



STUDY AND ENHANCEMENT IN A RESEARCH OVER THE DECADES OF WRITING BY MAYA ANGELOU

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ABSTRACT:

This Paper describes, Maya Angelou as a poet of the Multi-faceted personality by dealing especially with her poetical themes. Her writings made herself a great human personality. Some of her writings “Caged Bird”, “Phenomenal woman”, “Still I Rise” is discussed in this paper show her stability and enthusiasm in interest towards her writings. The paper also presents her idea in each concept of writing towards decades.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, Caged Bird, Phenomenal woman.

INTRODUCTION:

Maya Angelou, original name Marguerite Annie Johnson, she was born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S. She died May 28, 2014, Winston Salem, North Carolina. She is one of American poets and actresses whose several volumes of autobiography explore the themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression. Maya Angelou is an African-American poet, novelist, educator, dramatist, actress, producer, filmmaker, historian, dancer, and civil rights activist. She is one of the most famous and influential voices in the United States. Maya Angelou wrote poems about segregation and discrimination toward African-American in the United States and some of her poems talk about identity and the issue of racism. Maya Angelou is one of woman writers who use feminism approach in her work. In her poems, domination that is why the researcher chooses Maya Angelou’s works to be analyzed.

Nowadays, there are so many poems which is written by using discrimination and segregation as the subject because of the condition which appears in the society. Besides, there are some women poets who write poems by using feminism touches. For example, the image of woman in the society, the position of women among the men, and the discriminations which occur in the women’s life. Some people try to describe that theme by using feminism perspective. Feminism is an awareness of women who are under man’s domination in many aspects and set of action to resist it. Feminism is a theory which explains about woman emancipation in some aspect such as politic, economy, and another social aspect where women are not allowed to take part. In many people perspective, this is because of the stereotype of men and women in the sex site.

Maya Angelou, through her powerful writings, has inspired generations of women, African Americans and all people who struggle to overcome prejudice, discrimination and abuse. Throughout her life, Angelou has defied social norms. After being raped by her mother's boyfriend, she withdrew and was mute for five years. However, encouraged by her grandmother, who introduced her to literature, she gradually emerged as a talented artist. Her diverse career includes being the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco.

The contribution of Maya Angelou's writings to African American Literature is not merely of literary works but also has deep inspirational and motivational aspects to the women of any region and country all over the world then and now. The writings of Maya Angelou, especially her autobiographies record the birth, her childhood and her adult experiences and struggles among the American society as a black woman. Meanwhile it also represents the life and struggles of every black woman in the American patriarchal society. Her verbal skill has created identity and respect not just to her work and to the nation she dwelled, but has also credited self-identity to every women's heart.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Rosenstand states that "the first wave generally refers to the feminist movement in Europe and the United States from its early beginning the seventeenth century to the accomplishment of its most urgent goal, the right for women to right". Philcer and Whelehan (2004:53) say that "In Britain, the origins of first wave feminism lay in the widespread social and economic changes of industrialisation, one aspect of which was the extension of constitutional rights to wider sections of the (male) population. He also states that "This early feminism was concerned with the education and employment rights of women and with improving the legal rights of married women. There are four genres in this period. They are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism.

Indiani Eka Permatasari This study analyzes discrimination toward black woman which appears in Maya Angelou's poems. In this case, the researcher chose three poems of Maya Angelou. Those are "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird". In other to discover them, the study was conducted by using feminism theory and also historical and biographical approaches. It focuses on words, lines, and stanzas of the poems.

Dr. Darshana Trivedi The present paper is an attempt to study Maya Angelou's poetry which received less critical attention than her autobiographies. The career of Maya Angelou is a testament both to her vitality and power to endure. She also describes African American women's experiences and protest against the gender codes of American society by celebrating African-American women's self-respect. The tone of her poetry is optimistic, and confident. Through her writing she spreads the message of love, hope, sisterhood and peace across the globe by singing, "I am the dream and the hope of slave. I rise".

Social and Political Issues:

Angelou's poetry addresses social and political issues involving the African-American and challenges the validity of traditional American values and myths. In her poem, *America (Oh Pray my wings, Part III, Poem 3)*, for example, she rejects the notion that justice is available to all Americans. She refers to the problems of racism, and poverty which have affected the people. In the long history of America the gold of her promise has never been minded, the promise of justice for all has not been kept.

There is racial bigotry in the South where black people are killed ruthlessly (it used to be; not anymore). At the end of the poem, the poet calls for the end of 'legends untrue' which are spread through history to entrap America's children. There is a fervent call by the poet to discard the false myths once and for all and to discover the country afresh. In another poem, *Song for the Old Ones (Oh Pray my Wings, Part V, Poem 6)*, she recalls how the suffering blacks survived through the brutal humiliations of the white men. In the poem, *And I Still Rise (1978)*, Angelou reveals her determination to rise above the demoralising defeat that she faces in life and to grasp life on its own terms. In spite of calculating distortion of facts about the blacks and their history, she says "She will like dust rise still".

This "new" feminism is characterized by local, national, and transnational activism, in areas such as violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation, and the overall "pornofication" of the media. There are many perspectives about feminism. Rosemarie Tong on her book *Feminism Thought A More Comprehensive Introduction* third edition, there are some types of feminism, those are Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Care-Focused Feminism, Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism, Ecofeminism, and Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism. In this thesis the researcher presents four types of feminism, they are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, and Marxist and Socialist feminism.

Fascination for Man In all her works, including her autobiographies, her irresistible fascination for man is seen. She longed to be their beloved whenever she saw them passing by her windows. She feels that men at the beginning are gentle and tender in their love for the beloveds. But in course of time, they show their real face and cause a sense of suffocation in their women. All their beliefs about men and their love are crushed. After this bitter experience, the lady comes to know about men and their crude and coarse behaviour. Now the lady (the poet) begins to look at men who are passing by her windows without any longing for them. The mystery is dissolved. The aura of man is lost to her. The lady's eagerness is replaced by disappointment and frustration.

Maya Angelou is an Afro-American Poet who is famous for her autobiographies and collections of poetry. Her poems have been published in various collections. Some of them

are “Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘Fore I Diie, Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well, Still I Rise, I Shall Not Be Moved. Her autobiography published in six volumes with various names:

“I Know Why The Caged Birds Sings, Gather Together In My Name, Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas, The Heart Of A Woman, All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes, A Song Flung Up To Heaven.”. These autobiographies are a record of life of Maya that she lives. Early childhood of Maya was not up to the mark. She was ignored. She was not given proper attention and care by her parents. Maya has been a victim of rape at her tender age of eight. She was molested by her mother’s boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. This incident changed her life. When this rape was known to her family, she comes to hear news, ‘that Mr. Freeman was killed.’ After this incident Maya conceals herself in a colorless cocoon. She becomes silent. It was Mrs. Flower who makes this little girl speak. She encourages Maya to speak by telling her importance of language. Her words brought a new dawn in Maya’s life. Then these words, in the form of literature become Maya’s main strength, the strength that makes her popular not only in her own country but in the whole world also. Now because of the literature she becomes a world famous personality. It also helps her to understand both herself and the world around her. The scene of rape was an unforgettable moment in life of Maya. She still knows its pain. She shares her views on this unfavourable and disgusting vice in her poem “Men”:

*One day they hold you in the
Palms of their hands, gentle, as if you
Were the last raw eggs in the world. Then
They tighten up....*

Maya has experienced a lot of negative things in her life: The great depression, her parents’ death, rape, racism and her becoming as an unwedded mother at age of sixteen and bad marriages. Thus Angelou’s life made her far more than a loser or weeper instead; she would be labelled as a poet, an actress, a dancer, author, a teacher and a survivor. In her poem “No Loser, No Weeper” Maya tells that she hates to lose something, whether it is small watch or a toy. It is also related to her personal life because when her mother died she locked herself in a room and cried for an entire week. She also explains that how she lost a doll once and cried for a week. For the lost doll says Maya: “I lost a doll once and cried for a week./ She could open her eyes, and do all but speak./....I tell you, I hate to lose something.

The most famous poem of Maya Angelou is “Caged Bird” which is a part of her collection Oh Shaker Why Don’t You Sing. The title of the poem was adapted from the poem “Sympathy” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the celebrated African American poet. Written

towards the end of the Civil rights movement, Angelou in her poem talks about the dehumanising racial segregation and gender discrimination of black women in the American society. She compares the struggles of a bird in confinement with the plight of black Americans especially black women. She enhances the contrast by juxtaposing the images of a free bird and a caged one. The poet says,

*The caged bird sings with
A fearful trill of things unknown
But longed for still and his
Tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom*

In the poem, caged bird is a symbol of the black people, especially black women who are denied freedom, justice and equality on the basis of race and gender. During slavery black women faced violence at the hands of their white masters and also become victim of sexual abuse. Even though slavery has been long over, the prejudicial cultural logic at work continues to perpetuate oppression of black people. As Hariher Kulkarni aptly writes in this context, “The brutal treatment that the black women received during slavery invariably left profound scars on their psyche...the external forces operating at the socioeconomic levels came to bear an unmistakable relationship to the internal fears, worries, anxieties and feelings of inadequacy and frustration”.

Maya talks about several barriers that remain between whites and blacks. In the opening lines of the poem Angelou uses words such as Breeze, fat worms etc. that portray the white society as selfish and caring more about wealth than black’s plights and sufferings. Angelou has always been a victim of racial insult in her life. She as well as other blacks have suffered a lot due to racism. Thus the poem is an extended metaphor of racial segregation present in society. The same experience of racial insult is recorded in her autobiography I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings When Momma takes Maya to the town’s white dentist, he humiliates his black patients by saying that he’d rather put his “hand in a dog’s mouth than in a nigger’s”.

Image of Black Women in poem “Still I Rise”

“Still I Rise” is one of Maya Angelou’s best known poem. This poem was published in 1978. “Still I Rise” is about a Blacks living among Whites. Reading the history of feminism, this poem was written on second waves because the second waves was begun on 1960. In this era more black people opened their voice, especially black women. The term second-wave

feminism refers mostly to the radical feminism of the women's liberation movement. In this poem tells how Maya Angelou as one of black woman got oppression and discrimination. The type of feminism which found is Radical Feminism because Angelou wrote how her struggle to live around Whites who have bad thinking about black people. Angelou wrote in her poem below.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I wals like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room
(Still I Rise, 2nd stanza)

Angelou refers to her own tone as “sassiness and asks the hearer if her sassy tone is upsetting. She notices that the people around her in her society are “beset with gloom” when she success. She questions this. She knows that she successes in life, in her writing, and as a woman. The “oil wells pumping in her living room” symbolized her success. But it continued in the next stanza.

Just like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise. (Still I Rise, 3rd stanza)

Angelou compares herself to the moon and the sun as they are affected by the tides. This gave the reader the understanding that she has no other choice but to rise up out of her affliction. Trying as society might to keep her oppressed, it is in her nature to rise up and stand against oppression just as it is the nature of the tides to respond to the moon.

CONCLUSION:

Maya Angelou is one of the black writer who could support herself by her writing. She is praised for her ability to say what important was to millions of black people especially black woman. She is famous for her description of Black people life. She uses her works to praise voice concern about race and woman. She often writes poems and books about racial issues and feminism perspective Maya Angelou's poems are written testimonial narratives that reveal the transition from an intense experience of racial disparity to a world that must accommodate the 'phenomenal woman'. Her growth reflects the strength and individuality of

womanhood. Angelou has brought to light how she has had to endure appalling incidents, incidents that were in themselves hostile and filled with racial prejudice. In the first poem “Still I Rise”, the theme discrimination acts by White people. The theme shows the Maya ever experienced of discrimination. She experienced it since she was a child and lives in a town which practice of discrimination still much appeared because in her town the majority group is White people and at the time the society was controlled by Whites.

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