



## Thematic analysis of 'Everyday Use' short story by Alice Walker

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### Abstract

This Paper aim to analyze themes of "Everyday Use" short story by Alice Walker such as heritage, race and tradition theme through support of this story characters and to differentiate characters their relationship together and traditional life together in this study as well as reveals cultural tradition with the help of these short story characters who these characters give meaning of heritage, race and tradition in the context of literary study to depict past and present period use as well.

**Keywords:** Alice Walker, heritage, race, tradition, Dee, Maggie, mama

### Introduction

Alice Walker was born in the United States on 1944. She wrote almost on African-American women experiences in the area of rural south and she was famous in writing novels, short stories, poetry and essays in the field of literary work so in this way one of her best short stories "Everyday Use" short story is discussed on the background of African-American women cultural tradition especially in the study of this short story focuses on the theme of heritage, race and traditional life of characters of two daughters through perspective of their mother conflict relationship of heritage concept in this story study view (Whit Sitt). As to one of those daughters are Dee and Maggie and their mother is Ms. Johnson she who narrates the story on the theme of heritage, race and tradition value concept discussed here. First of all, here tells meaning of heritage in this story context through characters.

#### i) Meaning of Heritage

The word heritage in this story is considered into two ways. One meaning of heritage is family things or thoughts which came from ancestors so this meaning belong to Maggie and her mother characters in this story which leads to the readers family heritage in this story context meaning and on the contrary, the second meaning of heritage is beliefs, things or thoughts are to be recorded in history which are considered here African-American heritage which belong to Dee character in this study of story so there are two important approaches for heritage which discusses here through support of this story characters ([www.bartleby.com/The-Meaning-of-Heritage-in-Alice-Walker](http://www.bartleby.com/The-Meaning-of-Heritage-in-Alice-Walker)).

#### ii) Dee Views about Heritage

In view of Dee about heritage including things, On the contrary for Maggie and her mother for heritage idea including people. Dee thinks that she should be connected to her past back African-American roots through the symbol of quilt to show people display of this thing i.e quilt to be recorded in home or displaying this thing quilt for the city of people and she tells Maggie and her mother Ms. Johnson this thing should be hanged for the past as heritage in home which is traditionally recorded thing to display to join her African-

American heritage so in this context she gives references of this heritage through these dialogue words.

*"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts... She would probably be backward enough to put them everyday use... They are priceless... Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they would be in rags. Less than that! ("Everyday Use" 66)*

In the above mentioned dialogue words for Dee things which take backward i.e. her desire to go back towards Africa and represent her heritage through quilt symbol thing but for Maggie and her mother heritage is covered in people as that this notion of Dee makes a clear point for her that she is intentionally associated with the concept of heritage and her detail discussion given below:

#### iii) Heritage as a past tradition by Dee view

According to David Cowart,

*"She (Dee) wants to make the lid of the butter churn into a centerpiece for her table. She wants to hang quilts on the wall. She wants, in brief, to do what white people do with the cunning and quaint implements and produces of the past. Wangero fails to see the mote in her own eye when she reproaches her mother and sister for a failure to value their heritage – she who wants only to preserve that heritage as the negative index to her own sophistication" (175)*

In this statement Dee is described as a newly portrayed perspective when she arrives from college towards her home America then she eats food which is prepared by her mother. After having dinner she takes the churn and dasher after rifling the trunk and tries attempts to take the quilts (410-412) now It's clear that she has renounced her American name, she still catches to American consumer culture and she wanted her costume.

#### iv) Heritage as a constant determination by Dee View

*"[The quilts] had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then big Dee and I had hung them on the quilts frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the lone star*

pattern. The other was walk around the mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley Grandma Dee one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wrote in the Civil War." (55)

In this scenario quoted statement why Dee wants these quilts why because they belong to family history and especially history in general and it becomes a great example for Dee why because how objects capture the spirits of the people and their culture as well in this object context (57) and also rises curiosity about them which belong to historical tradition what Dee wanted to show objects in historical manner for the people of those areas in this short story context. In addition to this, she emphasized that this notion of heritage as constant determination showed our own perspective that what we are at stage of heritage level. ("Everyday use" 58).

#### v) Heritage as a historical tradition view by Dee.

"No," said Wangero. I do not want those [quilts]. They are stitched around the borders by machine".

"That'll make them last better," I said

"That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine! "She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them (59-61).

From this scenario it is assumed that Dee does not want made machine stitched borders over the quilts (63) but she has curiosity of her Grandma past stitched bordered quilt by hand so as to she has likeness of historical tradition view which is most liked by her why because it keeps on constant culture and meaning in history. (65)

#### vi) Heritage as an artistic tradition

"I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," [Dee] said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I, I think of something artistic to do with the dasher". (53)

It, s clear evidence that she (Dee) appreciates things very much as understanding art status but it, s also important notice that she has easy luxury use them to the way so she will be rich financially by decorating these things in the form of art to put their heritage in this way. Some people have kept warm of artistic tradition to go on it. Besides this, she showed her attitude towards art what should be. Moreover, she made a clear line of artistic value show within the society what is meaning of artistic tradition which goes on from ages till today.

#### a) Heritage as Everyday use by Maggie

She (Maggie) gives honor heritage in everyday life by using the symbol of quilt for everyday use rather than Dee wanted to put quilt for historical tradition in home especially on the basis of heritage concept. (Alice Walker 113). And the quilts should be used for everyday use in life because they are traditionally doing by our ancestors and our old Grandma (Alice Walker 113). So it, clear from scenario belief Maggie wants to maintain last connection which is traditionally passes on till today into generations to come.

#### b) Heritage as old tradition of ancestors by Mama.

Mama describes herself as a "large, big –boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the season of winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overall during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man in this short story ("Everyday Use" 408). So it, s clear from this description which I have put her with the second reference i. e belong to education (409), that leads to the readers that this woman nature is interest in practical aspect of life but she does not get lost a lot of time to think over abstract thoughts in concept of heritage view. However, her less education does not make resistance to remember her ancestors tradition which is going on for a couple of years for her. So in this context to clarify this example here is put quoted statement to associate two pieces of fabric through two quilts and those pieces were cut from the people clothes.

"In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell, s Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the civil war... "some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes Grandma Dee, s mother handed down to her" Mama said, moving up to touch the quilts". (Alice Walker 412).

It, s clear from this statement that quilts put its meaning to mama while she tries to move up the quilts that symbolizes the heritage that has been moving for long period of time as to lead this phenomena towards heritage as that She touches the people whom these quilts represent. And these are referred to other walker's works. As in the "The color purple, she also uses quilt as to help of a dying woman and to remember mother (159). And in her essay "In search of our Mother's Gardens, she writes for quilt in the Smithsonian Institute that was made by an anonymous woman if we put this anonymous woman from Alabama, then she would turn out one of our grandmothers" (14,15). So Alice Walker uses quilts to symbolize two women bondage between them. However, in the "Everyday Use" bond is used between women of many generations.

Alice Walker has knitted racism view to portray social and economic conditions of characters in this short story as to keep value of their traditions as discussed below:

#### vii) Race view by Dee

"You do not have to call me by [the name wangero] if you do not want to, said wander. "Why should not I?" I asked. "If that, s what you want us to call you, we, ll call you". (38-39)

It, s clear from this statement that Dee only changes her name to shock her mother and according to narrator point of view (Mama, 40) Dee only tries to celebrate her African roots which were earlier connected herself these notions of racism when she went to college for study. However, she made constant her idea of racism until she came back Africa from America to depict portray of social status in this context of story (Mama-42) says these notions of social status should not leave which makes a clear difference of family status in the society as well.

#### viii) Race view by Mama for Dee

*"Well," I say. "Dee".*

*"No Mama," she says. "Not Dee, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"*

*"What happened to Dee?" I wanted to know.*

*"She's dead," Wnagero said. "I could not bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me" (24-27).*

From the above mentioned lines of the story Alice Walker clears that she [Dee] does not make upset regarding change of name as other people think. She makes a clear point she is associated with her old roots of Africa not by changing her name as 'Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo'. So as a result she showed her personality of her racism not only by changing her name but also she made the same thought as before were.

#### Conclusion

Alice Walker put this story on the meaning of heritage among women over conflicted relationship of heritage concept. Heritage word here led to the readers into two thought process firstly, it was inspired by things traditions and then it was led towards how people used it for a couple of time. All this process showed through characters of this story. One of those women two are daughters and one their mother. Dee considered heritage in historical and recorded point of view in the form of past tradition, constant determination and artistic tradition. Maggie viewed heritage as everyday use and Mama put thought of heritage as old ancestors' tradition.

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