Alice Walker’s odyssey as a novelist began with the publication of her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* in 1970. This being her first attempt at fiction-writing it has the distinct flavour of a first-timer. There is a sense of holding back, apprehension and caution, clearly felt in the course of the entire novel. Here we witness the first step taken towards the development of both Alice Walker and her creation, as living monuments of Womanism.

All Walker’s works are colored with the purple shade of Womanism, some more some less. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* has a traditional male protagonist. It seems that Walker wanted to play safe, and so we have a male protagonist whose conversion into Womanism is the main theme of this initial endeavour. There can be varied interpretations of this plot. Being her first novel she may have wanted to utilize this opportunity to highlight the unique characteristic of this Black shade of feminism, and the essential place of Black men in it. It can also be read as an attempt by a Black female writer to awaken interest of the Black canon makers, and assert their (Black women’s) place in the canon.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is a story about the growing up of a little girl named Ruth under the guidance of her Womanist Grandfather Grange Copeland. The Copeland family has had a history of intense violence against women, wherein two generations of women have suffered at the hands of brutal patriarchs without any support from any corner. The Grandfather who in his
metaphorical third life guiding his Grand daughter towards a spiritually enhancing life of a Womanist, is the same man who is responsible for the death of his wife and the brutality of his son Brownfield.

The women who inhabit the world of *Grange Copeland* are the first generation fighters, women who are not protected by any existing chain of sisterhood, and so have not yet acquired a unique identity of their own. These women have not been nurtured by the stories of power and grit. For a very long time they have been told that they are nobodies, and so they have almost internalized their inferiority. Because they lack proper guidance and advice they have not been able to decipher the success stories of many of their ancestors, hidden behind the garb of pain and suffering. Protest of any kind has never been a part of their conditioning process. And so Walker’s women, in their first appearance, are not what they would gradually become, thorough Womanists.

For these women survival is their topmost priority. “Surviving whole” has not yet entered their psyche. Out of the three generations of Black women portrayed in *Grange Copeland*, the first generation woman i.e. Margaret Copeland is an ‘ideal’ Black American woman, who conforms to the directives laid down by the White world and Black patriarchy. Ideal, because she never protests against anything that is male, both Black and White. Silently waits for her wayward husband, takes physical and mental abuse without a sound, and finally dies under the guilt of her illegitimate relationship with her husband’s arch-rival, the white overseer Shipley. The historical background behind this gross misconduct of a Black woman heightens the impact of Margaret’s actions. Earlier during the times of slavery Black men were unable to stop sexual exploitation of their women, and so the pain and moral bankruptcy felt by them then, was carried forward to the future generations living during the Reconstruction Era.
Margaret and Grange’s married life begins on a positive note. They are shown to be spending a lot of time together, but gradually the in-human share-cropping system destroys their love and Grange’s spirit. Grange is unable to face his family as a defeated man and therefore shies away from them and escapes into the arms of the village prostitute Josie. After being hurt by her husband’s total lack of concern for her and her son, Mem is left with no choice but to hurt Grange with the same weapons that he uses to subdue her. This decision is also quite unconsciously arrived upon. Because, even though she is pushed into the arms of other men by Grange’s indifference, she is unable to put the blame on him. Her colonization is to such an extreme level that she even fails to notice her disappearance from her husband’s life. In her blind guilt she forgets the sequence of the unfortunate events that leads to her suicide. Instead of seeing her extra-marital affair as a consequence of Grange’s relationship with Josie, she puts the liability of his straying on her illicit endeavours.

Brownfield, who is the focal point in the narration of Part I of *Grange Copeland*, is shocked by the subtle but profound change undergone by his loving mother. The conversion of an affectionate, caring and nurturing person into a huntress was way beyond young Brownfield’s understanding. His memory of his mother, as a loyal and honest woman waiting for her wayward husband to return, conflicted with her new avatar of a woman of pleasure. The narrator records Brownfield’s perception regarding the breaking of the family.

Brownfield blamed his father for his mother’s change. For it was Grange she followed at first. It was Grange who led her to the rituals of song and dance and drink, which he had always rushed to at the end of the week, every Saturday night. It was Grange who had first turned to someone else (GC 20).
Though Brownfield was not old enough to understand the complexities of his parent’s breaking marriage, he could figure out when the rot began to set in. Before she changes, the woman that we see in Margaret is an ideal Black woman according to the standards of Black Patriarchy. She falters and ceases to be an ideal woman only when she begins to protest against her husband’s atrocities, albeit in her own way. As long as she plays the role of an obedient wife and an all accepting slave she is perfect, but, later rather than passively sitting back and receiving, she actively strikes at her husband, and thus loses the respect of her community. She does so merely to awaken Grange’s jealousy and ownership rights over both his wife and his property, but fails in her attempt as she chooses the wrong ally, a White man.

Though Margaret does not survive the fight, she does show some strength of character through the mere fact that she tries to oppose. Her biggest error of judgment lies in the fact that she tries to defeat Grange at his own game, by duplicating his means. But what she unconsciously overlooks is the fact that Grange’s actions were unethical in themselves, so they would definitely prove unworthy for her fight for justice. Her fight is legitimate but her approach is inappropriate. Here we see the lacunae created by the absence of a supportive sisterhood. If there were protective women surrounding her, Margaret would have fared better.

Initially Margaret does not fit into the Womanist bill, because she reveals none of the Womanist traits. She doesn’t question, doesn’t expect answers, doesn’t assert herself, and to top it all quietly accepts her inferior social status decided by her husband and the society. The only Womanist thing that she does is behave outrageously for a change. But she pitifully lacks the moral courage to stand by her decision. Being “Responsible” is one more Womanist characteristic that she adheres to. She takes up the responsibility of her actions and dies in
repentance. But this “Responsibility” is not Womanist in nature, as she doesn’t positively feel responsible, but is deeply rooted in the negativism of her guilt.

The basic problem with Margaret seems to be the lack of knowledge shared between older and same generation women. There are no guidelines laid down by women of their community, to counter sexism and racism prevalent in their day-to-day environment. If Margaret was supported by other women, she would have survived the pain and humiliation of being a discarded woman. There is an inherent fighting spirit in her but she fails to utilize it for her benefit. And so her indulgence in this self-defense tactic, destroys her rather than protecting her against the atrocities of her Black man. It is out of desperation to feel alive and wanted that she is pushed into the arms of other men. She even tried to have an active social life, but friends ignored her as soon as her husband got distracted. Brownfield notes:

Gone were the times she waited alone on Saturday afternoons for people who never came. Now when her husband left her at home and went into town she followed. At first she had determinedly walked the distance, or hitchhiked. Lately she had switched to riding, often in the big gray truck (GC 16).

Alice Walker notes that Margaret was an ignored woman not only by her husband but also by her own family. It seemed as if her parents had completely forgotten her existence once she was married off to Grange. Through Margaret’s plight Walker is underlining the importance of family and friends for the survival whole of entire Black community, both Black women and men. The difference of treatment meted out to Grange and Margaret for identical sins also highlights the situation of Black women in America in the early part of the 20th century. Walker also draws our attention to the limitations of a woman’s body. Grange being a man is forgiven for his straying and is also not liable for the
consequences of his illicit relationships. On the other hand Margaret is punished for the same deeds, both by her husband and her body. She bears a child out of wed-lock, the sin of which makes her a murderer of her own new-born child and then commits suicide. Discussing this Gloria Wade Gayle’s in her essay titled “Black Southern Womanist: The Genius of Alice Walker” observes:

Margaret is punished for those very sins for which Grange is let lose. Her extra-marital relationship with Shipley leads her to delivering an illegitimate child for which Grange leaves her and goes away North. Grange is angry not only because she has been unfaithful but also because she has slept with the enemy (Wade-Gayle, Southern 304).

Racism is a ghost which obliquely and at times openly threatens the lives of the characters of Grange Copeland. Though Grange is hurt to see his wife and son succumb to the pressures of the share-cropping system, he is unable to relieve them of the pain because he himself feels powerless, as an individual, to fight the system. In the same manner Margaret is victimized under sexism on more than one level. Being a woman in a white dominated Patriarchal world, she has very few choices. Her husband exploits her because she is a woman and the white overseer exploits her because she is a poor-Black woman.

Margaret has no release from these double-oppressions, firstly because she is so conditioned about her lowly social status and secondly, because she has no concept of rights and freedom of every American citizen. Robbie J. Walker writes in his essay titled ‘Coping Strategies of the Women in Alice Walker’s Novel: Implications of Survival’, that Margaret was the perfect embodiment of Zora Neale Hurston’s mule image. To quote him:

Margaret belongs to Zora’s “Mule” concept. The essence of that concept is that black women have been socialized to believe that it
is their duty to bear stoically, the burdens of the world. Margaret fails to explore the available possibilities and, thereby, becomes inevitably entrapped, considering it her “lot in life” to accept the prevailing circumstances, no matter how demeaning (Walker J. 407).

Alice Walker advocates change in the lives of her characters and all those people who agree with her theory of Womanism. Change for the betterment of self as well as of the society is highly recommended, because yesterday’s mistakes can be rectified only if changes are brought about and incorporated in today’s world. Margaret also undergoes a change, change not for better but for worse. She undergoes a thorough transformation as one of her coping strategies. She begins to live a double life, on week days she is “sober and wifely but on week-ends she becomes a huntress for soft touches, etc....” (Walker J. 408). These contrasting shifts play havoc on her already fragile psyche. All that she desires is some happiness in her troubled existence. Robbie J Walker describes these shifts as:

Thus the shifts between submissiveness and wantonness, neither trait bearing significant potential for enhancing the quality of her life, form the pattern of her coping strategy and to alter the quality of her existence (Walker J. 408).

Though Margaret fails to get converted into a complete Womanist, she does take the first few steps towards liberation. The Womanist seeds are planted inside her soul but have not been nurtured and watered enough for them to grow into a huge sheltering tree. Margaret being the first generation Walker woman has yet not felt the healing touch of sisterhood. She is a lone fighter who is easily defeated by a system much more powerful than her. In the highly segregated racist South Margaret struggles against racism and sexism, but a lack of a supportive past and healing present forbids her from visualizing a
transformed future. Not much leverage is given to the character of Margaret, by Walker, as she presents her as a mere victim who gives up the fight much sooner than expected from a Womanist. One can sum up Margaret’s character with a quotation taken from Gloria Wade Gayle’s essay mentioned earlier:

Margaret is burdened as mother and worker, but she experiences her deepest pain as the wife of a man victimized in the pernicious system of share-cropping. She lives with Grange’s brooding silence, drunkenness and abuse. She makes no effort to clear a space in their lives for her needs and dreams. She cannot, for Margaret is a totally submissive woman, socialized in a sexiest culture to believe there is no way out of suffering (Wade-Gayle, *Southern* 304).

The second most important female character in *Grange Copeland* is Mem, the school-teacher wife of Brownfield, Margaret’s discarded son. In her suicide Margaret compromised not only her life, but also the lives of her son and her future daughter-in-law. Margaret was so pre-occupied with her role as a wife that she completely neglected her motherly duties. She preferred to die for a man who cared the least for her, but refused to live for the one to whom she had given birth. Being left alone in the world that had defeated his parents, Brownfield had to employ all the survival tactics that he could think of. Like any teenager in his position Brownfield falls prey to the sharks of the real harsh world.

For Brownfield Josie and her Dewdrop Inn, are initially the only refuges available. His foremost priority being shelter and protection from the jaws of racism, he happily accepts the comforts offered by Josie. Before Brownfield can realize, he gets converted into a sexual slave. Brownfield devalues himself so much that he doesn’t even feel the need to question his position at Dewdrop Inn, nor does he have any desire to free himself and go in search of anything better.
It is only when Mem walks into his life, that he sits back and evaluates his position, “There was no longer any joy in his conquest of the two women, for he had long since realized that he wasn’t using them, they were using him. He was a pawn is a game that Josie and Lorene enjoyed” (GC 47).

Brownfield and Mem get married with great hopes and dreams of everlasting happiness. They begin with a lot of love, with him promising to protect and care for his family. For Brownfield, his marriage to Mem was a dream come true. Since the times when Brownfield was a young boy he used to daydream about a prosperous future. In order to escape the bitter reality of his parents’ lives he was in the habit of conjuring up a fantasy land, where he would be a grown-up, highly successful rich man coming home to a picture-perfect family. Brownfield wishes to translate this dream into a reality, and even makes an effort towards it. But due to a severe educational handicap, there aren’t many job opportunities available for an unskilled Black man, back then in 1940s. He has to, though quite unwillingly, become a share-cropper for a white farm owner. Brownfield had promised himself and Mem that it won’t be long before he finds a decent job and saves his family from the pernicious system of share-cropping.

What Brownfield fails to realize is that there is no way out of present situation, precisely because he is ill-equipped to improve his lot by getting a better job. Brownfield had promised himself that he would not allow his life to be a mirror-image of his father’s, but that is exactly how his life turns out to be:

That was the year he first saw how his own life was becoming a repetition of his father’s. He could not save his children from slavery; they did not even belong to him. His indebtedness depressed him. Year after year the amount he owed continued to climb (GC 54).
Gradually the hopelessness set in and he succumbed to the pressures of poverty and racism. He tried to fight off the depression in Mem’s arms, but before he could wake up from his dream, fate had already decided his course in life. His indebtedness drove his children into the cotton field with poisonous arsenic to burn their childhood with. When he saw his eldest-born Daphne hand-mop his boss’s cotton his heart bled and his manhood died:

His heart had actually started to hurt him, like an ache in the bones, when he watched her swinging the mop, stumbling over the clumps of hard clay, the hot tin bucket full of arsenic making a bloodied scrape against her small short leg (GC 53).

This pain gave way to hatred and acute frustration. And like all Black men in his position, Brownfield had no other place to release his anger, but his wife and children. He became a brutal patriarch. Brownfield’s departure from a loving, caring person, to a heartless abusive scoundrel are a slow but steady process. Walker tries to empathize with him by showing his helplessness and reverse progress. When the reader sees Brownfield treating Mem inhumanly, the picture of the earlier soft and loving Brownfield is allowed to haunt one’s memory. So passing a judgment on Brownfield is not an easy task. Finding no obvious faults in his refined and loving wife, he invented accusations targeting her morality. Mem was too stunned by her husband’s transformation that she completely missed out on a timely reaction. She suffered in silence. Her failure to protest was understood by Brownfield as a confirmation of her guilt:

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, although she was no party to any of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. His rage could and did blame everything, everything on her (GC 55).
Brownfield is a man defeated by his circumstances. His drawback is that rather than putting up a fight he succumbs to the external forces. Instead of utilizing his wife's education and his capacity to work hard constructively he chooses to destroy even the love they shared. Like most frustrated souls Brownfield suspends his quest for happiness midway. It is only because he stops dreaming of a better tomorrow that he allows the devil in his heart to overpower him. Gloria Wade-Gayles in her essay titled "The Halo and Hardship: Black Women as Mothers and Sometimes as Wives", sympathizes with Brownfield calling him a tragic figure:

He is a tragic figure whose emasculation at the hands of a cruel system robs him of his dreams, vitiates his humanity, and leaves in soul a taste of bitter bile. Walker's sympathy for Brownfield is genuine and deep.... His destruction as a man becomes in time, Mem's suffering as a woman (Wade-Gayles, *Crystal* 106).

Walker presents Brownfield's degradation as a gradual and heroic process. He is an ideal tragic hero, whose hamartia is his lack of vision and an easy acceptance of failure. Walker also tries to absolve him to some extent of the sins that he has committed by highlighting the fact that he is a man more sinned against than sinning. His less than perfect upbringing, his dark family history with absolutely no parental guidance makes him into the man that he is. He doesn't know what it is to be a real man and so when he fails to be one, it is understandable. There are no ideals or role models in his life. The commendable thing about Brownfield is that though he has never received parental love for himself, he is able to love his child wholeheartedly at least initially.

If Brownfield had been able to consciously own-up his responsibilities and if he would have stood-up for himself and his family, their lives would have been much different, much better. Mem was the one who paid for Brownfield's
transgressions. Mem’s education, the defining factor of her character, makes it very difficult for the readers to digest her silence in the face of brutality. Unlike her mother-in-law, Mem was economically independent and could have walked out on Brownfield. But may be the desire to hold on to the only family that she ever knew, stopped her from deserting her husband. Mem sacrificed her job in order to satisfy her husband’s towering male ego. She did so in the hope that once he felt comfortable being the man of the house, he would come around and love them as earlier. But this proved to be nothing more than a mirage. She played all her cards to transform Brownfield but failed miserably. For nine long years Mem allowed Brownfield to be the deciding force in their family, and as a result of which they suffered relentless misery. Walker writes about Mem “whose decision to let him be man of the house for nine years had cost her and him nine years of unrelenting misery” (GC 86).

Mem’s moral strength and courage helped her overcome the initial disbelief and inaction. She consciously decided to face her adversary and not succumb to the pressures of despair and hopelessness. Mem fought not for herself but for her children. Her disbelief got converted into stupor and then to hatred. This hatred fuelled her desire to protect her children from their brutal father. Brownfield attempted with all his might to break her spirit, but she stood her ground and survived. Writing about Brownfield’s reaction to her metamorphosis Walker discloses his discomfort:

He was annoyed when she despised him because out of her hatred she fought back, with words, never with blows, and always for the children. But coming from her, even words disrupted the harmony of despair in which they lived (GC 59).
Once Mem accepted the reality of her life she readied herself to fight back. The first priority that she set up for herself was to get a well-paying job and move her family out of the dilapidated ruins of her husband’s boss Mr. Jlo, into a real home. Mem refused to bow down any further at her husband’s altar, because even after absolute submission to him, he proved to be incapable of appreciating her generosity. His insults specifically targeted at her superiority, shook her confidence in her abilities. But once she understood her husband’s contempt for her, she could handle it better. After nine long years with him Mem was able to scrutinize her husband thoroughly. She identified his weaknesses and also his weak moments.

She very calculatively made her move, first got a job and a house and then confronted Brownfield in his drunken state’s hangover with a gun pointed at his groin. Mem challenged the only symbol of his manhood and threatened him into accepting all her conditions of good behavior once they moved into their new abode in the town. This resounding victory of Mem’s strong actions in contrast to all the nonsensical things her husband had till now indulged in, proved Mem’s capability and entrepreneurship. If she decided to do something she would definitely achieve it. Here we see Mem adhering to the Womanist quality of being “traditionally capable”. Gloria Wade Gayles throws some more light on the complex make up of Mem’s character as follows:

For most of the novel, we feel that she cannot act because she does not believe or understand what is happening to her. Eventually she becomes so desperate that she must believe in, fight for something. The goal she puts all her energy into, as do many women, is a house, a house that can become a home, because it is stable and comfortable and commands respect (Wade-Gayles, Southern 189).

Her only problem now was that she was too trusting. When she saw a changed Brownfield, she believed that the reformation would last for ever and
that the better life had brought about a complete change of heart in him. Her inability to see through Brownfield’s act proves to be her biggest folly. Brownfield was waiting for the right time to make his move. He got his opportunity by calculatively using Mem’s own female body against her. After two miscarriages Mem is too weak to hold on to her job. As a result she is unable to pay the rent and Brownfield slyly refuses to pay for Mem’s house.

Brownfield’s hatred for his wife’s success forbade him from enjoying the comfort of their new life. His male ego stopped him from accepting the fact that what he as a man had failed to do, Mem though being a woman had accomplished. He silently promised to sabotage Mem’s efforts. Mem helplessly watched as her dream fell to pieces right in front of her eyes. Mem was further weakened because of a lack of support from any quarters. She is absolutely alone in her fight against racism in the outside world and sexism within the confines of her home.

Mem was a woman with almost no family to run to. Her mother had died giving birth to her, her father being a straying married man, conveniently disowned his bastard child, and her grandparents did not forgive her for her mother’s sins. Josie, her mother’s sister was the closest relative she ever had. But Josie despised her for luring away Brownfield from her. So no family support of any kind was ever available to Mem. What she lacked was a Womanist orientation and upbringing. She was not fed on stories of a distant but glorious homeland. She was not nurtured by art and artifacts which would re-affirm her faith in herself. Nor did she feel that healing power of the Black church in her bleak life. To quote Gloria Wade Gayles:

Loneliness is a dominant feature of Walker’s portrait of Mem, for she is a woman without a past, without fond memories, without
life-giving myths, without self-reinforcing stories related by a grandmother, with ties to a warmly hysterical black church that beckons the disconsolate to its bosom, and without neighbours who give advice and lend support (Wade-Gayles, *Crystal* 110).

Loneliness was the predicament of most of the Black women growing up in the first half of the 20th century. The Great Migration from the Southern States of America to the Northern States had rendered them lonely. They had to support their families, establish themselves in the class and race infected Northern States of America. Mem’s situation is peculiar, but even otherwise Black women missed the closeness and family feeling that they had witnessed back at the plantation, among the Black families residing there. But once they were out of these plantations they had to make an effort to establish new relations and sisterhood amongst them.

Both Margaret and Mem suffered because of the missing support system in their lives. If Margaret would have sustained and survived, then, she would have been there for Mem. She would have passed on some readymade solution to the younger woman, who would have been guided by her mother-in-laws experiences and survival tactics. If the first-generation woman had taken care of herself, the second-generation one would have succeeded in not just trying to survive but “surviving whole”. Both these women failed even to survive.

The only survivor of the first two generations, who preaches “wholeness”, is Grange Copeland, the character whose name features in the title of Walker’s first novel. Surprisingly in her first work of fiction Walker creates a male character initiating into Womanism. But we can guess that in her very first work she wanted the Black men to sit up and listen to her. In an interview taken by John O’Brien, Walker offers an explanation, “In *The Third Life of Grange*...
Copeland, ostensibly about a man and his son, it is the women and how they are treated that colors everything” (O’Brien 250-1).

Like all her initial Womanist protagonists Grange’s initiation into Womanism is not a smooth transition. He does not change overnight into a loving grandfather. His metamorphosis is a long and mostly a painful process. He actually has to undergo the labour-pain of re-birth. The internal realization comes only after a profound retrospection and introspection. Grange’s conversion is spiritual in nature.

In his youth Grange was like any other Black man growing up during the times of Reconstruction. The emancipation gifted to them after the Civil War had failed to loosen the strong hold of racism in the American society. They were still the lowest, in every aspect of life. The American economy did not open its arms completely for the participation and benefits of the Black people. The former slaves and their children got converted into minimum wage labourers. The worst was the share-cropping system of the Southern Plantations.

Grange Copeland’s life graph saw many rises and falls. Initially he appeared to be a happy man, full of life and dreams. But gradually this young man came face to face with his Black reality and awakens to hopelessness. His inability to come to terms with the truth distanced him from his wife and son. He slowly refused to acknowledge their presence, in an attempt to dodge his responsibility towards them. Grange found an easy escape in wine and women. Neglecting his family appeared to be an easier option than owning them up.

His escape mechanism began working long before he actually ran away to the North. Before undertaking a Marathon run to North, every Saturday he would do a 100 meters to the arms of Josie, the village prostitute. He stopped
interacting with his family completely. He became completely insensitive to the feelings and needs of Margaret and Brownfield. As mentioned earlier the narration of Part I happens through Brownfield’s understanding of the various events, therefore the failure of Grange as a father becomes more pronounced and hard-hitting. The most prominent characteristic of his father which Brownfield noticed at the tender age of six is his father’s silence. He was unable to decipher the reasons behind Grange’s indifference. Brownfield noticed one more very peculiar thing about his father, which was his metamorphosis into a stone while working in the farm. First he thought that the big grey truck which came there everyday intimidated his father and converted him into a stone. But as he looked closer he realized with the first racial shock that it was not the truck but the man driving it who had this tremendous impact on Grange. The whiteness of this man sunk deep into the heart of young Brownfield, especially the chill that it brought over his father. Brownfield observed that his father:

Had no smiles about him at all. He merely froze; his movements when he had to move to place sacks on the truck were rigid as a machine’s .... He realized it was the man who drove the truck who caused his father to don a mask that was more impenetrable than his usual silence.... Thinking this discovery was the key to his father’s icy withdrawal from the man, Brownfield acquired a cold nervousness around him of his own (GC 09).

Without saying a single word Grange passed his own racial tension onto his son. His silence reinforced rather than dissipating it. No doubt about it, race and caste issues are too over-powering for an individual to handle single-handedly. But again it is for an individual to decide the extent to which the impact of these issues should be allowed to penetrate one’s psyche. No matter what one does whatever is outside one’s purview, is beyond one’s control, whereas whatever is within can be worked upon and motivated to achieve positive results.
But before this strength was acquired Grange had to undergo various stages of internal devaluations. At one point out of absolute frustrations he cursed Brownfield saying, “I ought to throw you down the goddam well” (GC 10). It was not out of hatred that he uttered this threat, but out of love and self-hatred that he was directing at himself through his son. He felt too powerless to protest against the oppressions and so he shrugs off his responsibility and accepted the apparently unchangeable reality. Theodore O. Mason Jr., shows in his essay titled “Alice Walker’s Politics in The Third Life of Grange Copeland: The Dynamics of Enclosure”, how Grange’s life becomes miserable because of his attitude of comparison with other people’s lives, his discomfort feeds on others’ comforts:

Grange’s sole response to this complete deprivation can only be “the fatal shrug”. Revealing here is Walker’s use of absence as a profound signifier. Literally, there is nothing to Grange’s life, so that he may recognize himself and his family merely as experiencing the inversion of what other people (mostly white) have. His life is so debilitating and lacking of substance that it propels him beyond speech for its expression (Mason 128).

When he could no longer handle the pressures of his life at home, he abandoned his family and escaped to the promised land of North America. Once he got there he was welcomed by the same shock that awaited all the Blacks who traded the hardships of the Southern States for the comforts of the North. The Black man’s invisibility in the North awakened his sleeping conscience, and his involvement in a White pregnant woman’s death shook him up to his core. The hatred that he saw in the eyes of the dying woman made him realize his own importance, which he was now sure, would never be of any account in the White Black-hating world.
After being abused and humiliated by almost all and one, repentance overpowered Grange’s all other feelings. Grange looked at the difficulties as a punishment for all the crimes he had committed against his loved ones. He thus decided to come back and make amends for his neglect. This was the second step on his ladder of evolution. The first one was taken when he began to accept his Black Identity. Grange’s decision to change for the better qualifies him as a Womanist character. His acceptance of the past and his willingness to acknowledge his responsibility for the past mistakes and the future actions, also make him a Womanist character.

Before he could allow the tree of Womanism to bloom in his heart, he has to melt the block of ice sitting heavily on his heart. The ice of indifference and the stony demeanour which overpowered him whenever he was in the presence of a White person had to disappear before he could look into the eyes of a white person and be himself. He realizes that he had to feel something for his oppressors, even hatred would do. He rekindled his dead emotions by forcing himself to express hatred against the hatred of the Whites. After the death of the White woman, who refused to be helped by a Black man and rather preferred to die. Grange tried to convince himself regarding his failure to save the woman’s life, by putting the entire blame on the woman’s attitude towards him. In fact he tried to awaken the feelings of murder of his enemies, in order to regain some self-respect:

He believed that, against his will he had stumbled on the necessary act that black men must commit to regain, or to manufacture their manhood, their self respect. They must kill their oppressors (GC 153).
The killing that is referred to is more metaphorical one, than literal. Grange felt the need to kill the enemy to survive in the first place. By this killing, he was trying to negate the importance and the central position accorded to the whites in the lives of the Blacks. He understood that in order to render the opposition powerless, they as a whole community must stop acknowledging the Whites fictitious power. While attending a Black church Grange saw through the entire process of colonization of the Black people using the White man's *Bible*, having a White man as God. He refused to accept these demeaning preaching which justified the separation of Black sheep from the White ones. He felt the need to connect with something more profound, more real yet more sublime than the religion preached in the church. During one such church meeting he screamed out saying:

> You want to keep on teaching your children Christian stuff from a white-headed Christ you go right on – but *me*, an’ later on *you* – is goin’ to have to switch to something new! And since hatred is what’s got to be growing inside you that’s exactly what has to come out, and in the right direction this time (GC 155).

The last line of the above quotation reflects the change in Grange's outlook. Till the time he left home he was directing his hatred at the non-deserving people – his wife and son – instead of properly channelising it. Now he knew who should be at the receiving end of his hatred. Grange's new-found philosophy for survival involved getting rid of all the hatred that has been getting accumulated for a long time. The inner system needed to be cleansed of all the pent-up emotions before love could flow in and out as freely as air.

Thus, begins Grange's Womanist sojourn towards self-affirmation. The first station on this journey happens to be his son's family. Helping this family acquires some happiness and dignity, becomes his life's mission. Grange takes
up the responsibility for letting his son down by abandoning him at a tender age, and thus, driving him to decay and destruction. He blames himself for the miserable state of his son’s family and so tries as hard as possible to lighten their load. He comes like Santa Claus carrying fruits and goodies for the children, for whom these had only been once-a-year Christmas gifts. Walker writes, “Grange felt guilty about his son’s condition and assuaged his guilt by giving food and money to Brownfield’s family” (GC 70).

Grange tries to improve the quality of Mem, his daughter-in-law’s life as well, but before he could do something concrete tragedy strikes the family. After Mem’s death and Brownfield’s imprisonment, the three girls become orphans. Daphne and Ornette are taken in by their mother’s hitherto absent father and Ruth walks into Grange’s abode. The coming of Ruth proves to be chance of Grange’s ultimate redemption. Grange introduces Ruth to a life of happiness and comfort, which she had never known before. Grange nurtures Ruth’s Womanist spirit by concentrating all his energies on sustaining her moral, physical, psychological and spiritual growth in harmony with her Womanist future. He provides a curious peek into the spirited part of their ancestors. In a true Grandmotherly fashion Grange indulges in story-telling, the art that survived the onslaught of slavery:

Grange and Ruth and Josie would sit around peeling oranges and shredding coconut until two o’ clock in the morning. Of course, the whole business could have been finished in an hour, but Grange would stop ten or fifteen times during the process to tell a story, or the truth about something or somebody (GC 128).

Such story-telling sessions have always been an important segment of oral traditions. They serve the purpose of transmission of culture, and nurture the creativity without much investment. Walker emphasizes the need to pass on
this confidence-building tradition, from one generation to another, especially among the marginals, because the need to feel secure and supported is greater amongst the deprived sections of the society.

Compared to his “first life” Grange is so completely changed in his “third life” that it becomes difficult to draw a parallel between Grange, the indifferent and hateful father, and Grange once again, but a loving and caring grandfather. His conversion is more of an internal affair than an external one and so he becomes sensitive enough to understand the urgent need to heal Ruth’s wound and provide her with a fertile environment which allows her to grow “whole” and strengthens her to face the adversities of racism and sexism. It never bothered Grange that his son consistently saw him drunk and out-of-control, but it did bother him when it was Ruth who would be affected by his drinking. “After all, she was only a little thing and didn’t understand, and might get the wrong idea!” (GC 136).

Grange takes up the task of informing Ruth about everything that is to be known. Lessons are imparted in geography, history both general and Black, politics, etc. Anthropology and sociology were given equal importance with science:

.... there are casual but emphatic talks about Indians, and yellow people who lived in houses with roofs like upside-down umbrellas.... She listened to sketches of places with foreign names, Paris, London, New York..., there were days devoted to talk about big bombs, the forced slavery of her ancestors, the rapid demise of the red man; and the natural predatory tendencies of the whites, the people who had caused many horror (GC 137-8).
In his eagerness to protect Ruth against the ills pervading the White dominated world, he tries to inculcate hatred in the heart of young Ruth for the Whites, by telling her horror-stories about their behaviour. But Ruth who has not had a first-hand experience of the white people doesn’t entirely believe her Grandfather; in fact she is always eager to make friends with the white neighbours living nearby. But as she grows up and matures through her own experiences, she finds some truth in Grange’s caution.

Grange considers the Whites to be the biggest reason for the Black people’s down-troddenness, but this belief soon undergoes a sea change. One of the consequences of the change that had visited him in his third life was that earlier he was eager to put the blame on everybody else but himself. Now, he had come upon the understanding that unless and until an individual takes up the responsibility of his/her life, there is going to be no-one on whom he/she can rely. The Blacks, he had now realized, suffered because they accepted the Whites as the supreme authority, powerful enough to destroy whosoever they like. It was the Blacks who had made the Whites as powerful as Gods. Walker is trying to caution the Black people against the short-cuts that most of them were taking, as it was the easiest way to shun responsibilities for their own actions. There is no scope of introspection if there is no sense of responsibility. And so there can be no positive change for the better. Grange tries to open up Brownfield for new things in life, but first he needs to accept his mistakes and change himself:

By George, I know the danger of putting all the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of your life.... White folks can corrupt you even when you done held up before. ‘Cause when they got you thinking that they’re to blame for everything they have you thinking they’re some kind of gods! You can’t do nothing wrong without them being behind it.... Nobody’s as
powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls, don’t we? (GC 207).

Grange desperately pleads to his son to mend his ways and begin life anew. But his failures in life have made Brownfield very stubborn and unrelenting to any warning coming from his father. The hatred that he feels for Grange also stops him from accepting his advice. Just as he himself has identified his sins and is paying for them, Grange wants his son to learn a lesson for his life and take an about turn. In almost a final appeal to Brownfield Grange cries out, “We, guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it” (GC 209).

But, by the time Grange arrives upon the scene of his son’s family it is already too late. Brownfield has gone beyond redemption. And after the tragic turn of events now he only had Ruth to work his miracle upon. Steadily Grange trains Ruth to be self-reliant and independent in almost every aspect including banking and driving. He offers the best of everything to Ruth and tries his best for an overall development of his orphaned grand-child. He protects her from pain and yet makes her resilient enough to face any adversity she might encounter, after Grange is no more there for her. In a true Womanist spirit Grange wants Ruth to not merely survive but to “survive whole”. “Survival was not everything. He had survived. But to survive whole was what he wanted for Ruth” (GC 214).

Not only does Grange become a Womanist in his third life but also nurtures Ruth’s Womanist spirit. He admires her intelligence and her willfulness. He appreciates her need to question almost everything that he tells her. Even at quite a young age Ruth reveals a skeptic attitude. She interprets the life
according to her own understanding and experiences and refutes her grandfather whenever she disagrees with him. She is a little girl who wants to know more than is good for her to comprehend. Barbara Christian acknowledges Grange’s efforts to be an ideal Black American Grandfather:

Grange nurtures Ruth’s womanist attitude toward life. Ruth asks questions, demands answers, and speaks with her own voice, Grange says of Ruth, “I never in my life seen a more womanist girl” (Christian, Women 307).

The most beautiful contrast between the grandfather and granddaughter is the primary attitude with which both of them want to scrutinize the world. The older person wants to control his surrounding through hate-generating fences, whereas the younger Copeland wants to reach out over the fence to the outside world, holding her hand out in friendship. Barbara Christian writes in her essay “Novels for Everyday Use: The Novels of Alice Walker”, that Grange wants her to discard the outsiders and save her from cruelty whereas she wants to experience love and become a complete person, “Grange wants his granddaughter to understand the world’s cruelty so she might survive and she, at her young age, wants to know love so she can be whole” (Christian, Women 201).

Grange succeeds in making Ruth a woman of her own mind. She does not believe or do exactly as she is told to do. Ruth, one day while returning from school confronts her father Brownfield, who had recently been released from prison. Ruth is able to rebuke him very strongly by refuting his claim that Grange had poisoned her against him. “I told you, you don’t know me. If you did you’d know I’m not just a pitcher to be filled by someone else. I have a mind, I have a memory” (GC 219).
Ruth, though has a very tough beginning, she grows up to be a woman full of dreams of a better tomorrow. With the nurturance of her grandfather Ruth is able to visualize a free and comfortable tomorrow. Grange also makes her financially very sound, the money that he saves, he mentions, is specifically to be used for her further education. He knows the handicap of being under educated, and so he wants Ruth to fully equip herself. Barbara Christian offers an explanation thus:

He wants her to be free of the curse of the generations that claimed Margaret and Mem, and perhaps women before them. In a word, he wants her to be “responsible. In charge Serious”.... At the end.... [George] dies so that Ruth might live whole in the light of her own suns (Christian, *Women* 307).

Thus, we see that Alice Walker’s first work of fiction lays down the base of her later Womanist edifice. Here the women are in their infancy as far as their Womanist attitude towards life is concerned. Though Margaret and Mem are not overtly Womanist, they do have a Womanist heart. If they were supported by their family and friends they could have become the pioneers of Womanist literature. But we have to agree that both these women have shown quite a strong resilience against their oppressors. They have not been passive receivers only. Though ultimately they did shrink in the presence of the strong male Gods. They did put a commendable resistance.

Grange Copeland is the only character who can be called Womanist in this saga of three generations. Ruth comes with a promise of a more Womanist future. Grange’s conversion into Womanism serves quite a few purposes, it proves Walker’s claim of Womanism being all-inclusive, it also shows how after a life full of defeat and decay, one can if one desires bring a positive
change in life. Through Womanism Walker supplies positive reinforcement in the struggle against racism, sexism and classism.

The end of the novel is not actually the end but a beginning for the new generation of Black people coming of age around 1960’s. When Grange feels protective not only for Ruth but also for the young Civil Rights Workers, he reveals his open-heartedness and the increase in the boundary of his family. Even in the face of death and self-annihilation Walker preaches love, commitment, positive change and survival whole. The novel begins in misery but end in hope. The historical background in which the novel ends is carried forward onto the next one. Ruth becomes Meridian and thus begins the second phase of Womanist journey envisioned by Walker. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* proves to be the right initiation for both Alice Walker and her creation into the Womanist realm, a truly well-defining first step.

*Meridian*

*Meridian* is Alice Walker’s second novel published in 1976. *Meridian* begins where *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* ends. Meridian’s character is a continuation of Ruth, the first properly identified female Womanist character of Walker’s fictional world. Walker’s first novel was symbolically strewn with gestation and labour images throughout its protagonist’s struggle towards Womanism. The early female characters therein were unable to nurture their Womanist spirit, firstly because of the hostile environment that they lived in and secondly because they were deprived of the most essential ingredient of Womanism, that is sisterhood. They were not cocooned by love and respect from anywhere and so they shriveled and died.
Out of the ruins of the first novel emerges a new woman. A woman, who is in some ways similar to her predecessors, and in some ways much more advanced and evolved than they were. *Meridian* is a story about a young girl who embarks upon a journey to self-discovery. She is unable to conform to the prevalent definition of a woman available to her in her immediate environment. She cannot fit into the mould designed for her and all women like her, by the society. Where everybody else finds meaning she finds absurdity. Meridian has to look for new meanings to sustain her in order to survive especially survive whole. Non-conformity takes a heavy toll on her mind and body.

Meridian like Ruth grows up during the times of the most defining Black Freedom movements, the Civil Rights movement. She finds her calling in the service of the community. Even after she joins the Movement she cannot completely accept the ideals of the Revolution. Not being able to fit into any of the pre-determined roles for her is her predicament. Unlike her fellow revolutionaries she is unable to pledge to kill for the revolution, and therefore is termed a defector. But when all her fellow comrades compromise the ideals of their much revered revolution, she is the one who unwaveringly adheres to them and carries the revolution to those obscure places in rural America which have been deprived of the benefits of the freedom struggle. She continues to fight for the Black people when everybody else moves on with their lives for better and more comfortable living. She is the one who keeps the Revolution thriving even after the popular leaders are long dead and gone. Through Meridian Walker tries to create and define the New Black Woman.

If *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* emphasized the Womanist insistence on change and responsibility, *Meridian* concentrates on the Womanist qualities of audacity, outrageousness, willfulness, and the need to preserve and utilize the traditional knowledge passed on by the generations of
Black women. Meridian’s fight begins by her rejecting the stereotypical image of Black motherhood, which has confined the Black women to a mere bodily existence. An extra supplement of motherly love has been poured upon the Black women, since the times of slavery, because their motherhood was essential in sustaining the white plantation owner’s households.

Just as Virginia Woolf advocates the killing of the image of “the angel in the house” which resides in every woman’s heart, Walker identifies the need to discard the all-benevolent, all loving, born-mother image of the Black women. Like all social conditioning this motherhood image has penetrated so deeply into the Black women’s psyche, that they find themselves ill-equipped enough to understand some other inclination. Even if their social confinement converts them into hysterical and cynical mothers, they cannot reject motherhood and embrace some other more fulfilling role. Walker insists that unless and until the repressive past and its stereotyping are rectified the Black women’s spirit cannot grow whole. Through *Meridian* Walker seeks acknowledgement of the humanity of Black women, a re-evaluation of their importance in the society as a human being not merely a machine to produce and nurture children.

The protagonist of the novel *Meridian* seems to be involved in a constant search for something that even she cannot identify. She does not know contentment and so is always on the edge of her seat. She unconsciously refuses to get actively involved in anything that goes on around her. She goes to the Church but does not believe in its divinity, she has sex but stays passive even in the middle of the act. She gets married, has a child but her heart is never into any of these happenings. Meridian feels a kind of distance from almost everybody and everything. She doesn’t feel alive at any of these moments. She wants to be somewhere else, but where she has no idea. She seems to be sleep-walking throughout her initial years.
Though apparently Meridian seems to be lost and dis-oriented, it is she who succeeds in entangling herself from the confines of conventions. She is the one who can see through the farce of happiness, and decides against flowing with the stream. She reveals remarkable independence of thinking, and doesn’t budge even when pressurized from all corners of the society. She is a woman of action not of words. Meridian is quiet externally because there is a lot of internal dialogue going on inside her. Throughout the novel Meridian is undergoing a tough labour of self-birth. Meridian ultimately gives birth to a new Womanist, one who was lying dormant for long. Gloria Wade Gayles describes Meridian as, “as a black woman [who] gives birth to self” (Wade-Gayles Southern 312).

All that Meridian does in her life can be defined by just a single term “outrageous”. The irony in Meridian is that the protagonist does not have to measure up to the standards of an outside alien world, but has to fight the ghost of an internal moral system. A system which she discovers is quite unnatural as it has been designed and reinforced by the dominant culture. Unlike Margaret and Mem, Meridian does have the comfort of a family, an upright mother and a socially conscious father. Her problem, however, is slightly different. She has to deal with a frigid mother who never wanted to have any children, but did it just because she was forced into a marriage and motherhood by the society.

Mrs. Hill, Meridian’s mother is the embodiment of all those Black women who have killed their real selves in order to confirm with the society’s standards of womanhood. When they mutilate their desires so ruthlessly, a psychological back-lash is inevitable in some unwarranted form. In the case of Mrs. Hill she is never able to fully love her children, whom she blames for taking away her life. She had to give up her job as a school teacher, which she cherished a lot, only because marriage and subsequent motherhood robbed her
of any extra time that she could have. She was a highly independent woman before her marriage, who shunned marital responsibilities from the bottom of her heart. Quite early in her life Meridian is able to read through her mother’s indifference towards her and her siblings:

Her mother was not a woman who should have had children. She was capable of thought and growth and action only if unfettered by the needs of dependents, or the demands, requirements, of a husband (MD 39).

Mrs. Hill could never handle the pressures of marital life; in fact she was not mentally prepared for it. She was happy being a single person, never wanted to get married but was finally pushed into marriage by other women who envied her independence but pitied her for being alone. She agreed to marry her colleague precisely because the mystery of married life enthralled her into the unknown. She was an independent spirit who should have been left alone but is sucked into the black-hole of marriage and motherhood.

Alice Walker seems to be voicing one of the biggest concerns troubling Black women post-Slavery. Here the Black experience in White America takes a back-seat. Walker moves on from racial oppression to sexual oppression of Black women by their own men. In Mrs. Hill Walker draws a portrait of a Black woman, who cannot identify with the limited roles available to her in Patriarchy. Slavery for most of the communities of the world is a by-gone phase; democratic nations have laws against any form of slavery. But women, everywhere, in all communities are enslaved by the institutionalized bondage of marriage, even in today’s liberated world. Now at least women in most of the developed and developing countries have started acquiring some freedom and independence.
Yet we are aware of many women even in these countries who suffer the atrocities of an unfulfilling marriage. One may wonder, as to why if marriage is so bad then do women still get involved in it. The answer could probably be that, it is a honey-coated, gift wrapped package-deal, which once accepted can hardly be rejected. Alice Walker is specifically putting forward the case of the Black women in America. These women, after tasting the flavour of freedom with the end of slavery, found themselves entrapped in another closer form of bondage. Their spirits began to revolt, but they could not vocally express their displeasure, as yet. All around them their body and its power to procreate was so highly praised, that they could not understand the claustrophobic feeling that some of them had towards motherhood. The sacrifice that goes along with being a woman in patriarchy kills all the charm and pleasure, which these relationships deliver. Walker presents the other side of the over-praised women’s role as mothers. She demolishes the myth of motherhood. It is a cry against the social conditioning which leaves no options for individual women who have no inclination towards marriage and motherhood. Walker sympathetically describes Mrs. Hill as a woman who:

.... could never forgive her community, her family, his family, the whole world, for not warning her against children.... Her frail independence gave way to the pressures of motherhood and she learned – much to her horror and amazement – that she was not even allowed to be resentful that she was “caught”. That her personal life was over. There was no one she could cry out to and say “It’s not fair” (MD 40).

The worst fallout of Mrs. Hill’s anger against the society is her refusal to allow her inherent creativity to flower. Mrs. Hill’s conscious decision to suppress her creativity can be read as an attempt to never allow her wounds to heal. The healing power of creativity would have allowed her to forgive and
forget the injustice rendered onto her. Her weakness is that she does not let go and move on. She constantly wants to be reminded of her pain. It is her way to fight against the world’s insensitivity. What she forgets in the process is that she is the one who is getting affected the most. The hatred that she preserves for the world destroys her before it goes out. She dies from within, just because of her own stubbornness. She viciously deprives her family of any comfort that a woman’s presence would bring. All her day-to-day activities are colored with her disgust:

She never learned to cook well, she never learned to braid hair prettily or to be in any other way creative in her home. She could have done so, if she had wanted to. Creativity was in her, but it was refused expression. It was all deliberate. A war against those to whom she could not express her anger to shout, “It’s not fair!” (MD 41).

Quite early in her childhood Meridian’s sensitivity awakens her to her mother’s mysterious hatred for her children. She cannot fathom what they had done to incite her mother’s wrath. She used to suffer from inexplicable guilt, which hampered her normal growth. When she tried to discuss her discomfort with her mother, Mrs. Hill’s response was an ambiguous question, “Have you stolen anything” (MD 41). No answers are given, only new mysteries are generated. Throughout her early years till her college days Meridian is unable to relieve herself of this guilt. Her body weakens and her spirit begins to wither.

Her release comes in the form of Miss Winter her music teacher at Saxon college. Meridian cried for help at home, but all that she received from her mother was a stoic silence. Her mother deliberately blinded herself to her daughter’s needs, “She refused help and support to Meridian, never to understand. But all along she understood perfectly” (MD 41). Due to her
mother’s reluctance to help, Meridian desperately needed outside help to exhume her of all the “unreal” charges levied upon her. Once when she was sick and almost nearing her death Miss Winter came to her rescue and uttered the words of forgiveness in her pained ears, and thus absolves her:

“Mama, I love you. Let me go”, she whispered, licking the salt from her mother’s black arms. Instinctively, as if Meridian were her own child, Miss Winter answered, close to her ear on the pillow. “I forgive you” (MD 123).

Miss Winter is not only her teacher, she is her predecessor too. Both Meridian and Miss Winter belong to the same small town and both had managed to reach the prestigious Saxon college. Not only does Miss Winter liberate Meridian from her pain, but does it in a real motherly manner. She even appreciates her strengths. Once on an earlier occasion Miss Winter had visited her old high school’s oratorical competition, where Meridian was reciting a speech on the greatness of American constitution and the American Way of Life. Right in the middle of her recital Meridian stumbled and went silent. This happened, according to Meridian’s explanation to her mother, because for the first time she had really listened to what she was speaking and realized that she did not believe in it. Mrs. Hill does not buy her story, but instead gives her a lecture on how to trust God and do your duty with your head held high.

Miss Winter has been overhearing the discussion between the mother and the daughter, and perfectly understands Meridian’s dilemma:

Miss Winter had pushed back the cuff of her gray mink coat and put a perfumed arm around Meridian’s shoulders. She told her not to worry about the speech. “It’s the same one they made me learn when I was here.” She told her, “and it’s no more true now than it was then” (MD 120).
Miss Winter is the first sensitive senior woman that Meridian encounters. Though she is not completely evolved as a Womanist, Miss Winter clearly seems to be on the right track. She upholds and displays the ideals of community mothering. She shows the capacity to love all children irrespective of their parentage. Missy Dehn Kubitchek in her essay titled “Every Mother a Daughter”, brings out the importance of Miss Winter in Meridian’s life as under:

Whereas Miss Winter is able to relieve Meridian of the guilt which snubs her from allowing her spirit to grow. Miss Winter appreciates when Meridian at a very young age is able to see through the falsity of the high school speech’s political content during her recitation (Kubitchek 162).

Kubitchek goes on to discuss a very interesting aspect of Black Motherhood. While comparing Meridian’s literal and metaphorical mothers, she examines this Her-storical identity of Black women. Meridian’s mother though tries to conform to the matriarchal history of sacrifice and servitude, even when she is not attracted to the institution of motherhood itself and even when she hates her children, she fails miserably. Whereas Miss Winter is able to mother a sick child and save her from a certain death even when the child is someone else’s. Mrs. Hill has willingly surrendered all her healing powers, because of her self-inflicted hatred. On the other hand Miss Winter had retained her miraculous powers to heal, the powers which had not been drained out by an unwanted marriage and children thereon. Kubitchek points out the irony Miss Winter’s single status by stating, “.... only the childless woman can mother effectively because only she is allowed to preserve sufficient energy to preserve integrity” (Kubitchek 112).
Meridian enters puberty without any guidance and instructions from her mother. Meridian is also a woman who should have stayed away from the vicious cycle of marriage and motherhood, but she too like her mother realizes this too late. Failing to know the limitations of her body, Meridian is pushed into motherhood and marriage. She had gotten involved with her husband only as a refuge from the gaze of other men who left her alone when she got the label of so-and-so’s girl. She did not enjoy sex but did it only because her lover wanted it. “And so, while not enjoying it at all, she had had sex as often as her lover wanted it, sometimes every single night” (MD 53).

Meridian is not intrigued by the thought of having a beautiful female body. Margaret and Mem shrank in the presence of the Male God; Meridian shrinks not only because of a Male God’s presence but also because of a negative female presence. Meridian’s mother had deliberately deprived her children of all the pleasure of feeling alive. In fact she instills hatred in them for being alive, for their existence itself. Grange and Brownfield very ruthlessly wiped out the lives of their women, whereas Mrs. Hill starched and ironed out her children’s spirit:

In the ironing of her children’s clothes she expended all her energy. She might have put into openly loving them. Her children were spotless wherever they went. In their stiff, almost inflexible garments, they were enclosed in the starch of her anger and had to keep their distance to avoid providing the soggy wrinkles of contact that would cause her distress (MD 73).

Mrs Hill’s anger would have literally stifled and killed Meridian, had there not been Miss Winter. Meridian is not healed even after her marriage to Eddie, who refuses to grow up to be a man and take care of his family. He has no interest in the specific love-needs of his wife. He knows only sex but has no idea about love. After marriage and the birth of their child, he notices Meridian’s lack of
interest in sex, he accuses her of having gone cold, but what he refuses to admit is that even before marriage Meridian had hardly shown any interest in sex. Their marriage goes its pre-destined way, they break off. Meridian is very upset that nobody around her warned her about men:

Later on she would frown even more when she realized that her mother, father, aunts, friends, passers-by – not to mention her laughing sisters – had told her nothing about what to expect from men, from sex (MD 53).

Meridian’s home environment had blunted her to any form of love. And therefore even after becoming a wife and a mother she is unable to soften her feelings for her kith and kin. The ice is broken only when Meridian volunteers as a Civil Rights activist. She is unable to love her immediate family, but is capable of feeling compassion for a larger group fighting for the human rights of the Blacks in America. All her bottled up emotions begin to overflow soon after she starts working in the Movement:

At first she had burst into tears whenever something went wrong or someone spoke unkindly or even sometimes if they spoke, price. But now she was always in a state of constant tears, so that she could do whatever she was doing – canvassing, talking at rallies, tying her sneakers, laughing – white tears rolled slowly and ceaselessly down her cheeks (MD 80).

These flowing tears serve a very useful purpose of purging her soul parched by the pain inflicted on it by most of her close ones. Meridian’s growth as a Womanist intensifies from this point onwards. Tears, according to Alice Walker are essential for surviving whole and so a Womanist “values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter” (SMG xi). Meridian’s wounds are too deep to heal merely by the healing touch of tears, only after she is absolved of her
guilt and later on when she makes her connection with the past does she become a complete Womanist.

Meridian’s feelings for her tiny son resemble her mother’s aversion for her children. She cannot bring herself up to the seemingly natural task of loving her biological child. She cannot understand why she feels nothing other than hatred for her son. To keep herself from killing him, she diverts her attention to the T.V. news about the Civil Rights activities going on in her town:

It kept her mind somewhere else while she made her hands play with the baby, whom, even then, she had urges to kill. To strangle that soft, smooth, helpless neck, to push down that kinky hand into a tub of water, to lock it in its room to starve (MD 67).

Meridian herself finds this very frightening, and so instead feels like committing suicide. She is saved from these negative thoughts by her involvement in the Movement. Then when she gets a scholarship to go and study in Saxon College, she finds a way out of the oppressive motherhood. She decides to give up her baby for adoption. Before she cuts off her ties completely from her baby she undergoes a change in the way she approaches her child:

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 a considerable amount of impersonal love. She wanted to know more about his perfect, if unplanned-for, existence (MD 86).

This change in her attitude differentiates her from her mother. Mrs. Hill is never able to love her children, even impersonally. Meridian’s conversion here has a Womanist tinge to it. She is able to love her child as a perfect part of the whole natural scheme of the universe. She learns to appreciate the spirit in his tiny body. And so when she gives him up for adoption, she does it with a light heart,
"When she gave him away she did so with a light heart. She did not look back, believing she had saved a small person’s life” (MD 87).

Meridian tries to leave behind her past and moves into the promising future. Along with her personal past she also severs off her ties with her collective past of the acute racial abuse. But her conscience does not allow her to move on. Though she had given away her child with a light heart, the glorious history of Black motherhood keeps haunting her, accuses her of failing as a Black mother. During the times of slavery the biggest blessing for a Black woman was to keep her children, because they did not belong to her. Meridian is constantly reminded of the strong matriarch stories of her collective past, wherein there are true accounts of Black mothers laying down their lives to protect their children; and “had thought their greatest blessing from ‘Freedom’ was that it meant they could keep their own children” (MD 87).

Meridian bears the burden of not living up to that standard. Her guilt of parting away with her child forbids her from owning her matriarchal past and thus she is deprived of the earlier women’s strength. Meridian ended up comparing herself with her mother, and pronounced Mrs. Hill as a better mother compared to her. Mrs. Hill’s decision to raise all her unwanted children and not give them up for adoption, to pursue her dreams, made Meridian seem like a monster:

And what had Meridian Hill done with her precious child? She had given him away. She thought of her mother as being worthy of this material history, and of herself as belonging to an unworthy minority, for which there was no precedent and of which she was, as far as she knew, the only member (MD 87-8).
While discussing Meridian's maternal history Alice Walker delves upon the grit and perseverance exhibited by her female ancestors. Meridian's great-great-grandmother was a slave, whose children were sold away by her master; she followed the buyer and stole the children back. She suffered bone-splitting whipping, just to keep her children with her. Mrs. Hill's great-grandmother was a famous painter, who earned money for her paintings from her master. From the money that she could keep with her she bought her entire family's freedom:

Mrs. Hill's great-grandmother had been famous for painting decorations on burns. She earned money for the man who owned her and was allowed to keep some for herself. With it she bought not only her own freedom, but that of her husband and children as well (MD 121).

Mrs. Hill's mother's life was also full of struggle and tough compromises made for the sake of her children. Her husband had no desire to raise a family and so he shunned all the responsibilities of the family thereof. He refused to pay for Mrs. Hill's education. It was her mother who bargained with him and agreed to pay for her daughter's education. She refused to complain about the hardship she would undergo earning the extra twelve dollars for school. Thus, Mrs. Hill was fed on this all-sacrificing image of motherhood. So when it came her turn to make her share of sacrifice, she never thought that she could refuse. Though, she did it most unwillingly, she took up the responsibility of her family as a tribute to her mother and other female ancestors.

The shock of her life came when her own daughter Meridian decided to break this chain. She was highly unappreciative of Meridian's decision. Mrs. Hill accused Meridian of failing not only her but all her female predecessors. What she and to some extent even Meridian failed to understand was, that the conditions under which the earlier women exhibited exemplary maternal feeling
did not offer them many choices. They had to protect their children, or else the society would literally devour them.

But the case was different for Meridian and her mother, the changing social, political and economical scenario offered them more choices. Either they could choose their biological and social roles or charter new avenues for themselves. Only if Mrs. Hill had exercised her other option of living alone and pursuing her career she would have saved herself and her children from a lot of pain and suffering. She would have not just survived but would have “survived whole”, and could have been in the position to spread more love and affection among all her pupils, because all that had kept her going through her tough childhood was “her determination to be a school teacher” (MD 122).

Meridian appears to be more conscious of her choices, as she opts for the untraditional one of parting with her only child. The guilt that she suffers from is more because of her mother who fails to support her daughter’s dream. Mrs. Hill refuses to accept that Black women can opt out of motherhood especially after having a child. It is better to give away one’s child for adoption rather than keeping it and making it feel unwanted and unloved all throughout its life. Barbara Christian’s comments on Meridian’s decision and upholds it as an essential step forward from a suppressive history of sacrifice and at times forced motherhood, as follows:

In her recounting of Meridian’s maternal history, Walker emphasizes certain elements characteristic of the Afro-American ideology of motherhood. It is the prescribed role for women in American society, but this prescription is not so much ritualized as it is enforced by the limited options available to women (Christian, Feminist 231).
Though Meridian gives away her child to pursue her dreams, her maternal instincts don’t die. She expands her maternal limits to include all those neglected, abused and silenced people, whose cause is nobody’s concern. She mothers the entire deprived community, rather than mothering one single child.

After she breaks free of her familial bondage she moves on in the creation in search of herself. Her involvement in the movement and the various experiences that she has at the Saxon college define her future course of action. She makes new friends and acquaintances at both these places. She finds a friend and lover in her co-worker Truman Held. The Black Movement had yet not reached the stage where Black was Beautiful and so Meridian lost her Black lover to a white exchange student – Lynne. Among all the ideals preached at the Saxon college the most suffocating that Meridian found was the insistence on sexual purity and virginity, and the desire to be accepted by the “other”:

It was assumed that Saxon young ladies were, by definition, virgins.... The emphasis at Saxon was on form, and the preferred “form” was that of the finishing school girl whose goal, whenever she would later find herself in the world, was to be accepted as an equal.... (MD 91).

During her stay at the Saxon College Meridian is compelled to take up a part-time job as a typist for a Black faculty member, to meet her expenses. Her experience with this Black man echoes many such incidents that happened during the Civil Rights years. Mr. Robinson for whom Meridian works is very protective about Black girls from the claws of White men, but it does not stop himself from exploiting such helpless women. In return of small gifts Mr. Robinson tried his level best to seduce her. Meridian describes him as a man who:
.... was also very emotional about protecting the virtue of black women from white men.... When he grabbed her as she stepped warily into his office and attempted to rub his old penis against her, she felt nothing but hard pelvic bones poking her in the stomach (MD 109).

If this was the case with older Black men, the situation with the younger men was no better. Meridian’s lover Truman Held and many like him ran after white women whenever they got a chance. Truman heartlessly discards Meridian for the white Lynne, who promises to exalt his social standing. But after just three years of marriage to Lynne, the fever died and then he came back to Meridian pleading her to take him back. Truman Held contrary to his name is neither a True-man nor is he held by any particular ideology.

When he marries Lynne he does it out of fashion. But like all fashion this also proves to be short-lived. “Black is Beautiful” replaces the earlier notion of beauty which upheld white skin to be the standard of beauty. Truman, then, began to feel ashamed of having a white woman for a wife. Now he needs a Black wife and so he turns back towards Meridian, thinking that she would be more than happy to have him back. His masochism takes all women for granted, and therefore he is extremely shocked to hear a Womanist denial from Meridian, “For Lynne’s sake alone, I couldn’t do it”. She had said languidly, rocking slowly in her yellow chair, “What does she have now besides you”? (MD 137).

When Truman tries to remind her that Lynne was a white woman and so she should be hated and discarded by the entire Black community Meridian very quietly tell him that she was white even when Truman married her. Truman is surprised to see Meridian taking Lynne’s side and advocating for her. To which
she replies, “Her side? I’m sure she’s already taken it. I’m trying to make the acquaintance of my side in all this. What side is mine”? (MD 137).

Meridian’s Womanist sensibility does not allow her to hate another woman, even if she is a White woman. Lynne and Meridian’s relationship has some touches of Celie and Shug relationship of *The Color Purple*. Both these women have loved the same man, and both of them have been used and discarded by Truman, Lynne is not able to connect with anyone else but Meridian. When she needs to be comforted after her daughter Camara’s gruesome death Lynne comes to Meridian. Meridian on her part comforts Lynne whenever the need arises, but yet her still prevalent “Black Solidarity” prevents her from accepting Lynne’s story about her rape by a Black man Tommy Odds. She just refuses to listen to Lynne’s account:

Can’t you understand I can’t Listen to you? Can’t you understand there are some things I don’t want to know?

“You wouldn’t believe me either “Lynne asked”. “No”, Meridian said, coldly (MD 153).

Meridian’s denial to accept her friend’s story reveals her Womanist immaturity. But looking at the period in which the novel is placed, her reaction is quite understandable. What is not understandable is her refusal to even listen to Lynne’s story. But the redeeming factor in Meridian is her readiness to take in the devastated Lynne and help her regain her balance.

In Truman we see the fashionable young Black men trying to blend in and be accepted by the other. The problem with Truman is that he cannot belong anywhere as there is an absolute lack of self-identity. He has no desire to either establish his own identity or search for true self. He merely flows with the
current trend. He joins the Revolution because it was in fashion to be a part of it. When everybody left the movement half-way and moved on with life, he too followed suit. Meridian who finds her inner calling in the Revolution is essentially better placed like the duo Pozzo and Lucky in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, than Truman who is directionless like Vladimir and Estragon.

Though Meridian appears very fragile and physically weak, the truth is that she has a hidden source of strength which enables her to fearlessly and unflinchingly face a military tank, while fighting for the rights of the poor and discarded. Her only drawback is that she lacks a strong support system of understanding, caring women. But Meridian on her own grows into a strong Womanist. Womanism is more of a spiritual growth than a physical one and therefore throughout the course of the novel we witness Meridian’s spirit growing stronger even when her body grows weak. All her comrades of the Civil Rights Movement give up their ideals and deviate from their chosen way of life and leave the movement half way. It is only Meridian who adheres to these ideals, and all by herself takes the struggle to those obscure rural towns and villages where revolution is most needed.

As Walker has the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s in the backdrop of *Meridian*. She does bring in the issues concerning the Black Feminists of that time. As is well-known, Black women had whole-heartedly joined hands with their men for the liberation of their community. But as mentioned earlier, these women were never allowed to voice their issues related to sexism. Here Walker comments on the absence of not only Black women’s issues but on white women’s as well:
As they sat they watched a television program. One of those Southern epics about the relationship of the Southern white man to madness, and the closeness of the Southern black man to the land. It did not delve into the women’s problems black or white (MD 176).

Women on the whole have been at the receiving end irrespective of their race. Violence against women becomes a great leveler between the two racially different sets of women. The story of Marilene O’Shay illustrates the diminishing racial boundaries between Black and white women. Marilene is a mummified white woman who is brutally murdered by her husband for her alleged extra-marital affair. The brutality doesn’t end there, he goes on to mummify her and converts her into a roadshow to capitalize on her infidelity. Walker while describing the mummy, remarks about the skin colour of the dead woman, the white colour has gradually changed to a grayish-black colour, creating an ambiguity about the race of this abused woman. Elliot Butler-Evans remarks on this ambiguity saying:

Marilene O’Shay’s story shows how women from all races suffer just because they are women. The banal description of her as “devoted wife”, “obedient daughter”, and “adoring mother” becomes descriptions that imprison other women in Meridian’s world, and the racial ambiguity signified by Marilene’s shin coloruine signifies the cross-cultural oppression of women (Butler-Evans 118).

Meridian’s connection with women gets strengthened with the awareness of this mutual victimization, and therefore she stands up for even that woman who takes away her lover.

Meridian’s search for wholeness begins quite early even when she was just a child. Following in the footstep of her great-grandmother and her father,
Meridian was able to make a connection with the collective past of the American people. The ecstasy that the three generations of Meridian’s family feels in the Sacred Serpent, the mound situated on their land, was a result of the strange vibrations that reverberated in the mound as it was the burial ground of Indian-American community who lived on the place long before Meridian and her family came there. The live connection that these three people can make at the Sacred Serpent awakens their sub-conscious and connects them to the spirit that prevails all throughout nature.

The special affiliation that Meridian’s father and great-grandmother had with the Native Americans highlights the Womanist ideology of working for the survival whole of the entire community. Meridian’s father moves a step further in undoing the wrong done to the Native Americans by giving back the land to its rightful owners. Though his purpose is not served because the local government intervenes and declares the Sacred Serpent as a heritage site to be kept under Government’s protection, the act itself elevates Mr. Hill to a higher level of personal growth. By bringing in the issue of Native Americans Walker pleads for the importance of this neglected tribe. Barbara Christian observes in her essay mentioned earlier that, Walker’s “..... use of Native American culture as well as Afro-American culture emphasizes the need for a point of view that values all life rather than some life” (Christian, Feminist 247).

Meridian had unknowingly taken after her great-grandmother Feather Mae, who had passed on her “outrageousness to her great-granddaughter. It is from her that Meridian inherits her Womanist consciousness. Feather Mae awakens to the eternal presence in all the elements of this world after her ecstatic experience at the mound. She even goes on to renounce the entrapments of organized religions and begins to worship nature:
Later Feather Mae renounced all religion that was not based on the experience of physical ecstasy — thereby shocking her Baptist church and its unsympathetic congregation — and near the end of her life she loved walking nude about her yard and worshipped only the sun (MD 50).

Feather Mae also passes on her “harmless madness” to her great-granddaughter. Meridian is a “saint”, a “lunatic” and a headstrong person. She resembles all those personal as well as collective women ancestors who due to their inability to express their creativity had gone crazy. But because they were “harmless” and unobtrusive they were not put away in a mental asylum but were called “Saints”. Meridian’s various adventures undertaken for the benefit of the entire community appear to be saint-like to all the people around her. In fact most people consider her to be a lunatic, because they have never before seen anybody fighting for the cause of someone else. These two characteristics in Meridian relate her to the earlier women and establish the link between Black women of all generations.

Like many of her predecessors Meridian is also a deviant, a woman who is termed a non-woman because she does not adhere to the American standards of womanhood. But this proves to be a blessing in disguise. As she is not confined in the mould of an ideal woman she can do all that is out-of-bounds for normal women in America. Barbara Christian comments in her essay titled “Meridian: The Quest for Wholeness”, “Deviants at birth, black women could more easily assume the efficacy of the unknown, test forbidden waters, than other American women who were believed to be normal” (Christian, Women 219).

There are many more characteristics in Meridian which link her with her other predecessors like Phyllis Wheatley and Nella Larson. Barbara Christian
goes on to point out some of them in the above mentioned essay. She describes Meridian as "looney", a woman torn by "contrary instincts" and Meridian's desire to change both herself and the world, are some of those attributes earlier held by strong deviant Black women:

Like some of her ancestors, Meridian is a "looney" woman who is physically and psychologically abused. Like Phyllis Wheatley and Nella Larsen, she is given the opportunity to become an exception, torn by "contrary instincts". And like the contemporary black woman that Walker envisions, Meridian becomes an artist by "expanding her mind with action" (Christian, Women 206).

Meridian is an amalgam of the ancient and the modern. Her inherited strength enables her to combat the contemporary demons. She opts out of the sexual oppression inherently a part of the institution of marriage and she also opts out of the Movement which loses its sight of freedom for all and merely became a handiwork of the urban Blacks. Meridian's entire being proves to be an antithesis of the popular image of a Black woman in the American society.

Even as a child Meridian was a very inquisitive girl. She demanded answers and took up tasks which no-one else did. One day she landed up with gold bullion covered with rust and dirt, she knew it was gold but nobody in her family agreed with her. Yet little Meridian persevered, and tried all her best to file away the deposits on her bar of gold. This filing away is symbolic of Meridian's life-long search for her Womanist self hidden beneath layers of social conditionings. Her constant efforts to understand the meaning of life itself is echoes in this event as well. Anne Mickelson describes this process in her as under:

The function of the gold bullion falls within the sphere of the technique to foreshadow Meridian's constant assessing of self, her
gradual loss of concern for personal identity, and her final sinking of self into total commitment to working with children and the poor (Mickelson 162).

It is during this journey towards wholeness and fulfillment that she awakens to the hidden treasures responsible for the survival of the African-American community in the oppressive white America. The sustaining and reinforcing power of their oral tradition is brought into the narrative with the powerful and moving story of Louvinie. Louvinie was a slave with an amazing gift of narrating frightful bone-chilling stories. Her master’s children were more than eager for her stories. One day in the middle of a story one of the master’s children collapsed and died because of a weak heart. The punishment for Louvinie was that her tongue was cut out and she was made speechless.

Louvinie found her cut off tongue and buried it in a secret place over which they grew a magical maglolia tree. It could be heard singing songs in the dead of the night and a fleeing slave could never be detected if s/he was hiding in its foliage. It is in this very place that the Saxon University comes up where Meridian goes for her further studies. By then, the tree has been named after the great revolutionary figure Sojourner Truth. Meridian unconsciously follows these foremothers’, who fuel her sense of selfhood and help her achieve her direction in life. To quote Susan Willis’s essay titled “Alice Walker’s Women”:

Louvinie, used language in the struggle for liberation. In this way, Walker builds a network of women, some mythic like Louvinie, some real like Sojourner Truth, as the context for Meridian’s affirmation and radicalization (Willis 114).
Though Meridian’s own mother fails to acquaint her with her strengths, the mantle falls on such community mothers who willingly share their secrets and survival tactics with these young women.

The community becomes very prominent in Meridian’s life once she leaves the confines of her home. First, it is the Civil Rights Movement which throws her in the midst of action, where many young men and women have come together to demand equal rights for the Blacks. Secondly, it is the community of the women at the Saxon College which make her aware of the collective strength of togetherness. The second incident is related to an orphan girl, called ‘Wile Child’, who is raped and made pregnant by some unknown person. Meridian brings this girl to her hostel and tries her very best to keep her there. But she as her name suggests she is a ‘wild child’, who is unable to understand the affection that is being levied upon her and so she tries to escape. While running away from the hostel she is hit by a fast moving car and she dies of the injuries. The girls at the Saxon College decide to bury her on the college premises, but the authorities refuse to allow them to use both their church and their cemetery, as they fear the impression this burial would have on the morality of their students. The girls go on a rampage and destroy the most valuable Sojourner Tree. Meridian agrees with everything else except the chopping of this magical tree.

Though Meridian gives up her own child, she is able to be a mother to this orphan girl. Outside the confines of motherhood defined and restricted by the society, Meridian is able to perform the duties of a mother wholeheartedly. Michael Cooke acknowledges the spirit giving mother in *Meridian*, he writes:

The fact that Meridian is able to make even a rudimentary contact with the Wild Child again signalizes some socializing, some
healing, and freeing power in her. Meridian is the spirit giving mother, rather than a body making one, and each interferes with the other (Cooke 147).

The difference between Meridian and the other revolutionists, both at the College and at the Movement, is firstly they are all trying to change the 'others', but are unwilling to change themselves. Secondly, they have failed to keep their connection with their past alive. The revolutionists refused to learn from the past nor do they appreciate the healing power of their ancestral history. According to Walker, personal change and acknowledgement of the past are two most important ingredients of being a Womanist. Meridian quite unconsciously affirms to both. Barbara Christian opines in her above mentioned essay that one needs to keep the past alive in order to move into the future. She adds:

The question that permeates this book and her life is the nature of social change and its relationship to the past and the future, a question at the crux of the Civil Rights Movement. In other words, what does one take from the past, which is still often present, to create a new future? What does one throw away? (Christian, Women 205).

Meridian’s social commitment does not end merely by joining the Civil Rights Movement, but it continues even after everybody else has left the Movement and moved on. She takes on the issues of racism as perpetuated in far off rural areas of America. Meridian’s persistence and dedication are qualities she has inherited from her father. Meridian wants to change the world and is not afraid to do it herself.
One more very important change that touches Meridian’s life is her perception about murder for the right cause. Initially, she is not agreeable to the idea of killing for a cause. But when she witnesses a sleeping rural community awakens to the need to remember their lost son, who was a martyr in the Civil Rights Movement, she understands the necessity of killing for justice, “Only in a church surrounded by the righteous guardians of the people’s memories could she even approach the concept of retaliatory murder. Only among the pious could this idea both comfort and uplift (MD 285).

The church music also helps Meridian connect with the healing part of the Afro-American culture and tradition. The music thaws Meridian’s dead spirit and assists her in defining her own identity. Her purpose in life also becomes clear as she promises to preserve the most valuable treasure of the Black church, i.e its music. She pledges to sing the memory songs for those tired souls in need of rejuvenation, who after soul-drenching battle against racism, need to refresh their memory and re-fuel themselves for future struggle. Meridian enthusiastically takes up the responsibility of singing these healing songs for her fellow revolutionaries:

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, and if I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all (MD 206).

Meridian attains her wholeness when she begins to appreciate her community and its life enhancing influence on her. She learns that she can move into the future only if she accepts her past, both personal and collective. The black church and its music were always there, but the vision to acknowledge them was not there.
Meridian’s quest ends successfully in her discovery of herself through the church. She is almost resurrected from dead, and once she finds her strength she decides to move on to heal many more people like her. Truman, who by now has joined her in her present endeavour, is left behind to carry on her social work. Meridian passes on her search for wholeness to him. She attains her own wholeness and does not keep the secret to herself, but activates Truman’s soul towards finding his own wholeness. Barbara Christian agrees with this idea of including men in bringing about revolutionary change, she writes, “In passing this struggle for understanding to a man, Walker infers that the need for understanding of creativity and life in both men and women is a pre-requisite for revolutionary change” (Christian, *Feminist* 243).

Meridian leaves behind one more treasure for Truman to savour. She does not take along with her the amazing wall decorations adorning her room. Following in the footsteps of her ancestors Meridian had decorated her walls with her friends’ letters and her own poems. This is how she leaves her own tradition behind for Truman to create his own memories.

Meridian begins her journey with a lot of confusion but finally liberates herself from the ghosts that plague her soul and body. In the process of her own liberation, Meridian paves the way for many such Black women who are compelled to shrink, shrivel, and die. She redefines motherhood by charting new arenas for a widespread approach of being a Black mother. She paves the way for her followers by walking on the untrodden ways of selfhood. Her struggle finally ends in the freedom that she has achieved through her flowing tears, tears not for herself, but for the slain son of the old gentleman in the Black church.
To conclude this chapter, we can say that the initial three important women characters namely, Margaret, Mem, and Meridian literally shrink under the male Gods gaze. Some like Margaret and Mem shrivel and disintegrate, while some like Ruth and Meridian strive hard and survive whole. Because they look for wholeness within themselves and their communities, they succeed in their attempts. What differentiates all the four of them from the coming protagonists of Walker’s later fiction is the fact that they are still under the control of the White and the patriarchal world. This is the basic reason for their inability to come forward and form a sisterhood. The lack of female bonding is evident in these two novels. The seeds of Womanism which lay buried deep inside the hearts of their mothers and grandmothers begin to germinate in the younger generation women like Ruth and Meridian. Walker, by the end of her second novel, successfully frees her women from the bondage of race and gender stereotypes. The overpowering presence of male gods decrease as Walker conforms more and more to her ideology of Womanism in the years to come.