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# Women Representation in Alice Walker's Fiction

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## **Abstract**

*There is no doubt in denying the fact that Alice Walker can be labeled as a novelist whose fictional works are known for gender representation as she deals with the oppression of black women. Her quest is a new identify for black women, a self-awareness which will make them self dependent socially, emotionally and spiritually. Racial oppression, general violence, history and ancestry, Civil Rights Movement – all these form the sum and substance of her work. It was Alice walker who coined the term 'Womanism' a form of black feminism that affricates and prefers women's culture, women's flexibility and women's strength. 'Womanism' according to Alice Walker is not narrowly exclusive; it is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. In all aspects Alice walker is the brightest star in a galaxy of black American women writers*

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Afro American Woman writer Alice Walker is a novelist in English. Racial oppression, general violence, history and ancestry, Civil Rights Movement – all these form the sum total of her work. It was Alice walker who coined the term 'Womanism', a form of black feminism that affricates and prefers women's culture, women's flexibility and women's strength. 'Womanism' according to Alice Walker is not narrowly exclusive; it is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

Alice Walker is a feminist, she is the foremost Afro-American women black feminist. Alice Walker's black 'womanism' consciousness is characterized by sexual racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations. Alice Walker deals with oppression, racism, and sexism in America. Alice Walker's division of women into three kinds, as "suspended" part of main stream'; and "awakened by political force" is pertinent. Some Afro-American and Indian Women are reconciled to their position, to the lack of understanding between them and their

men ('suspended'); others question their lot but unable to break away resign themselves ('part of mainstream'). The third phase is that of rebellion. More Afro-American women than Indian women are able to positively define themselves; long periods of economic independence, existence of three women households, and preference for a daughter in the family are perhaps contributory factors for this emergence of the awakened black women.

Alice Walker is of the view that "Black Women now offer varied, live models of how it is possible to live. We have made a new place to move" (quoted in Washington 1979:146). However, the Afro-American women, like the Indian women turn to their children for emotional fulfillment and companionship; to be able, without fear of disapproval which they often receive from their husbands, to talk, to laugh and to feel. Motherhood not only gives them satisfaction, but also power, even if lop-sided, which they lack in their marital relationship.

The creature sparks of the survival culture of the 'suspended' black women is the theme in *Meridian*. The theme finds an appropriate expression in the character of Meridian. Meridian, to begin with, is a lonely, crazy Woman who has been physically and psychologically abused.

But unlike the women characters in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Meridian is provided with an opportunity to liberate herself, through the Civil Rights Movement. Initially she involves herself in a movement fully. But as the Movement turns into violent revolution, she questions the validity of the violent means to achieve revolutionary ends. She gains a sense of perspective and proportion through suffering, which she believes is essential to human development. The oppression which destroys all the creative sparks of Margaret and Memm, makes Meridian philosophical, as she imbibes the collective wisdom of her people. Alice Walker fights the myth of the Black motherhood as a stereotype of strength, self-abnegation and sacrifice. Margaret and Mem are abused mothers produced by the sharecropping system. Their idea of motherhood, guge not stereotypical, is restrictive. Mem's attempt at providing a good and protective motherhood to Ruth fails, and the role is finally taken on by George Copeland. Meridian's idea of motherhood is not restrictive: 'she is torn between her own personal desire to become a mother and the fact that motherhood seems to cut her off from the possibilities of life and love' (Alice Walker, "*In search of our Mother's Gardens*" 64-65). It is this contradiction in her desire which precipitates her quest to become a mother not in the biological sense of term, but in the philosophical sense when she takes to non-violent resistance for the sake of children. The renunciation of her cell, her sleeping bag and her role passed over to Truman, again, is symbolic of the role of the mother earth that she had played. Truman climbs shabbily into Meridian's bag and realizes the terror of the role of mother earth that he now has to play. She therefore passes on the struggle to defend life to Truman in order to understand the sacredness of life fully, symbolizing the awakening of the spirit, and also the beginning of another individual search.

The novel is thus used as a contemplative and analytical tool.

*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker won her the Pulitzer prize and the American Book Award in 1983, for creating a very powerful black liberated woman character in Celie who succeeds in the process of survival both at the level of self and community meaningfully in the context of the racist, sexist and classist society of America. The novel chronicles the life of the black girl Celie who despite poverty, illiteracy, and physical as well as mental exploitation, transcends her plight through self-awareness, and attempts to scale the subtle and warm dimensions of womanish consciousness. Walker tells Celie's story in the form of letters first written to God and later to her sister Nettie. Celie, writes to God to help her to survive the spiritual, emotional and physical abuse she suffers at the hands of her father (step father). Thus, she begins her journey from powerlessness to the state of full empowerment and from self-abnegation to self-recognition.

*The Temple of My familiar* extends to the revision of the history of people of color not only in the United States but also in South America and Africa prior to colonization. Walker places a feminine ancestral figure, the goddess archetype, at the center of the skeleton of her text which has lived through all those half million years. Lissie Lyles, the ancestor, will tell us the stories of her previous lives, since she has been transfigured many times either as a human or as an animal. The recollection of all memories from her previous, the multiple storytelling structure to which the text turns will arouse the reader's consciousness about themes and issues that have been traditionally left out from historiography, since historical discourse has been at the service of supremacist, colonial, patriarchal ideologies. Walker, with the help of the dream of the memory, since the memory, as the mind, has the capacity to dream takes us back to the origins of culture and civilization in an attempt to explain the wounds that modern societies inflict on

people of colour all around the world. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is the latest novel of Alice Walker which is about the life of a barely glimpsed character from these works. Combining fact and fiction, communing with the spirits of the living and the dead, Alice Walker in this novel strikes with graceful power at the heart of one of the most controversial issues of our time, the female genital mutilation. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) follows the story of Tashi, an African woman of the fictional Olinka tribe where she undergoes female circumcision (female genital mutilation, or FGM\*), and examines the reasons for her decision and the consequences that are followed by it. The central theme of the book is the cause and effects of FGM as a cultural practice in the novel, and this is horrifying.

In this way, after going through different fictional works, we can safely and rightly aver the fact that as a black writer, Alice Walker powerfully explores the black women as victims of the society who are doubly exploited first, on the basis of their race and second on the basis of gender which reflects their pitiful situation in the patriarchal society. Walker clearly shows that they are victims of both racism and sexism in the American society and the same time seeks to transform them into emergent black women. This note attempts to examine how *Meridian*, one of her most celebrated novels, reflects her strong belief in the black womanist tenets. It tells the story of the black woman in a period of transition, story of a coming to consciousness and a subsequent development of self and search for authenticity.

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