RSIRJLE GWALIOR Research Scholar - An International Refereed Journal of Literary Explorations

Research Scholar
An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations

ISSN 2320 – 6101
www.researchscholar.co.in
Impact Factor 0.998 (IIFS)

IN THE TRACK OF DRAUPADI – ALICE WALKER'S MERIDIAN HILL

Dr. V. SHOFIA
M.Phil., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of English
E.M.G. Yadava Women's College,
Thiruppalai, Madurai, India

Human history has recorded many revolutionary figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela and many others, who have initiated significant changes both in the political field and in private thinking. These figures are seen as literary prototypes also. Many imaginative characters in the creative writings try to follow their footsteps by opting at least a few of their cherished principles. But it is an interesting aspect to see that while history meticulously records the heroic performances of the male revolutionaries, it pathetically fails to register the achievements of the Female–Heroes, who have made a greater but silent impact both in the larger, societal arena and in the individual lives. Names such as Kasturba Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame Curie and many other women are a few stars that twinkle in the revolutionary sky.

History apart, the mythologies also abound with male heroism. Joseph Campbell in his monumental book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968) writes:

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religion, philosophies, art, social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the magic ring of myth. (3)

The statement "the myths of man" includes the myths of women also and the mythic hero is the person of self-achieved submission. Campbell remarks further:

> The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man -- perfected, unspecific, universal man -- he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore . . . is to return then to us transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed. (19-20)

By means of several illustrations from the mythological stories, Campbell builds his 'Hero's Journey Monomyth', the journey distinguished with three stages, the Departure, the initiation and

the Return. However, the sharp criticism against this evaluation is: "Most of the historical myths he studied arose in profoundly sexist eras of human history. Women were property of their fathers or husbands; they were prizes to be won, or spoils of war to be seized and raped. They often held little role in society other than to bear and raise children, and only rarely did they wield political, military, or religious power. . . . Female characters were wives and mothers, seductresses and villains, lovers and conquests – but rarely the celebrated victors." (http://fangirlblog.com/2012/04/the-heroines-journey-how-campbells-model-doesnt-fit/) In other words, a Heroine's or a Female-hero's journey should be built addressing the iconic choices faced by women and the different values that often animate women's lives compared to men, such as choices about when to have children, or whether to have children, can be at the very heart of self-identity for many female characters in a way that often is not the case for their male counterparts. A Female-hero's objectives are often different, as well, such as protective or nurturing motivations or placing the safety of others above her own survival or glory.

The Female Hero in American and British Literature (1981) by Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope traces the Female-hero's journey that identifies the different stages she has to cross over. Susan R. Gannon in her article " Women as Heroes" in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Volume 8, Number 3, Fall 1983) forwards an appraisal of Pearson and Pope and says: They suggest that "because negative myths about women are internalized through the socialization process, the first task of the female hero is to slay the dragons within." The important psychological journey in which the female hero goes forth to slay the inner dragon and thus to win the treasure—"the liberation of her true, vital, and powerful self"—is explored in the second part of the book. The final section deals with the hero's return to the kingdom. It describes "the various forms of community she discovers or creates, and describes her confrontation with the external dragons of patriarchal society" (31). At the end of her journey, the hero discovers herself, her authentic and whole self, and finds that her entire world is transformed. The process of the journey converts to be a revolutionary. A few such rebellious female mythical figures do appear; but, unfortunately they are treated as negative revolution-aries, the myths highlighting their negative features only. However, these female mythical figures (in almost all myths) are full of exemplary potentials, and remain as prototypes guiding the spirit of the nation -- then, now and always. One such supreme figure and influential prototype is Draupadi of the Indian Epic *Mahabharatha*, who is seen as a remarkable " *kanya*-Virgin", and who never asks anything for herself, but continues to wage a silent rebellion , confronting the external dragons of patriarchal society and help to establish a new era. A parallel figure in literature is Alice Walker's Meridian Hill, the protagonist of her novel *Meridian* (1976). This paper ventures to see how Meridian Hill follows Draupadi's Revolutionary Footprints, by singly facing the challenges as a rebel.

The *Mahabharatha,* apart from its manifold themes also indicates an underlying and an undeniable point that the womenfolk, whether belonging to the primary or subsidiary tale, are powerful personalities possessing unshakeable pragmatic wisdom. In reality, they are the ones to conduct the chariot called *Mahabharatha* in different routes to realize their ends. Chaturvedi Badrinath (1933-2010) in his book *The Women of the Mahabharata: The Question of Truth*, (2008) writes:

> In the stories through which the *Mahabharata* speaks of life, women occupy a central place. In living what life brings to them, the women of the *Mahabharata* show that the truth in which one must live is, however, not a simple thing: nor can there be any one absolute statement about it.

> Each one of them, in her own way, is a teacher to mankind as to what truth and goodness in their many dimensions are. The women of the *Mahabharata* are incarnate in the women of today. To read the stories of their relationships is to read the stories of our relationships. They demand from the men of today the same reflection on their perceptions, attitudes, and pretensions too, as they did from the men in their lives, and equally often from other men full of pretensions, even if they were kings and sages. (8)

The phrase "men of today" includes men of any country, society and community. The *Mahabharatha* women are great *gurus* who continue to impart timeless education and wisdom to mankind. Among the innumerable women characters of the *Mahabharata,* the major ones are the three queens Satyavati**,** Kunti and Draupadi, who can be called the true leaders of the epic. These women have separate biographies of their own, but are sagacious, exercising their leadership by the power from within.

Draupadi, the fire-born**,** uninvited adopted daughter of Drupada, the king of Panchala**,** emerges from the *Yajna* along with Dhrstadyumna to revenge Drona, the childhood friend of Drupada**.** In the *Svayamvara* she rejects Karna and garlands Arjuna who wins the competition by aiming at the target. She becomes the common wife of the Pancha Pandavas, by following the dictum of her mother-in-law, Kunti**.** She procreates each husband one son and thus she becomes the mother of five sons. In the dice-game, Yudhishtra, the eldest of the Pandavas loses to Duryodhana by staking everything, including his brothers and wife, Draupadi. When she is humiliated in the open court by Duhsasana, the brother of Duryodhana, she takes the vow of tying her tresses after applying the blood of Duhsasana. She spends twelve years in forest and one year in incognito along with her husband leaving her sons with Subhadra, another wife of Arjuna**.** During the undercover time, she becomes an attender to Sudesna, the wife of King Virata whose brother, Kicaka tries to molest her. She seeks the help of Bhima, her second spouse to kill Kicaka**.** At the end of incognito Draupadi prefers war rather than peace. After the war she accomplishes her desire yet she loses her five sons. She follows her five husbands to heaven in her old age. She slips down on the way and dies. All through her ordeals, her constant supporter and companion is Krishna; his divine assistance and wisdom helps the Pandavas as well. Krishna is the *avatar* or incarnation of Lord Vishnu who must execute divine justice to protect *dharma.* Draupadi, being his tool, has the sole objective of taking vengeance on Kauravas. During the disrobing she does not get any assistance from her five husbands but she makes the blind monarch shower on her boon after boon. On the other hand during the exile she persuades her husbands to opt for war rather than peace. She achieves her objective not only with her Pragmatic wisdom but also with her power. Draupadi is portrayed as a strong, stubborn and stoic woman who will not yield to any kind of pressure. As the central figure of *Mahabharatha*, she is a pan-Indian phenomenon. The folk lore, the folk theatre and in fact the entire folk tradition of different regions in India, and also literatures in various Indian languages have displayed their creativity and imagination to portray the myriad facets of this woman par excellence. Whatever be the genre or medium, Draupadi's stubbornness and her stoical endurance become the crux of the creative execution.

'Stubbornness' is differently defined -- unreasonably often perversely unyielding, bullheaded, firmly resolved or determined, resolute, refractory, harsh, obstinate, and unmoving. It means refusing to modify one's own idea for anybody's sake because she/he feels she/he is right. Such a 'persistent' person also never deviates from his decision, because he knows why

he is right, and when and how he should execute it. The one vital quality that goes with stubbornness is 'pride'. A stubborn person will not budge on an issue, is often associated with arrogance and acting all-knowing. Stubborn people readily cuts off all means of negotiation and are the hardest to deal with. Literature has no dearth of stubborn characters, just as in the real life. Stubbornness is an inseparable trait in a rebellious nature. Mary Anne Ferguson in her book *The Images of Women in Literature* (1977) observes: "A person who deliberately departs from a socially approved stereotype by playing a new role---developing a new life style---usually must pay a heavy cost in guilt, alienation, or psychosis" (Introduction to the First Edition 9). Such a person is usually labeled a rebel. Nevertheless, certain types prove solid and tough, since they seem to draw the entire experience of humanity. They are differently formed and informed through the images of myths. That mythical image becomes the prototype to inspire creative writers. Ferguson further states:

> Individuals may rise above those stereotypes and be fully human in spite of the limiting images others have of them. Such individuals belong in the category of "The Liberated Woman"---a woman who is self-aware, who in spite of role playing has a sense of an autonomous self, and who acts, when possible, in accordance with her own self-image. Such self-awareness, the first step toward liberation, may come only with great anguish; indeed, the price may be life itself. (390)

Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavas is one such powerful, energetic prototype, a pragmatist and a stubborn stoic. The expression 'stoic' means to be unemotional or indifferent to pain, and the Stoics develop inner calm. Further they have the wisdom to reason out their emotions, the courage to execute the wishes but also exercise self-control in enjoying comforts. In addition they are honest in their dealings. John Sellers comments in his book *Ancient Philosophies: Stoicism* (2006): "We should focus all of our attention towards those things that are "up to us", paying no attention to things that are out of our control. . . . Up to us are conception, choice, desire, aversion and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not up to us are our body, our property, reputation, office and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing" (113).

Draupadi silently waits for thirteen years to take revenge on the dishonest Kauravas. Further her self-control discards the responsibilities of a mother. She, as a stoic, understands what is within her reach and what is not. Her humiliation is "not up to her"; she desires to take revenge on the Kauravas using her 'Power from Within' which is "up to her". She insists her partners to take arms against Kauravas because she is concerned with better living rather than merely living. John Sellers quotes Socrates's words that aptly describe Draupadi's condition: "As one develops one's understanding, one places greater priority on being consistent in what one does than on mere material benefits. . . . [Further] living by a consistent set of principles was far more important than merely living at whatever the price"(109). To preserve her identity, she chooses perhaps a terrible means aimed at the lives of the Kauravas. Draupadi springs full grown as a bonus to Drupada from the sacrificial fire and she is the sole cause for the 18 day Kurukshetra war. Like Satyavati, Draupadi too is dark and gifted with fragrance, another Yojanagandha. She resembles her mother-in-law, Kunti and great grand mother-in-law, Sathyavathy, in knowing more than one man and regaining her virgin status before changing each husband. Her entire life is parceled out among her five husbands. Apart from her name Draupadi, meaning daughter of Drupada, she is also known as Panchali as she is the Princess of the Kingdom of Panchala and thus is associated with the nation. She is called Krishnaa owing to

her dark complexion and in addition she is named as Yajnaseni because she is born from the sacrificial fire. Dr. Pradip Bhattacharya, a well-known scholar in *Mahabharatha* Studies, has contributed his erudite presentation, *Five Holy Virgins, Five Sacred Myths: A Quest for Meaning* in five parts to the magazine *Manushi* (2004). Part IV titled "She who must be obeyed - Draupadi the Ill-fated one" (19-30) discusses the several facets of Draupadi under different sub-headings. Under the sub-title, "Lovely and Enchanting", Bhattacharya comments: "Panchali", as she is called when she appears from the altar, is pregnant with double meaning: "of Panchala" and "puppet". This presages how she lives her entire life, acting out not just her father's vengeful obsession but as an instrument of the gods to bring death back to the world" (*Manushi* 144, 21). He also quotes from Vyasa's original translated by Prof. P. Lal that profoundly describes her enchanting beauty: "eye-ravishing Panchali, / black-and-smiling-eyed… / Shining coppery carved nails, /Soft eye-lashes,/ Swelling breasts /Shapely thighs… /neither short /nor tall, neither dark nor pale, /with wavy dark-blue hair, / eyes like autumn-lotus leaves, / fragrant like the lotus… / extraordinarily accomplished,/ soft-spoken and gentle…/ She is the last to sleep, the first to wake /even earlier than the early-rising / cowherds and shepherds./ Her sweat-bathed face is lovely, /like the lotus, like /the jasmine; slim-waisted like / the middle of the sacred / vedi, long-haired, pink-lipped, / nd smooth-skinned." (*Adi Parva* 169.44-46, *Sabha* 65.33-37). Bhattacharya has also written the same as an abridged form , *Panch Kanya: Women of Substance* that has been published in the website www.boloji.com. He succinctly sums up her predicament, a fiery woman to remain a fiery rebel throughout. He says:

> Born unwanted, thrust abruptly into a polyandrous marriage, she seems to have had a profound awareness of being an instrument in bringing about the extinction of an effete epoch so that a new age could take birth. And being so aware, Yajnaseni offered up her entire being as a flaming sacrifice in that holocaust of which Krishna was the presiding deity. This feature of transcending the lower self, of becoming an instrument of a higher design is what seems to constitute a common trait in this ever-to-be-remembered maiden. . . . learning . . to sublimate our petty ego to reach the higher self. ..
> (*Panch Kanya:Women of Substance-3*, *www.boloji.com*, 22-3-2011)

Bhattacharya refers to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's article, "Draupadi" (*Bibidha Prabandha* Part 1, 1887), in which he says that Draupadi " is pre-eminently a tremendously forceful queen in whom woman's steel will, pride and brilliant intellect are most evident, a befitting consort indeed of mighty Bhimasena [and] represents woman's selflessness in performing all household duties flawlessly but detachedly." He further appreciates:

> No twenty first century feminist can surpass her in being in charge of herself. . . . She seeks to fulfil herself regardless of social and family norms. . . . She never allows her husbands and her *sakha* to forget how she was outraged and they were deceitfully deprived of their kingdom. When she finds all her husbands, except Sahadeva, in favour of suing for peace, she brings to bear all her feminine charm to turn the course of events inexorably towards war.

Draupadi shocks her contemporaries by challenging the Kuru elders' very concept of *Dharma* in a situation where any other woman would have collapsed in hysterics. None can answer her**.** Can we ever imagine any woman who suffered an attempted rape in the forest and countenance her husband forgiving the abductor, this followed by public molestation in Virata's court with her husband reprimanding her for making a scene, and then, when all seems ready for

war, to hear her husbands tell Krishna to sue for peace and still remain loyal to them, and sane! The worst is yet to come, with the decimation of all her sons by Ashvatthama. Ultimately Draupadi becomes queen, but what does she have left for herself, one wonders. And at the very end, when she stumbles and falls, dying, on the Himalayan ridges, not one of the five husbands tarries by her side. Not one even turns back with a word of comfort. Self-born of the sacrificial flames, Yajnaseni leaves the world all by herself, *nathavati anathavat*, five-husbanded yet without a husband. Vyasa's Draupadi is a balanced woman, a rebellious lady, a distracted mother, a submissive wife and daughter-in-law, but a woman obsessed with vengeance fuming in secret wrath.

Subsequently, the readers again see a different Draupadi, a woman not born out of a mother's womb and a queen, in Meridian Hill, an ordinary, simple girl who becomes a rebel by challenging the patriarchal and societal conventions. Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) has been described as Walker's "meditation on the modern civil rights movement" (*Alice Walker Literary Society*). The novel is set in the turbulent period of 1960s and 1970s and the hub of the novel is Meridian Hill, a student of the Saxon College. She becomes an activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Walker herself was an activist for the Civil Rights Movement and she credits Martin Luther King Jr., for taking such a decision. However, later she revised her opinion about the Movement. Karen F. Stein writes in her article "*Meridian*: Alice Walker's Critique of Revolution" (*Black American Literature Forum*. Vol.20, No: 1/2, 1986, 129-41):

> While she wrote of the Civil Rights Movement with unreserved approval in 1967, she would later contend that it continued to oppress women and so failed in its mission of human liberation. . . . Activists merely turned political rhetoric to their own ends while continuing to repress spontaneous individuality. To overcome this destructiveness, Walker reaches for a new definition of revolution. Her hope for a just society inheres not merely in political change, but in personal transformation.

Walker has been a tireless crusader of women, who continuously raised her voice against the horrors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and genital mutilation, a ritualistic practice employed by several native African cultures. She labels herself a "womanist," and indicates that her primary goal as a writer and individual is to free women from oppression in all of its forms. Walker is also a student of history, and strives to create a dialogue in her work between the past and the present, to elucidate eternal truths as well as eternal struggles and hardships. Walker's various aesthetic and social concerns are harmoniously combined in *Meridian*, an exploration of a young woman's coming of age and her journey from loneliness, guilt, and self-doubt, to self-acceptance, empowerment, and love. Like Walker once was, Meridian is set on a path to greater self-realization and endures the hardships of firmly and irrevocably establishing her identity amid the chaos of social upheaval, sexual alienation. *Meridian* is in some respects autobiographical, but Walker and Meridian Hill, the novel's protagonist, differ in many significant ways. Walker's model to create her protagonist is Sammy Lou of Rue, a farmer's wife and a Civil Rights Movement activist, who uses a hoe to murder her husband's murderer. She reaches the optimum point, fights back and wins, though her reward is death in the electric chair. She simply laughs when she is labeled a militant.

The "new definition of revolution" when applied to Meridian Hill points to her struggle with the stubborn self. Before she can successfully define her role within the revolution, she has to first define herself. In order to achieve this, as Karen Stein observes, she must reject "the temptations of conventional middle-class life, the conventional women's roles of dutiful

daughter, wife, mother, lover. But she must reject as well the contemporary temptation of martyrdom and false revolutionary consciousness, for these roles are death masks". (140) Meridian Hill, the young civil rights worker is thin and slight, with deep brown skin, and has a sad and serious presence. Bold, defiant, and courageous, Meridian seems older than she is. Cynical and often pessimistic, she does not fill her life and perceptions with hope. A stubborn ambivalence often prevails. Later, a serene, detached calm settles on her life. She is repulsed by sex and the physical aggressions of men, and ultimately prefers her own company. She falls in love with another activist, Truman Held, and though he impregnates her, they have a turbulent on-and-off relationship. Later Truman becomes involved with a white woman, Lynne Rabinowitz, who is also active in the Civil Rights struggle. After Meridian has an abortion, Truman becomes far more attached to her and longs to start a life together. As her illness progresses and her hair falls out, she takes to wearing a knitted cap at all times.

Meridian's estranged relationship with her mother casts a shadow over much of her life. She struggles to overcome this and other obstacles as she searches for self-awareness and self-acceptance. Her mother's emotional distance, disapproving nature, and moral superiority fill Meridian with guilt and sadness, which persist well into adulthood. Meridian longs for guidance and a sense of belonging. Unsure of the existence of God and her own relationship to the spiritual world, Meridian understands that traditional paths and explanations do not pacify her. Instead, she turns to the civil rights movement, which gains force and momentum during her young adult years. Ultimately, she struggles with her own sense of sacrifice and dedication to the cause. She questions her own revolutionary impulses after admitting her inability to kill on behalf of the movement. Feeling a gulf in her life between the ideals of the other civil rights activists and the ways by which they actually go about implementing change, Meridian returns to her roots, working and living in often-impoverished and rural communities.

Meridian selflessly helps others in order to compensate for the guidance she never received from her mother. The work, coupled with her bravery and determination, result in the emergence of a calm, sustaining, and growing self-awareness. At the beginning of the novel, she is a broken and damaged individual, mourning for a love and loss she cannot verbalize. At the end, she emerges whole and healthy, thanks to her struggles and the hard-won wisdom she has acquired along the way. Meridian ultimately realizes that no one person, movement, or institution can offer her the assistance she seeks, and she finally turns to herself. Meridian's journey to self-discovery is marked by physical and sexual abuse, a broken marriage, and a child she decides to give away. Her strange illness is in some ways a manifestation of her instability and insecurity. Her bouts of lost consciousness and episodes of paralysis signal that she is a woman without an identity or a sustaining inner life. Ultimately, she realizes that her power lies in her unique and unwavering courage.

Walker in the novel takes up the question she has raised earlier in her essay 'The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?' and tries to explore through her persistent heroine Meridian. The title of the novel, *Meridian* suggests various meanings, which include: "the South, the highest apparent point reached by a heavenly body, a distinctive character, and a line from which other guiding lines may be constructed". Walker prefaces her novel with a lengthy list of definitions and traditional usages of the word *meridian.* A total of twelve different meanings are included for both the word's noun and adjectival form. One of the most common definitions of the term is "zenith, the highest point of power, prosperity, splendor." This alone signifies the fact that Meridian , a complex and capacious character whose presence and identity cannot be reduced to a simple phrase or formulation. The meanings celebrate the movement as

well as the heroine, Meridian Hill, and give her a symbolic status. Meridian's life as a young, black unhappily married woman with a baby in a small southern town is turned upside down by the arrival of voter-registration activists and then transformed beyond recognition. Among the activists is Truman with a conviction that political change is necessary and possible, draws Meridian into the movement. Meridian leaves her husband, abandons her child, distances herself from her devout Christian mother and surrenders her life to activism. The novel not only traces the rise and growing power of social activism, interfaced with racist and segregationist policies, but also tracks the ascent of Meridian from her spiritual and physical pain to a newly whole being in full charge of her capacities and inner wealth. Walker wrote this novel at a time when many young black people were roused by the tenets of nonviolence and civil disobedience that had characterized the early years of the movement, but took on more militant and extreme positions that alienated their supporters. Perhaps, this controversial thinking made the novelist depict her title character as an innately tough and resolute person, of course, not one without problems as well, and thus has created a rebel who understands the real meaning of a rebellion. In fact, Walker strongly feels that personal struggles are an unavoidable part of life, which helps a person overcome one's obstacles and, ultimately, define their character. She frequently turns to earlier examples of strong female role-models. As noted earlier, Sammy Lou is one such model. Another typical model she very much appreciated is the creative legacy of the African-American women, the female folk creativity that sustained their maternal ancestors, especially that of making quilts. "Walker's own literary process is, in fact, developed on that model of quilting", remarks Barbara Christian in the 'Introduction' to Alice Walker's Book, *Everyday Use* and relates it to the Movement itself: "As she focuses on the movement's refusal to violate life and extend its philosophy of non-violence to include the nurturing of life, she creates a pattern that suggests a quality usually ascribed to mothers as central to all those who would be revolutionaries." (6)

The novel is punctuated with many incidents that move back and forth to establish the rebelliousness of the protagonist, such as Meridian escorting local schoolchildren, mostly poor and black, to a sideshow attraction displaying a mummified woman, on a day the children are forbidden to attend, earlier, Meridian is unwilling to assert that she will kill on behalf of a black revolutionary organization, to the dismay of the others assembled. Then, even further back in time, she, at the age of thirteen, is unwilling to accept Jesus into her life, a decision that prompts her mother to withdraw her love. Another aspect that makes Meridian a revolutionary is her outlook towards motherhood, largely formed due to her troubled relationship with her mother, which casts darkness in her life. As an experience, motherhood is one of the social constructions that regulates womanhood. It is both subjection and subjectivity—a cultural commodity determined and regulated largely by men, even as its condition materializes in and on women's bodies. Black motherhood is a social construction which combines racial and historical experiences (such as slavery) with western constructions of motherhood. Historically African American women have been viewed as balm bearers, the ones who held a people together against assaults from outside as well as from within the community. They were considered towers of strength against the degradation of slavery and against the abuse of husbands and the demands of children. Black Motherhood thus, has become the symbol of immense strength. Meridian becomes a revolutionary by breaking this belief. The book meticulously records Meridian's amazing life with her mother, Mrs. Hill, her time as a teenager ignorant about sex (attributed mostly to Mrs. Hill), and her life as a stoic, nearly as a single parent. As a teenager, uninformed about sex, Meridian becomes pregnant, marries, and drops out of school to have the baby boy, who makes her feel indifferent at best. She is not happy to have the child because she did not

want it since she finds the condition of motherhood simply suffocating. Ashis Sengupta observes in his article "Afro-American Women's Fiction: Perspectives on Race and Gender" (*New Quest*. No.110, March-April, 1995, 89-98):

> To her, maternal sacrifice is but another form of "slavery". She even curses herself for "Shattering her mother's emerging self" (*Meridian*, 51). Afro-American motherhood, in particular, is traditionally viewed as a vehicle for preserving black heritage in the face of white cultural domination. But Meridian wants to get rid of her maternal bonds too, because they no less prevent her from realizing her personal and social self. The myth of black motherhood as a "sacred calling" is thus reversed in this novel. (96-7)

Meridian is caught in a cultural conflict – on the one hand she is quite keen to preserve the black heritage and on the other is anxious to reject her motherhood, be a rebel to exist meaningfully in society. At the time when her marriage to Eddie is dissolving, Meridian notices the presence of white civil rights workers in a black neighborhood. Later, the house in which they are staying is bombed. The incident spurs Meridian to volunteer for the cause. At the headquarters, she meets Truman. Soon they demonstrate together, get beaten, arrested, and jailed. Mrs. Hill disapproves of Meridian's radical political activities. Unexpectedly, Meridian is offered a scholarship to Saxon College. Her friends attempt to convince her mother that it is a great opportunity for Meridian. Meridian is not able to accept her mother's pressure on her to be converted, to accept Jesus as her savior. Arunima Ray in her article 'The Quest for "Home" and "Wholeness" in *Sula* and *Meridian*: Afro-American Identity in Toni Morrison and Alice Walker'(*Indian Journal of American Studies* Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 1993, 59-65) remarks : "She challenges her mother's blind acceptance of a cruelly limiting Christianity, of her secondary citizenship, and of the overlapping constraints of marriage and motherhood that is tantamount to being "buried alive, walled away from . . . life, brick by brick" (*Meridian*, 51)." (62) Meridian is expected by her community to be a good wife and mother, but she abdicates her roles as Devoted Wife and Loving Mother and commits herself to the civil rights struggle. She is also quite sure that she would never do any sacrifices made in the name of motherhood like her foremothers. After one child and an abortion, Meridian has her tubes tied, thereby removing the possibility of future children. Her mothering instincts surface, nonetheless, in the form her personal revolution takes.

Unsure of the existence of God and her own relationship to the spiritual world, Meridian finds that traditional paths and explanations do not comfort her. Instead, she turns to the civil rights movement, which gains force and momentum during her young adult years. Ultimately, she struggles with her own sense of sacrifice and dedication to the cause. She questions her own revolutionary impulses after admitting her inability to kill on behalf of the movement. Feeling a gulf in her life between the ideals of the other civil rights activists and the ways by which they actually go about implementing change, Meridian returns to her roots, working and living in often-impoverished and rural communities. Both in the personal and public activities, Meridian is caught in conflicts making her psyche plunge into several complexities. Meridian Hill is a silent, eccentric, and determined woman who has held onto her strength and dignity despite the many hardships she has faced throughout her life. Like Draupadi, she remains a quiet rebel, seeking ways to execute her *dharma*.

Workcited

Badrinath, Chaturvedi. *The Women of the Mahabharata: The Question of Truth.* Hyderabad: Orient, 2008.

Bhattacharya, Pradip. *Five Holy Virgins, Five Sacred Myths: A Quest for Meaning*, 1-5. Manushi, 2004.

----------. "*Panchkanya—Women of Substance*." *Boloji.com.* 1999-2010. 15 Sep. 2009. http://www.boloji.com/hinduism/panchkanya/ pko1.htm.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with thousand Faces.* New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1968.

Christian, Barbara T. *Alice Walker's Everyday Use*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994.

Ferguson, Mary Anne. *The Images of Women in Literature.* Boston: Houghton, 1977.

Gannon, Susan R. " Women as Heroes" . *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Volume 8, Number 3, Fall 1983.

Lal, P, *The Mahabharata of Vyasa.* 18 vols. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 2005.

Pearson, Carol and Katherine Pope. *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* . New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1981.

Ray, Arunima. "The Quest for 'Home' and Wholeness in Sula and Meridian: Afro-American Identity in Toni Morrison and Alice Walker". *Indian Journal of American Studies*. Vol.23, No.2, Summer 1993.

Sellers, John. *Ancient Philosophies: Stoicism.* Berkley: U of California P, 2006.

Sengupta, Ashis. "Afro American Women's Fiction: Perspectives on Race and Gender". *New Quest*, No.110, March-April, 1995

Stein, Karen F. "Meridian Alice Walker Critique of Revolution" *Black, American Literature Forum.* Vol.20, No.1/2, 1986.

Walker, Alice. *Meridian*. California: Land Mark Books, 1976.