

# Review of the book meridian by alice walker



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The lyrical novel, 'Meridian' by Alice Walker, merits a lyrical introduction. Let me do it with an allegory: "The full moon is shining in the sky. It's full moon day. Observing the beauty of the moon, a tempest rises in the ocean beneath. The ocean, in an effort to reach the moon, sends the roaring waves, one after another. But alas! Can the waves reach the moon howsoever big they may be? Can the moon ever come down to the Earth, whatever be the intensity of the wish!—and yet the struggle goes on for ever!

The truth lies in the struggle that will never end! The love for the cause needs to be on similar lines comparable to the struggle of the ocean to reach the moon. That the waves will ever be able to reach the moon is impossibility so also the possibility of the ocean giving up the struggle is not at all there! The approach of Alice Walker to the many problems she faced many stages she passed through, many pleasant and unpleasant situations she was exposed to—how she handled them with equanimity and grandeur is the actual sum and substance of the theme of the book! This book is not meant for reading, it is worth studying. The substance of her experiences is application-worthy in private and public life of an individual. She lived through the tough civil rights era, and topics like interracial dating are not easy to handle!

The readers of a book expect perfect characters. If there are ten characters, they expect all of them to be perfect, free of any blemish, and true to the salt. Walker has proved in this novel, incomplete characters, the non-coherent ones, can contribute to a perfect story. To expect a uniform writing style in a book, is expecting too much from the author. It depends upon the moods of the writer. The style can vary from chapter to chapter, and even in

between the chapter. It is the author's right to experiment with his characters. The hide and seek approach as for the inner lives of the characters, the method of depicting the same is the prerogative of the author. The author has the purpose behind it, which may not be obvious to the ordinary reader. This is not the shortcoming of Alice Walker; this is her strength!

The book depicts the struggle of the black people during the civil rights movement and the gender struggle of women. The former issue is mainly relevant to USA and the later is the universal one. The democratic society of USA guarantees freedom, equality and co-prosperity. But a sort of pseudo-democracy which is vulnerable to individual or collective egoism, exclusionary racism, gender bias, hegemonic nationalism and ideological fundamentalism still persists, operates with immunity and show their telling effects on the society from time to time.

Meridian is a young black woman and she has the tremendous sense of involvement in whatever she does, to the extent that people think her to be slightly crazy. She is like, any sensitive individual! The story has a number of dream sequences! She is a civil rights worker with a difference! She is afraid of her own black people; her fear is that the solution to the problem of race is creating another more serious problem, dehumanizing the blacks! She is guided more by emotions and constantly thinks whether the remedy (the action plan) is worst than the disease!

On slightest provocation, racial riots erupt in USA even today. The pages of race history and relationships, daubed in bloodshed ask a crying question.

How to make this Planet Earth heaven like? The answer is simple, straight and direct. Eyes full of understanding, heart full of love and the life that refuses conflicts-these alone are enough! That Meridian veers round to spirituality to find solution to the various social issues that she is involved in, is the right approach. No "isms" have solved problems faced by humanity and there is no hope that they ever will! The real spirituality is not something that is preached from the ivory tower. For, that which is no practical can not be spiritual either.

Unless the thought process of the individuals, whether white or black, man or woman, change, the action process can not change. When the thoughts are changed, the mind is changed; when the mind is changed, the man is changed; when the man is changed, the society is changed; when the society is changed, the nation is changed; such changed nations can contribute to the all-pervading happiness. Meridian is involved in the method of securing the type of happiness she visualizes, that is possible through the inner strength of an individual. No enactments or laws can bring about the inner change which is so essential for social harmony.

The story weaves around Meridian, her black on-and-off boy friend Truman Held, and her white Northern best friend Lynne. The civil rights struggle has affected all of them in one way or the other, an element of mutual distrust hangs around their relationship. They are neither totally good, nor totally bad; they are the victims of circumstances. Alice Walkers handles this unique relationship of Meridian very well, in a peculiar non-coherent form, with sensitivity.

If you believe that life is to be lived in its trials, tribulations, duty and beauty-ask Meridian- she would say, ' yes!' She is willing to go to any extent to render help to others. She is aghast at the thought of one individual hurting the other, in the name of race. She finds it difficult to comprehend this situation, because her heart is the spring of love. She is incapable of hating and hurting others! For some of her follies, one is confused whether Meridian deserves condemnation or sympathy.

She got pregnant in ignorance and she had to leave the school. For her work in civil rights, she is offered a college scholarship and she leaves the baby with her relatives and departs. She realizes that it is sin and shame to give up the baby and deny mother's love. After aborting Truman's baby, she gets sterilized. She broods extensively-- that she is denied her mother's love and about her own failure as a mother. She turns stubborn, and her inability to forgive bothers her. But at the same time, she concludes that she had to make the tough choice, otherwise she will not achieve anything in life.

Her indecisions within the decisions that she made continue to follow and haunt her. She is unable to find happiness in her private (family) life and disappointment is in store for her in her public life also. Her trusted co-workers quit and move to better their own prospectus. Despite the paralyzing illness, she continues to work in the most difficult places in the deep South. Non-violence is her flagship and she trusts this method to work and deliver permanent good for the people with whom she is involved, for their welfare. Getting the civil rights is not the end of the journey. This movement has raised many social, political and philosophical issues.

Meridian is an extraordinary character created by Alice Walker that struggles and actually wishes to live like an ordinary character. She is determined to free black people, but circumstances so develop that she is obliged to lead the struggle alone, after the Movement is declared dead. She lives amongst the poorest of the poor in the South, turns poor like them, takes leadership in the non-violent protest marches to give them confidence as well as to secure improvement in conditions in their communities, register them as votes. That was their method of resistance, and to make their voice heard.

To her, efforts for individual perfection and fight for social justice for the people must go on together like the train that runs on two parallel tracks. Society is a big and complicated conglomeration of individuals. Spirituality doesn't guarantee equality as per the secular norms-it promises equanimity. Meridian's struggle is personal and spiritual. The avowed spiritual path is to march from darkness to light. Meridian agrees with her friends that nonviolence has failed to free black people, at the same time she is not willing to give up her commitment to nonviolence. The result achieved from violence can only tender impermanent results. With violence one may achieve certain temporary goals, but it is definitely not the food for the soul! " Brutal force has not won anything durable," -was it not Adolph Hitler who said so!

Meridian says, " perhaps it will be my part to walk behind the real revolutionaries-those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black ... --and when they stop to wash off the blood and find their throats too choked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing, I will come forward and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear. For it

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is the song of the people, transformed by the experience of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul. If I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all". (p. 201)—this is her confusion and conviction. The split-personality within her is showing and expressing!

Conclusion:

At times, Meridian is like the fire-brand revolutionary, who wields the gun; on another occasion she sits in a corner with the paper and pen! The application of non-violence to solve hard social problems requires lots of patience and sacrifice. Every sacrifice has the sacri ' price!' Firstly there should be a cause for the sacrifice, secondly there must be the heart for the sacrifice, thirdly there must be the girt, determination and commitment for the sacrifice and finally to receive the rewards or punishments for the sacrifice with a balanced mental attitude!

This is the toughest test! Therefore, some drop out; some fail! And a few do succeed and they are the great ones! It is difficult to say to which category Meridian belongs! Even Alice Walker perhaps doesn't know and that is her -- the problem!