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Bias and difference in the narration of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*

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For ages the researches have been done to examine the bias and difference in Gender narration. One can observe a sharp contrast in the narration of the same issue by different genders. However even amidst the same gender there could be difference in addressing in same issue. One such example can be drawn through the parallel narration between Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker who talks about the women of their past. They have a common identity in gender and different identity based on the country, culture, race and age. Despite belonging to the same gender, when they talk about the subjugation of women, their narration and standpoint highly vary. To examine the variation in their perspective and narration the two major works namely Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* has been chosen. This paper ventures to trace the reason for the bias and difference in the narration of a same gender who addresses a similar issue.

Key Words: Gender narratives, bias in narration, Woolf and Alice Walker, Women Subjugation

Both Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* traces the women of the past but in different context. The former discusses the state of Black women from the early sixteenth century, their status as a woman and as an artist. On the other hand, Woolf in her lecture discusses about the women writers of the past including different genres like poem, novels and prose. However, though both vary in context, culture and narration, still the writers discusses common subject i.e subjugation. The theme of subjugation is a common criterion in both their mentioned text.

To begin with "In Search of our Mother's Gardens", Jean Toomer's notion about the sex worker is discussed in the opening paragraph. He is in praise of the intense spirituality of Black women which they are unaware about. They themselves struggle and stumble. They were dimmed and confused by pain. He further adds that their bodies are the temple (shrines) where the men find their abode. However, these women are the saints who were stared out of the world and some of them no doubt are their great mothers and grandmothers.

Alice Walker has a sense of affection in addressing the ancestral women artist. She calls them as 'mother' and 'grandmother' whereas Woolf maintains a distance with the previous era women writers. Both Alice Walker and Woolf quote the name of numerous women writers. For instance, Walker profoundly discusses the life of Phillis Wheatley, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston etc and Woolf talks about Currer Bell, George Eliot and George Sand etc. In Both cases to use the phrase of Woolf, "Anonymity runs in their blood" (57) and in a way "Women are poorer than men because this or that" (49).

With regard to the domestic treatment of women, Woolf makes a special reference to the mention of 'wife-beating' in Professor Trevelyan's *History of England*. Along with wife-beating an emphasis also has been laid upon the state of daughters who refuses to marry the gentleman proposed by their parents. To quote,

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Wife-beating...was a recognized right of man and was practiced without shame by high as well as low...similarly ‘the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents’ choice was liable to lock up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion. Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice, particularly in the “Chivalrous” upper classes. (Woolf, 49-50)

Even in the time of Stuarts reign, the husband was the lord and the wife was treated as slave in both the upper and middle class. Woolf in particular points out to the different state of the woman in reality and in portrayal of literature. Similarly, Walker also quotes the plight of women in below lines,

When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty inspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we asked for love, we have been given children. (405)

According to Toomer, “they lay vacant and fallow as autumn fields, with harvest time never insight: and he saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy; and become prostitutes, without resistance; and become children without fulfillment” (Walker, 402).

Whether it is Phillis Wheatley or it is Walker’s own mother, all have been subjected to male chauvinism. The woman who carved an identity for themselves or the woman whose personal account has not yet been shared has undergone the same agony. A middle class woman and the Black woman have never found their mark in history, art and literature yet they made a beautiful garden for the forthcoming Black women who could happily tread upon in that garden. Alice Walker’s discussion about women of past brings in a new term called “Contrary instincts”.

Alice Walker in order to bring the difference between a White Woman and a Black woman pathetic condition cleverly uses the phrase of Virginia Woolf. She quotes Woolf’s line inserting phrases like ‘black woman’, ‘eighteenth century’ and ‘saint’. By inserting this phrase in the statement made by Woolf, she raises a major issue on a term like “Contrary instinct”. For Woolf “Contrary instinct” simply means that she must have lost her health and sanity but for Alice Walker the term means much more like “Chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one’s body by someone else and submission to alien region”. To quote,

“any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [inset “eighteenth century,” insert “black woman”, insert born or made a slave:] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard (insert “saint”), feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts (add chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one’s own body by someone else, and submission to an alien region”), that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty”. (Walker, 404)

Again Walker in another context quotes Woolf to show the variation in subjugation of their ancestral women. She quotes a line from Woolf and similarly inserts phrase from the African American woman context to exhibit a fact that unlike the White woman these women could not even see a spark of creativity. They kept a seed of flower within themselves which they could never see. Virginia Woolf talks about the anonymity of the writers who could never sign their work with their names whereas on the other hand for the Black woman even the creativity remained anonymous without any label within themselves. Walker cleverly uses the phrase and play with the words of Virginia Woolf. She draws a parallel line between the White Woman and the Black woman as follow,

White Woman	Black Woman
1. Working class	Slaves, the wives and daughters of share croppers
2. Emily Bronte (or) Robert Burns	Zora Hurston (or) Richard Wright
3. Devils	Sainthood
4. Wise woman selling herbs	Root workers

After drawing the parallel line, Alice Walker compare Anon's anonymous identity of being a woman with the anonymity of creative spark that laid within her mother and grandmother 'like a sealed letter they could not plainly read' (Walker, 407).

Woolf insists on the need to have some money and a room of her own to become a creative writer on her own but Walker on the other hand wonders on the creativity of her mother and grandmother who did not possess even their body and mind for themselves. For ages it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write. They did not have any freedom to paint, to sculpt or to expand their mind by any other artistic work. Over a period of centuries those women who might have been poets, novelists, essayists and short story writers must have passed away with real gifts stifled in them. However, this did not put an end to the women artist story. Due to the biological gift, later many African American Women artists could have evolved. As walker states perhaps Phillis Wheatley's mother also could have been an artist and therefore despite being a slave her mother's signature was drawn clearly upon her. The saintliness of their mothers and grandmothers has led to "literally cover the holes in our walls with sunflowers" (Walker, 408).

In contrary to this self-struggle and emancipation of African – American women, Woolf talks about the struggle of women in men's world. She ponders upon issues like the statement "Who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare"? (Woolf, 53). Further she throws her wild imagination and discusses on the imaginary sister of Shakespeare naming her to be Judith. In detail she portrays her to be a gifted sister with artistic sense of acting in plays but at the end in due course of persuading her dream in London, how she would have ended up in the hands of Nick Greene, the actor-manager. Bearing a child in womb, she could have killed herself one winter's night and got buried at some cross-roads.

The entire narration places Judith's struggle in the man's world whereas in case of Walker's subjugation on women the struggle and the emancipation begins from the bottom layer of finding oneself. The lecture of Woolf tries to renovate the creative writing nature within oneself. In contrary Walker states that these African American women have already found themselves. To quote Walker's lines, "Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength-in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (409). Woolf sees man's world as a great hindrance for the creative development of women. Even Walker expresses such notion but she does not fail to quote the superior idea about African American women by Jean Toomer. Woolf brings Shakespeare or Trevelyan in the lecture from a different perspective. One could see a sharp contrast between them in treating men's ideal.

To conclude, Walker's and Woolf's narration of subjugation of women vary at large and intersect at some context. Due to the difference in race, one could find that despite belonging to same gender their priority varies. All those variations have been discussed in detail. So, more than the gender the elements like race, age and the social strata creates a great impact in women's writing.

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