

African Memory and Narrative Voice in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems

الذاكرة الإفريقية والصوت الشعري السردى في قصائد مختارة لمايا أنجيلو

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الملخص

تركز هذه الدراسة بشكل أساسي على مايا أنجيلو، وهي شاعرة بارزة في الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الكيفية التي تصوّر بها قصائد مايا أنجيلو «الطائر الحبس» (Caged Bird) و«مع ذلك أنهض» (Still I Rise) و«امرأة استثنائية» (Phenomenal Woman) أشكال القمع والمقاومة التي عانت منها النساء السوداوات. سيتم اقتباس هذه القصائد من كتاب الأعمال الشعرية الكاملة لمايا أنجيلو لمايا أنجيلو (1994). وتركز قصائدها على الذاكرة الإفريقية المرتبطة بقمع النساء السود، كما تُعدّ صوتاً سردياً للنساء المضطهدات. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على التحليل الأدبي من منظور النظرية النسوية السوداء. وتُظهر الدراسة أن الشعر يصوّر القمع والمقاومة بطرائق متعددة، ولا سيما من خلال أعمالها الأدبية والشعرية الخاصة. وقد لجأت الشاعرة إلى ذلك للتعبير عن حق النساء السوداوات المتساوي في العيش بحرية، وإثارة تعاطف القراء، ووصف أشكال القمع والمقاومة المختلفة التي واجهتها. تُعدّ مايا أنجيلو من الأصوات الأدبية البارزة التي عبّرت عن معاناة الفئات المهمّشة، إذ وظّفت موهبتها الاستثنائية في إبراز قصص أولئك الذين طُمست أصواتهم عبر التاريخ، ومنحتهم موقعاً ضمن السرد الأشمل للهوية الأمريكية. وتنقسم الدراسة إلى أربعة أقسام، يركّز كلّ منها على موضوع محدد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أنجلو، الطائر الحبس، الذاكرة، الصوت، النظرية النسوية.

Abstract

This study focuses primarily on Maya Angelou, an important poet in African American literature. The purpose of this research is to determine how Maya Angelou's poems "Still I Rise," "Caged Bird" and "Phenomenal Woman" describe forms of oppression and resistance experienced by black women. These poems will be taken from *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* by Maya Angelou 1994. Her poems focus on African memory of black women's oppression, and she is regarded as a narrative voice for oppressed women. This study employs a literary analysis with a black feminist theory perspective. As this study demonstrates, poetry depicts oppression and resistance in a variety of ways, most notably through her own literary and poetic works. The poet did this to convey black women's equal right to live freely, to elicit kindness from readers, and to describe the various forms of oppression and struggle they encountered. Angelou, often considered as a voice of the downtrodden, used her tremendous gift to amplify the tales of those silenced by history, giving them a place in the larger narrative of American identity. It is divided into four sections, each of which focuses on a specific topic.

Key Words: Angelou, Caged Bird, Memory, Voice, Feminist Theory.

1. Introduction

Maya Angelou, originally named Marguerite Annie Johnson, was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. Her extraordinary life and work changed the face of literature and social justice. Angelou, who grew up in the racially segregated South, suffered childhood trauma, including sexual abuse, which caused her to be mute for almost five years. During those years, she cultivated a great passion for literature and used poetry as a refuge. She began performing professionally as a singer and dancer and took "Maya" as her stage name after her brother's nickname for her. Her later works were deeply influenced by her international performances and travels as a human rights activist. In the sixties, working alongside civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, she intensified her dedication to justice and equality. Her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* published in 1969 was

an instant hit and a literary sensation as it broke new ground by offering a narrative of race, identity, and the endurance of the human spirit. In total, the author has penned numerous autobiographies, poetry collections, and essays, which highlight the human spirit's strength. Maya Angelou was a recipient of numerous awards and accolades including, among others, over 30 honorary degrees. She also read her poem *On the Pulse of Morning* at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993. Maya Angelou died on May 28, 2014. What she left behind is a legacy of empowerment, resilience, and the artistic expression as a tool of transformation. (Johnson, 2014)

1.1. Oppression as a Form of Racism

Throughout world history, and especially in America, women have been arbitrarily treated through various forms of colonialism and oppression by individuals and the social environment. Women have been expected to accept such ordeal as something normal and natural for them. The same thing is true for African, American women who are doubly pressed both by white and black men. They are not given the status of humans, so they get treatment that is worse than that of white women. This problem in the greater society has been around for a while and is still unresolved in the present time. Oppression is any act that results in either physical or mental pain. Oppression is a form of racism that inflicts pain and black women get deep wounds through it. According to Collins (2000), oppression manifests itself in troubles of the body in a variety of ways. African, American women have always stated that race, class, and gender are the three topmost axes of oppression to which they are subjected. Women's encounters of oppression, discrimination, violence (both physical and non, physical), marginalization, sexual harassment, and gender injustice led to the development of the word feminism.

1.2. Feminism and Black Feminism

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2016) defines Feminism first emerged out of the dissatisfaction of seeing women treated as inferior to men in many aspects of life. Feminism is basically the struggle of women

against the patriarchal system. The patriarchal system means that there is a difference in social life based on gender. Hence, feminists don't accept the idea that disparities between men and women are natural and inevitable. Rather, they argue that these inequalities need to be questioned. The core idea of feminism is that it demands getting educational, economic, and political rights. For instance, a male, dominated society tends to see women as things that can be used mostly as a complement. Here, the problem refers to the lack of gender equality, thus, leading to discrimination against women. The feminist movement has been divided into three waves. The first wave of feminism resulted in individual pieces by feminists who had differing opinions on how feminist they were. The topic that is most often discussed is about the empowerment of middle class single women. At that time, the event's momentum attracted public attention to women's full participation in social and political life particularly in politics as a whole. And in this case, no achievement at all is produced. Dissatisfaction with the achievements of the first wave of feminism resulted in the emergence of the next wave.

From 1960 to 1980 the second wave of feminism was born. The ideas and the actions of the second wave feminists were seen as having unity. The feminist movement as a whole talked about women's liberty. This wave comes from women's dissatisfaction with different types of oppression. In the first wave, however, emancipation has been attained in social and political life. Feminists have always had theoretical disagreements and political bans between them, thus causing a split in this movement. The concept of a second wave of feminism which distills the experience of the very same women is then looked at as outdated and redefined by post, colonial feminists (O'Conner, 2012).

Black feminism is also referred to as the third wave of feminism. Even though black and white women do not live in different countries, the problems that arise from the difference in their skin color led to the formation of black. The struggle of black women was not more difficult than that of white women, as they were always considered the lowest class of white society. Black women face racism and sexism in the same way that white women face racism and

sexism. Feminism fights for two things that women in general do not have: equality with men and the freedom to choose what is best for themselves. White women face different problems than African-American women. Black women face far more complicated issues because they come from different backgrounds, have different skin colors, and are different races. They are considered the lowest caste humans when compared to white women, and they face increased pressure in the society in which they live. In addition, they are treated worse than white women. (O'Conner, 2012)

2. The Development of Angelou's Poetry

Maya Angelou is regarded as one of the most iconic literary figures of the twentieth century, known for her deeply moving poetry that explores themes of identity, empowerment, and the human spirit. Her work, which reflects her own life experiences as an African American woman, has a global impact that crosses racial, gender, and cultural boundaries. Angelou's poetry captures the struggles and triumphs of marginalized voices, giving readers hope and a deep sense of self-worth. Angelou's distinct poetic voice has had an indelible impact on literature and society, challenging oppressive systems and inspiring generations to embrace their identity and potential. Identity is a central theme in Maya Angelou's poetry. Her inquiry into the topic, in fact, has a very personal dimension since it was formed through her experiences in a world filled with racial and gender, based discrimination. The combination of Angelou's childhood in a racially segregated South and her exposure to racial discrimination through the system helped her to regard identity as the result of a complex mixture of race, gender, and self, perception. This complicated notion of identity can be seen, for instance, in her Still I Rise poem in which she confidently expresses her uniqueness and strength despite being stifled. The line Still I rise is a potent statement of self, respect and rebellion, showing her resolute intention to embrace her identity in spite of the world's efforts to belittle it. Angelou's work often uses the lens of the African American experience, combining poetic devices and historical allusions to suggest the link between personal identity and the heritage of the community. (Kent, 2008)

In "Phenomenal Woman," she celebrates the beauty and strength of Black womanhood while rejecting traditional beauty standards that frequently marginalize women of color. The poem's confident tone and rhythmic structure emphasize the importance of self-acceptance and pride in one's heritage. Angelou affirms her own self-worth by emphasizing the inherent value of her identity, and she inspires her readers to embrace their own unique qualities. Empowerment is another central theme in Angelou's poetry, closely related to her exploration of identity. Her works act as rallying cries for those who have been silenced or marginalized, giving them a voice and a sense of empowerment. In "Still I Rise," Angelou portrays resilience and empowerment in a personal and universal way, addressing the common struggles of those who face oppression. The poem's defiant tone and triumphant imagery send a message of hope and determination, inspiring readers to overcome adversity and reclaim their power. (Kent, 2008)

Angelou's ability to empower her audience is also evident in her poem "On the Pulse of Morning," which she read at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. In this work, Angelou advocates for unity and collective progress, encouraging people to recognize their common humanity and work toward a better future. The poem's optimistic vision and inclusive language reflect Angelou's belief in the transformative power of empowerment and its ability to effect positive change. Another distinguishing feature of Angelou's poetry is the use of language to convey empowerment and self-assurance. Her command of rhythm, metaphor, and repetition results in a lyrical quality that heightens the emotional impact of her work. In "Phenomenal Woman," for example, the repeated affirmation "I'm a woman , Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, That's me" reinforces the speaker's confidence and self-assurance, transforming the song into a celebratory empowerment anthem. Similarly, the refrain of "Still I Rise" serves as a rhythmic declaration of resilience, drawing readers into the poem's empowering message. Angelou's exploration of empowerment frequently goes beyond individual resilience, addressing larger social and political issues. Her poetry highlights the systemic inequalities that marginalized communities face, encouraging readers to confront and dismantle these injustices. (Johnson, 2014)

In "Caged Bird," for example, Angelou employs the metaphor of a caged bird to represent the constraints imposed by racism and oppression. The poem's juxtaposition of the free and caged birds emphasizes the stark differences between privilege and marginalization, while the caged bird's persistent song exemplifies the tenacity of those who resist oppression. Angelou's poetry also celebrates the role of community and solidarity in promoting empowerment. Her works frequently emphasize the interconnectedness of individual and collective struggles, encouraging readers to find strength in solidarity. In "On the Pulse of Morning," Angelou's call for collaboration and mutual respect emphasizes the value of collective action in overcoming societal challenges. By emphasizing our shared humanity, she fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, inspiring her audience to work for a more equitable world. Angelou's ability to inspire empowerment and self-confidence stems from her authenticity and vulnerability as a poet. She creates works that are deeply meaningful to her readers by drawing on her own experiences with trauma, loss, and resilience. According to (Smith, 2015), This authenticity is evident in poems like "Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal Woman," in which Angelou's personal journey serves as a source of strength and inspiration to others. By sharing her struggles and triumphs, she fosters a sense of community among her audience, reminding them that they, too, have the ability to overcome adversity and embrace their identities. Angelou's poetic legacy is distinguished by its universal appeal and lasting relevance. Her exploration of identity and empowerment crosses cultural and temporal boundaries, providing insights that are still relevant in today's world. Her ability to articulate the experiences of marginalized communities while instilling hope and resilience has cemented her status as one of the most influential poets of her generation. Angelou's poetry has had a long-lasting impact because of her distinct voice and perspective as a Black woman in America. Her works question societal norms and stereotypes, providing a compelling counter-narrative that celebrates diversity and individuality. Angelou's poetry amplifies marginalized voices and redefines the literary canon by focusing on the experiences of those who have long been silenced. Another important aspect of Angelou's poetry is her use of nature as a metaphor for resilience and transformation. Angelou's poems, such as "On the Pulse of Morning," are rich in natural imagery, which she uses to represent renewal and

continuity. In this poem, the rock, river, and tree represent enduring elements of the earth, reminding readers of nature's constancy in the face of societal upheaval. Through these metaphors, Angelou encourages readers to draw inspiration from nature's resilience and apply it to their own struggles for empowerment. Angelou's poetry also addresses the theme of intergenerational wisdom. Her works frequently demonstrate an awareness of the lessons passed down through generations, particularly within African American communities. (Smith, 2015)

In "Still I Rise," for example, she draws strength from her ancestors' historical resilience, invoking their spirit for empowerment. This connection to ancestral heritage not only supports Angelou's sense of self, but it also serves as a reminder of the collective strength that has sustained marginalized communities throughout history. Another notable aspect of Angelou's poetry is its focus on the theme of self-determination. Angelou's works, including "Phenomenal Woman," emphasize the importance of defining oneself on one's own terms, free of societal expectations or stereotypes. This emphasis on self-determination is particularly empowering for women and marginalized people, encouraging them to reclaim control of their narratives. Angelou's confident and unapologetic tone in these poems demonstrates her faith in the transformative power of self-assertion. Angelou's poetry is particularly accessible and relatable. (Smith, 2015) demonstrates that unlike some poets whose works require extensive interpretation, Angelou's simple language and universal themes make her poetry accessible to a wide range of readers. This accessibility ensures that her messages of identity and empowerment reach people from all walks of life, fostering a common understanding of the human condition. Her ability to convey profound truths in simple yet evocative language demonstrates her skill as a poet and dedication to connecting with her audience. Angelou's poetry is deeply rooted in a sense of optimism and hope. Despite addressing themes of struggle and adversity, her works consistently convey hope for change and the triumph of the human spirit. In "Still I Rise," Angelou's declaration that she will overcome oppression is a powerful affirmation of hope and resilience. Angelou's poetry is distinguished by its unwavering optimism, which inspires readers to envision a better future and take action to make it a reality.

3. African Memory and Narrative Voice in Angelou's Selected Poems

Maya Angelou's poems "Still I Rise" and "Caged Birds" describe how black women face various forms of oppression and how they struggle against structural oppression. Maya Angelou's poems reflect her status as an African-American woman in society. Maya Angelou's poems are interesting to study because they differ from her predecessors in several ways. It is strongly advised that you read all of her poems to gain a better understanding of women's oppression. Meanwhile, using black feminism theory to address various issues affecting African-American women is thought to be the best option because the theory understands structural oppression in inferiority groups, particularly women, and explains how they form resistance to structural oppressions. The study shows that black women face unique challenges in each of Maya Angelou's three poems. Maya Angelou discusses how black women cope with hatred, discrimination, and injustice. In the poem "Still I Rise," he was able to accept the challenges he faced because of his gender and skin color, and he possessed a strong personality and self-assurance. (Gillespie, 2010)

Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal Woman" then describes how the character in the poem does not take ownership of the issue of society's beauty standards for black women. Maya Angelou's poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing" reflects the poet's opposition to the phenomenon of discrimination against black women through feminism. The researcher hopes that this study will provide information about the history of the emergence of feminism in literature. The researcher hopes that this study will provide information about the history of the emergence of feminism in literature. This study looks at how Maya Angelou's poetry depicts black women's struggles and the types of struggles she addresses. Maya Angelou exemplifies black women's struggle in its most fundamental aspects. She embodies the conflict between white people and black women. White people treated black women harshly. Because black women are often portrayed as slaves or members of the lowest caste in society. These poems show how Black women have fought racism. Angelou's poetry is concerned with the present and personal, but it also emphasizes the importance of remembering the past. (Gillespie, 2010) This theme is particularly prominent in her poem "On the Pulse of Morning," in which she emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the history of oppression and suffering while

striving for progress. Angelou's poems encourage the reader not to forget the painful histories that have shaped the present, but to draw strength from them in order to create a better future. Her works consistently emphasize the importance of historical memory, particularly the impact of slavery, segregation, and African Americans' ongoing struggles. In poems like *Caged Bird*, she reflects on African Americans' collective trauma, acknowledging the legacies of oppression while also advocating for liberation and the dismantling of these systems. The speaker in *Caged Bird* sings not only for herself, but for everyone who has been oppressed by society's control systems. The speaker in *Caged Bird* sings not only for herself, but for everyone who has been oppressed by society's control systems. Historical memory takes on a deeply personal meaning in poems such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, in which Angelou uses her own life to reflect the collective African American experience. By revisiting painful experiences, Angelou encourages her readers to confront history head on, ensuring that past lessons are not forgotten. The act of remembering becomes a powerful tool for empowerment, allowing people to claim their stories and reshape the future. Angelou's poetry preserves historical memory, ensuring that the empowerment she advocates for is both personal and collective. By passing down resilience stories, she connects generations of readers to a shared heritage of strength, perseverance, and survival. Angelou's poetry incorporates the concept of intergenerational empowerment. Her poems focus not only on individual empowerment, but also on how that empowerment extends to families, communities, and future generations. In poems like *A Brave and Startling Truth*, Angelou advocates for a collective awakening that crosses individual boundaries and invites communities to join the fight for justice, peace, and equality. Angelou's emphasis on intergenerational empowerment reinforces the idea that change does not occur in isolation. In *Still I Rise*, for example, the speaker's defiance is directed not only at herself, but also at those who have come before her and those who will follow. She rises not only for herself, but also as a symbol of the larger struggle for freedom and equality. (Angelou, 1978)

The repeated refrain "I rise" connects the speaker's personal empowerment to a larger, collective liberation movement. This theme is also present in her reflections on motherhood and female relationships. Angelou's *Phenomenal*

Woman celebrates women's strength not only as individuals but also as a collective force. Angelou's poetry celebrates women's wisdom, power, and resilience as a shared legacy passed down through generations. In this way, Angelou's poetry promotes a sense of collective identity—whether among women, African Americans, or the general public—and emphasizes the power of collective action in achieving empowerment and social change.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. A Critical Analysis of Maya Angelou's Still I Rise

Angelou, an acclaimed African American poet, uses this poem to express unwavering determination in making one's voice heard. The emotions conveyed likely mirror those of many who have endured hardship, but the lines below suggest a distinctly female perspective:

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise. (Angelou, 1994)

The speaker states that no matter how wicked the lies about her are or how often she is put down, she will, like dust, keep rising. It is almost as if the line is referring to the times women have been pushed aside to the margins of society and especially how patriarchal societies have made their identities disappear or twisted them. These lines from a woman's point of view are a strong statement that a woman is still able to rise despite the many centuries of oppression. A formalist analysis based on the text helps the reading by explaining that the figurative expression like dust is not just an image of unquenchable spirit but also a poetic figure that elevates an ordinary thing to a symbol of might. The delicateness and ubiquity of dust resemble the unrecognized yet unshakable presence of women in history too powerful to be suppressed and too complex to be unraveled. Women's history reveals that women have been treated as property, sex slaves, and laboring in domestic work, a triple combination of conditions that kept them without voice and very much invisible in the society.

The poem challenges the above story through form: its consistent rhythm, forceful mood, and the phrase I rise, which is repeated, all serve as acts of reclaiming. The poetic pattern of repetition reflects the non, stop feminist resistance. The combination of these literary elements helps to strengthen the speakers unwavering determination and the act of pushing back the historical silencing. In the second stanza, the speaker asks pointed, sarcastic questions aimed at the dominant sex. These rhetorical questions do more than critique male authority—they mock it. From a feminist standpoint, the speaker is calling out male fragility and discomfort in the face of a woman’s unapologetic self-assurance. Formalist tools help make this critique more effective: the conversational tone, internal rhyme, and enjambment energize the stanza, turning resistance into rhythm. The imagery of “oil wells pumping in my living room” pairs wealth with bodily autonomy, suggesting that confidence and self-worth are natural resources—already owned by the speaker, not granted by society. Here, feminist defiance is amplified by formalist precision. One can glean from the lines in the second stanza the mockery the speaker directs at how society—or men in particular—treats a woman:

Does my sassiness upset you?
 Why are you beset with gloom?
 ‘Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells
 Pumping in my living room. (Angelou, 1994)

The speaker in the second stanza sarcastically and pointedly questions the dominant sex in order to challenge them. These rhetorical questions not only criticize male authority but even mock it. Here the speaker through the eyes of a feminist is exposing the male fragility and the discomfort of a woman being confident and unapologetic. The formalist means of expression making this critique even more potent are: the conversational tone, internal rhyme, and enjambment that give the stanza a vibrant effect and change resistance into rhythm. The metaphor of oil wells pumping in my living room associates wealth with bodily autonomy which means the speaker's confidence, self, worth, and therefore, her rights are natural resources that neither society nor the law have given her. Feminist resistance is strong here with the utmost formalist accuracy.

The lines in the second stanza show how the speaker mocks the way society and men treat women. Cooper (2018). The stanza thus expresses a deep-seated fear within dominant structures: that the so-called "weaker sex" will outshine or overpower those in power.

The second stanza exemplifies this tension: if society is taken aback by a woman's confidence, it implies a deeper opposition to female empowerment. According to feminist theorists, women's resistance through language and self-celebration subverts patriarchal expectations, allowing gendered voices to reclaim dignity and identity (Showalter, 1985; Crenshaw, 1991). The speaker's tone conveys veiled pride and an unwavering conviction that such oppression will not prevail. This pride and defiance continue in the third stanza.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Throughout the passage, the poet represents herself as a resilient force of nature like the moon, the sun, and the tide to symbolize her struggle and triumph. The heavenly and natural elements hint at the idea of a woman's inner strength being such as one cannot go against it for very long (Walker, 1983; Angelou, 1993). The metaphor plays the central role in likening the speaker's rising to something natural, inexorable, and carried out by God Himself, thus associating the theme of self, assertion with cosmological powers. In her poem, the speaker names herself as one who, like moons and suns, rises after even the most depressing sceneries and circumstances. Depending on which one you see at the time, moons and suns take turns in lighting the sky. If we consider moons as symbols of darkness and despair, such a situation will last only as long as the dark night because we will definitely have a new day (suns) soon. With the certainty of tides and Just like the hopes springing high depict the speaker's faith and upbeat spirit which is ready to defy the present depressing situation. Including moons and suns to portray the speaker's life is a perfect analogy, and one that works particularly well.

Did you want to see me broken?
 Bowed head and lowered eyes?
 Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
 Weakened by my soulful cries. (Angelou, 1994)

In these lines, the speaker confronts the societal expectations forced upon her and uses rhetorical questions to demonstrate how society attempts to marginalize her presence. From a feminist angle, the images conjure up the idea of women being culturally conditioned to be passive, compliant, and emotionally inhibited. Beauvoir (2011) stated that women have been stereotyped as "the Other" for ages defined not by their own qualities but by their relation to male dominance. The bowed head and lowered eyes are the pictorial indication of this character: submissive, powerless and unnoticed. hooks (2015) similarly explain how patriarchy has essentially 'trained' women, especially women of color, to perceive silence as an internalized survival strategy, thereby discouraging the display of their capabilities and independence. The poem's formal elements depict the kinds of behaviour society expects from women, however, the feminist voice in the poem negates those expectations and regains its power.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
 Don't you take it awful hard
 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
 Digging in my own back yard.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker's tone becomes more assertive and ironic. The repetition of rhetorical questions reveals her rebelliousness and highlights the conflict between her empowered self-image and societal norms. The term "haughtiness" is significant here because it infers that society interprets female confidence as superiority, particularly when expressed by Black women, whose assertiveness has historically been labelled or repressed. (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

The distinction between society's offense and the speaker's delight supports a feminist dispute: women's unapologetic expression of self-worth often unsettles patriarchal norms because it threatens to destabilize long-held power

hierarchies (Rich, 1979). By "digging in her own back yard," the speaker metaphorically undermines those hierarchies, representing that her strength and resources are innate and independent on external validation or male approval.

You may shoot me with your words,
 You may cut me your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulness,
 But still, like air, I'll rise

In this stanza, the poet assertively tells us of her unconquerable spirit which is beyond any one's pretension to control. She is not scared of anything. Even the severest verbal criticism, the hostile stare, and the coldness of the society have no effect on her. She is air, a simile for contempt being the easiness with which air enters everyone's nostrils. So she is both wild and possibly, uninvited. The makeover of the speaker's extraordinary strength, resourcefulness and the ability to be everywhere at the same time is brilliantly accomplished by the simile But still, like air, I'll rise. The stanza conveys that the speaker's sexiness and bodily autonomy are the main issues of societal perceptual problems. Her firm belief in her physical charm can be seen as a gesture of defiance against traditional gender norms. Those norms consider female sexuality as something that should be hidden or controlled. The words, Does it come as a surprise / That I dance like I've got diamonds at the meeting of my thighs? is a clear revelation of her pride in her femininity as well as her understanding of the latter's power. This figure of speech makes it clear that her sexuality is something precious, rare and absolutely hers not subject to male will. Instead of using her beauty to trap men, the speaker is making a statement that sensuality is her own possession as a symbol of power and autonomy. Her tone is both playful and rebellious, suggesting that her mere confidence in expressing her body unsettles those in power. The vivid imagery in the final line highlights her unapologetic embrace of her identity as a woman, affirming that femininity and strength are not mutually exclusive (Collins, 2000; Cooper, 2018).

Out of the huts of history's shame
 I rise
 Up from a past that's rooted in pain
 I rise
 I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide
 Welling and swelling I bear in the tide
 Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise. (Angelou, 1994)

4.2. A Critical Analysis of Maya Angelou's Caged Bird

In the first stanza, Maya Angelou mentions nature. She talks about how "a free bird leaps on the back of the wind." She describes the bird's flight against an orange sky. Free birds have the right to "claim the sky." The way she describes the "orange sun rays" makes the reader appreciate the natural beauty of the sky, while her description of how the bird "dips his wing" makes the reader appreciate the bird in his natural habitat, enjoying his freedom. (Bloom, 2001)

A free bird leaps
 on the back of the wind
 and floats downstream
 till the current ends
 and dips his wing
 in the orange sun rays
 and dares to claim the sky. (Angelou, 1994)

This stanza in 'Caged Bird' is a complete opposite of the first one. The poet starts the second stanza with a conjunction but, thus she kind of warns the reader of a contrast coming up. This is then followed by the description of bird that stalks his narrow cage. The tone is changed almost instantly and noticeably

from a tranquil and content tone to a dark, disturbing, and even a bit frustrating one. She goes on to say that the caged bird can seldom see through his bars of rage. Where the free bird can enjoy the open sky, the caged bird is hardly ever able to see the sky. She even says that his wings are clipped, and his feet are tied. In the text of her autobiography, the writer confesses that she has frequently experienced such feelings. She felt like she was very limited from the freedom that was actually her birthright. (Bloom, 2001)

The poet goes on to say that the desires he sings for are the very things that make him open his throat to sing. The poet herself had this experience in her own life. Writing, singing, and dancing were her ways of expressing her deep desire for freedom. The third stanza goes back to the free bird, thus strengthening the difference between the free bird and the caged bird in the reader's minds. She mentions a free bird which thinks of another breeze so that he can enjoy the sighing trees and be free to find his own food. The mood in which she composes the first and third stanzas is so different from the second stanza that readers can sense it. The first and third stanzas bestow the reader with a feeling of ecstasy and thrill, thus the second stanza comes across as quite dull and even oppressive.

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. (Angelou, 1994)

Stanza four of "Caged Bird" keeps on reflecting the contrast between the two birds, free and imprisoned. The very first line is a sharp contrast to the last line of the third stanza. It is bleak and frightening. The line exposes the harsh reality of the life of the caged bird. In addition, the predatory/prey relationship is also suggested by the image of the fat worms lying in wait on a lawn that is bright at dawn. Thus, it is the worms that would be terrified for their lives, losing freedom as the birds feed upon such prey. On the other hand, if a bird was

trapped by a cage, the worms would be the ones with the freedom, in comparison to the caged bird. She had a multitude of dreams which ended up dying since she never got the freedom to do all that her white counterparts did. Her discrimination and racism were her cage, and even though she sang, she felt that her voice was not heard widely, but only close to those who were nearest her cage. Besides being dark, the second line of this stanza is even terrifying. The narrator portrays the bird's cries as 'shouts on a nightmare scream.' Thus, the caged bird at this time is so disconnected from his living. The poet then repeats these lines:

His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

Once again it is reaffirmed that the bird opens his mouth to sing because his cravings for freedom and his desire to express himself are so strong that they cannot be suppressed. This last stanza is also devoted to the caged bird. The poet hints that the caged bird, who probably never tasted freedom, in his heart still remembers that he was made to be free. Whereas to the caged bird, freedom means "fearful" because it is "unknown," the bird still sings "a fearful trill" since it still yearns for liberation. Here, the speaker admits that his plea for liberty is "heard on the distant hill." This is like the writer and her plea for freedom in the form of equality. She senses that her appeals are being heard but only as very soft background noise. She still thinks that she is kept in the cage and even if she sings, her cries are only heard as a faint far, off sound. The penultimate line reads, "For the caged bird sings of freedom." With this, the speaker conveys that the caged bird, though it may never have tasted liberty, still sings about it because he was made for freedom. This is in line with the African American struggle during Maya Angelou's era.

4.3. A Critical Analysis of Maya Angelou's Phenomenal Woman

Maya Angelou's Phenomenal Woman, centers on self-respect, self-confidence, self-love, self-acceptance suppression, oppression, creed and racial discrimination but the poet is always concerned about the Inner Mystery. A woman becomes phenomenal and extraordinary when she loves herself, accepts herself and above all respects herself. The structure and shape of a woman's body talks about hips, feet, lips, bright teeth, eyes and the waist which might stand and fall down for beauty and people always surround her like

honey bees. Just walk towards the room and always look cool and enthusiastic to the people. Maya Angelou being an African and dark skinned woman, helped her community, and wrote to uplift and make aware of inner beauty, which is the real secret of a Phenomenal Woman, made invisible by the male chauvinistic society. The poem, *Phenomenal Woman* falls under the Feminist Theory and it's all about the Womanhood, that is, self-care, confidence, self-acceptance. The Literary devices are used for the purpose of visual presentation , repetition of each quality of words to remember the lines, deliver the apt emotions, and Hyperbole to explain the situation.

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. (Angelou, 1994)

The challenges and limitations which the women overcome in the society, the poet always labels the beauty of a woman as self-respect. Men are always about to wonder at women because of their smiles. Womanhood is not superficial but it is strong and reflected in everyone's life.

I'm a woman
Phenomenally
Phenomenal woman,
That's me. (Angelou, 1994)

Many centuries ago, women were always looked upon as objects, she was made to feel insecure and self-conscious. This was not an inbound nature of man. The physical appearance, degradation of women are the problems which are difficult to overcome. Racism is always respected and respected by society and by the people coloured women are always degraded by men in the society. The speaker reviews her corporations with different ladies. She makes sense of the fact that "lovely ladies" frequently take a gander at her and can't help thinking about what makes her so appealing and charming. The speaker rushes to bring up that, dissimilar to these conventionally gorgeous ladies, she isn't "charming" and doesn't have a model's figure. Hence, different ladies are confounded by her allure and need to reveal the key to her strong presence. The speaker endeavors to settle this secret by depicting her novel's actual attributes and idiosyncrasies. Truly speaking beauty does not lie in the complexion or physical structure of women. Outer appearance doesn't even matter at all and only inner beauty matters. A Woman's secret lies in her confidence. The way

she respects herself, feeling happy and blessed to be born as a woman and to have such a wonderful and beautiful body which helps her to present herself confidently. This is a Woman's Secret! The Inner Mystery! Men and women are playing on the same ground? Gender equality matters.

Men themselves have wondered
 What the flash they see in
 They try so much
 But they can't touch
 My inner mystery. (Angelou, 1994)

Men believe that not even a single woman would try to take action and change her status or position in the society. But the phenomenal woman's bolt action left men confused. This biased situation of women can be included in Marxist and Socialist feminism because in this type of feminism the focus is upon the oppression toward the women and women as being ill-treated Women and looked down in the society. In any case, she takes her examination to one more level when she recommends, interestingly, that she really has one more sort of magnificence through and through. She has a baffling inward excellence that men can't see or see in any event, when she attempts to show them. They are heedless to what makes a lady lovely from the inside, as they just appointed authority to her — and reasonable different ladies too — in light of her actual looks. Utilizing exotic language, the speaker portrays actual qualities and idiosyncrasies that make up her delightful and cryptic emanation. Toward the finish of the verse, the speaker rehashes the hold back about being a sensational lady. Black women are segregated and striving for their social rights and equality, the Patriarchal society made women voice less. It aims to examine the ideas and concepts which are to dominate the white people. The poet has used refrain, a literary device to emphasize on her subject matter of the poem Phenomenal Women . “Phenomenal women and that's me” is the refrain. The poem” Phenomenal Woman” is a free verse poem, the meter of the poem is a combination of Trochee and lamb which means stressed and unstressed syllable. The poet has made use of hyperbole, a literary device that helps to exaggerate the situation to understand better.

I walk into a room

Just as cool as you please,
 And to a man,
 The fellows stand or
 Fall down on their knees. (Angelou, 1994)

The speaker continues to depict her impact on men. She makes sense of how she radiates a strong erotic nature that draws their consideration at whatever point she strolls into a room. Each time she strolls before them serenely and without hesitation, they either stand up at her appearance or soften from their longing for her. They then, at that point, swarm around her, competing for her focus. As in the main verse, the speaker subtilizes her actual characteristics and singularities for making sense of her impact on others.

Now you understand
 Just why my head's not bowed.

She lets the audience know that he/she ought to be pleased with her when she strolls by, as she is a sure and self-regarding lady. The speaker subtilizes extra characteristics about herself, portraying her cheerful walk, the regular magnificence of her actual qualities, and the world's requirement for a lady like her. These things have occurred in her life since she is a remarkable lady and is pleased with it, doing her own thing. The poet expresses that as opposed to adjusting to the norms set by society, ladies ought to reconnect with their own worth and track down approval from the inside. All ladies are fit for being "sensational," the sonnet suggests, assuming they embrace who they are as opposed to attempting to find a place with inconsistent social guidelines. As a matter of fact, the sonnet proposes that tolerant and cherishing yourself is, in itself, a phenomenal demonstration inside a general public that advances uncertainty and self-hatred in ladies. This step towards unqualified confidence makes a lady genuinely marvelous. The speaker shows superiority over men. The figure of speech, Irony, the poet conveys the contrast between real beauty which is the inner mystery and the fake one which is perceived by the society. It is an assertion of the phenomenal beauty, power, and value of all women. The poet on behalf of all women celebrates the pride in being a woman. By repeating her identity, she makes it clear each individual is beautiful in their own way.

Conclusion

Maya Angelou's poetry continues to resonate deeply with readers, offering timeless messages of oppression, black feminism, African memory, and narrative voice. Through her evocative descriptions and profound messages, Angelou not only speaks to the struggles and triumphs of African Americans and women but to all people striving for justice, equality, and the courage to rise above adversity. Her poetic legacy remains a beacon of hope and strength for individuals and communities, offering readers not only a reflection of the human condition but also a call to action. By embracing the wisdom, beauty, and power found within herself, Angelou's poetry urges all of us to rise, stand firm, and demand our rightful place in the world. Maya Angelou's poems are that of courage, confidence, and confrontation. She speaks directly to the experiences of Black people, particularly Black women, who have endured systemic oppression yet continue to assert their worth, (as well as empower its readers today to remain determined and confident in the face of adversity). Through vibrant language, rhythmic repetition, and unshakable pride, Angelou transforms pain into power. The poems not only resist marginalization but reclaim dignity, anchoring itself as timeless pieces in the canon of struggle literature.

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