who gives his art to his granddaughter, Ruth. His art of singing and dancing help him hide his grief and pains. Walker writes, “When he danced you couldn’t tell if his day had been bad or good. He closed his eyes and grunted music.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 175) Ruth enjoys dancing with her granddaughter. She learns an untaught history through his dance. Ruth learns about the culture of her homeland which she has never known and felt the pattering of drums.

In the novel, *Meridian*, Alice Walker presents the central character, Meridian, as an activist and artist. She is lonely, physically and psychologically abused woman. She gets an opportunity to become an exception for other black women. She becomes an artist by strengthening her physique and mind with action. While at Saxon she is disappointed by her affair with Truman. She thinks about herself as a wilful and sinful girl. In the course of her stay at Saxon, Meridian learns folk stories, songs and dances. With the help of this transformation she remains the only survivor of the Civil
Rights Movement. She gets a new approach to revolution. She forgets all her pains and agonies and serves her people. She listens to the old music and visits the black church very often. She writes songs and sings them. Her contribution to the movement is her memory songs those are “the songs of the people transformed by the experiences of each generation, that hold them together, and if any part of it is lost, the people suffer and are without soul.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 221) She believes in the folk heritage that will help in the process of attempting social change. She thinks that her own existence is inseparable from all black people. She 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.

(Alice Walker, 2004: 236)

Meridian’s intensity and passion peep out through this. She decides to utilise her art for the survival and wholeness of her community. She forgets all her pains and guilt she committed in the past. She puts it, “i want to put an end to guilt, i want to put an end to shame, whatever you have done my sister (my brother)…..know i wish to forgive you....” (Alice Walker, 2004: 235) She writes this while telling Truman, her lover about her love for him. She is presented herself to be returned to the world cleansed of sickness. She hopes, “… all the people who are alone, as I am, will one day gather at the river. We will watch the evening sun go down. And in the darkness maybe we will know the truth.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 242) This hope of Meridian Hill shows that she believes in her community and her struggle for them has a great future. She wants to say that she is not alone, oppressed and without bearing any conflict in her soul. This discussion of Meridian, as an artist, indicates the importance and the place of art in the life of human being.

2.1.8. Survival and Wholeness

Survival is an important concern of every human being in both theory and practice. It is much obvious that only the way of narrating the actual state of universe can restore the wholeness. The present state of being is to be narrated the past history
for the knowledge of next generation. As far as African American literature is concerned, the story telling is a powerful way to transmit the history to future generation. It is so because there is a strong link between narration and survival. Walker has emphasised the importance of life giving power of storytelling. In her collection of essays, *Living by the Word*, she asks a two-headed woman in a dream about the way to help the survival of the world, the woman replies, “Live by the word and keep walking.” (Alice Walker, 1988:2) Walker uses this black art form to depict the poverty, victimisation and injustice through her works. Her works present the situations of the black community. The blacks are caught between oppressive forces of racism and sexism. Because of this oppression, the survival has become the problem for women. In order to survive, the black women have to fight against the racial and sexist oppression in America. The women protagonists and other womanist characters in the works of Alice Walker want not only to survive but to survive whole.

In the novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker presents some womanist characters that try to survive whole. Margaret, Grange’s wife, is victimised by oppression and suppression experienced by Grange Copeland. She is always ill-treated and never receives a kind word from him. Because of this treatment she changes from a woman who is “kind, submissive, and smelling faintly of milk into a wild woman looking for frivolous things, her heart’s good times, in the transient embraces of strangers.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 24) Though she is oppressed by her husband, she loves her people, family and struggles for the survival and wholeness. With this good intention she beds with Shipley. She keeps sexual relations with other men also. All she has done is a part of her struggle for survival whole. But unfortunately she cannot succeed in struggle and as she is abandoned by her husband, she poisons her bastard son and ends her life also.

Mem, another womanist character in the novel, is also a victim of oppression and sexism. She is married to Brownfield, the son of Grange Copeland. Like a womanist, Mem loves her husband, children and her community. Brownfield is satisfied with Mem, “She was so good to him, so much what he needed, that her body became her shrine and he kissed it endlessly, shamelessly, lovingly and celebrated its magic with flowers and dancing.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 66) This lovely relationship works only for three years after their marriage. After that, because of no improvement
in their living conditions, Brownfield changes his attitude and abuses Mem very often. Mem is educated and well-mannered. But Brownfield wants her to come at his level. She tries to support him in almost all the works and obeys his orders. He changes her speech, makes her burn her books and sends her to different households as a domestic worker. She is regularly beaten by him and is treated, “....like a nigger and whore, which he knows she was not.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 72) All the tortures Mem bears as a try to survive. She gets a job of a teacher to support her family and teaches Brownfield also. When she is tired of all the ill-treatments, she revolts against her husband and selects her own way to run the household. Brownfield becomes powerless and accepts all the rules which Mem lays down for him. For the purpose of survival whole Mem becomes violent in the course of time. Unfortunately, because of her biological weakness Brownfield shoots her on Christmas Eve when she returns from work. Walker emphasises the universality of violence because of which Mem cannot survive after great efforts and struggle. After the death of Mem, one daughter becomes a prostitute, another goes insane and third one, Ruth, becomes Grange’s child. Ruth is brought up by Grange against the will of Brownfield. Grange wants joy, laughter, contentment and surviving whole for Ruth. He says,

And still, in all her living there must be joy, laughter, contentment in being a woman; there must be happiness in enjoying a man, and children. Each day must be spent in sense, apart from any other.

(Alice Walker, 1988: 272)

This view shows the womanist attitude of Grange Copeland. He demands that other women cannot survive after a great struggles, but Ruth must survive with wholeness. Walker writes, “Survival was not everything. He had survived. But to survive whole was what he wanted for Ruth.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 272) The view of Grange is a part of womanist maternity.

Josie, an another womanist black woman in the novel, becomes victim of her father’s hatred at the age of sixteen. She is cast out of the house for the shame she brings to the family. To gain her father’s love back, Josie uses her body and earns money to buy gifts for him. He accepts her gifts but never acknowledges her deed. Though she is cast out of the house, she struggles for the survival and wholeness. She is both Grange and Brownfield’s whore and later Grange’s wife. She loves Grange much and therefore, after the death of Margaret, she marries him. She, as a womanist
character, wants to get rid of her husband’s debts. For the purpose of helping him, she sells her Dew Drop Inn, that remains her everything and livelihood. This step is taken by her as she wants the survival with wholeness. But in the end she plays a role of a destructive link between father and son. In her sixties she is to live without her fortune and aged out. Yet, she remains a complex woman with total freedom. Walker describes all the women characters as “.....loving, hateful, strong, ugly, raging, weak, and pitiful and mad who try to live with the loyalty to black men that characterize all of their lives.” (Alice Walker, 1983: 251) All with their natures and behaviours they want survival and wholeness for their people and community.

Ruth, the youngest womanist character in the novel, is the product of the past sharecropping system and beginning of the future Civil Rights Movement. Grange in his ‘Third Life’ brings her up and commits his life to the survival of Ruth. She has a womanist attitude towards the life which is narrated by Grange. He says of Ruth, “I never in life seen such a womanish gal” (Alice Walker, 1988:230) Ruth is the cause to bring the change in the life of Grange Copeland. She becomes aware of the struggle against the abuses and oppression. She grows in the period of the Civil Rights Movement. She achieves a self-realisation and self-definition that makes her able to survive with wholeness.

Meridian Hill, in Meridian, is a womanist protagonist of the novel who suffers of contemporary patriarchy. She becomes the mother of a child in early age and she has to leave her education. As a courageous and wilful woman she gives her child for upbringing and starts her struggle in the Civil Rights Movement. After certain efforts and struggle, she comes to a conclusion that she must love and respect herself as her whole life depends upon self love and self respect. She becomes isolated in the movement as it is outdated at present. But she keeps fighting against the segregation she experiences in the society. She follows the path of non violence to bring about the desired changes in the system. She also understands that one should comfort the self for the reason of survival and wholeness. Karen Stein has written about the novel, “Walker’s novel affirms that it is not by taking life that true revolution will come about, but through each individual’s slow, painful confrontation of self.” (Karen Stein, 1986: 140) Only Meridian completes this personal transformation. Her confrontation with her personal history, family history and racial history helps her choose her way to live life. In the final section of the novel her journey from
contrariness to wholeness starts. She gets strength for her struggle from the traditions of her community of the South. For the purpose of survival whole she turns toward the church. It is the church of Nat Turner that is rooted in the soil of protest against oppression. In the church, listening to the hymns, Meridian achieves a spiritual release and transformation. She finally understands that she has to respect her self and “not… give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 220) She also turns to the songs and tales of her cultural heritage and finds a way to serve her community. After suffering from illness, bitterness and confusing for long time, Meridian emerges as a strength and powerful woman. She searches for wholeness and the answers for the problem of human injustice. For the purpose of survival, Meridian rejects conventional middle class life, the traditional roles of women, such as a dutiful daughter, a wife, a mother and a lover. For this rejection she has to encounter with death and deathliness. Through these experiences she gains the knowledge and power to achieve a new sense of self. She rejects her motherhood in search of self and seeks admission in the Saxon college. She rejects her lover, Truman, and her son also. When Truman comes to her for love after a long time, she refuses him. She forgives him for the treatment he gives her by marrying another woman, Lynn. She suggests him that the grace which he searches must come from his own search for wholeness. She sets him free and she becomes free of the pain and bitterness. When Truman leaves her, she considers herself a woman used and discarded, she says to Truman,

You are free to be whichever way you like, to be with whoever, of whatever color or sex you like and what you risk in being truly yourself. The way you want to be, is not the loss of me.

(Alice Walker, 2004: 238)

Meridian respects Truman’s freedom without any quarrel and violence. Walker also affirms that violence is not needed for any movement. Taking life of any person is not revolution but love and respect would make any movement successful. In Meridian the process of searching for self identity takes place without any violence. Thus search for wholeness is a continuing process without hurting others. In this relation, Barbara Christina has rightly written, “Walker invites us to use the novel as contemplative and analytical in our own individual search.” (Barbara Christian, 1980: 235) This shows that an individual search is an adventure that ends in a neat
resolution that leads to survival and wholeness. The survival and wholeness can be achieved through every individual's slow and painful efforts and confrontation of self.

2.1.9. Motherhood and Womanist Maternity

Through the novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian*, Alice Walker has presented her views regarding the motherhood and its womanist nature. In the *Third Life of Grange Copeland* two women, Margaret and Mem, are presented as mothers. In the era of slavery and even in the twentieth century, black women are treated as servants. The place of mother in the African American society is much important as they have to take care of their homes and families. They have to work as nannies for white children as slaves do. In the past they had also to work in cotton fields, clean the homes of white people and rear their children. A mother had to look after her children, house and their elders also. A mother is loving, caring and responsible figure in the house in the African American society. The works, which a mother has to do, are described by Alice Walker in a proper way. She writes of her own mother as,

> She made all the clothes we wore, even my brother’s overalls. She made all towels and sheets we used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds.

(Alice Walker, 1983: 238)

This is the picture of every common mother; she loves society, family, sons, daughters and other women also. In the African American community she is tortured and beaten by the husband. She has to face the sexism in the community and in the family also.

In the novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker presents Margaret as a wife and a mother in the Copeland family. She is ill-treated by her husband, Grange. He is free to treat her as he wishes, therefore she is victimised and abused by him. As a mother she loves her son Brownfield but cannot teach him the way of the world. Therefore Brownfield has mixed feelings for her. He does not get any love from his mother. Yet, she has good relations with her son. When at leisure time they sit at home, they play games. She has a great love for her husband. But Grange, her husband, keeps sexual relationship with a prostitute, Josie. Margaret establishes her sexual relations with other men in turn to take revenge upon her
husband. This behaviour of Margaret is considered to be womanist. Gladys Willis writes,

Margaret’s behaviour is ....outrageous, audacious, and courageous, only in that she does what a woman is never expected to do. Actually, she does what men do to survive and what women can never do and survive. (Gladys Willis, 2006: 23)

Through her sexual relations with different men she begets a son, Star. After the birth of Star, Grange shows his resentment and deserts her by moving to the North. Margaret feels guilty of her deed and cannot live without Grange. She decides to commit suicide, but as a mother, she worries about her illegitimate son, Star. She becomes helpless and unable to take decision. Finally she murders her son by poisoning him and commits suicide.

Mem, another mother in the novel with three daughters, plays her role as a mother till her death. She gets married to Brownfield and takes hold of his house. She is an educated woman who tries to take her husband, daughters and her family to a certain standard of living. She has a special attitude towards the art as she maintains her household in an artistic way. Mem and Brownfield enjoy a peaceful life in the beginning. Brownfield has got a woman as a loving wife and a caring mother. Walker writes, “...he thought of her (Mem) as of another mother, the kind his own had not been. Someone to be loved and spoken to softly......someone never to frighten with his rough, coarse ways.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 6) They get married and enjoy their married life for three years. After that Brownfield start to treat her like ‘nigger’ and a ‘whore.’ Mem starts suffering from the suspect and ill-treatment from her husband. Though she tortured by her husband, she loves her daughters. She fights against Brownfield and gets a house with light, toilets and other facilities for her daughters. She declares that they are moving to another house. She decides to work harder than before for her daughters. She says, “......... if you think I won’t work harder than ever before to support these children, you ain’t only mean and evil and lazy as the devils, but you’re a fool.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 116) She lays some rules for Brownfield if he comes with them and moves to new house. She also joins a job for the purpose of caring her daughters. This behaviour of Mem is violent one, but there is a cause behind her violence that Brownfield abuses her physically and verbally. This courageous and audacious behaviour as well as love for daughters make Mem a
womanist character. But at the end, because of her biological problems, Mem is shifted to the old house and is killed by her husband. Mem’s maternity or motherhood remains a womanist maternity.

In *Meridian*, Walker has portrayed two different types of mothers. Mrs. Hill and the protagonist of the novel Meridian Hill are presented as mothers in the novel. Mrs. Hill, mother of Meridian, is presented by Walker as a failed mother. She works as a teacher in a small Mississippi town with the enjoyment of “freedom of thinking out the possibilities of life.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 40) She is a different sort of mother as compared to other mothers. She does not have any interest in marriage and rearing children. She has become a mother under the condition of necessity in the life of a woman. Motherhood, in Mrs. Hill’s views, is like, “....being buried alive, walled away from her own life, brick by brick.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 42) Because of this view she has become a woman with weak personality after motherhood. But she is much practical about it. Though she has the view that maternity is a burden, she believes in it and thinks that one should follow the custom. As a mother, Mrs. Hill believes is morality. When Meridian wants to give her own child away, Mrs. Hill, as a mother, opposes it. She says, “Well, it can’t be moral, that I know, it can’t be right to give away your own child…If the good Lord gives you a child he means for you to take care of it.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 85) She convinces Meridian to look after her child as it is the gift of God. The motherly feelings of Mrs. Hill are indicated by this statement. Though Mrs. Hill expresses this view, she is a courageous, a wilful and practical woman. She is totally indifferent towards marriage and motherhood. She blames her society for her marriage and motherhood. Walker writes, “She could never forgive her community, her family, the whole world, for not warning her against children.” (Alice Walker, 2004: 41) Due to this dissatisfaction she can never bring herself to truly nurture her children. She openly expresses her hostility towards her children. This shows that Mrs. Hill is a womanist character but not an ideal mother for her children.

Meridian, the protagonist of the novel, is not nurtured and taught well by her mother, Mrs. Hill. She, unknowingly, gets entrapped in marriage and domesticity. Her marriage remains loveless for her and she is abandoned by her husband, Eddie, after the birth of her child, Eddie Jr. She decides not to waste her life in domesticity and rearing the children like her mother. Though Meridian, as a womanist, loves her
people, community and other women, she is not ready to look after her son by giving up her education. She finds a meaningful cause, the Civil Rights Movement, and devotes herself to it by giving her young one up for raring. She gets an offer from Mr. Yateson to attend Saxon College on scholarship. She puts her baby for adoption and tells her mother that it is the only chance for her to get education and do something useful. But Mrs. Hill does not forgive Meridian for her deeds. Though she chooses her own way of living, she cannot bury the maternal thinking in her. She chooses her own way of life that gives her a feeling of guilt and of ‘failing motherhood.’ This feeling almost kills her; she suffers of physical illness and experiences traumatic nightmares. Walker writes about the love of Meridian for her child, Eddie Jr. or Rundi as, “One day she really looked at her child and loved him with as much love as she loved the moon or a tree, which was considerable amount of impersonal love.” (Alice Walker, 2004:89) After she gives her baby for adoption, as a mother, she is haunted by “Nightmares of the child, Rundi, calling her, crying, suffering unbearable deprivations because she was not there…..” (Alice Walker, 2004: 90) Meridian can avoid her responsibility, but cannot avoid her maternal thinking. Her thoughts of motherhood haunt her and she becomes restless as a mother feels when her child is taken away from her. These motherly feelings make her a womanist character that Alice Walker has proposed.

2.2. Summary

Alice Walker introduces the term Womanism in 1983 in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She has presented women characters with womanist characteristics in almost all her novels. She has presented the women characters that are girlish, irresponsible and not serious. They are sometimes, referred to be outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful. Some women are much interested in the grownups doing. They have much love for another women and men sexually or non sexually. Almost all the women characters are ‘committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.’ The women characters, presented in the novels by Alice Walker, are ‘traditionally universalist.’ She also has discussed the issues of racial segregation, poverty, sexism and different movements related to African American community.
The Third Life of Grange Copeland by Alice Walker presents a family with sharecropping background. Grange Copeland, the protagonist of the novel abandons his son and wife and moves to the North. In his first and second life he is presented to be an unsuccessful man, suffered from oppression, racism and poverty. He goes to an extent that he does not care for his wife and son for his own survival. Whenever he suffers of his own helplessness, he oppresses his household. This behaviour of Grange negatively affects the manhood of his son, Brownfield, and his wife, Margaret’s morality. When Grange keeps sexual relations with Josie, a prostitute Margaret gets affected by it. She also develops her sexual relations with different men to take revenge upon her husband, she begets an Albino baby that causes frustration of Grange and he moves away from his house. The behaviour of Margaret is considered to be wilful and outrageous. Yet, she cannot live without Grange therefore poisons her son and commits suicide. Her death makes Brownfield an orphan. Brownfield, in the state of oppression and lack of love, visits Josie for solace. He follows his father’s steps and ruins his life. He comes in contact with Mem, Josie’s niece, and gets married to her. Both of them have a great time with each other for a short period. After four years of their married life with three daughters, Brownfield starts abusing her. Their relation is stretched in a way that Brownfield murders Mem. Mem’s death dispersed the lives of their three daughters–Ornette, Daphne and Ruth. Ruth is looked after by her grandfather, Grange in his third life in the South. In attempt to get the custody of Ruth from her father, Brownfield, Grange murders Brownfield and he is also killed in the police action.

Through the novel Alice Walker wants to make readers aware of “the connection between the oppression of black women and children on one hand, and oppression of black American people on the other.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 317) Grange and his son, Brownfield, are victims of the share cropping system. Grange comes in contact with different people, race and American society as whole. That mends his conception of self but Brownfield never gets this type of benefit. Social contexts affect the way of both the characters in an opposite manner. Grange, Mem and Ruth try to move out of the conditions of slavery into modernity. Mem decides to move to a new house with her daughters to improve her material circumstances but Brownfield rejects and opposes the idea. Mem becomes furious when the oppression crosses the limit of her bearing capacity. She makes her announcement of moving to a
leased house on a gun point. Mem shows her inert power and courage as a womanist lady. Brownfield becomes helpless in front of Mem’s power. She struggles for survival and wholeness of her daughters and husband as a womanist. She allows her husband to live with them. She forgives him instead of all his tortures and ill treatments. But the racist and sexist system does not sustain Mem and her survival and reconstruction becomes short lived. Maria Lauret writes about the grief of Mem as, “She burns her books, and with them her dreams.” (Maria Lauret, 2011: 53) and returns to sharecropping and slavery to a previous state of economic deprivation. After being a courageous, audacious and wilful woman she cannot survive because of her weakness as a woman. Brownfield murders her and makes her daughters isolated.

Ruth, daughter of Brownfield and Mem, is presented as a strong and wilful girl. Grange, after he returns to the South in his third life, takes custody of Ruth. True freedom for Ruth comes through the efforts of Grange. He decides to protect his granddaughter because he thinks her “purity and open-eyedness and humour and compassion were more important than any country people or place he must prepare her protect them.” (Alice Walker, 1988: 272) He prepares himself for the upbringing and protection of Ruth, but her father, Brownfield, takes him to the court. The judge, being a white, gives Ruth’s custody to Brownfield. Grange becomes furious on the decision of the court and kills Brownfield. This is followed by the death of Grange in the police action. This incident affects the lives of Copeland girls, Ornette, Daphne and Ruth. Ornette and Daphne are taken by their maternal grandfather and Ruth remains in the South to join the Civil Rights Movement. Ruth behaves in a womanist way right from the childhood to her youth. She is the only Copeland that survives whole due to her grandfather. Her participation in the Civil Rights Movement creates ground for the next novel Meridian of Alice Walker.

Meridian deals with the tradition of motherhood through generations. The protagonist, Meridian lives a childhood that is dominated by her mother, Mrs. Hill’s unsatisfied motherhood. Mrs. Hill is not satisfied with the responsibilities of motherhood because it has affected her career. Yet, she sacrifices her career and ambition for her children. She suffers of the feeling that her personal life is over, after she becomes a mother.
Her frail independence gave way to the pressure 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.

(Alice Walker, 2004: 42)

Her indifferent attitude towards life and motherhood affects the life of her daughter, Meridian. She becomes pregnant at sixteen because of her ignorance about sex. She has to get married to Eddie and take a role of wife. Her motherhood makes her leave her education. It changes the course of her life. She takes a courageous decision of giving her child away for upbringing and resumes her education at Saxon College. When she explains it to her mother, Mrs. Hill, she opposes the idea of giving the child for adoption. Mrs. Hill scolds Meridian for all her deeds, but Meridian remains firm on her decision and starts her education again. While in Saxon, she gets involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She desires to work for her community as a womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

Alice Walker has presented the contemporary social aspects such as oppression, racism, sexism and poverty in the black community through her novels, The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian. The reason behind the poverty of the black people is sharecropping system. This system makes people work hard with less gain. The males are oppressed by the white landlords and in return these black males oppress their wives at home. This causes violence in the family. Grange treats his wife, Margaret, and Brownfield treats his wife, Mem, in an inhuman way. These treatments make the women struggle for their survival. Margaret and Mem, in the efforts of survival, show their courage to oppose their male partners. Margaret comes to know about her husband’s affair with Josie, a whore, and takes courageous step to have a number of lovers. She develops sexual relationships with different people. This relationship results in the birth of an ‘Albino’ child, Star. This shows that Margaret shows a womanist features. As Walker says, womanist: A woman “loves individual men, sexually and/or non- sexually.” (Alice Walker, 1983: xi) The behaviour of Margaret is considered to be courageous and wilful. Unlike Margaret, Mem becomes furious and takes gun against her husband, Brownfield. On the gun point she makes her husband accept her decision to shift to a house taken on lease. She loves her husband and daughters and demands for survival with wholeness. Though, Margaret and Mem express their practical views, they cannot survive. The
only woman character, Ruth, survives with the help and support of her grandfather, Grange’s support. Grange wants to have not only survival but wholeness also for Ruth. As Alice Walker expresses her views about being womanist as, “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” (Alice Walker, 1983: xi) in the same way Grange Copeland desires a great future for his granddaughter, Ruth. Meridian is presented as a more powerful character as compared to other women. She violets her community’s traditions and gets sexually involved with Eddie. When she is impregnated by Eddie, she gets married to him in her early age. But her husband, Eddie, deserts her by getting married to another woman. She gives her child for adoption and gets a scholarship for education. She cannot contribute a great deal to the education and participates in the Civil Rights Movement in desire to do something for her people. In this relation the character, such as Margaret, Mem, Ruth and Meridian contribute a great deal to the womanist view of Alice Walker. Margaret and Mem cannot do something good and cease to exist before the achievement of their goals. Ruth and Meridian survive and support their community. Their behaviours are womanist in nature as they like struggle and revolt against the established ideologies of their community. They behave in a responsible or accountable way as far as their actions are concerned. They oppose the ideologies that are founded on Biblical texts. Gladys Willis writes,

These women are not less committed to fighting injustice perpetrated against them by a patriarchal society, but they are committed to Christian doctrine that is founded on Biblical texts, rather than secular literature.

(Gladys Wills, 2006: 20)

Some of the women characters, in these novels, cannot succeed in their struggle. Margaret commits suicide after poisoning her baby and Mem is murdered by her husband. Ruth and Meridian survive with their womanist struggle.

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