

I. Women, Their Position and Suppression

From the beginning of human civilization, women were mostly considered as inferior, incidental beings whereas men as the subject, superior and absolute ones. In almost patriarchy, all the images of women are created by men. Though patriarchy viewed and judged a woman in terms of masculine value system. She is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures but she nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the stabilize her as an object. Many people have defined woman from various perspectives. For examples, Aristotle says, “The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” (Gaarder 150). We should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness and St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an “imperfect man and incidental being” (Gaarder 150). This is symbolized in *Genesis* where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called “a Supernumerary bone” of Adam.

Plato suggested that there is no pursuit of the administrators of a state that belongs to woman. But the natural capacities are distributed alike both creatures, and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all (Gaarder 455). The only difference between men and women, Plato says at this point, is that women have weaker bodies than men, but there is no sign that something is amiss with their souls.

Plato believed that women could govern just as effectively as men for the reason that the rulers govern by virtue of their reason. Women, he asserted, have exactly the same powers of reasoning as men, provided they get the same training and are exempt from child rearing and housekeeping. Women’s freedom thus became more restricted.

However, he did say that a state that does not educate and train women is like a man who only trains his right arm.

Aristotle was more inclined to believe that women were incomplete in some ways. A woman was an “unfinished man” (Gaarder 116). In reproduction, woman is passive and receptive while man is active and productive; for the child inherits only the male characteristics, claimed Aristotle. He believes that all the child’s characteristics lay complete in the male sperm. The woman was the soil, receiving forth the seed, and the man was the sower. Or In Aristotelian language, “The man provides the form and the woman contributes to the substances” (Gaarder 150).

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Hegel’s view on man and woman is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlines it is rather vague unity of feeling. According to him, “Women are educated by living rather than acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood on the other hand, is attained only the stress of thought and much technical exertion” (Gaarder 367).

Ancient legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. Since ancient times

satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women. St. Augustine who declared that “woman is a creature neither decisive nor constant but capable of managing her property” (Gaarder 153).

From the beginning of human civilization, women were considered as inferior and second class, while men were perceived as the superior belongs. As an inferior being, she has subordinate and peripheral position in society. It is believed that women were made to fulfill men’s purpose; they were experienced to serve men physically, sexually and mentally. They have always been dominated, violated and subjected to male supremacist ideology.

Bonaparte remarked about women in this way. “Nature intended women to be our slaves. They are our property; we are not theirs. They belong to us, just as a tree bears fruits, belongs to gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women! Women are nothing but machines for producing children” (Morgan 92).

Women have been victimized sexually; Even the primitive society established certain restrictions and dictated certain rules over sexes, as a results male started showing leadership and imposing his authority over sexes. Though there is no such rule or characteristics to justify the hierarchy between male and female in the social status. Men as their supposed superiority thought it was their right to rule over women. They established a unanimous rule in every aspects of humanity. Their supremacist ideology taught and encouraged women to believe that they are of less value; they are naturally inferior and unequal to men. Women have been denied the rights as human being. They occupied a little or no space in social, cultural, economic, legal or political sphere. They

remained usurped, dominated, invisible, insignificant and worthless beings to male chauvinism and supremacy.

The history of western society remained highly discriminative and bias in women's career advancement through all the ages. Great scholars and philosophers were bias in defining women. They depicted women as inferior, immature, incomplete in their intellectual potentialities. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that "Women are imperfect men" (Gaarder 270) and for Confucius, "Woman and those of low birth are alike in being difficult to deal with" (Gaarder 270). To the Puritan Conviction, "women are less intelligent than men" (Gaarder 271). All these philosophers and religious persons had condescending attitude toward women. Women have been misinterpreted in socio-political, cultural, biological, religious world and in the works of art and literature by generations of people to justify and maintain patriarchal system.

The denigration and subordination of women in western culture begins with the mythical description of god and goddesses. For instance, Apollo worshipped as the symbol of wisdom, knowledge and supremacy, while Eros is considered as symbol of jealousy and sensuality, Venus as symbol of beauty. Women's position remained flexible and supplementary and is depicted as stereotypical, faithful and devoted wife. It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concept of gender of the traits that are convinced to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in identity and behavior are lonely cultural construct that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization.

Mackinnon rejects the feminist orthodoxy that rape, is an expression of violence rather than sexual desire by arguing that in a patriarchal society. The gender identity and

sexuality of both men and women are learned in a context of domination and submission from which they become inseparable. she says that “Women bound, women battered, women tortured, women humiliated, women degraded and defiled, women killed-or, to be fair to the soft core- women sexually accessible, have- able, there for them, wanting to be taken and used with perhaps just a little of light bondage” (326-7).

Violence against women by acquaintances or by strangers is an assertion of the individual power of males as well as the power of men as a class. In this way, the beliefs and attitudes which support male interests and privileges are reinforced in women’s and men’s daily lives. Furthermore, we live in a culture that celebrates aggressive masculinity and denigrates female sexuality is defined as lustful, even desirous of male aggression.

Spender claims that women’s oppression lies not in social organization or physical domination but in a male control of culture, religion, language and knowledge that limits women’s freedom. She argues that man made language which structured the thought of women. Man made language which is based on men’s perceptions but it excludes the women’s experiences. Thus, violence against women is directly related to the condition of women in a society that refuses equal pay, equal access of resources to women because they can, because they live in a world that gives them permission.

According to Mill, men and women should have equal political rights and there must be no bar to women’s education and employment, in practice he saw the sexes as playing very different roles in society. He argues that women should be free to follow the career of their choice, they should not be forced into marriage through economic necessity: if, however, they do choose marriage then this is their career, and they should accept the responsibilities.

Finkelhor argues that the sexual exploitation of women and children is made easier in a society that is dominated by men. Sex in any society is a valuable commodity, and a dominant group. He says:

“Women, their rights and responsibilities, opportunities and obligations were essentially determined by their position in the family as wives and mothers. Women were viewed first and foremost as members of a dependent class whose individual rights were subservient to their class position”. (381)

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hooks defines sexism is the form of oppression that we confront throughout our daily lives. “sexism directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in that most intimate context-home and in that intimate spheres of relations- family” (400).

She envisions a process of education and consciousness raising where women from diverse backgrounds come together in small groups to talk about feminism and to learn from each other, but she calls upon men as well to commit themselves to overthrowing patriarchal domination.

Beauvoir says, “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in the society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (161). Thus, woman is produced by civilization and historical materialism.

Hartmann has argued that modern society must be understood as both capitalist and patriarchal. She says that Marxist analysis forgets that men as well as capitalism benefit from present arrangements, and claims that: “they have higher standard of living than women in terms of luxury consumption, leisure time and personalized services and men of all classes have at least a short term material interest in maintaining women’s oppression” (243).

In ancient myths of every religion, women are found in poor condition, suffering hard after being subjected and mistreated by men. Two greatest epics of Hindu mythology, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have enough instances of women’s suffering because of their gender. Sita’s chastity is doubted and questioned by men including her devoted husband Ram too and she has to let herself be swallowed by mother earth in order to prove her chastity in *Ramayana* and Draupati has a no any choice but to marry five men willy- nilly and later on, she is mercilessly sold a cattle by her husband to other men even without asking her permission in another epic *Mahabharata*.

Babel is one of the Marxist philosophers who convey a strong concern with the oppression of women. He says, “Women’s oppression is a product of class society that will only be ended when proletarian revolution brings about a socialist society in which women will have full economic independence, and domestic work and childcare will be collectivized” (61).

Violence against women is directly related to the condition of women in a society that refuse equal pay, equal access to resources, and equal status with males. Men physically and emotionally abuse women male violence is fed by their rights to dominate and control their sense of superiority over group of people who, because of gender, they consider inferior to women.

Stael is another remarkable writer who conveys a strong concern with the situation of women dominated by men. She talks of women’s suffering due to uncertainty of their place in society and men’s cruel treatment. Everything, she says, in their success and failure is arbitrary and they are neither in the world of nature nor in the world of society. Women are strictly restricted by men to exercise their intellect. Intellectual men often astonish at women being as capable as they are. Defining the mistreatment meted out to the women, she writes:

Yet since the revolution men had thought it politically and morally useful to reduce woman to the most absurd mediocrity. They have addressed women only in wretched language as devoid their minds [...] As soon as woman is marked as distinguished person, the public in general is prejudiced against her (451).

Violence against the female body (rape, incest and harassment) and the perpetuation of fear of violence from the basis of patriarchal power. Both violence and fear are functional. Without the power to intimate and to punish, the domination of women in all spheres of society-political, social, and economic.

hooks claims that African women were defined as sexual savages, immoral and eager for sexual relation with any men. She says:

The racist construction of the sexuality of Africans and particularly as rapist. This view provided the justification for castration, and other brutal punishments designed to terrorize and control African men and slave community as a whole. Similarly, African women were defined as sexual savages, as depraved, immoral, loose, available and eager for sexual relations with any man. That African-American women are treated poorly by the criminal justice system when they are victims of sexual assault is well documented (394).

At the time of slavery black women were forced to live in a degraded condition. The masters of slave fully exploited and abused black in public as well as in private sphere. They had to work all day, the same works as men. Furthermore, black women were terrorized through rape. These women bore illicit children. But, still, they had no rights over their children. Slaveholders snatched their babies and sold them to speculators. The separation of the mothers from the children was the marked feature of cruelty and barbarity of the slaves system. Such kind of discriminating practice tortured black women not only physically but also psychologically.

Black women were physically and psychologically degraded and demoralized by both black and white men. The stereotypical definition attributed to black women as mammy, whore, matriarch which give little value upon their lives. All the black women were defined as sexually depraved, immoral, evil and fallen women to both black and white males. In *Ain't I a woman: black woman and feminism*, hooks writes, "Rape was a method used to terrorize, dehumanized and [...] to trip the female slave of dignity". Black men can no longer protect them because they themselves in dehumanize condition. White men abused and exploited her sexually to terrorize and control her. Sexual harassment, violence and exploitation of black women transcend the boundaries of race and class. The sexist hostility against them is practiced not by white men but also implemented in black community as well.

II. Black Feminism

The term “feminism” does not have any one agreed meaning that could be formulated as a set of beliefs, and it probably never did have, it’s a broad movement embracing numerous phases of women’s emancipation aiming to understand women’s oppression in terms of race, class, gender and sexual preferences and its efforts lie in changing it. It no longer seeks to abolish the systems, status and societies. Its aim is to realize the total self-actualization of the individual. It’s a voice against the inadequacy, the distortion as well as the ideologies, which the males have created.

Feminism is concerned with the marginalization of women who live with their being relegated to a secondary position. It represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times. Feminism began with the discovery by an individual of her self-consciousness as a woman.

Feminism is introduced by many scholars and critics with diverse perspectives. Although feminism, in actual sense, orients the diverse aspects of women’s lives in a male-dominated model of the society, it is characterized and elaborated in multiple dimensions. The critics and scholars have given their overview regarding the body of feminism according to its touch and area of studies.

Mauter argues that feminism is the theory of knowledge which has the stance of rejecting the male objectivity that manipulated the women in a meticulous way. He presents the opinions of feminists, “some also hold that traditional concepts and ideals of truth, objectivity and value-neutrality are to be rejected on the ground that they are used for the purpose of male domination” (148). The values and norms of the society were constructed by the male members of the society so as to oppress the women, due to the

male dominated truth, values; the women were dominated to accept the bitter reality of their own oppression. Such unanimously weaved values of the male dominated society were challenged and rejected by feminist epistemology.

The term feminism refers to the theories and made of criticism that advocated women's rights, independence from male domination and an access to authority. It is a conscious movement of women who began rejecting their passivity and docility which was imposed upon them by patriarchal socio- cultural framework. The primary aim of feminism is to develop the personality of women and to make them aware of their restricted and divided position in the male- dominated society and culture. Arvonne Fraser introduces feminism, "as the objects of feminism was to elevate the equal rights and human rights, the status of women of race, language and religion in order to achieve equality with men, in all fields of human enterprise and to eliminate all discrimination against women" (144). To Fraser, feminism is a field of studies to demonstrate the oppressed condition of women in patriarchal ideology and culture. It also asserts that all forms of discrimination against women should be discarded and eliminated to maintain equality between the sexes- male and female.

Feminism is viewed as political discourse to question the existing discourse of patriarchy that unanimously dominated all patterns of society since ancient to the present. Patriarchal discourse always valorizes the personality of male and patronizes women trapping them inside certain restrictions of unnecessary rules and regulations to raise the staunch voice against such male-worldview of the society, feminists undertake the steps for the extension of awareness to change the conventional mentality of the women inherited from the ethics of patriarchy and culture. Toril Moi has provoked her remark regarding feminism, "it is a special kind of political discourse, and a critical and

theoretical practice committed to struggle against the patriarchy and sexism not simply a concern for gender in literature [...]” (204). In fact, patriarchy was unfathomably grounded ethos since the beginning of human society and civilization. Male ideology and discourse unanimously dehumanized and degraded women in all spheres of life and creativity—intellectual, political and social. To rescue the women from monolithic male normatively, to empower them for their co-existence with men in the society, feminist theories and discourse played the pivotal role. More explicitly, the politics behind the discourse of feminism is to empower women in all sphere of life resisting the patriarchal norms of the society.

Feminism is a political movement characterized by an awareness of women about the male-privileged social-cultural framework. Feminist writings and critical works got world-wide importance only after the 1960s’ women’s movement. It took about two centuries of struggle for recognition of cultural roles and achievements for women’s social and political rights. Mainly, the literary discourse has played significant role for the germination, extension and gradual development of the discourse of feminism. Although female authorial voice reacted against the extremity of patriarchy since the 18th century, it was not popularized extensively, due to the unshakably roots of patriarchy. However, Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792 well deserves its rank as the first feminist work. Since then, women writers have been exploring their experiences through their books but they are frequently marginalized and overshadowed by the male literary canon. Wollstonecraft discovered that contemporary educational system was male-made and the women did not have an access to it. She explored that patriarchal education system deprived women and taught them to internalize the men-oriented values. Women have been intellectually and morally

represented inferior to men. She advocated promoting women education to liberate them from male-guided principles and dogmas. Wollstonecraft took her stands against patriarchal society and its domination over women. She remarks, “Patriarchal society, traditional educational system and sentimental novels teach females to be submissive, sentimental and emotional which restrict them from power of judgment and power of reason” (397). Similarly, Margret Fuller’s *Women in the Nineteenth century* (1845) and John Stuart Mill’s *subjection of women* (1869) advocated for the equality of women with the men in the society but their voices could not get any response due to massive range of patriarchy.

Showalter assesses the British woman since the Victorian period from the perspectives of women’s experiences. She categorizes female writers dividing into three phases. The first phase is the feminine phase (1840-1880) in which female writers imitate and internalize the existing male literary conventions. To Showalter, these female writers-George Eliot and Bronte sisters saw the possibility of women welfare in the existing male canon. The second phase, she termed, is feminist phase (1880-1920) in which feminists of the time are called radical who protest the male, values, literature and standards that oppressed the women in multiple ways. The third phase (1920s onward) is female phase, which rejected both imitation and protest and turned to female experience as the source of women’s autonomous art.

Showalter expresses that the female psyche is influenced by the generally culture but the general culture there is their own subculture which forms a collective experience of women. She thinks that women are naturally different from men since they have their own type of body language, psyche and capacity to behave and think. She invented the term ‘gynocritics’ to describe the study of women as writers in which they are invited to

speaking for themselves. She divided women feminist critics into two groups: women as readers and women as writers. She says:

The task of feminist critic is to find a new language, a new way of reading than can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism. This enterprise should not be confined to women. I invite Criticus, Poeticus and Plutarchus to share it with us. One thing is certain feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay, and we must make it a permanent home. (1233)

During the eighties, Gilbert and Gubar appeared concentrating on the figure of the suppressed female and investigating the typical motifs and patterns among nineteenth century women writers. The work is a kind of realization of female identity where Gilbert and Gubar locate the female territory in its longer context.

Examining the woman writers defined themselves as free as men writers; they expose the true identity of patriarchy and realize the significance of their own identity. Radical feminist like Millett takes patriarchal ideology as the main cause of women's subordinate position. She discards the hierarchy between male and female. Radical feminists claim that patriarchy is based primarily upon male violence and of women's sexuality. So, we can say that domestic violence and sexual abuse of both women and children within the home is seen as the cutting edge of the patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and most aggressive form.

After the end of Second World War and in the beginning of second half of twentieth century, society, culture, philosophy and literature got drastically changed. New vision emerged with strong theoretical stance. One of the existential feminist critic and

writer Beauvoir strongly reject the tendency of treating women as second sex born to assist their male guardians. She claims that a biological existence of a female is socially covered as a demure creature. She strongly objects to man's attitude of discriminating between sexes as 'self' and 'other', men being the former and women the latter. She says:

A woman is silent but her language is not understood: she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond uncertain appearances. She is doomed to immanence; and through her passivity. She bestows peace and harmony- but if she declines this role, she is seen worth with as a praying mantis, an ogress. In any case, she appears as the privileged other, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness. (994-98)

She explained that myth is useful to man. According to her, "Myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends on readymade valuations rushes headlong" (135).

A woman in patriarchal society is always treated as powerless, helpless and victim in the hands of men while male is synonymous with strength, aggression. Such categorization of men as superior being and women as inferior being is the cause to all forms of domination in the human society.

The word feminism indicates the well- educated and privileged class of white women who have time and are bored with men and homes. White feminist scholars address the theories of subjectivity, concept of binary oppositions such as male verses female or equality verses difference but they hardly give attention to race. They continue

to analyze their own experience in ever more sophisticated forms. They totally ignore the existence of all non-white women.

White feminism has created a woman's tradition and history but often only by silencing and making absent the Black woman. Feminist historians describe the specific differences in Black and white women's history, economic and social situation. For example, white women are more likely to marry, have access to education, have fewer children and earn more.

Stepping outside the masters' boundaries, African-American writers in America produce and maintain their own literary tradition, as a material form of their relationship to their culture and society, which is known as Afro American literature. Afro- American literature as Bell writes "Afro- American literary Tradition" is not "a solipsistic self-referential linguistic system, but a symbolic socio cultural act" (1147). In a broader sense, Afro- American literature focuses black people's society, their identities and culture.

In 1970 and 80s, several black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and started voicing out their agonies as marginalized and doubly oppressed as black and as women in their works. Being black and women they were victimized by blacks as well as the white society. The black female experience is characterized by the interlocking oppression of race, class and gender. These oppressors are interwoven into social structures and work together to define the history of the lives of black women.

Jefferson points out that black people are inferior in intellectual power like reasoning: "In memory they are equal to whites, in reason much inferior, never yet could find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration" (qtd in Price 251).

Feminists have attacked traditional political theory for excluding or marginalizing woman, feminism itself has been accused of universalizing the assumptions and needs of white women in Europe and American and largely ignoring the very different perspectives of black and third world women.

Black women and their experiences were regarded as valueless, insignificant and inferior to white male culture. They become the matter of violence, exploitation, hatred and neglect on the level of race and gender. The Victorian ideals of the true woman such as loyal, passive, sexually pure whose survival needed tough physical labor and who were vulnerable to rape and to sexual exploitation in the workplace. They were victimized by both black men and white society.

Some of the black feminists Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker protest the missive silence of feminist criticism about black and third-world women writers and call for a black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual politics.

These feminists are concerned with sexuality to define their reproductive freedom and the control of their own bodies. They believe that men characterize woman sexuality as vulnerable, erotic and always demanding male to satiate their sexual lust. They believe that heterosexuality is another way of male domination over women. For them, men treat women as sex objects and usurp them without trying to understand woman's desires and needs. Those who emphasize lesbianism point out that lesbianism are not necessarily the woman-woman sexual intercourse but it is the avoidance of male. Women must be sexually evident in the behavior of white women who turn their deaf ear to serve assaults upon black women. Black feminist accuse other feminist critics of developing their ideas

only in reference to white upper-middle class women who oftentimes practice feminism only in order to become part of the patriarchal power structure. For black feminists, majority of feminists want to be counted as men and share the bounties of the dominant society such as equal wages, child care and other accepted social rights, while black women have been marginalized within the paradigm in which they are ignored, romanticized or ghettoized.

Marking Afro-Americans as inferiors, interrupting their creative power and positing whole literary tradition as white, racist white writers celebrate their racial pride. White writers' such monopoly affects creative imagination of black writers. About the effect of imposing racial self in creativity Morrison writes:

I am interested to know what that assumption has meant to the literary imagination. When does racial "unconsciousness" or awareness of race enriches interpretative language and when does it impoverish it? What does positing one's self in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced and all others as raced entail? What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one's own race to or in spite of, a race of readers free? In other words, how is "literary whiteness" consequence of that construction? (Playing XIV)

In Morrison's words, it is clear that racial self has played an important role in the construction of American intellectual and cultural history. In her *Unspeakable Thing Unspoken*, says that "The distinguishing features of black writing lies in its language- its unpolished, seditious, confrontational manipulating, inventive, disruptive, masked and

unmasking language” (qtd in Lauret 39). In black women’s writings the concept of the ‘Self or the presence of assertive speaker- the presence of father- is denied through the concept of double voiced textual address.

Morrison writes, ”If we don’t keep in touch with the ancestor, [...] we are, in fact, lost [...] when you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself. I want to point out the dangers, to show that nice thing don’t happen to the totally self reliant if there is not conscious historical connection.” (Playing 78).

The writing experiences of Black women are invisible in the eyes of critics. Even black male critics seem to be unknown about Black women’s literature. In their eyes, Black women’s works hardly exist because they lack the ability to comprehend Black women’s experiences. Christian emphasizes on the search for black female experience and self. Discovery of self is the central theme in her work. She elaborates that black women’s experience and culture are different from that of white one’s.

Black feminist literary criticism offers a framework for identifying the common socio- aesthetic problems of authors who attempt to fashion a literature of cultural identity in the midst of racial/sexual oppression. It incorporated a political analysis that enables us to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievement. Bethel says:

Black women [...] made in establishing artistic and literary traditions of any sort, and to understand their qualities and sensibilities. Such understanding requires a consciousness of the oppression .These artists faced daily in a society full of institutionalized and violent hatred for both their black skins and their female bodies. Developing and maintaining this consciousness is a basis tenet of Black feminism (178).

Walker, in her landmark essay, “*In Search Of Our Mothers’ Garden*,” discloses how the political, economic, and social restrictions of slavery and racism have historically undersized the creative lives of black women. She says that black women’s literature has usually been viewed as a distinct subcategory of American literature. She further says that white women look at black women’s works they are of course ill-equipped to deal with the subtleties of racial politics. Even the black male critics can also act as if they do not know that black women writers exists and are, of course, hampered by an inability to comprehend black women’s experience in sexual as well as racial terms.

Walker prefers the term womanist to feminist because womanist connects with the African oral tradition and the Yoruba goddess, Osun. She outlines four features of womanism: “Black feminism; women who love other women sexually or none sexually and appreciate and prefer women’s culture, emotions and strength; women, who love music, dance and themselves; and womanist are to feminist as purple is to lavender” (33-36).

In Walker’s *Third life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple* and Morrison’s *Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, it can be seen a critical exploration of the strength and weakness of the institution of black family and church as well as the continuing racial and sexual exploitation of black people especially women. Bell says:

Influenced by the sexual revolution as well as by the continuing color and class struggle in the American social contemporary Afro- American neo-realists are still basically inclined toward a redemptive, paradoxically progressive and apocalyptic view of history even when the surface pattern

are dialectical, cyclical and spiral, ambivalent in their narrative allegiances range of their thematic concerns from the religious and political to the economic, psychological and philosophical aspect to contemporary life.

(278)

Katrak argues that in the works of postcolonial women writers the female body is in a state of exile- including self exile and self-censorship, outsider ness and un-belonging to itself within patriarchy. She proposes the idea of external and internal exile of bodies in patriarchal societies. The external exile manifests migration and geographical relocation such as political persecution, material conditions of poverty and forms of intellectual silencing in the third world societies, whereas the internal exile exists where the body feels disconnected from self as though it does not belong to it and has no agency. Female bodily exile results from colonial education accompanied by racial superiority. Thus, female bodily exile resulting from forgetting one's native language and cultural ways supplanted by English language or for resting the patriarchal authority of fathers and husbands.

In western culture, female bodies are politicized .The politics of the female body includes the constructions and controls of female sexuality, its location socioculturally, even materially, in postcolonial regions. Third world women writers represent the complex ways in which women's bodies are colonized. They represent the struggle of protagonist to resist patriarchal objectification and definition as daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, and mother-in -law. In certain African cultures where the woman as reproductive unit, a widow is sometimes remarried to the deceased husband's brother so that she may continue to reproduce and augment the family's property in the form of

children. Thus, politics of female body involves the demystification of these several roles that reinforce control over women's bodies.

Carby argues that within categories like family, patriarchy may not function equivalently as the site of oppression for black women as for white women. She further criticizes the political limitations of Euro-American feminism which does not pay adequate attention to race, and it does make black women in problematic and distorted ways.

Mohanty draws link among the histories and struggle of third world women against racism, sexism, colonialism and monopoly capital. She argues that third world feminism (i.e. black and minorities feminism) and the first world feminism (i.e. white feminism) have common issues that but differences are also plentiful. Thus, claiming universality of gender oppression is not the same as arguing for the universal rights of women based on the particularities of our experiences. Locating the feminism in their contexts, she argues further that "the challenges posed by black and third world feminist can point the way toward more precise transformative feminist politics based on the specificity of our historical and cultural locations and our common contexts of struggle" (107).

The black feminist movement was not dependent on Black male's liberation. They were struggling to assert their identity as the human. In the late 1960's when the right of women more receptive to the voices of Black women writers. Black women writers like Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, and Sarah Wright came in the literary platform rejecting the Euro-centric model and turning to non white communities and nonwestern and Afro-centric model.

Black feminist theories marked a distinctive feminist consciousness that was stimulated from black women's common racial and sexual experiences in traditional American society. About Black feminism Collins says, "Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African American women which clarifies a standpoint of and or Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of black women's reality by those who live it" (20). This definition includes the basic elements of black feminism, black feminist consciousness, and black women's stand point.

Black women's movement made up of working class and middle class black women came to counter racism and sexism for both improvement and social equality with whites. The material condition of black women as well as the social ideology regarding them has been very different from the privileged middle class of white women. Unlike white women, black women are not only to sexual role in patriarchy but have to deal with particular ethnic status and circumstances. In other words, they are oppressed as women, again oppressed as minority.

Bethel observes the double oppression in this manner. Black feminist literary criticism offers a framework for identifying the common socio- aesthetic problem of authors who attempt to fashion a literature of cultural identity in the midst of racial/sexual oppression. He says:

It incorporated a political analysis that enables us to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievement Black women [...] made in establishing artistic and literary traditions of any sort, and to understand their qualities and sensibilities. Such understanding requires a

consciousness of oppression these artists face daily in a society full of institutionalized and violent hatred for both their black skins and their female bodies. Developing and maintaining this consciousness is basic tenet of Black feminism. (178)

Several black female writers argue that historically black women have been stereotyped as sex object, immoral, depraved and loose. Their selfhood is physically and psychologically degraded and dehumanized with brutal forces perpetuated by white and black males. So, black feminists are conscious about their alienation from white/male social structure and from women's liberation movement. They demanded full integration of women into social, political life.

Black feminist consciousness is Afro-centric. This consciousness is necessary for black women to reject patriarchal perceptions of women and to value women's ideas and actions. As Evans states:

The women's liberation groups engaged in "conscious raising" a technique for using the prism of their own experience to rebirth everything they had been told [...]. They talked about everything from family roles, to sexuality and the body, to work, education and ambition. Telling stories from their own lives about marriage, motherhood, menstruation, orgasm, work and school, they challenged accepted ideas about women. (162-63)

Afro-American novelists develop their personal and national identities within and against the distinctive pattern of values, orientations to life, and shared memories they acquired from and contribute to Afro- American culture. Within the writers are more rebellious and explosive because of double burden of being black and female. Tate says

that through writing novels “Black women have observed the vigorous and courageous self- concept of slave like women and added proud, confident, activist roles to their lives” (121). She describes how women in twentieth century are celebration of life and self. Therefore, some black women like Zora Neale Hurston, Paul Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker etc. moved in the direction of marking a new tradition of their own.

In black literature, we find the issues of motherhood, black language, black culture, their battle with society for equal social, political, economical, sexual rights. Alice Walker describes herself as a “Womanist”- her term for black feminist- which she defines in her book *In search of our Mother’s Garden* as one who “appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility [...] women’s strength” and is “committed to [the] survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”. Walker’s this philosophy has shaped most of her writings. Thus, Walker demonstrates that black women were free to pursue their selfhood in a society permeated by sexism and racism.

Walker defines herself as a womanist, as opposed to a feminist, because she feels that the definition of womanism does not includes the separatism that she experienced in the predominately white American feminist movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s, a separatism that manifested itself as a type of racism, classicisms and sexism within the feminist movement itself. Womanist for her is “a black feminist or the feminist of color [...] loves music, loves dance, loves moon, loves the spirit, loves love, food and roundness, loves folk, loves herself, loves other women, appreciates and prefers women’s culture”. Her womanism has been reflected in her writings. Her characters in fictions are racial domination and sexual victimization to freedom. In *Meridian*, Meridian Hill turns to be a social worker and involves in Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, in *The Color Purple*, Celie establishes her own business and divorcing from her husband.

In recording history, she explores the historical oppression, the insanities the loyalties and the ultimate triumphs of black woman. Her central characters are black women, who throughout the history have endured oppression and exploitation at the hands of whites of extremely abused, mutilated, dimmed and confused woman for Walker

[E] xquisite butterflies, trapped in and evil toiling away their lives in an era, a century that did not acknowledge than expect on “the mule of the world”. They dreamed a dream that no one knew it-not even themselves in a coherent fashion and saw visions no one could understand. They wandered or sat about the countryside crooning lullabies to ghosts, and drawing the mother of Christ in charcoal on courthouse walls. (*In Search* 232)

Walker’s wounded black women can’t be the ‘mule of the world’. She projects them to seek a new social order and equality in her fictions. Walker succeeds in redeeming the image of the stereotypical black woman through the effective, sensitive and realistic portrayals in her novels. Walker’s men, on the other hand, are traditional black male chauvinists of both the lower and middle class who stereotypically vent their hatred of exploitation by whites on their families especially the women, and whose only redemptive act is like Grange Copeland, to turn from hatred to love and to faith in a social order based on sexual, economical and racial equality. On the contrary, the struggle of women characters is sometimes violent, usually sensational and tragic. Her women characters are courageous, audacious and outrageous. They reject traditional roles of motherhood, nurturing and dependence heralds the emergence of a new generation for racial black heroines in search of self identity, security and power.

III. Sexual Abuse of Meridian and Other Women

Meridian depicts the women's sexual violence such as physical abuse to rape in the African patriarchal society. In the novel, Walker addresses how such torturous activities affect the mind, body and spirit of the characters.

Walker's second novel *Meridian* has been called a women centered perspective on the civil Rights movement. The novel takes place during the civil Rights turmoil of the 1960's. It is the story of Meridian Hill, an intelligent and sensitive woman, who returns to work in the south after being expelled from a revolutionary group in New York for refusing to swear she would kill as well as die for the revolution. Confronting the essential meaning of the Civil Rights Movement back home in Chicokema, she is at last able to connect the political intellectualization of the struggle with the daily, needy reality she sees about her. In this novel, she uses the element of pain and strength of entire tradition as the basis of her design.

Meridian Hill is a sensitive black woman. She has experienced the sexism and racism, the major obstacles to societal wholeness. Shetty argues, "Meridian, like Walker, is a result of her history and her distortion of life cannot be free and her people are free, she cannot be free" (79). Bell opines that in Meridian "Walker focuses more sharply on the making of a revolutionary and on living up to what is required by history and economics" (266).

Meridian Hill's journey starts from the state of powerlessness, submissive and exploitation of her body by her male counterparts. Sexist exploitation of her body begins at the age of fifteen with her seduction by Dexter. After Dexter, his assistant seduces Meridian. Moreover, assistant expresses his domination over Meridian's sexuality: "the

girl was his now whenever he wanted her, because he had discovered a secret few men knew: how to make a woman come by using his beautiful voice (67).

In the male dominated society, woman is not supposed to develop her own interest; she should rather enjoy what her husband enjoys. There has always been the relationship of power between man and woman in which women are sometimes idolized but most of the time oppressed and exploited. They are often target of male sexual violence. They are taken as mere objects of sexual pleasure.

In the novel, Meridian finds the sexual violence of a black girl, named wild child. She lives in slum area, wears dirty dress, eats rancid food, and curses the people by using vulgar language. She becomes pregnant by an anonymous man. The unusual behavior and pregnancy of wild child becomes the matter of discussion in the society. Meridian suggests that wild child shouted words that were never uttered in the honors house.

The Saxon students along with Meridian tried to impart the normal behavior to wild child. But wild child did not show any positive reaction to the behaviour of them. The anonymous pregnancy of wild child results her to commit suicide. Even after the death of wild child, Saxon students give blessing to her. They say “God will bless you” (46). Though they not only give blessing to wild child but also reveals great sympathy to her. They say:

We are sorry, young woman, but it is against the rules and regulations of this institution to allow you to conduct your funeral inside the chapel, which as you may know, was donated to us by one of the finest robber baron families of New York. Besides, it is nearly time for vespers, and you

should have arranged for this affair through the proper channels much earlier. (46)

The Saxon students sang through tears that slipped like melting pellets of sleet down their grieved and angered cheeks:

We shall overcome ...

We shall overcome...

We shall overcome somebody...

Deep in my heart, I do believe...

We shall overcome somebody.

Many legends and tales of slave woman found in the library of Saxon College remind the situation of black people and their pathetic and miserable condition. For instance, Louvinie, a slave woman whose tongue was clipped out at the root and that was buried under a magnolia tree on the Saxon plantation. Other slaves believed it possessed magic. They claimed that the tree could talk, make music, was sacred to birds and possessed the power to obscure vision. Campbell and Kean find the intention of white master is blocking the black people's history, ancient beliefs and memories.

The people of south who were compelled to live life of pain, difficulty and scarcity. Meridian Hill reads the history of black motherhood. Women face the pathetic and miserable situation due to slavery. She realizes that "enslaved women had been made miserable by the sales of their children, that the daughter of these enslaved women had thought their greatest blessing from "freedom" was that it meant they could keep their own children" (91).

When Meridian is at the age of twelve, Eddie loves her. For Meridian, “sex is not pleasure but a sanctuary in which her mind was freed of any consideration for all the other males in the universe who might want anything of her” (62). In her opinion, she could only make male friends when she was sexually involved with a lover and the new male friends thoughts of her as “so-an-so’s Girl” (62).

When Eddie makes her pregnant, she felt as if she’d contracted a communicable disease, that the germs had been in the air and that her catching the disease was not fault” (62). She finds her similarity to the woman who is portrayed negatively in the magazines as a “mindless body, a sex creature, something to hang false hair and nails on” (71). With her relation to Dexter, Dexter’s assistant, and Eddie, Meridian, undergoes to know the experiences of becoming a lover, wife, mother and daughter-in –law. All these men who violate her are “disloyal and despicable in their abuse of woman” (262). The assistant says “the girl was his now whenever he wanted her, because he had discovered a secret few men knew: how to make a woman by using nothing but his beautiful voices” (67).

The sexual exploitation of women either black or white found in the society. Lynne, an American white woman who is raped by another male figure named Tommy Odds. It was Tommy Odds who thought she was not a human being, as if her whiteness, the mystique of it, the danger of it, the historically verboten nature of it, encouraged him to attempt to destroy her without any feelings of guilt. For Lynne, “Tommy Odds is like a book she hasn’t read; like a town she wanted to pass because mangoes don’t grow in her own yard”. (164). Truman reads The New York time which mentioned Lynne, “a virgin who was eager for sex and well-to- do enough to have worldly experiences” (142).

Lynne's decision to marry Truman isolated her from her community; her parents mourned for her as if she were dead. After the birth of child of Lynne, Truman did not give attention to her. Lynne says to Truman, "you think you can step over me and just keep going to ruin my life" (148). Truman leaves Lynne and comes to Meridian. Truman says to Lynne, "I gave you up for Meridian. For black brown skinned Meridian, with her sweet colored folk mouth hand her heroic nigger woman hair" (171). Lynne charges Truman as vampire who sucks the blood of young white virgins. Lynne is also raped by Tommy Odds, Truman's black friend who, having lost his arm in a racist attack, takes revenge upon a powerless white woman.

When Lynne wants to talk to Meridian, she refuses a white woman.

"I can't listen to this" said meridian,
rising abruptly and throwing up her hands.

"I'm sorry. I just can't".

"Wait a minute", cried Lynne.

"I know you're thinking about lynching and the way white women have
always lied about black men raping them.

May be this wasn't rape. I don't know.

I think it was. It felt like it was".

"Can't you understand I can't listen to you?"

Can't you understand there are something I don't want to know?"

"You wouldn't believe me either?" Lynne asked.

"No," Meridian said, coldly. (153)

In this way, Meridian shows distinction between black women and white women. Even though she is a female, she gives her own opinion on white woman in this way, “white women were useless expect as baby machines who would grow up to oppress her. Without servants all of them would live in pigsties” (108).

Sexually exploited Meridian gets some courage then she divorces from her husband. She not only divorces from her husband but also rejects the role of mother. She abandons her own child, Eddie Jr. She thought of her mother being worthy of this maternal history. Her mother taught her to obey the norms and values of patriarchal society. She encouraged her to be obedient daughter, devoted wife and adoring mother. But Meridian wants to cross the boundary which is created by the patriarchal society.

Meridian shows her own identity when she is in the school while attending an oral competition. She recites a speech which praises “the virtues of the constitution and the superiority of American way of life” (121). She stops in the middle of the speech because she knows that there is “no truth in words, she speaks” (124). She finds that the American values are not superior but they are racist and sexist.

Meridian’s mother told her to go church. But she dislikes going to church. Whenever she was in church, she felt claustrophobia, as if the walls were closing in. Meridian rejects her mother’s Christian vocabulary of self- sacrifice. Lauret state that “Meridian’s mother Christian vocabulary of self- sacrifice, designed to induce guilt, is thus yet another discourse that Meridian refuses and refuses to pass on her child” (136). Indeed, Meridian Hill, as a black woman rejects the traditional values of controlling, and shows her difference in white-male dominated society.

Meridian shows her own identity when she is in the school. In an oral competition, she recites a speech which praises “The virtues of the constitution and the superiority of American way of life” (121), she stops in the middle of the speech because she knows that there is “no truth in words, she speaks” (124). She finds that the American values are not superior but they are racist and sexist.

Meridian Hill is a black woman who expresses the view on white men. She says that white men liked black women for sex. She notices that “White women are considered sexless, contemptible and ridiculous by all [...], they were clear, dead water. White man liked black women for sex. For some white men it was a matter of gaining experiences, initiation into the adult world, the maid, the cook, a stray child, anything not too old or repulsive would do” (107).

Rise of consciousness in Meridian

Meridian Hill's great awakening appears when she rejects the role of wife and mother. She divorces from her husband to transcend the sexual barrier of society. After divorcing from her husband, she involves in the civil Rights movement.

Meridian had guilt and profound sense of loss after abandons her first child in order to attend college, and then later aborts a second pregnancy, causes her to question more deeply the use of retaliatory violence in the struggle for Civil Right. Her troubled relationship to her own mother that embody the historical institution of self- sacrificing black motherhood, including generations of slave women who struggle to keep their children makes her literally sick with feelings of maternal inadequacy.

The thought of killing for a revolution has brought Meridian inevitably to reflect upon her own identity and purpose as a woman who has rejected black motherhood. At first, her decision to give up her baby son, product of her hopeless teenage marriage has transmuted her earlier savage frustration to what seems bearable guilt. Then at college, having joined student like those she encountered first as civil rights workers, she has experienced torment. No rationalization of her decision has served allay her nightmares about her child: "On some deeper level than she had anticipated or had even been aware of, she felt condemned, consigned to penitence, for life" (91).

She has awakened to the past and present of the larger world, from the time a bombing has led to her acquaintance with Truman Held and the others. During the same time, she has awakened also to the fact of her womanhood and begun a painful assessment of herself in relation to her own mother. She thought of her mother as being worthy of maternal history.

Meridian Hill's first historical consciousness comes, with her knowing of traumatic history of black motherhood. She realizes

enslaved women had been made miserable by the sale of their own children, that they had laid down their lives gladly for their children, that the daughters of these enslaved women had thought their greatest blessing from "freedom" was that it meant they could keep their own children. (91)

Meridian Hill finds the racial and sexual victimization of black girl named Wild Child. Similarly, the most chilling tale of slave woman Louvinie, who tells the story to white children in her care. Story of such terror that one of them dies of shock. As a reaction, the slave master rips out Louvinie's tongue, which is buried down. This act clarifies that white masters are "historically implicated in the silencing of Afro-American people" (90).

Meridian sees white women were sexless, contemptible and ridiculous by all and black women for sex and said so. In addition to this, she thought of black women were sexually exploited. Taking all these problems in the mind, Meridian becomes passive. She says, "I have a dream" (186). She dreams, "she was a character in the novel and that her existence presented an insoluble problem, one that would be solved only by her death at the end" (117). But her exploitation leads her to take a new role. She understands her role:

I am not belonging to the future. My point is to walk behind the real revolutionaries – those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black and therefore go right ahead and sing from memory

songs they will need once more to hear. For it is the song of the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation that holds them together. (201)

Meridian who defines herself as “a woman in the process of changing her mind” (25). She is actively engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, which demands equality of races, full employment of blacks, black control over black community and end to every form of repression and brutality and cruelty. She wants the destruction of the rich as a class and the eradication of all personal economic preserves. Taking these issues of Civil Rights Movement Walker projects Meridian as the representative of revolution. Her avowed readiness to die for the Civil Rights Movement.

Meridian’s decision to return to the south, to “go back to the people, live among them, to understand them and herself like Civil Rights workers used to do” (31) is a serious one. She involves in the process of changing the mental state of people. She convinces people to fight for their voting rights, admires their strength and most importantly leading the parades of black people. Black people admire her strength, “She was doing good thing, typing, teaching literature to read and write” (85). Meridian Hill finds a compassion, solidarity and human value with the people of her race. They live in a poor community but friendly and very clean.

Meridian Hill’s commitment recounts us what Luther King says in his speech I have a dream:

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to

degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. (75)

Meridian Hill's creation of powerful voice shows that she is liberated in a racist and sexist society; she is not an object of exploitation. She says, "Paralysis is going away already" (26). She continues to "raise and lower her arms flexing her fingers and toes as she did so. She rolled her shoulders forward and up and raised and twisted her ankles. Each small movement under her face looks happier, even as the effort exhausted her" (26-27). She gets better by herself and a return to the world. She says:

There is no water in the world for us
Brought by our friends
Through the rock of mother and god
Vanished into sand
And we cast out alone and recreate
Ourselves. (213)

Meridian Hill has been conditioned by her community's patriarchal institution to repress her individuality that is not to speak out inappropriately in patriotic speeches. She could not publicly repent, despite her mother's urgings; she could not utter the patriotic speech which was assigned in high school. Her awakening appears when she rejects the role of wife and mother. She divorces from her husband. After divorcing from her husband, she involves in the Civil Rights Movement. Her struggle in the revolution makes her not only an agent of social change but also an agency. She lives in the poorest blacks in the rural south, "like the Civil Rights workers used to do" (31), becoming poor

like them, leading them in nonviolent protest marches to improve conditions in their communities.

Meridian shows readiness to kill for the revolution. She is willing to die but does not think she can kill for the freedom of black people. She knows that it may be necessary to free black people and poor people, but she does not imagine a society created through violence in which people can be free. She says, “She could bear the hatred of her own father and mother, but not the hatred of black people and poor men” (166).

Meridian Hill represents a new black female subjectivity. She always goes to differentiating herself from every spheres of domination. She escapes from the traditional religious values and black motherhood. She has managed to escape the symbolic death of being killed by patriarchy’s standard. She leaves behind obedient daughter, devoted wife and adoring mother. Meridian’s railroad cap and dungarees are emblems of her rejection of conventional images and expectations of womanhood. Thus, Meridian Hill is a black woman in a state of becoming “part of an evolutionary spiral, moving from victimization to consciousness” (219).

Meridian is the antithesis of the stereotypical African American mother figure. Believing that she is the epitome of failure at motherhood, she relinquishes her son, has her tubes to prevent future pregnancies, and devotes her life to activism in order to be an agent of change. Walker advances Meridian to the position of symbolic mother of the African American race. Thus, Meridian is a novel about the interconnectedness of personal change and movements for social change.

Meridian lives on her own, separated from her family and the cadre that has rejected her. Alone, she performs the spontaneous and symbolic acts of rebellion, such as

carrying a drowned black child's corpse to the mayor's office to protest the town officials' neglect of drainage ditches in black neighborhoods. She says:

I must undertake to have myself and to respect myself as though my very life depends upon self-love and self-respect [...] and [...] I am entering my soul into a struggle that will most certainly transform the experience of all the peoples of the earth, as no other movement can [...] because the movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is –now galvanizing [...] the unarguable majority of human beings everywhere.
(58)

Meridian Hill creates her identity through her involvement in the Civil rights movement. During her involvement in civil rights movement, she meets a revolutionary artist named Truman Held. Though his name suggests he is a true man, in reality he shows treacherous behaviour to Lynne, a Jewish woman from the north who has come down to work on voter registration during the summer to the south. He marries Lynne because she is white. When Lynne gives birth of Camera, Truman abandons her. Lynne says:

“You think you can step over me and just keep going [...] ruin my life. You only married me because you were too much of a coward to throw a bomb at all the crackers [...] you're like the rest of those niggers zombies. No life of your own at all unless it's something against white folks. You are vampire. You suck the blood of young white virgins to keep you vigorous. (150)

Truman's interest in white woman Lynne is an act of defiance against the white man. On the other hand, Lynne reveals her hatred to Truman by saying, "I don't care about beast and I don't care about the son of a bitch any more" (148). There seems to be no place for Lynne among blacks or among whites. She does not want to be accepted by white people. "I know white folks are evil and fucked up. I know they're doomed" (175). When Lynne tries to Meridian that Tommy Odds raped her, Meridian refuses to listen or to believe her: "can't you understand there are some things I don't want to know?" (153).

Meridian Hill represents the black female subjectivity. Truman sees the "new part grow out of the old these part of her, now sure and ready, even eager for the world"(219). Truman says to Lynne, "I gave you up for Meridian. For black brown skinned Meridian, with her sweet colored folk mouth and her heroic nigger woman hair" (171).

Walker has created Meridian Hill who represents the black woman's self-worth, power and self definition. Truman Held helps and supports in the work of Meridian to reform the community of black people. With Truman "Walker draws a knowledge of masculine attraction as well as his deficiencies" (McDowell, "The self"2). Because of his misunderstanding of black female, Meridian Hill differentiates herself from black male.

The character of *Meridian* is "an attempt to make real in contemporary terms the notion of holiness and commitment. The novel accomplishes a remarkable amount. The issues she is concerned with are massive. It is a lean book that goes down like clean water" (Colby 774).

Meridian Hill is seen constantly defining herself against and in relation to her environment. The church unlike the conventional Baptist church Meridian attended as a

girl. Listening to the congregation's hymn, Meridian finally achieves a spiritual release and transformation:

In comprehending this, there was in Meridian's chest a breaking as if a tight string binding her lungs had given away, allowing her to breathe freely. For she understood, finally that the respect she owed her life was to continue, against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particles of it without a fight to the death, perfectly not her own [...] indeed she would kill, before she allowed anyone to murder son again.
(200)

Meridian Hill brought new time, space, carrying all the good qualities of black woman. She says, "All the people who are as alone as I am will one day gather at the river. We will watch the evening sun go down. And in the darkness, we will know the truth" (220).

Truman says to Meridian would return to the world cleansed of sickness. Truman refers to "Meridian as new part grown out of the old those part of her, now sure and ready, even eager for the world" (219). At the end of the novel, Meridian brought new hope, new space, good qualities of black woman.

Truman supports in the work of Meridian to reform the community of black people. To her, he was courageous and new. He was, in any case, unlike any other Blackman who fought against obstacles. He said, "I am so glad you came to South" (100). Meridian understands to continue her role in the south. She wants to devote her life for the black people.

Meridian Hill's creation of powerful voice shows that she is liberated in racist and sexist society. She is not the object of sexual exploitation. She feels that she has courage to tackle any obstacles of racist and sexist society. She states that "the paralysis is going away already" (26).

Meridian uses her creativity to change the existing social condition of her society. She involves in the Civil Rights Movement in which she get dignified position. She forgets her physical and mental pain. She makes connection to the people of south, lives with them and taught about their life, liberty and freedom.

Meridian appropriated all the good qualities of black women to herself, now that she was awake enough to be aware of them. In her life with Eddie, she knew she had lacked courage, lacked initiative or a mind of her own. She thinks that she belonged to the people who produced Harriet Tub man, the only American woman who led troops in battle.

Meridian reaches at the highest point of power and splendor. She changes herself, discovers her position in black society and changes the racial division in her society. She says, "I am strong" (32).

Conclusion

Despite the multicultural and multiracial nature of American society, the tendency of prognostic hierarchy of white supremacy and black inferiority is rampant. The basic idea of hierarchy and oppression is based on racism which claims that the superiority of whiteness is natural. In the same way, it has been considered natural for blacks to lack whiteness. Racism is not simply argued in biological categorization of colored groups. It has transgressed the hierarchy of color and referred to other categorization such as class, institution etc.

White racist violence is common to Afro- American male and female. Besides racism, sexism adds a layer of oppression in the life of black women. Sexually black women have been raped and that led to the production of illicit children to increase the number of slaves. They are considered as nurturing mummy. Therefore, black women are put at risk because of their race and sex.

African American women could not remain inert. The racist and sexist definitions of their existence have not served them. Their oppression taught them to choose new role to break the silence of black women. For them writing is the best medium through which they express their anger, regret, love, isolation and quest for freedom. Black feminists like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison describe transformation of silence into language and action can be an act of self- revelation. Their heroines always inspired to establish their freedom, autonomy, and subjectivity through violating the norms and standards created in racist and sexist society.

The evolution of black female writer in the 20th century in the mainstream American literature is noteworthy. The black women have double consciousness of being

black and female. So, they have not got any place in the white and black literary tradition. Alice Walker has formed womanism instead of black feminism as her literary enterprise, to struggle against racism and sexism. She creates the heroine who struggle in the racist and sexist society and wins the battle for the creation of her own identity, power, autonomy and subjectivity.

Walker's novels highlight the need of self-discover and self-identity leading to self-actualization. They emphasize the individual self's need to actualize her minor potentiality in order to enhance self-esteem. We can say that woman to Walker is a creative force and not a burden of continuity disfigured self, a woman at war with the patriarchal societal forces, which impede the growth of her feminine instincts.

Walker's *Meridian* chronicles a story of black women's struggle against racist and sexist society. Meridian Hill is born in a middle class southern black family. She begins her life in the traditional way offered to woman- marriage and motherhood. These all traditional values erase her autonomy. Treacherous male figures like Daxter, his secretary and Eddie regularly rape her as sexual object. She experiences the role of lover, mother and daughter-in-law in a white dominated society. These roles lead her towards anxiety, frustration and alienation.

The layers of oppression can be seen in the life of Meridian. Meridian at the age of twelve became pregnant. Due to pregnancy, she has to quit the school. Meridian's mother teaches her to be obedient daughter, devoted wife, and adoring mother. If a woman does not follow this, her life drawn likes cascading tears. Similarly, the patriarchal society insists her to reveal the patriotic speech in school. Despite her

mother's urgings, she could not utter the patriotic speech which was assigned in high school.

Meridian shows early flashes of individuality when her mother teaches her to acknowledge god as the master who was the master of man's life. Meridian rejects her mother's self sacrificed vocabulary saying, "It was a life ruled by its own spirits" (23). Stories of Wild Child, Lauvinie, sale of black people and their oppression in the society made her sad. After her bodily violence and spiritual suffering, she became ill. She realized that the existence of black women is like the existence of beast.

Meridian's struggle against sexist society is seen when she divorces from her husband and abandons her child. She disobeys the role of obedient daughter and devoted wife and loving mother. Then, she goes to the south and lives with the southern people. While living in the south, she rivals against racism and sexism. When Truman deserts her and marries Lynne. She links herself to her brave ancestors like Harrier Tubman. She rivals against white femininity, charging white woman as machines to produce racist whites.

Walker's womanist agenda is clearly reflected in the creation of the characteristics of Meridian. Walker says womanist is outrageous, audacious and courageous. Obviously, Meridian changes herself, discovers her position in black community and changes racial division in her society. Meridian says, "I am strong" (32). She struggles in the racist and sexist society. Lastly, she becomes strong, makes political changes in the society and becomes the agent of social change.

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