



Maya Angelou: An inspiration for women empowerment ...with particular reference to her autobiographies

Shivangna Sharma¹, Dr. Malti P Sharma²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

² Associate Professor, Department of English, S.K. Govt. P.G. College, Sikar, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Angelou explores the subjects like identity, rape, racism, and literacy as it contains a sequence of struggles and harassments. With progression in the steady state of life she experiences the more blatant instances of racism, such as a white speaker's haughty statement at her eighth-grade graduation, her white boss's assertion on calling her Mary, and a white dentist's refusal to treat her. Her personal displacement repeats the larger social force that banishes black all across the country. Plagued by the triple conflict of racism, sexism, and power, Maya is depreciated and debilitated at every turn, making her unable to acclimatize at one dwelling, between the ages of 3 to 16 she is made to shuttle around seven different homes. Black woman in America experiences threefold strong-arming of race, sex and class. In the United States the combat for equality, mainly in the southern states, has been long and difficult, from the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's to the political deliberations still going on today. This Research will try to uplift the curtain on those harsh realities and will make readers as well as society familiar with the impulsive issues like racism, Prejudices with in society, colonial history and condition of Blacks in White Society. A thorough study on the authors work will present a realistic account of the socio-economic and cultural condition of the past, making the current generation acclimatize with the life and the times of the earlier generation and its influence on the contemporary life and to develop a sense of respect for the Women in their respective arenas and treat them with equality. The present chapter voices the struggled repression from a racist and Chauvinist society; as how a black women attempted to create not only racial equality but also gender equality through her undaunted audacity and forbearance. The study focuses on Angelou's phenomena of resistance in the background of post colonialism through exploring the current means by which people formulate their racial identity. She is an inspiration for all women of the universe.

Keywords: identity, rape, racism, literacy, displacement, Plagued, influence, contemporary life, gender equality, phenomena of resistance

Introduction

Maya Angelou has written seven autobiographical narratives all of which critically explore all the defining phases of her experience as an African-American woman. After many years of slavery experience, the former slaves in America began rediscovering themselves after losing their real identity. It has been explained by many scholars that this is because most of them were even given different names so as to cut all links they had to their ancestry and roots. Baker Jnr. (1987) complements that assertion when he explained that when slavery was abolished in the latter part of the nineteenth century on the American soil, many African-Americans still had no identity created by themselves. As such, many of the descendants of these former slaves resorted to using different means to define an identity for themselves. Many resorted to working hard in many disciplines to define an identity for themselves. These include education, law, sports, politics, and a host of others.

Maya Angelou is a reflection on the subservient status of a Woman as a Second sex and as a recluse. Her broodings on how women come across assorted degrees of subjugation depending on their customs, socio-economic class, and the Nation in which they reside is an eye opener. She highlights

different types of repressions that Black women in America surface, Blacks largely gets subjected to the tripartite force of racism, chauvinism and classism. Racial prejudice and Negro resistance, ignorance, sense of worth, segregation, sexual abuse and displacement are the major topics addressed in the coming fragments. Maya has proven herself as an emblematic appeal for every Black girl growing up in America, goes from being a victim of racism with a lowliness complex to a self-aware individual.

Maya Angelou realistically illustrates her life experience as a teenager and portrays the situation and experiences she came across as sexual abuse, racial discrimination, divorce of her parents, and the conflict with her step mother and even teenage pregnancy. With the support of her mother she learnt how to take care of her son. Angelou's biography may serve as an example of how an African American girl attempted to survive against male prejudices at social and psychological levels, even in absence of any power and authority and endured all the hardship with her positive zeal and confidence. In her own words "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult" (Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings 6). The author is

concerned with the question of what it means to be a Black female in America. Her progression as a story writer is based on certain social clout which attacks the Black woman with unacquainted intensity and force.

On the social front, many African American women made a difference in the way they managed their homes and communities. With the increase in the number of men who were getting imprisoned or dying through gang violence, or running off with other women, many women were left with no choice than to bring up their children single-handedly without any support.

Maya Angelou grew up in an American society that was undergoing change by way of civil rights, racism, masculine patriarchy and domination. As such, her worldview was largely influenced by the changing trends of the time. It is; therefore; not surprising that her writings and works depict issues that revolve round trending issues of her formative years. Angelou has a sequel of seven autobiographies, which reveal her life story to any reader interested in knowing about her life. These novels include "I Know why the Caged Bird Sings" (1970), "Gather Together in My Name" (1974), "Singin' and Swingin'" and "Gettin Merry like Christmas" (1976), "The Heart of a Woman"(1981),"All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes" (1986), "A Song Flung up to Heaven" (2000), and "Mom & Me & Mom" (2012). All of these six novels critically document Maya Angelou's strive to achieve and make an impression in life as an independent woman and mother, and finally, and most importantly, as a respectable African American.

Objectives

The objectives of this present paper is to attract the attention of the helplessness women, readers and lovers of literature and the researchers towards the struggles of Maya Angelou whose pains and agonies are undescribed in words. In spite of her very hard and tough life, she left no stone unturned to make her own identity as a successful writer of international repute and also proved herself as one of the most powerful women of the world.

Her acute pain

Literature is the compendium of human behavior and it describes and explains the experiences of individuals living within relationships. The emergence of English novel has to be viewed in terms of highly complex cultural determinants, which clearly suggest its flexible and illusive nature. When novelists in started writing in English, they were confronted with the perceptible surface of reality on one hand and with the particular nature of society on the other. The novel as it developed as an art form in the Western world is primarily concerned with the time and space and their relation with man but the situation seems to be quite different in Indian context. The primary task of Indian novelist is to explore the relation of man and society and how this relation gives a peculiar and particular meaning to socio- economic life. The creative imagination of novelists like Prem Chand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra in Bengali were inspired by social realism. In fact, the socio-cultural life of India has been instrument in shaping fiction of Indian writers.

Angelou firmly believed in the Divine creation of universe as

it was based on the principle of equality but to her utter notice of what she faces, she finds that the selfish motif of human beings manipulated those powers and segregated them as per his own discretion and formulated their own Taboo without liaising to any Sect. What makes discrimination nastiest in her appeal was the dentist refusing to treat Maya in her acute pain without being obliged to the fact that her grandmother had helped him in the time of his dire need. He rejects to treat her austere toothache on account of her Black colour and refers her as Nigra and prefers to put his hand in a dog's mouth rather than treating a Black:

Annie?" "Yes, sir, Dentist Lincoln." He was choosing words the way people hunt for shells. "Annie, you know I don't treat nigra, colored people." "I know, Dentist Lincoln. But this here is just my little grandbaby, and she ain't gone be no trouble to you ..." "Annie, everybody has a policy. In this world you have to have a policy. Now, my Policy is I don't treat colored people... My policy ..." He let go of the door and stepped nearer Momma. The three of us were crowded on the small landing. "Annie, my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's. (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings).

Angelou expresses the emotional response of Afro-Americans people who are living in the southern United States, as how they are deprived of good education, better job prospect along with the basic amenities, accommodation and proper medical treatment. With the existing segregation gambit and its empowerment to entail that Black people continue to be the less privileged ones and at any point of time they should not overcome the white people in terms of Social ladder and clout. Segregation, relocation and struggle to establish oneself in a different environment and in a different country as conversed in the novel and further in this paper are one of the governing experiences of Black women in America as Maya herself shuttled around seven different homes in between 3 to 16 years of her age: "Admittedly the training was not the same. While white girls learned waltz and sit gracefully with a tea cup balanced on their knees, we were lagging behind, learning the mid-Victorian values with very little money to indulge them." (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings)

Women in America suffer dual peril from the white and the male hegemony. Angelou's representation of rape leaks the real grief of many Black American women and she being the victim succumbs and submits to the illicit lust of Mr. Freeman. From the moment she was abused, her sexual identity becomes a question as She gets confused between sex with love, she oscillates between womanhood and childhood, and do not know which way to choose. After this inhuman and heinous act the malevolent is released shortly from jail. The Depiction of Rape on the Psyche of the child is vividly elucidated through the content of the act as it is between a child who is ignorant, unformed, not a teenage and Mr. Freeman who already was in a relation with her mother for satisfying his carnal pleasures, cuckolds Maya by conniving as if he was playing with her and without explicating the intent of any lewdness:

He was just playing before." He released me enough to snatch down my bloomers, and then he dragged me closer to him. Turning the radio up loud, too loud, he said, "If you scream, I'm gonna kill you. And if you tell, I'm gonna kill Bailey." I

could tell he meant what he said. I couldn't understand why he wanted to kill my brother. Neither of us had done anything to him. And then. Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight year- old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot. (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings)

Angelou transports her feeling of being raped by accepting the wrong done to her through her long silence of five years. Her decision not to open up of the deceit was owing to the fear of being highlighted and what repercussions the revelation would evoke amid the other family members. Time is the best healer and it is rightly said that Once lost always lost is not the true case for Chastity as nature has its own recuperative powers, though it heals the body but it leaves a scar on the psyche of the individual who keeps recollecting the moment which keeps questioning "Why me? And wants to erase it as a bad dream but cannot relinquish the stigmatization similarly like Lady Macbeths guilt where she feels that All the perfume of Arabia shall not sweeten this little hand, her inner self and the sexual exploitation of her body is clearly elaborated and illustrated in the below Lines:

Her rape at a very tender age of eight exhibits the inner self of a Black woman who moves from a Childhood to an adolescence phase with a familiarity of being used and abused and herein suffering the Stigma in a male dominated society. The protagonist here addresses all the also wants to prevent it from happening to someone else, so that anyone who had been raped might gain understanding and not blame herself for it. She writes about being a Black American woman and also speaks about what it is like to be a human being and further echoes the principle of live to move on as this is how we are, what make us laugh, and this is how we fall and somehow, amazingly, stand up again.

Maya's resistance to discrimination and prejudice takes many vicissitudes in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. The tussle between insecurity and displacement keeps toggling throughout her childhood but still she resorts to one of the life's most important principle to stand up for what you have faith in and do not allow anyone to take advantage of you. One of the dominant alterations from the total parting of sense of worth and race to the amalgamation of the two comes in the fragment where Mrs. Flowers makes Maya feel liked and respected. "It would be safe to say that she made me proud to be Negro, just by being herself." (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings)

She comprehends this truth with grace and accepts racism as pure and simple:

"Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty ...'
...It was the Negro national anthem" (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings 178).

The interrogation of self, transits from self-hatred into self-

pride and by accepting it with pride mantra that I am Black:

"All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated." (McPherson, Dolly A. (1990).Order Out of Chaos: New York: Peter Lang Publishing 10-11.)

Race and Racism

This is racism that exists within individuals. It is when one holds negative ideas about his/her own culture, even if unknowingly. Xenophobic feelings or one's internalized sense of oppression/privilege are two examples of individual or internalized racism. This M is the racism that occurs between individuals. It is the holding of negative attitudes towards a different race or culture. Interpersonal racism often follows a victim/perpetrator model.

Recognizing that racism need not be individualist or intentional, institutional racism refers to institutional and cultural practices that perpetuate racial inequality. Benefits are structured to advantage powerful groups as the expense of others. Jim Crow laws and redlining practices are two examples of institutional racism.

Structural racism refers to the ways in which the joint operation of institutions (i.e., inter-institutional arrangements and interactions) produce racialized outcomes, even in the absence of racist intent. Indicators of structural racism include power inequalities, unequal access to opportunities, and differing policy outcomes by race. Because these effects are reinforced across multiple institutions, the root causes of structural racism are difficult to isolate. Structural racism is cumulative, pervasive, and durable.

The interrelated terms of race and racism should be examined separately before their connection is explored. This entry defines both terms and explores their meanings and new approaches to these concepts in the twenty-first century.

Institutional Racism

A system of procedures/patterns in all walks of life, i.e. education, housing, businesses, employment, professional associations, religion, media, etc., whose effect is to perpetuate and maintain the power, influence and well-being of one group over another. It originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society; and thus receives far less public condemnation than individual racism. Although more subtle than individual racism, it is more destructive of humanity.

Race is one of a number of popular cultural conceptions about human variability. The Western concept was developed in its present scientific and related lay versions largely in the nineteenth century (Barkan; Gossett; Naroll and Naroll; Stocking). At its most abstract level, race is an explanation for observed human variation; people differ in appearance because they belong to different races. Behavior is also implicated; people behave differently because they belong to different races. Racism is a set of negative beliefs held by individuals or groups with respect to a population thought to be biologically distinct. Such beliefs about fundamental biological differences came late to the Western world, but not

as a result of scientific progress.

My aim in this present paper is to change the way we think about the causes and origins of racism. I argue against prevailing views of student racism as arising from a need or desire to protect or gain white privilege, or as rooted in ignorance of systemic oppression or lack of exposure to difference. As long as we see racism's origins in these terms, our curricular and pedagogical responses-multicultural exposure to difference, critical interrogations of whiteness and privilege-will be ineffective. In the analysis that follows, the research scholar; has deliberately highlighted "nastiness"-the offensive, the problematic, the narrow, the stereotypical and prejudicial in students' responses to matters of race-in order to trace the origins of racism across the various vectors that constitute the infrastructure of high school English. I move across time and contexts, between the interior and emotional, the institutional and ideological in my analysis.

But my mom, she is not a racist, and later she told me that she agreed with my dad, the "n" word was wrong and ignorant, and that it was sad that my uncle had never had more opportunities to be educated, but it wasn't his fault, but I should never use that word because only trash used it. And I totally agree. I have some friends who will say it's ok to use it if you're referring to people in general, not just Blacks. And they use it themselves, you know? You see Black people saying it all the time. I think, if you use it to describe anyone who is lazy or criminal or on welfare or something, it's not bad.

"Life loves the liver of it," she wrote.

Maya Angelou's Universal Struggle

Maya Angelou's power came, in part, from daring to tell her own story. The poet, author, journalist, playwright, singer, dancer, and speaker rose to fame through autobiography-her breakout 1969 work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* documented her first 17 years-and kept relating that story to ever-larger audiences, until her death today at age 86. What Maya Angelou Means When She Says 'Shakespeare Must Be a Black Girl?'

As a black woman raised in the segregated South, abused by men when she was young, her narrative spoke to a particular American struggle. "The evil that Angelou witnessed" in her early years, wrote Hilton Als in a 2002 *New Yorker* piece, "was generally directed at black women-the mules of the world, as Zora Neale Hurston called them. It shaped her days and, in large part, informed her current public persona of fiery, lyrical dignity." Later, Angelou would say that "A black person grows up in this country-and in many places-knowing that racism will be as familiar as salt to the tongue."

Summing Up

To sum up: we come to the conclusion that the autobiography of Maya Angelou is a reflection on the subservient status of a Woman as a Second sex and as a recluse. Her broodings on how women come across assorted degrees of subjugation depending on their customs, socio-economic class, and the Nation in which they reside is an eye opener. She highlights different types of repressions that Black women in America surface, Blacks largely gets subjected to the tripartite force of racism, chauvinism and classism. Racial prejudice and Negro

resistance, ignorance, sense of worth, segregation, sexual abuse and displacement are the major topics addressed in the coming fragments. Maya has proven herself as an emblematic appeal for every Black girl growing up in America, goes from being a victim of racism with a lowliness complex to a self-aware individual.

Parenting arrived to Maya Angelou at the age of seventeen, and she at her teenage faced all impediments to raise her baby. In addition to her duty at home, Maya Shares her own experience as a black mother where apart from handling both Productive and reproductive roles, she also worked as a prostitute and also as a bar servant to raise her child; She was even denied of the govt. job which she subsequently achieved post multiple follow ups. Angelou dispels the domineering conception of motherhood for working class women. By doing so, she creates a stimulus in the heart of white and Black women who face similar biases. The fundamental issue is about the delineation of experiences of Black women in especially southern America where the author herself was born. Young age familiarity is demonstrated by the blues opening, and all the subsequent chapters lead readers in to the ability of overcoming disarticulation and other inequalities. At last, we can say that Maya Angelou is indeed an inspiration for all women in the world who are being exploited by men and others. She motivates everybody to fight against the unsocial elements and exploitation. Men and women are given equal power in the society. We are as powerful as men.

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