



SUBJECTS IN DISCOURSE: BLACK FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL QUERY

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ABSTRACT

The autobiographical writings by Black women have been shaped by their unique literary legacy and the experiences which are again distinctive to them. Their narratives become a site where they dismantle and resist any attempt to diminish any stereotypical representation of Black womanhood. Their narratives, thus becomes a space where they construct and define a uniquely black and strong female selfhood based on their legacy and experiences. In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the significance of the genre of autobiography more specially as skillfully employed by the Black Women autobiographers. The paper further tries to also meditate on how the genre of autobiography has intrinsic relations with the ideology of gender.

Keywords: Self, Autobiography, Gender, Genre

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Autobiography is one of the richest and most revealing modes of manifestation of African American people among all other narrative traditions. The genre of autobiography has always been central to African Americans to examine themselves and to celebrate their unique experiences and ideals. Since its inception it has been a powerful mode of expression to articulate, and by degrees, to alter the social, political and cultural veracity of the United States. The paper sets the tone by mapping a brief history of the African American autobiographical tradition specially the African American Women's autobiographical tradition. The paper sets out the discussion on how autobiography is a powerful form through which black people have documented their protests expressing the specified reality of the racialized society in the West. Inscribing themselves in narrative has been one of the most popular ways of recording their realities and simultaneously documenting their resistance. The autobiographical form constitutes a long history

within the African American community which beginning as the slave narrative speaks, gradually turned to be a popular form of protest literature, trying to tort attempts to keep the black people silent and invisible throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The genre of autobiography has been a very effective and popular tool of expression for the African Americans. The year 1945 saw the publication of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* which met with immense critical appreciation and it's a landmark in the literary history of autobiography. The narrative very poignantly captivates the consciousness of America with the compelling experience of initial pain and deprivation to the ultimate triumph of fuel. Another important writer of the period was W.E. Du Bois with his brilliantly exclaimed narrative *Dusk of Dawn*. The subtitles of both the narratives i.e. *An Essay toward an Autobiography of Race Concept* by Du Bois and Richard Wright's *A Record of Childhood and Youth* reveal the nature of black autobiography as a documentation of the actual version of reality and

not fiction. The genre of autobiography has helped these writers to give voice from every segment of black life. Like Du Bois and Wright people from all sections of society whether man or woman, radical or conformist, a songwriter or a scholar have made use of personal history to reassert their identities. Autobiography as both literature and personal history has attended to the needs of various talented people the out. The outcome of this is a big compliment and reaching the tradition of Du Bois and Wright who intern have inherited from Langston Hughes, Ida Wells Barnett, James Weldon Johnson, Booker T Washington and the slave narrators. The 60's and 70s on the 20th century have been a most fertile era for the development of the general by the African Americans. Autobiographies by James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Claude Brown, Dick Gregory Billie Holiday, and Nate Shaw have been critically acclaimed and they play a major role in linking the author with the readers. Moreover these narratives also give voice to personal identities which have led to the reformulation and re examination of issues like raise ethnicity and class by critics and social scientists. The paper attempts to appraise its relationship between gender and genre evaluating issues through the category of sexual difference interrogating glorified gender boundaries. A careful study of autobiography also shows how the ideology of gender has fortified the opinions of masculine and feminine cell phone, thus in turn promoting the hierarchy of the sexes. The issues of gender and John Ryan autobiography are so intricately interlocked that the various diagnostic strengths cannot stand independent of each other the end of centric tradition of autobiography has rendered women's dialogue with the genre particularly troublesome. The paper raise the pertinent questions in an attempt to problematize the aforementioned issues column how old is generic inflations rendered? In what manner the issue of gender modulated the issue of genre? In what ways the theoretical move impressed the study of self preferential writings? The female autobiographer struggles with contravening postures as she goes from one fiction of self representation to the other period she simultaneously engages in the discourse of cell food that aligns itself to the discourse of men which tells us the power and hegemony of the melts subjectivity and at the same

time by choosing the genre she unveils her subversive posture for literally authority period to further complicate her woos her story is not exactly the same with the story of a man and so her kinship with the authorising figure of male cell phone becomes quite problematic. Added to this she also has to inscribe the female self in the discourse constituting the idea of a woman that defines the arguments of female subjectivity her relationship to language for more power and learning. The theory of gender always sees a woman's life as a silent space, a gap and his ideal woman is always reticent and her life is shaped around the lives of others. Looking from this point of view woman has no autobiographical self. When we look back to the autobiography tradition in the past how we see that the patriarchal discourse with its own inherent fractures and contradictions can never be a totalizing phenomena most women of the period of renaissance maintain the customary silence; but by writing letters Diaries and journals they obliquely spoke of themselves. But there were women who wrote autobiography narratives which coincided with the emergence of the genre like the life story of Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the Life of Anne Bradstreet the life story of Madame Guyon, the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich – all of which in themselves are interesting and radical. The autobiographies and additives by other women that followed speak out loud that despite the hegemonic efforts by the patriarchal discourse, women have chosen to write autobiographical there by inserting significance and authority out of cultural absence. A woman becomes the generator of significance rather than just performances of representation but her own initiation in the act of writing autobiography is extremely precarious because she expects the audience and the readers to read her performance is a woman she transgressive cultural formation and anticipation as soon as she inscribed herself in the narrative. Moreover the language she appropriates to is a tool for oppression used by the dominant discourse. She becomes conflicted because she situates herself in between to different types of discourse the discourse of men and the discourse of woman the female. The female retrospective is informed thereby in the dialogue of these two conflicting discourses.

The conflict of the female autobiographies to dismantle the two discourses invariably impacts the texture and structure, the thematic concerns and the rhetorical strategies of the narrative. The negotiation thus threatens to dismantle the paternal narratives of the andocentric discourse. However endangered attempts of the female autobiography of ports at self representation are, are very active using the public platform of autobiography informs the disciplinary norms of the patriarchal order. Now in order to understand the intricate relationship between gender and genre we also need to understand the history of the theories of autobiography as propounded by various critics the emergence of Autobiographical theories from William C Spengemann who propounded his theory in *Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of Literary Genre* to Paul John Eakin who presents his views in *Fictions of Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. More specifically we need to see the history of women's autobiographical theorization as found in the works by theorists like Mary G Mason, Estelle Jelinek, Shari Benstock, Bella Brodsky and Celeste Schenck. Drawing inspiration from French feminism, theorists like Donna C. Stanton and Nancy K Miller began the study of reviewing gender essentialism through hypothesis of sexual difference. There narratives questions the invisibility of women's writing in the canon of western autobiography, other autobiography critics such as Felicity Nussbaum, Susan Stanford Friedman, Barbara Green Elizabeth Genovese Fox have offered different kinds of readings of women's autobiography. The concept of self has always been the focus of attention any literary end of years more specifically in autobiography. The focus on the self and its construction in the narrative has engaged much critical attention during the subsequent years. The concept of the female selfhood as positive by critics like Sheila Rowbotham and Nancy Chodorow has furthered our understanding of the self which is diametrically different from the main sales. The issues of female self would become more problematic when the subject is a woman of colour. The problem here arises because of her anomalous positioning and the inclination to interpret her subjectivity in solely racial terms.

20th century female autobiographies of continue to write of the self in a world that still the rights blackness and privileges the male over the female. Their model of identity construction inspired by the models of the 19th century black female autobiographers. The self constructed in the discourse were not as static self but rather a process where the self is under reinvention. Reconstructing their selves idiot the significance of female cell phone becomes more important when we study the writings of Harriet Jacobs Mary Church Terrell, Zora Neale Hurston and Annie Moody who took radical private and public stances resisting their in their dehumanising conditions. These women come up age at different times their strategies for negotiating the self in the negatives are entirely different; yet they create self that resume some control over their lives. Using the operational some birds are racially inferior self of the patriarch context into the finally triumphant black experiential self. In her prize-winning monograph, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*, Margo Perkins reads these works as "extensions of the writers' political activism"(cover):

Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown exemplify a radical current in African American political resistance. Their individual and collective commitment to revolutionary activism is evident in the kind of autobiography each produces. Like other leftist radicals, Davis, Shakur and Brown seek through their work (as both activists and writers) to alter mass consciousness by disrupting the status quo in a way they believe will lead to progressive social transformation.

Thus we see how autobiography focuses on the centrality of self in the writings of African American women and especially on their negotiation of the self in their narratives. The significance of black women's autobiography rest up on their brilliant ability to document their life as human beings and as African American women. Black women's writing also clears out the unique black American consciousness. Throughout their narratives they develop several themes which frequently occur in black auto viral discourse: like the role of community, black heritage as a source of strength, the role of elders in the

community etc. Their writings are also unique because of certain other themes like the theme of birth and death, the search for selfhood, the transition from innocence to knowledge and the importance of determining ones own self definitions. The articulation of these themes and humorous and sometimes bitter portrayal of their own life have firmly established black women's writing as a very significant voice.

NOTES

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- [5]. Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender In Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick, J: Rutgers University Press, 2002).
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- [7]. Margo Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2000), p. 22.