

**Experiences of Marginalized Women:
Maya Angelou's
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in Focus**

Birhan Assefie

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Foreign Literature

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Foreign Literature**

Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

May 2012

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Birhan Assefie entitled: *Experiences of Marginalized Women: Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Degree of Master of Arts (Foreign Literature) compiles with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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ABSTRACT

Experiences of Marginalized Women: Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Birhan Assefie

Addis Ababa University, 2012

Experiences of marginalized women in America have been less studied since African-American literature, unlike in the present times, was not taken as an integral part of American literature. Though it gets better attention now, it is impossible to say it accorded the level it deserves. Maya Angelou, who won Pulitzer Prize for her first volume of autobiography-*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is one of the significant authors who talk loud in addressing blacks' experience in America. This paper has attempted to explore experiences of African-American women by taking Angelou's novel in focus.

The foundation of the research is laid in chapter one; in the background of the study, the statement of the problem, objective, significance, scope and methodology of the study have been discussed. Trends of Afro-American literature were presented as changing from being neglected into better status of concern. Autobiographies of black women have been ignored more severely than the rest of writings in the world. Hence, by applying text based analysis, the researcher planned to achieve the objective of exploring black feminine experiences in America with special reference to Angelou's novel.

To realize the objectives that are set in the first chapter, detailed explanation has been given on the central concepts of feminist literary criticism in general and black feminism in particular preceded by a discussion of local and global studies on the same area to the current research. Studies have been made on different works by raising distinguished issues under the umbrella of feminist concept. It has been confirmed that the current research is distinctive since it focuses on the exploitation of marginalized women's experiences set in in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. By the conceptual framework of the study, discussions about African-American literary history, criticism and its form of resistance together with the concept of black feminism have been provided.

In light of the theoretical concepts of Black feminism an attempt has been made to analyze the novel under study in chapter three. In this part, the novel has been analyzed thoroughly to explore dominant feminine experiences revealed in the text. Under the framework of black feminist reading, the researcher has critically analyzed unique experiences of black women from the rest of the world. Race, gender and class issues were the general brands of black women's oppression. Hence, racial prejudices against black women and the response to the injustices have been discussed based on the nature of resistance from helpless anger to outright protest. In addition, sexual abuse and segregation followed by ignorance and maternity have been analyzed as interlocked oppressions of black feminism. The paper was closed by raising key points of the study in brief. As it has been shown in the analysis of the novel under study, Angelou was able to reflect the multiple oppressions of black women in America. Furthermore, she indicated her feminist vision through the portrayals of optimist, thoughtful, kind and faithful characters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my advisor Dr. Pradeep Sharma for his highly constructive comments, corrections and encouragements throughout this thesis. Above all his patience in reading this thesis, recommendation to read relevant books and readiness to alleviate any problem gave me confidence while undertaking this study.

I also have a great gratitude to Prof. Pillai (PhD.), who has inspired me to study African-American literature.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

In the world, every nation has its own literature though some of them remain unknown due to hegemonic influence of dominant nations. Literatures of colored people have been given less emphasis while they themselves have been reading and studying works of white world. Black-Americans' literature has been neglected from American literary history for a long period of time. Literary works of Black women Americans have gotten the worse treatment considered as incompetent to different white made literary canons.

African-American literature is an ingredient of world literature that is produced, as the name implies, by Black Americans. The genre traces its origin to the slave narratives (Trudier Harris in, Mario Azevedo [2005]). It is continuing today with famous Black authors such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Walter Mosley, and they are ranked along with the top writers in the United States. Some of the themes and issues explored in African-American literature are the depiction of experiences of marginalized women. They also point to the role of African-American women within the larger American society, culture, racism, slavery, and inequality.

The position of African-Americans in American society has changed over the centuries from at least explicit marginalization into implicit one. As their place altered, the focus of their literature also changed. Before the American Civil War, African-American literature first and foremost paid attention on the topic of slavery, as indicated by the subgenre of slave narratives. According to Tyson (2006), at the turn of the 20th century, books by authors such as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington discussed whether to tackle or calm racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and Black Nationalism. Today, African-American literature has become

acknowledged as a fundamental component of American literature. The most important ground for the wide prevalence of this brand of literature is the nature of resistance depicting the experience of the marginalized. The term 'marginalized' is an umbrella term covering the whole marginalized society, but in the present study, it takes into account only the female writing and the female experience.

The stories of African-American writers are gaining momentum now in world literature. It is asserted that "The Black power movement is gaining momentum and more African-American women are expressing themselves in writing" (Norine Voss [in Judith Spector], 1986: 53). They have started writing extensively on a variety of themes, especially their experience in America, Jamaica, and Britain. And also, the study in African-American writing is the area of thought in modern critical reading.

As far as autobiography is concerned, it is a recent phenomenon with works like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (1860) (Harris, 2005). Maya Angelou produced a wonderful fictional autobiography, which is similar with the famous Douglass autobiographical work in its techniques of storytelling and plot development, in 1969. In the text, she applies the first-person narrative device so well that readers believe the novel is indeed the historical life story of its author. This and other literary qualities such as: theme development, characterization make Angelou's work fictional. Therefore, throughout the paper, the work has been referred as an autobiographical fiction or novel. Including the novel under study, African-American fictional autobiography roots in the oral tradition and in the African-American slave narrative.

Though, it is said that African-American literature gets better attention now, it is yet to be granted the place it deserves in learning materials and college curricula. If not, it is difficult to bring the desired change in the society. Patterson (1968) says in similar fashion in the introduction part of his book,

And it is a sad fact that graduates of our finest institutions of higher learning leave their campuses without any knowledge of American history as it really is. These are the people who head, for the most part, the social and economic institutions in our country. And if they are not aware, how can we expect the man in the street to change his attitudes (xvii)?

Leave alone American society, even the world community wouldn't change the image of Black-American literature and even history. If the important theorists and commentators in literature rarely mention works by Afro-American writers, what is the average graduate student to think but that no such works exist or, if they do exist, that they are peripheral and unworthy of serious analysis? Therefore, beyond an exploration of Black feminine experiences, the paper aims to show the quality and real nature of African-American literature.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

African-American women autobiography is the less studied area of literature though it is an integral part of American literature. In fact, the literature is unique from the rest of the world since it focuses on revealing the experiences of the marginalized people, mainly Black women, and their protest against oppressors. Patterson (1968) puts this as:

It has been traditional for intellectuals to dismiss almost entirely the whole body of Negro literature as inconsequential and insignificant. When compared with world literature, a great deal of Black writing does suffer, not because of technical incompetence but because too often the Black writer is imprisoned in his own alienation, which ultimately restricts his scope and limits his subject matter (xvii).

Let alone Black women autobiographers, even white women in the same field were excluded from the canons made exclusively for white and male autobiographers. "Even though, females have begun to tell their autobiographies since 1436, critics have ignored autobiographies of women far more than they have disregarded women novelists and poets" (Norine Voss [in Judith Spector], 1986: 218). As Russel (1990) puts it, African-

American Women writers started to produce literary pieces starting from 1960s. They predominantly insisted on portraying the life of Blacks by taking literature as a recording means. They also strive for self-definition and self-evaluation in the campaign of resisting the negative and wrong images of Black females. By concentrating on the recreation of positive Black self-hood, they depict their characters from being passive objects to self-realization. The current study was dedicated to show how and what experiences of Black women portrayed with regard to the autobiographical novel of Maya Angelou.

According to Norine Voss, the autobiography of Black Americans is usually taken as a deviant tradition from white autobiography. Including the early slave narratives, Afro-American autobiographies are dedicated to define the experience of struggle and rebellion against white oppression. Black women's autobiographies are grounded in the experience of slavery and in the literary tradition of the slave narratives (Nellie Y. McKay, 1988). The experience of Black women is conditioned by race, gender and class. Black women autobiographers set themselves free from stereotyped views of Black womanhood, and identify their own experiences. Outstanding among them is Maya Angelou whose autobiography embodies the role central to feminine experience and an escape into freedom.

Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel-*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*-portrays women as the marginalized beings and their experiences. Hence, while discussing the novel under a frame of a research project, it takes as its target an investigation in detail of the nature of the experience of the marginalized found in the autobiographical fiction in question. The Afro-American feminist-marginalized experience is pictured in many of the postmodern writings, but how it is figured and how their voice is heard aloud are questions to be answered in detail. The present project is a humble attempt to find answers to such questions.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is **to explore experiences of marginalized women with special reference to Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings***. In line with the general objective, the study has got the following specific objectives.

- To get into the nature of African-American resistance literature
- To investigate mixed oppressions of African-American women
- To examine the nature of the sacrifice paid by black women in America

1.4. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that what might emerge from analyzing experiences of marginalized women in the selected novel would provide wider opportunity for understanding the concerns of African-American literature, Negro resistance and feminist writing. It is also believed that it would help raise consciousness about Black women's autobiography and feminist criticism on it. In addition, the study will initiate readers to know more about Black female experience in America, and at least to think for a moment about combating abuses against women in their respective settings. Any work devoted to Afro-American literature will be a novel contribution for scholarship in and outside the University. This study will help potential researcher on the same field as a reference or standing point. Further, in the postcolonial critical thoughts, there exists a clear gap in this kind of approach and observation, and the present study is expected to fill this gap.

1.5. Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature, for it looks at experiences of marginalized women in Angelou's novel. In addition, since the research is mainly concerned with the textual analysis of the novel, qualitative research method was found to be the most suitable approach for the present study.

The research used both primary source and secondary sources. The primary research method was made through first-hand investigation and analysis of the text in question. The secondary data consist of the examination of studies that other researchers have made on the post-colonial African-American literature. The method of documentation follows APA Style, 6th edition.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The study is limited to an investigation of Black women experiences on Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In fact, there are other autobiographies written by Afro-American autobiographers such as: Harriet Wilson and Frederick Douglass. However, as the writer herself asserted in her interview, the selected work is produced as a voice of the race but not limited to the experience of the author herself. This autobiography is representative of the twentieth century autobiographies, which deal with the marginalized feminist experience. The researcher has limited the study to Angelou's fictional autobiography so as to complete the work within the time schedule of the project paper. The novel has been selected keeping with the best of interest of the research question; however, the study concentrates only to Black women's experiences because of the scarcity of enough data in the field of postcolonial resistance literature. In brief, the study focuses primarily on the experiences of marginalized women as depicted in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. No other work of Angelou was taken into consideration and no any other theme in the book was considered for analysis in the present study.

1.7. Notes on the Author

1.7.1. The Life of Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, growing up in rural Stamps, Arkansas, with her brother, Bailey. She lived with her religious grandmother, who owned a general store. She attended public schools in Arkansas and California, and became San Francisco's first female streetcar conductor. Later she studied dance with

Martha Graham and drama with Frank Silvera, and went on to a career in theater.

During the early 1960s, Angelou lived in Egypt, where she was the associate editor of *The Arab Observer* in Cairo. During this time, she also contributed articles to *The Ghanaian Times* and was featured on the Ghanaian Broadcasting Corporation Programming in Accra. During the mid-1960s, she became assistant administrator of the School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana. She was the feature editor of the *African Review* in Accra from 1964 to 1966. During this time she served as northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King (Cudjoe, 1990). As a matter of nature, she gets aged as she is 84 years old. Maya Angelou has not died, she is still alive.

1.7.2. Major works of Maya Angelou

Angelou has been an inexhaustible author for decades. Angelou's poetry is fashioned almost entirely of short lyrics and jazzy rhythms. Although her poetry has contributed to her reputation and is especially popular among young people, most commentators reserve their highest praise for her prose. Angelou's dependence on alliteration, her heavy use of short lines, and her conventional vocabulary has led several critics to declare her poetry superficial and devoid of her celebrated humor. Other reviewers, however, praise her poetic style as refreshing and graceful. They also praise Angelou for addressing social and political issues relevant to African-Americans and for challenging the validity of traditional American values and myths.

Although, Angelou began her literary career as a poet, she is well known for her five autobiographical works, which depict sequential periods of her life. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is about Marguerite Johnson and her brother Bailey growing up in Arkansas. It chronicles Angelou's life up to age sixteen, providing a child's view of the confusing world of adults. Although her grandmother instilled pride and confidence in her, her self-image was shattered when she was raped at the age of eight by her mother's boyfriend. Angelou was so devastated by the attack that she refused to speak for

approximately five years. *I Know Why the Caged Bird sings* concludes with Angelou having regained self-esteem and caring for her newborn son, Guy. In addition to being a sharp account of an African-American girl's coming-of-age, this work affords insights into the social and political tensions of the 1930s.

Her next autobiographical work, *Gather Together in My Name*, (1974) covers the period immediately after the birth of her son Guy and depicts her heroic struggle to care for him as a single parent. Her third volume, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) describes Angelou's stage introduction and concludes with her return from the international tour of *Porgy and Bess*. The fourth one, *The Heart of A Woman* (1981), portrays the mature Angelou becoming more comfortable with her creativity and her success. The fifth and the last volume, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), recalls her four-year stay in Ghana, and its dominant theme is motherhood (Bader, 2004).

1.7.3. Role of Maya Angelou in African-American Literature

The life experiences of the richly talented Maya Angelou are the cornerstone of her stories. Her stories trace the foundations of her identity as a twentieth-century American Black woman. Angelou has been praised for the rich and insightful prose of her narratives and what many observers feel is an indispensable record of Black experience. 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," she wrote in the book "It is an unnecessary insult" (Angelou, 1969: 4). She is noted for her distinct ability to recollect personal truth through insightful and powerful images, sights, and language. Angelou earned high marks from critics who praised her narrative skills and expressive prose. In her writings, the author is concerned with the question of what it means to be Black and female in America. Her development as a story writer is based on certain social forces which attack the Black woman with unusual intensity. According to Cecil & Kelly (1998), it eventually becomes a fit and a substitute for a deeper look.

Commenting on Angelou's autobiographical writings, O'Neale wrote that one of the author's overall achievements is the elevation of the Black female in literature.

One who has made her life her message and whose message to all aspiring Black women is the reconstruction of her experiential 'self,' is Maya Angelou. With the wide public and critical reception of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the early seventies, Angelou bridged the gap between life and art, a step that is essential if Black women are to be deservedly credited with enormous and creative feat of non-effacing survival (61).

By expressing herself, Angelou has tried to uncover sufferings of Black women in her times. She cried loud against racism, sexism and classism in her autobiographies, and she became a model black woman artist in the late 20th century.

Cudjoe similarly commented that Angelou's autobiographies rescue not only her personal history, but the collective history of all Black women. Maya Angelou expressed specific concerns of Black girls in America. By giving rise for the new and unfamiliar genre-autobiographical fiction-Angelou keeps the very nature of African-American literature. Hence, she contributed much in developing the genre and portraying marginalized female experiences.

Angelou commented to Claudia Tate in *Black Women Writers at Work* on the special importance of images for Black women. As she herself implemented in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, image making is essential for Black women writers since they are found in the area where considered as minority group. She said it is boring to always see males and whites on the stage. There should be equal participation of Black women. Angelou also described the awareness and responsibility she feels in providing images for Black women.

To conclude, Angelou contributes much for the development of African-American literature mainly by developing the new genre-autobiography in particular and for American literature in general. She is the author that fights injustices against black women. She is not only feminist but also human rights activist.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Feminism is a significant issue today, since it is the matter of all women in all parts of the world. Hence, many researchers are usually interested to investigate different aspects of feminism in different times. Among these, scholars in literature try to approach literary texts by employing different feminist literary theories. The current paper is one of the attempts to show experiences of Black women in America by using Black feminism as a theoretical framework of the study. Nevertheless, there exist various researches on similar topics; the researcher has selected papers whose topics are quite closer. In doing so, it has been given due attention to show the gap that this paper is expected to fill by giving brief review of research papers conducted locally and globally.

2.2. Local Studies

Several research works on feminist reading of literary texts have been made in Addis Ababa University at post-graduate level. Among these, works which focused on feminist reading of Ethiopian literary works are MA thesis of Mekonnen Zegeye's "Images of Women and Plot Structure in the First Four Novels of Fikre Markos Desta", Mulumebet Zenebe's "A Comparative analysis of the Images of Men and Women in the Works of Some Ethiopian Women Writers", and Napoleone Kifle's "Major Themes in the Works of Four Women Writers."

Mekonnen analyzes the depiction of women in the four works of the Ethiopian novelist. The novels are *Behind the Buska*, *Evangadi*, *The Love of the Zersis* and *Achame*. He tried to apply the concept of feminism as a literary theory from western, African and Ethiopian point of view. Besides, he discussed female characters of women writers as they are grouped into two i.e. victims of the cultures of their societies and strong and liberated.

The other related research is conducted by Mulumebet, who wrote the analysis of the

images of both men and women in the works of five Ethiopian women writers: Elfinesh Bekure, Mekdes Asnake, Tsehay Melaku, Yemiwodish Bekele and Yezina Worku. Here, the researcher selected three short stories and four novels for investigation. The works are *Owasa* and *Anguz* by Tsehay, *Tsilmet* by Elfinesh, *Mehagebu* by Mekides, *Yekirbruk* and *Senait* by Yezina and *Enegrewalehu* by Yemiwodish. The last three are short stories, and the rest are novels.

Mulumbet tried to investigate the oppression of women by cruel and ignorant men, and culture. Throughout the discussion, it is noticed that women can escape from the domination of the male group and the culture via strong and sustained resistance against the domination.

In addition to the above studies, Napoleone has made a research on themes of some poems of Ethiopian women poets, namely Aregash Seifu, Firmaye Alemu, Mekides Jenberu and Senayt Abera. He argues that even though the dominant themes are love, morality, and life, the authors addressed feminist aspects, showing how women suffer from the traditional harmful practices and cultures.

Apart from theses on Ethiopian literary works, there are also works on texts of African writers in English. One of them is Mulualem Denbegna's thesis in Addis Ababa University at postgraduate level in 2006 on 'Aspects of Feminism in Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* and Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, applying a post-structuralist approach. In the review of related literature part, he incorporates the discussion on feminism as a socio-political influence of feminism of African women, feminism as a major literary movement, contributions of feminist narrative, post-structuralism, feminist narrative as post-structural narrative and some prior research works on the same field.

He argues that the oppression of women by tradition is not to straightforwardly express their feelings and their overload of household activities as reflected in the novels. He also tried to show the act of deconstructing dominant masculine discourses by putting

instances out of the novels. Then he puts that even though the texts seem to present male domination over female, the writers implicitly say against the oppression by saying it is indefensible sin. Finally, he asserts as the writers expose biased and backward traditions against female group and deconstructs the dominant discourse by depicting women characters as wise, strong and courageous. At the end, Muluaem recommends all responsible bodies to work hand-in-hand at least to minimize the violation of both human and democratic rights of women.

Rahel Itana (2007) has done her Master's thesis on 'The portrayal of women in Osmane Semben's *God's Bit of Wood* and *Ekewens Jange*. She examines how women are depicted in these two novels and comes to the conclusion that the women are not depicted in their own nature as themselves, but in relation to men. In the same manner, Yodit Admasu (2004) has dealt on 'The portrayal of women in selected novels of Peter Abrahams'. She analyzed the depiction of female characters and figures out that the women are represented as cruel, shallow, and treated as only sexual objects.

Tekle Tesefalidet (2007) has also studied 'The portrayal of major female characters in four African novels'. Tekle found out that stereotyped images of women are abundant in the novels he analyzed. He also asserted that these abnormal and stereotyped attitudes towards women will have a great impact on women's discrimination in their real life.

Mekonnen Fekadu's thesis, 'Images of women in the Fictions of Selected African Women Writers: A Comparative Black Feminist Study', shows how women are portrayed in the works of different African women. He used Black feminism as his conceptual framework. The researcher identified several images of women that they are victims of gender and class oppression in their respective cultures. Women's role is limited to fulfill man's needs even by bearing children. All women characters of the selected texts confront male dominated cultural oppressions. The thesis focuses on four works: Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Tsehay Melaku's *Quasa* and Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures*. Except the last short story, the remaining are novels.

Here is one more research conducted in 2004 in Addis Ababa University on the title “Black Women Writers Defining the Self: A Womanist/Black Feminist Reading of Four Selected Novels” by Yehualashet Mersha.

By applying postcolonial feminist or Black feminist approach from the multitude of feminism types, he tried to explore the self-defined, Black, and female consciousness in the works from different regions: Africa, United States of America, and the Caribbean. Hence, the study is a comprehensive analysis of Black women writers from different settings. He himself mentioned in his study that the study is intended, apart from interpreting the works from Black feminist perspective, “to enrich the knowledge of Black feminism, to show the common experiences of Black women almost in the world and to give insight to the development of Black feminism” (4). This and Mekonnen Fekadu’s works lie under the same conceptual framework with the current study.

2.3. Global Studies

Not only locally but also globally, studies have been made on related issues to the current one. Mason’s “Travel as Metaphor and Reality in Afro-American Women’s Autobiography”, Koyana’s “The Heart of the Matter: Motherhood and Marriage in the Autobiographies of Maya Angelou” and Barnwell’s “ ‘Singin’ the Blues: Writing Black Female Survival in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*’ have been reviewed as follows respectively.

According to Mason, the very feature of many Black made autobiographies is that the demonstration of travel as metaphor of the break away from of slaves out of the severe oppressions they face. However, historically, travel and the journey motif were unreachable to women as metaphors because of the lack of mobility in their lives. In Western countries, except the spiritual pilgrimage of the Middle Ages and traveling preaching during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women had little access to travel unless they were of the upper classes. It is not surprising, therefore, to say that the history of autobiography related to travel is not much older than the Black writers.

The origin of the travel motif in Afro-American women's literature, specifically the autobiography, is an account of actual travel. In the early tradition of Black women autobiography, travel preachers take the lead with their autobiographies about the incidents they experience during their journey.

The slave narrative also told about a real journey, an escape from the South to the North. Both genres establish a radical and political tradition for African-American women's autobiography. Travel or journey became synonymous with action and commitment to social change. Unlike its European counterpart, Afro-American women's travel literature was established at the center of public discourse: in the slave narratives' role in the national debate about slavery and in the spiritual autobiography's role in the discussion of women in the church. Since she revealed much and worked as a preacher and a teacher at the same time, *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* exemplifies this particular distinctiveness of the African-American women's autobiographical practice. To the tradition of political promise Prince's narrative adds a more personal seek for secular self-betterment and self-determination. Mrs. Prince was one of the model Black women autobiographers who applied travel motif in her narratives.

Travel as a metaphor and reality is depicted in almost all Black women autobiographies of all times. Those autobiographies, through their tour, witnessed varied kinds of racial and gender oppressions. In general, the article affirms that the growth of authentic, individually authorized selfhood is the central theme of Black women spiritual autobiography with travel as a central metaphor.

The great contribution of Maya Angelou for the development of the genre called autobiography is confirmed by Koyana. The researcher argues that Angelou is special in the use of humor, self-mockery, linguistic sensibility and the skill of balancing the quest for human individuality. Beginning with the praise of Angelou, Koyana puts how racial, class, and gender oppression affect the experience of motherhood in the United States between the 1940s and 1960s.

The researcher argues that experiences of Angelou remove the ambiguity that the dominant white and male group imposed on women. It is stated that Angelou, as a working-class mother, depicts that the socially accepted white notions of domesticated mother-hood issues like child rearing practice, childbearing, sexuality and the experiences of women as mothers and wives in general. Besides to this, Angelou attempts to manifest the complex relationship between families and society.

Motherhood comes to Maya Angelou at the age of seventeen, and she, at her teenage, faces all difficulties to raise her baby. It is identified that the meaning of mother –work for white mothers and the rest of oppressive mothers. Motherhood, for whites, is usually associated with tasks of household; whereas for Black mothers, it is about both productive and reproductive roles. Angelou works, in addition to her duty at home, as a prostitute, bar servant. Even though, she asked the government for a job, she was neglected until she strived to get it by herself. At the end she became successful. She got the job-the first ever Black Woman street car conductor.

In the second volume of her series of autobiographies, Maya Angelou describes her life situation right after the birth of her son. The novel, *Gather Together in My Name*, the researcher concludes that excluding Black mothers from meaningful employment leads the victims into unwanted harmful experiences. Finally by relating maternal concerns with support and economic politics, Angelou “radicalizes autobiography and acknowledges its contribution to the struggle for racial equality” (42). The researcher confirms that Angelou makes a great deal to falsify the oppressive notion of motherhood for working-class women. By doing so, she creates an inspiration in the heart of whites and colored women who face similar injustices.

Like the rest of scholars that viewed Angelou’s works, Barnwell begins his paper by giving great praise to Maya Angelou as a crafted autobiographer. The introduction of the paper deals with central idea of the novel - *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The core issue is about the depiction of experiences of Black women in especially southern

America where the author herself was born. Maya was born in St. Louis and grew up in segregated Stamps, Arkansas during 1930s. Her first volume of autobiography is the best of the remaining five latest pieces as it won a Pulitzer Prize.

Barnwell argues that Angelou's masterpiece got prominence since it is special for the universal sense of self it portrays. He adds that the text can be approached as it owes to other elements in the African-American cultural tradition, "such as Negro spirituals, the blues, Black vernacular, and of course Black poetry" (49). The work of Angelou is related to the earliest slave narratives in that it traces the journey of slaves to northern America from south to be humans.

According to Barnwell, among African-American elements found in the text, blues is pervasive throughout the novel. The blues gives shape to the text to have typical feature of Blackness. In other words, the blues serves as an autobiographical act since it has individualizing features like those in autobiography. With blues opening, the author manifests her young age experiences in thirty-six chapters. All the chapters lead readers in to the ability of overcoming displacement and other injustices.

In his analysis, Barnwell substantiates his argument by providing extracts from the novel as follows:

"Lift ev'ry voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty ..." [...]
"Stony the road we trod
Bitter the chastening rod
Felt in the days when hope, unborn, had died.
Yet with a steady beat
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?" (178-179)

The above lines are analyzed as they are reflections of traditional blues that are unique since they celebrate social transcendence of the Black community. With these lines of

blues, Angelou tries to create mutual understanding among Blacks against the oppressors. Hence, blues is used as a tool of Black people to express their resentment. Barnwell concludes that the work of Angelou is composed in the way that blues are composed, and it is quite inspirational and monumental.

In one or the other, all the above mentioned studies concentrate on feminism. Even though, the first three are confined to Ethiopian literary works, they apply feminist literary theory in showing the maltreatment of women characters in the works given. The remaining, on the other hand, are on Black writers' texts in English language..

The present research is different from all the above in that it focuses on describing experiences of Black women as depicted in Maya Angelou's fictional autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Here the researcher applies Black feminist literary theory in analyzing the life of Black women in a racist, classist and sexist American society in postcolonial period like some of the reviewed studies. Autobiographical novels of Black women have been ignored as if they were trashes by the dominant male and white group. Now, the researcher claims that the works are worthy in their literary quality as well as the ideas they raise. Therefore the current study has concentrated on a distinguished and an ignored literary genre.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1. Introduction

It seems very important to examine the critical perspectives on African-American literature and feminist writing in particular. The researcher has attempted to encode some of the significant critical thoughts on African-American literature, prior to the discussion of the conceptual framework of the study, so as to highlight its general features.

According to Patterson (1968), Afro-Americans have been writing literature in English since 1746 and publishing books in English since 1773. Afro-American literature in particular can play an important role in modern literature (Walker, 2008). Afro-American female writings especially deal with the realities of ‘postmodern’ experience.

“Postcolonial writing in English is fairly new, post-1960s when most African and Caribbean nations became independent. The recentness of these English-language traditions must be distinguished from the much longer cultural heritages of these areas, and even ancient literary traditions in Indian and African indigenous languages” (Katrak [in, Bruce King], 1996:201).

While it is crucial to respect the integrity of the Afro-American literary tradition, one must also realize that the works of most Black authors can be discussed in terms of the themes, motifs, and stylistic developments viewed as characteristically African-American. The themes in Angelou’s novel are a case in point to the current research.

Euro-American literary categories—not only literary traditions, genres and conventions, but also the very notions of aesthetics and imaginative literature—serve hegemonic functions in the sense of inculcating works of Blacks. If this is true, one must ask whether European or White made critical methods are more suitable than others for evaluating and analyzing the works of Black writers or of minority writers in general. The most appropriate framework for analyzing the literary practice of Blacks is necessarily

different from the dominant white made theories. Many explorations are going on the works of American Women writers. A large growing number of scholars and teachers would today try to find answer to questions of selection of appropriate framework to approach texts.

3.2. Trends of African-American Literature

African-American history was neglected from American history before 1960s. However there were numerous events of Black community such as slave rebellions on the plantations and their literatures (music, painting and sculpture). Thus, the resistance of slaves and Harlem Renaissance contributed much against the exclusion of the history of African-American from American history. It is claimed that many African-American literatures deal with the record of Black experiences. The real source of racial discrimination in America is the presence of racist practices in the government which rules the country. The policies were designed in favor of white community in education, health and infrastructure basis (Tyson, 2006).

One form of racist practice has been the presence of the so called American canon which discriminates African-American literature. The greatest oppressive definition that whites gave to their canon, as Tyson (Ibid., p. 361), was their literary canon was “universal-relevant to the experience of all people- and included in the canon when they reflect European experience and conform to the style and subject matter of the European literary tradition....” This is to say that works that fulfill the Western literary canons are taken as great arts and vice versa. Westerners created the idea of ‘Eurocentricism’ that is the belief of giving much superiority to western culture over the rest of the world. Not only canons of feminism but also other literary canons have been produced to maintain white cultural hegemony.

Though African-American literature dates back to the earliest times as mentioned in the introduction of the paper, it has been ignored and considered as ‘offshoot rather than part and parcel of American literary history (Ibid: 361). Despite this environment has begun to

change, the change is slow. Still a number of wonderful literary works of African-Americans are excluded from course syllabi of American Literature courses.

3.3. African-American Resistance Literature

African-American history and life is extremely varied, so too is African-American literature. African-American literature has generally focused on themes of particular interest to Black people in the United States, such as the role of African-Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an Afro-American. As Albert J. Raboteau has said, all African-American studies, including African-American literature, speak to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in America. The rejection of white values and standards is one of the most powerful aspects of the Black literary works. Hence, it can be said that African-American literature explores the very issues of freedom and equality which were long denied to Black people in the United States as a marginalized group. Within such a situation, it also throws light on the female marginalized group.

African-American literature constitutes a vital branch of the literature of the African Diasporas, with African-American literature both being influenced by the great African Diasporic heritage and in turn influencing African Diasporic writings in many countries. And therefore, it comes under the title of resistance literature (Gates, 2008). However, while these postcolonial characteristics and themes of literature exist on many levels of African-American literature, they are not the exclusive definition of the genre and don't exist within all works. But the most important feature of this literature is the resistance to using Western literary theory to analyze African-American literature. As Henry Louis Gates, one of the most important African-American literary scholars said that his desire has been to allow the Black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions.

The recent emergence of African-American cultural theory covers the way for a new kind of intellectual inquiry. It gives chance for minority discourse in the broader academic community. The Black Power movement has energized the Black Arts movement, with the quest to identify a Black Aesthetic (Gates, 2008). In the 1980s the Black women's writing promoted the Black Aesthetic, and reopened the questions of the Black tradition in literature. However, the study of African-American culture and theory, while getting delayed recognition, is still largely a marginal intellectual pursuit (Angelou, 1985). This comment will largely force to cross-examine some of the ideological and philosophical assumptions strengthening recent theoretical discourse on African-American texts.

Perhaps the starting point for Afro-American critics, or any other marginal critics, should be some awareness of the real situation which generates their scholarship. The rhetoric that characterizes discussion of Afro-American cultural production and critical discourse greatly obscures the material context in which that discourse is produced. A text that extensively deploys such material contexts is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. It has received only a very limited critical treatment so far. Yet it is a paradigmatic Black feminist text. It blurs the lines between autobiography, fiction, and the essay; employs meta-fictional strategies that call attention to its textuality.

3.4. African-American Literary Criticism

African-American literature is different from American literature because its root traces to Africa and it reflects the recurring themes of the Black experience. As (Tyson, 2006) puts, African-American literature manifests common themes such as:

Reclaiming the African past... surviving the ordeal of slavery, the quest for freedom from slavery and other forms of oppression, the quest for literacy; the experience of African-Americans during the civil war and reconstruction ; surviving life in the south under segregation; the problems and conflicts of mulattoes in a racist society; the difficulties of economic survival;...urbanization; alienation and the quest to reconcile double consciousness; the role of religion in personal and collective survival ; the

importance of cultural heritage....(385).

Tyson adds the triple oppression of racism and sexism together with classism as one of the common themes though it became popular after the mid 20thc. Without doubt, all the above themes are confined to the idea of resistance against the negative in search of the positive. Black American experience is central for the manifestation of all the injustices and other life circumstances.

African-American criticism is both a subject matter and theoretical framework. As a subject matter, it deals with works of literature produced by Afro-Americans. On the other hand, as a theoretical framework, it is concerned with works which manifest issues of African-American that are race and other political and psychological matters. The latter approach never bother with the race of the author where as the first one takes race as domain of study regardless of issues raised through the works.

3.5. The Concept of Feminism

Feminism is basically a political movement that includes the acting, speaking, writing and advocating on behalf of women's issues. Everywhere and anywhere in the world, women have been considered second class to man. In most cultures men take pleasure in most or all positions of power that is why those cultures are called patriarchies. These initiate women to fight for their rights under the shade of feminism that is against the domination. The word patriarchy can be broadly defined as the superiority of men over women in a certain society. In this male oriented rule, women face diverse degrees of oppression depending on their race, customs, socio-economic class, religion and the country or region in which they live. Feminism, therefore, focuses on spotting prejudices against females and to at least lessening their problems with regard to repression. In the same vein, Shukla puts that "Feminism is a concept emerging as a complaint in opposition to male control and marginalization of women (2006:1). This confirms the above definition regardless of wording.

Feminist Movement is a social movement which supports the rights of women in all social spheres, such as patriarchal, political, economic, educational, physical and psychological domains. In other words, feminism strives for the freedom of women and equal opportunity of sexes in all places. It has come a long way in realizing its chief purpose equalizing the position of women. In tracing the historical background of feminism, there are three crucial movements which had really contributed for the advancement of different feminist theories. All of the three types deal with different aspects of the same feminist issues.

What historians refer to as first-wave feminism arguably began in the late 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and ended with the approval of the Twentieth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which protected a woman's right to vote. First-wave feminism was concerned primarily with establishing, as a point of policy, that women are human beings and should not be treated like possessions. The main concern of first wave feminism is that women fought for basic political and citizen rights for women such as for the general right to vote, to stand for election, and equality with men in working and educational settings (Barry Peter, 2002:34).

The second wave of feminism emerged from 1960s-1980s during which many women entered the labor force, and would have possibly ended with the verification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). It mainly dealt with the inequality of laws, cultural inequalities and the role of women in society (Ruthven, 1984).

Both first-wave and second-wave feminism represent movements that existed alongside with civil rights movements for people of color, a slight majority of whom happen to be women. But the fight always seemed to be for the rights of white women, as represented by the women's liberation movement, and Black men, as represented by the civil rights movement. Both movements could have been legally accused of downgrading women of color to lower status. They also tended to stress the rights and opportunities of middle-

class women over poor and working-class women. And they were basically limited to developed nations.

The third one is considered as a response to the perceived failures of the so called the remaining two waves of feminism. In a much reviewed and cited article on the relationship between first and third world feminisms, Chandra Mohanty (1991) argued that women in the third world have been considered not agents of their own destiny, but victims. A strong image has been constructed, even in feminist scholarship of an average third world women who lead an essentially reduced life based on her feminine gender (sexually constrained) and her being third world (ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized). In simpler expression, the inability of white women to acknowledge and incorporate the issues of third-world women provoked the development of the third-wave feminism. This brand of feminism questions the essentialist view of the former two waves of feminisms.

Black women in America stimulated forward in the attempts of showing the importance, necessity and need of a movement and addressing the ways racism, sexism and classism all work together to be responsible for each other. They attended to the needs that were disregarded by white women and Black men in the women's and Black women liberation movement. The movement generated several important organizations in the early 1970's that are committed to fight against all forms of oppression (Ruthven, 1991). Third-wave feminism takes a global perspective not by merely attempting to decolonize developing nations from Western practices, but by empowering women to actualize change, to gain power and equality, within their own cultures and their own communities and with their own voices. It is not restricted to a given ethnic group or region rather it stands against westerner's act of universalizing women issues.

3.6. Feminist Literary Criticism

Rooted from the politics of feminism, it advocates the rights of women in all social spheres such as patriarchal, political, economic, educational, physical and psychological

domains and examines how these ideologies and practices shape literary texts. This criticism is predominantly based on the theory that gender is a socially constructed and historically altering reality. It aims at the founding of genuineness in the voice of women writers and female characters as representatives of human beings in literature. Feminist literary criticism enhances cultural politics of race, sex and other differences in feminist critics.

The development in feminist theory bears feminist literary criticism. It is defined by different scholars differently though the central point remains the same to all. It is well stated by Kolodny in Brown and Olso (1987) defines feminist literary criticism as:

Literary criticism which uses feminism as its criterion when applied in the study of literature, feminist literary criticism covers various contexts and a variety of activities, including any criticism written by a woman; no matter what the subject, any criticism written by a woman about a man's book from a feminist perspective; and any criticism written by a woman about a woman's book or about female authors in general (37).

This explanation implies that feminist literary criticism assists with the analysis of female fictional characters by exposing ways in which sexist stereotyped formulations of women's roles in society are arranged in literary texts. It also enables to examine the portrayal and attitude of female characters by different authors.

Similarly to Kolondy's definition, Bultock, Stallybrass and Trombly (1988) say that feminist literary criticism is

"... concerned with both women as writers and women as readers (of male and female texts). It is an activity which raises the question of authentic and politics, and the relationship of women to language. It has also established the importance for women of having their own space in which to speak and express themselves freely and to expose the sexual ideology in the works of male and female writers. It has situated the text (rather than the author) at the heart of critical practice. It has explored the construction

of sexuality through the text and questioned the very existence of a fixed (male or female) human subject (314).

The above definition implies that feminist literary criticism addresses the social forms that sexual discrimination takes. It also creates a stage for women critics to utilize feminist theories in textual analysis and includes critical interpretations of the cultural ideology.

In a cross section of different eras, cultures, religions, men have played a dominant role in the society, while women left in the kitchen to perform domestic activities such as preparing food, caring for children. Not only this but also the subordination of women also incased in the imaginative works of literary texts where they appear in most cases submissive, servants and assigned for non creative tasks. For centuries, women were underrepresented in the literary works produced by male authors. To this end, literature have provided a powerful and essential role in the awareness and stereotyping of men and women. This long and deep rooted gender biased literary texts have contributed to the reinforcement of existing conceptions and misconceptions about the sexes. When we look at feminist literary criticism, Ruthven (1991) observes that, the dominant stereotyped images of female fictional characters were set as far back as Aristotle where he declared “The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and St. Aquinas’s belief that woman is an “imperfect man”. There are many examples of this sort in the history of literary criticism.

Josephine Donovan, one of the leading advocators of this school of thought feels that there should be no separation between the aesthetic and the moral aspects of the literary text. Her central part belief is presented as follows:

Feminist Criticism is rooted in the fundamental priori intuition that women are seats of consciousness: are selves, not others. Women in Literature written by men are for the most part seen as 'Other', as objects of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from the goals for the male protagonist. Such literature is alien from a female point of view because it denies her essential selfhood (Donovan, 1983:23).

She cites examples like the *Odyssey*, major work in the western civilization where she adversely criticizes it for it does not present the inside of a women's experience'. According to her, it serves one purpose, for the excitement of the male protagonist. So, these works remain foreign to women readers.

3.7. Black Feminism

There is no only post-colonial theory and no one critic can perhaps stand for, or articulate for, the post-colonial critical field (Katrak, in King [1996]). Out of the multitude of theories found under postcolonial theory, feminist theory is prominent. Even feminism is a broad area where various types of it are found. Among these, Black feminism is the perfect theory from which African-American women's fictional autobiography can be approached. Though the matter is severe with Black women writers, all post-colonial women writers explore their own cultural specificities in their literary works

Black feminist literary perspective is quite suitable to study the experience of Black women in America. Unlike white feminism, it takes special aspects of the Black community into account. Black women's question relies not only on sexual rather on racial and class oppression. According to Katrak, "Racism along with sexism is important analytic categories within Third World feminisms, as are also the interesting categories of class, color, nation, without which one cannot undertake a satisfactory analysis of Third World women" (237). For Third World women, feminist struggles aspire for the full pride of women along with men.

As explained earlier under 3.6., the presence of male domination for a long period of time makes women to stand up for their rights against men and men-made rules and cultures under the shade of feminism. According to Leglistizin and Ross (1976), "Women in every country western or not western, industrialized or rural, modern and premodern are underutilized ... denied access to positions of prestige and power..." (7). Therefore, to keep away from the problem, various theories have been developed under feminism though still arguments are available on them. The dominant argument against the popular

feminist literary theory is the inadequacy of the theory to be representative of all women writers in the world. It is exclusively made for white middle class women.

As Ketu H. Katrak in Bruce King (1996) attributes:

Today, it is commonly accepted that feminisms are historically, culturally, and geographically specific. This doesn't eliminate hegemonic tendencies in certain schools of feminism that continue to be Universalist, perhaps not overtly, but subtly, and hence more dangerously, and in spite of the challenges of Black and Third World feminist theorists (236).

By showing the failure of white feminism to incorporate the voices of Black women writers, Black feminists showed the varied position of their case as it is associated with oppression of women based on their color and sex. Hence, Black feminism becomes appropriate brand of feminism to deal with Black women's experiences. In brief, it is foolishness to try to analyze works of Black women based on western feminism instead of Black feminist theoretical framework that enables to address special aspects of Black women such as racism, sexism and classism.

Until the 1980s, western feminists assumed that their aspects of feminism work for the whole women in the world. They thought that there are common forms of oppression of women. Nevertheless divisions among feminists depend on nationality, race, language and religion occurred. Hence, it disproved the project of western feminists. Prominent scholars who exposed the limitedness of western feminism include famous Black feminists such as: Dubois, 1978; Davis, 1982; Rich, 1986 and Anzaldua and Morgia, 1981.

Black feminists and critics of post-colonialism have made mere investigations of the racism and ethnocentrism at the heart of white feminisms. bell hooks argues that:

All too frequently in the women's movement it was assumed one could be free of sexist thinking by simply adopting the appropriate feminist rhetoric; it was further assumed that identifying oneself as oppressed freed one from

being an oppressor. To a grave extent such thinking prevented white feminists from understanding and overcoming their own sexist-racist attitudes towards Black women. They could pay lip service to the idea of sisterhood and solidarity between women but at the same time they dismiss Black women (bell hooks, 1984: 8-9).

White feminism has no any perfect support from any of other feminisms. For instance, they don't understand as there is power relation between them and Black feminists, and the central point of western feminism is highly problematic for Black feminism. The primary source of oppression for white feminists is men, but Black feminists raise a number of sources for their oppression such as race, gender and class. In other words, assumptions at the heart of white feminism don't reflect the experience of Black women. This is well stated by McEwan (2009) that:

Western feminists have been criticized for universalizing their own particular perspectives as normative, essentializing women in the south as tradition-bound victims of timeless, patriarchal cultures, and reproducing the colonial discourses of main stream, 'male-stream' scholarship...the tendency of western feminism to theorize difference in universalizing ways is also problematic (99).

As many African and other colored scholars say, colonization doesn't totally end rather it continues in different forms. Though in the current postmodernism period, there is hybridity of cultures, still the domination of western based culture is visible. "The implications of western feminists writing about women outside their own cultural milieu must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of western scholarship; in other words, western domination of the production, publication, distribution and consumption of information and ideas (Ibid: 104)." Hence, the basic influence of the women's movement came from demanding for the inclusion of race, class and gender as determinant factors as women's oppression.

Black Feminist scholars accused white feminists as they failed to address the issues of race, class and gender as determinants for women's oppression. And they question white

feminists' act of universalizing their feminist ideas to all women of the world. This idea is strengthened by Monthy as follows:

Mainstream feminist thought reflected the hardship of white women and specifically middle to high income bracketed ones. This narrowly defined movement was dominated by white feminist thinkers whose main assertion was that there was equality in women's oppression. But the crucial point here is the extent of the oppression experienced by different women i.e. it did not include the issue of class, race, religion and sexual orientation. Although a Black and a white woman are both victimized by the institutionalized form of sexism, a Black woman has to live with the added complexity of class and race issue (1991, p. 63).

bell hooks in her book-*Feminist theory – From Margin to Center* (1984)-recounts a debate in her classroom where she argued against her white classmates the most important determinant for the origin of domination, is skin color then follows gender. She stresses her argument by attacking the women's liberation movement by claiming that the movement has not only been prepared on a fine platform, it first and foremost called interest to issues pertinent chiefly to white women with class privilege. She adds by saying "We need a theory mapping thought and strategy for a mass based movement, theory that would examine our culture from a feminist standpoint rooted in understanding of gender, race and class" (xii).

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

4.1. Introduction

Knowing that Black women in America experience various kinds of oppressions, the researcher has tried to identify dominant topics of marginalized experience. Mainly in the segregated Southern part of America, Blacks face predominantly three brands of oppressions: racism, sexism and classism. Hence, it is believed that racial prejudice and Negro resistance, ignorance, sense of worth, segregation, sexual abuse and displacement are the major topics addressed in the coming sections.

In the course of the novel, Maya, who has been described as a symbolic character for every Black girl growing up in America, goes from being a victim of racism with an inferiority complex to a self-aware individual. Maya Angelou herself confirms:

When I wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, I wasn't thinking so much about my own life or identity. I was thinking about a particular time in which I lived and the influences of that time on a number of people. I kept thinking what about that time? What were the people around Maya doing? I used the central figure-myself-as a focus to show how one person can make it through those times (Tate, 1999: 153).

She responds to racism with dignity and a strong sense of her own identity. Angelou was one of the first Black autobiographers to present, as Cudjoe put it, "a powerful, authentic signification of [African-American] womanhood in her quest for understanding and love rather than for bitterness and despair" (1990: 46).

Maya states that the odds pitted against Black women include not only the triple threat of sexism, racism, and Black powerlessness, but also the simultaneous presence of "common forces of nature" that assault and confuse all children. Maya has had to grow up more quickly than the children around her. Maya is already on her way toward becoming "a formidable character" as a result of the many assaults she deals with in "her

tender years,” but this does not mean that Maya is an adult. Maya’s discussion of the “common forces of nature” foreshadows how her journey of survival has yet to meet the obstacles of adolescence, sexuality, and teenage pregnancy. These obstacles are faced by all children, but for Black females, they intensify an already difficult situation.

The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power. The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance (Angelou, 1969: 265).

Hence, Maya Angelou’s novel provides plenty of instances of oppression of Black women and since it is autobiographical, it is quite suitable subject for the analysis of marginalization happened to Black women. Therefore, the researcher has taken relevant extracts out of the novel and analyzed them with text-based interpretations.

In the course of the analysis, the researcher has used different names to the central character since she was given separate names by different members of her family. Marguerite Anne Johnson is the birth name, Maya is the name given by her beloved brother Bailey, and Margaret is given by Mrs. Cullinan due to wrong pronunciation of the name Marguerite. Hence, since Angelou herself loves the name ‘Maya’, the name is used predominantly than other names.

4.2. Summary of the Novel

Marguerite or Maya Johnson is a young Black girl growing up in the racist town of Stamps, Arkansas. She and her brother Bailey were sent to Arkansas by their parents when she was three and he was four: they now live with their father's mother, Momma. Momma is firmly religious, and she owns a general store where the children are expected

to labor. They are both very clever, and spend much of their time reading because there is little else to do in Stamps.

Maya does not recognize why white people treat Black people so awfully. In fact, she does not understand much of the adult world, though she tries hard to do so. She is merely expected to sit still and keep her mouth shut. Then their father arrives suddenly, and takes them to St. Louis to stay with their mother. He is handsome and interesting, but he is unsuccessful and does not really seem to care for his children. In St. Louis, the children are looked after by their mother's family and their mother herself—a beautiful, laughing movie star type of woman. Her boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, avoids contact with the children for the most part, until he begins to abuse, and finally rapes, Maya. Soon after he is exposed, he is puzzlingly killed, probably by Mother's family. Maya believes it is all her fault, and stops talking for a long time. She and her brother are sent back to Stamps, where Maya meets Mrs. Flowers, who teaches her that speech and writing are beautiful and important.

Maya's life continues with a series of episodes that affect her in different ways—some positive, some negative—but all of them teach her something. She is sent to learn manners in a white woman's house at ten years of age. She has her first real confrontation with prejudice, and decides that she will not accept it. She watches her Black neighbors nearly kill themselves with work, and then look to religion for relief—or, she sometimes thinks, as an escape. She makes her first friend, and gets interested in boys—though not seriously. Bailey, a year older, gets initiated into sex by a fourteen-year-old, who then leaves town, breaking his heart. Maya hears a ghost story from a neighbor and is terrified, then learns her grandmother's power when Momma is able to make everyone in the house, including Maya, feel better.

Maya attends her eighth grade graduation, at first proud of herself, but then disappointed when a white guest speaker tells the crowd that they can only be good at sports, not academics. Still, even after that depressing speech, the crowd sings together, and Maya feels proud again, of herself and her people.

When she has got toothache, her grandmother tries to take her to a white dentist, who declines to aid her. All her grandmother can do is obliging him to give her money, when Maya would like Momma to run him out of town. Soon after, Momma decides that Maya and Bailey have to go to California to be with their parents. Maya doesn't know why, but she thinks it's because Bailey has seen, up close, a dead Black man and a white man who is happy to see the man dead. Maya thinks Momma is afraid for her grandson, who is becoming a man.

In California, Maya at first lives with her grandmother, then her mother. She and Bailey love Mother very deeply: she is beautiful, fun-loving, and she loves them. She is strong and kind, and marries an equally strong and kind man, Daddy Clidell. In San Francisco during the war, Maya witnesses racism against Blacks and Japanese people. She does well in school and gets involved with dance and theatre. She spends the summer with her father and his girlfriend, who is not much older than Maya herself. Her father takes her to Mexico for a night, and Maya learns that he has a mistress there. Her father gets so drunk Maya has to drive him home. She has never driven before and is terrified, but once it is over, she feels proud. She gets into a fight with her father's girlfriend and decides to leave. She lives in a junkyard with a group of teenagers for a month. There, she learns about friendship and tolerance.

Back in San Francisco, she decides to work as a streetcar conductor, though Black people are not allowed to do this. She persists until they finally hire her. She works for a semester and then goes back to school. Meanwhile, Bailey and Mother have been fighting so much that Bailey finally leaves home and gets a job on a railroad train. Maya is disappointed in him.

She reads some lesbian literature and, not understanding her developing body and mind, thinks she is a lesbian. She decides to find a boyfriend. She approaches a popular boy and asks him to have sex with her. He agrees and the experience is disappointing-almost boring-for Maya. She forgets him, and three weeks later finds she is pregnant. She hides it from her mother and stepfather for eight months, and when she finally tells them they are at first angry but then accept it. She has the baby, and is afraid of hurting it for a

while, but soon realizes that as long as she has good intentions, her instinct will help her care for it.

4.3.0. Experiences of Marginalized Women

4.3.1. Racial Prejudice and Negro Resistance

Arkansas is a racist area divided between Black and white, male and female. Angelou uses metaphor of a bird struggling to escape its cage, described in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, as a central image throughout *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. As she reveals via her works, the caged bird sings of freedom bound by the cage of race, gender and class. The novel represents Angelou's imprisonment resulting from racism and oppression. Angelou demonstrates, through her involvement with the Black community of Stamps, as well as her presentation of vivid and realistic racist characters and the offensiveness of Southern white attitudes toward African-Americans, her developing understanding of the system for surviving in a racist society. Angelou's fictional autobiography contains a sequence of lessons about resisting oppression. The sequence she describes leads Angelou, as the protagonist, from helpless rage and resentment to forms of subtle resistance.

Angelou displays that Momma's approach to handle racism serves as a base for actively protesting and combating racism. Momma is portrayed as a practical person whose patience, courage, and silence ensured the survival and success of those who came after her. For example, Maya breaks the race barrier to become the first Black street-car operator in San Francisco, and responds assertively to the demeaning treatment by her white employer Mrs. Cullinan. In addition, Angelou's description of the strong and unified Black community of Stamps demonstrates how African-Americans challenge oppressive institutions to refuse to go along with racism. The author demonstrates how she, as a Black child, develops her racial hatred, common in the works of many contemporary Black novelists and autobiographers. At first Maya wishes that she could become white, since growing up Black in white America is unsafe; later she gets rid of her self-hatred and embraces a strong racial identity.

The nature of Negro resistance in the story is mainly provided in two forms: subtle resistance and active protest. The story line of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* shows these two forms of confrontation against racism respectively. It begins with passive protest against maltreatment of whites followed by overt objection from Blacks against racial acts.

4.3.1.2. Disrespect

As Angelou calls 'powhitetrash' girls mock Maya's grandmother by posing the physical appearance of the big Black old mother as an ape. They continue the act of mocking up to a hand stand of one of them without any cover of the body in front of Momma. Momma is the respected religious mother who owns the only Black owned Store, and she is the woman who lends money to the poor people without color barrier during the Great Depression. So, how moral just to tease such kind of person? In fact, she gets this treatment since she is Black and Black nothing else.

They came finally to stand on the ground in front of Momma. At first they pretended seriousness. Then one of them wrapped her right arm in the crook of her left, pushed out her mouth and started to hum. I realized that she was aping my grandmother. Another said, "Naw, Helen, you ain't standing like her. This here's it." Then she lifted her chest, folded her arms and mocked that strange carriage that was Annie Henderson. Another laughed, "Naw, you can't do it. Your mouth ain't pooched out enough. It's like this" (Ibid., p. 29).

Maya observes the scene from the place where Momma told her to be. She becomes emotional against the white children who show rudeness and crudity, and she wishes to stone them. The event causes Maya to react with helpless anger and humiliation, but through the response of Momma to the girls, Maya learns there can be a better and more effective way to respond.

At first, Maya's reaction to the "powhitetrash" girls is anger, resentment, embarrassment, defenselessness. When the girls ape her grandmother's posture, Maya weeps, thinks of

getting her uncle's rifle, and wants to throw lye and pepper on them and to scream at them. When they leave and Momma politely calls good-bye to them, Maya's rage peaks:

[S]he stopped singing and said, “Bye, Miz Helen, ’bye, Miz Ruth, ’bye, Miz Eloise.” I burst. A firecracker July-the-Fourth burst. How could Momma call them Miz? The mean nasty things. Why couldn’t she have come inside the sweet, cool store when we saw them breasting the hill? What did she prove? And then if they were dirty, mean and impudent, why did Momma have to call them Miz? (Ibid., p. 31-32)

However, Maya realizes that her grandmother has achieved something and won it. Maya learns a lesson that there is a more effective strategy for reacting to racism and segregation than rage and indignation, a strategy of fine resistance. Here, the response to the racist children is subtle resistance that doesn’t harm life, liberty or property.

4.3.1.3. Disheartenment

The act of undermining the Black students’ future happened at the time of Maya’s 8th grade graduation by the white man invited as a guest speaker. There is an insult by the white person, when the speaker tells the Black audience of all the improvements which the white schools will receive-improvements that far exceed the few planned for the Black school.

The white man named as Mr. Edward Donleavy from Texarkana gives quite racist speech in front of the Black crowd during the commencement address of the graduation.

He said that he had pointed out to people at a very high level that one of the first-line football tacklers at Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College had graduated from good old Lafayette County Training School. Here fewer Amen’s were heard. Those few that did break through lay dully in the air with the heaviness of habit. He went on to praise us. He went on to say how he had bragged that “one of the best basketball players at Fisk sank his first ball right here at Lafayette County Training School.” ...The white kids were going to have a chance to become

Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises (Ibid., p.174).

The white man disheartens and annoys the Black crowd including students and their parents together with school administrators by saying that Black students will be hired in labor oriented jobs, and they lack mental brilliance so that they couldn't be like the known scientists. Maya's first response of humiliation and anger happens; "Then I wished that Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner had killed all whitefolks in their beds" (Ibid., p. 176). The anger doesn't remain limited to the young Maya rather it gets shared now by her community in the hall; "...the proud graduating class of 1940 had dropped their heads" (Ibid., p.175). Then there is the action on the part of a member of the Black community - Henry Reed's improvised leading the audience in "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" (Ibid., p. 178). The song is called 'Black National Anthem' and every Black in the hall sings it. In the same vein to the response against powhitetrash girls, the song avoids an out-and-out conflict with the white oppressor and permits the Black community to feel its dignity and superiority; "We were on top again. As always, again. We survived" (Ibid., p. 179). Here the response is not only noticed from the central character but also from the Black community. The resistance is still not exactly an outright protest and it still avoids open confrontation, since the white insulter has left and does not hear the singing.

4.3.1.4. Discrimination

One of the greatest abuses occur when Stamps' white and only dentist - to whom Maya's grandmother had lent money, interest-free and as a favor-refuses to treat Maya's severe toothache, telling Maya and Momma,

"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.” He had never once looked at me. He turned his back and went through the door into the cool beyond (Ibid., p. 183-184).

What makes the discrimination not to treat Maya the worst thing of racism and rudeness is that the dentist is the man who received much money at the time of Great Depression from Maya’s grandmother-Mrs. The maltreatment is not limited to Maya rather it goes to Mrs. Henderson, who is the richest Black in the area. The seriousness of the pain of Maya’s toothache and the openhandedness of Mrs. Henderson do not bother the arrogant white dentist to say no for their inquiry since they are not white rather they are Black. Similarly, with the case when powhitetrash girls tease Momma, now also Mrs. Henderson warns her grand-daughter to leave the room and wait outside to save the child from racist events happened, which may be dangerous for the growing child. This shows how Momma, as expected, is role model of her grand-daughter.

The kind of resistance is different from the rest of passive ones in that here, through the italicized text, it is shown that Momma directly confronts the dentist and finally orders him to leave the town sooner.

“I didn’t ask you to apologize in front of Marguerite, because I don’t want her to know my power, but I order you, now and herewith. Leave Stamps by sundown.” “Mrs. Henderson, I can’t get my equipment ...” He was shaking terribly now. “Now, that brings me to my second order. You will never again practice dentistry. Never! When you get settled in your next place, you will be a vegetarian caring for dogs with the mange, cats with the cholera and cows with the epizootic. Is that clear?” The saliva ran down his chin and his eyes filled with tears. “Yes, ma’am. Thank you for not killing me. Thank you, Mrs. Henderson” (Ibid., p. 185).

The only part of the novel presented in stream of consciousness tells us what Maya thinks in her mind at the time when she was waiting for her Momma outside of the building. Momma threatens the white dentist in front of him which is unusual to her. Actually, this

happens in the mind of Maya who fantasizes her grand-mother bothers her enemy. The actual event happened to the dentist is that momma collects an interest of the money she gave him before. The italicized passage reveals what Maya wishes her grandmother could do to the racist dentist.

Maya noticed no open confrontation from her Momma against the racist whites, and she knows that is out of momma's philosophy. The act created by Maya herself highlights that subtle resistance is not enough as an overall strategy for responding to racist oppression. On the other hand, the fantasy passage anticipates the kind of outright confrontations between oppressed Black and racist oppressor. Although it is only a fantasy, it is the first instance in the novel of a Black person openly confronting a racist white, and thus is the first hint that such confrontation is a possibility.

4.3.1.4. Naming

Our name is an essential part of our identity, if someone deliberately changes our name; it is a lack of respect for our identity. Maya's name gets changed easily by a white woman from 'Marguerite' to 'Mary' without her consent. The act is totally unkind for the poor Maya, who sympathize to the woman. Maya first began working as a domestic-in-training for Mrs. Cullinan, she felt nothing but forgiveness for her mistress. Mrs. Cullinan was fat and could not have any children because she had no organs. Even when she pronounced Angelou's name incorrectly from 'Marguerite' in to 'Margaret', Maya smiled and felt sorry for her.

However, her feelings get changed when one of Mrs. Cullinan's friends suggests that she calls the girl Mary, as this was shorter and easier to say than Marguerite. "Well, that may be, but the name's too long. I'd never bother myself. I'd call her Mary if I was you" (Ibid., p. 104). Mrs. Cullinan received the woman's advice, and proclaimed that Angelou was 'Mary' from now on. It shows the lack of respect white mistresses have for their servants, who are considered as inferior just because they are Black. So, it is natural that Maya didn't like being called out of her name. First it meant the white does not respect her, and then it reminds her of the slavery times when Blacks were named on the will of

their masters.

Black servant, Maya, is called out of her name at the time when she is working for Mrs. Cullinan,

...she called me by the wrong name. Miss Glory and I were washing up the lunch dishes when Mrs. Cullinan came to the doorway. "Mary?" Miss Glory asked, "Who?" Mrs. Cullinan, sagging a little, knew and I knew. "I want Mary to go down to Mrs. Randall's and take her some soup. She's not been feeling well for a few days." Miss Glory's face was a wonder to see. "You mean Margaret, ma'am. Her name's Margaret." "That's too long. She's Mary from now on (Ibid., p. 105).

Mrs. Cullinan gives new name to Marguerite as 'Mary' that is not really related to the original name. The boss provides the reason behind changing the name of her servant as the first name is quite long to call and better to change it with the short one. Mrs. Cullinan's act is a violation of Marguerite's identity since she is Black.

In the same chapter of the novel, there are other incidents of racism. When Maya and Glory serve Mrs. Cullinan, it is strictly forbidden to share any materials even drinking ones with the white family members. The two Blacks have separate glasses to drink from and their glasses were kept in separate shelves. "I had a glass to drink from, and it sat with Miss Glory's on a separate shelf from the others" (Ibid., p. 103). This is an act of racism that shows the misrepresentation of Blacks as non-humans who shouldn't be served equally with whites the so called humans.

One of the noticeable experiences that happened to Maya in the novel is standing up for what you believe in and not allowing anyone to take advantage of you. Angelou demonstrates the racist habit of renaming African-Americans, as shown when her white employer insists on calling her Mary. Angelou describes the employer's renaming as the "hellish horror of being 'called out of his name'" (Ibid., p. 106). Maya understands that she is being insulted and rebels by breaking Mrs. Cullinan's favorite dish.

Marguerite, the main character of the story, is courageous to perform what she needs to

do. Her own name that was given to her by her parents is just now so easily being changed by the white women, and the action makes her very angry. She feels that she was just robbed of something important, her name. Even though, she is just a young girl, she doesn't want to tolerate such mistreatment. Her inner dignity and pride arise and push her to forget about her need of money and job. She frightfully feels that her opinion might never be valued. That is when she decides to change all that once and for all. Marguerite feels that it is crucial to make a statement. She breaks her employer's favorite piece "china from Virginia" (Ibid., p. 107).

Maya disliked Mrs. Cullinan for changing her name, and it is really painful to let a white woman rename you for her convenience. Following her brother's advice, she dropped and broke Mrs. Cullinan's favorite dishes; a fish-shaped casserole dish and green glass coffee cups on purpose. She rebelled against her. "When I heard Mrs. Cullinan scream, "Mary!" I picked up the casserole and two of the green glass cups in readiness. As she rounded the kitchen door I let them fall on the tiled floor" (Ibid., p. 107). Here, it shows how Marguerite expresses her internal feelings without any hesitation. After calling her a few discriminatory names, Mrs. Cullinan finally called Maya by her correct, but still mispronounced name: Margaret. Maya, with her active protest against the injustice, deserves her identity at least by getting her favorite name. This is the actual open confrontation against racism next to the hint in the scene of the white dentist.

Maya Angelou skillfully presents two stories to compare and to make a reader clear more with the idea. While the act shown above is a huge act against the oppressor, the Black girl named as Glory shows opposite position with regard to the change of name.

Miss Glory had a fleeting second of feeling sorry for me. Then as she handed me the hot tureen she said, "Don't mind, don't pay that no mind. Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words ... You know, I been working for her for twenty years." She held the back door open for me. "Twenty years. I wasn't much older than you. My name used to be Hallelujah. That's what Ma named me, but my mistress give me 'Glory,' and it stuck. I likes it better too." I was in the little path that ran behind the

houses when Miss Glory shouted, “It’s shorter too.” For a few seconds it was a tossup over whether I would laugh (imagine being named Hallelujah) or cry (imagine letting some white woman rename you for her convenience). My anger saved me from either outburst. I had to quit the job, but the problem was going to be how to do it (Ibid., p. 106).

Maya becomes really ashamed of Glory who does not mind to be renamed by the white lady. This incident is provided to make a contrast of feeling created to Maya and Glory. Maya becomes angry with the act of the boss, whereas Glory enjoys the new name since it is, as she says, ‘short’. Though the Black girl is victim of the attack, she does not realize it is an insult. The relationship between Glory and Mrs. Cullinan is well, glory seems to have accepted the fact that Black people are under the control of white section. Even though Mrs. Cullinan renames her Glory, Glory accepts it. However, Angelou did not appreciate being treated like she was an object that could be given a new name whenever its owner pleased, but she also pitied her mistress, and she conveyed her feelings by using an angry tone of writing. She acts against the white women directly in front of her by destructing the precious properties.

4.3.1.5. Outright Protest

In San Francisco, it was a dream to see a Black woman being streetcar conductor before Maya Angelou’s success to be the first Negro girl street car conductor. In fact, it is not the interest to challenge the institution rather a need to survive that leads Maya to apply for the job. But, eventually, it brings another interest beyond securing her income not to pause her education. At the beginning, Maya knows from her mother that it is impossible to be hired as a conductor being a Black girl. “To her question of what I planned to do, I replied that I would get a job on the streetcars. She rejected the proposal with: ‘They don’t accept colored people on the streetcars’” (Ibid., p. 257).

However, she continues to struggle for the job. When the white secretary of the San Francisco street-car company repeatedly frustrates her attempts for a job interview, Maya is at first persuaded not to take it personally:

The incident was a recurring dream, concocted years before by stupid whites and it eternally came back to haunt us all. The secretary and I were like Hamlet and Laertes in the final scene, where, because of harm done by one ancestor to another, we were bound to duel to the death. Also because the play must end somewhere, I went further than forgiving the clerk, I accepted her as a fellow victim of the same puppeteer (Ibid., p. 260).

But then Maya decides that the rejections, which have everything to do with her race, also have everything to do with her personally, and this is because her personal identity and her racial identity cannot be entirely separated: "The whole charade we had played out in that crummy waiting room had directly to do with me, Black, and her, white" (Ibid., p. 260). After a long and tiring bargain with the white receptionist, she becomes the first ever Black girl streetcar conductor in San Francisco. "[O]n a blissful day I was hired as the first Negro on the San Francisco streetcars" (Ibid., p. 262). San Francisco is a place where there was serious racism. "A story went the rounds about a San Franciscan white matron who refused to sit beside a Negro civilian on the streetcar, even after he made room for her on the seat. Her explanation was that she would not sit beside a draft dodger who was a Negro as well" (Ibid., p. 207-208). Attaining the street-car conductor's job becomes not only a victory for civil rights, as a result, but also a personal victory for Maya's sense of self. The active resistance and outright protest, that is Maya's persisting and breaking the 'color line' of the San Francisco street-car company.

4.3.2 Sexual Abuse

The young Maya is raped at the age of eight by her mother's boyfriend-Mr. Freeman. Maya is abused many times by whites since she is Black, but now she gets hurt by a Black man since she is a woman. As she herself mentioned at the very beginning of the novel, it is quite doomed to be woman in racist and sexist society of America. Black women in America face double jeopardy from the white and the male group.

Angelou's depiction of rape exposes the real suffering of many Black American women. There is one more way that men exploit women by sexual mistreatment. This is what

happens to the poor young Maya by the man who, at the same time, owns her mother for his sexual practice. Mr. Freeman is probably initiated by the absence of strict rules that guard Black women in the country at that time. It is noticed that he is released after a very short period of time for his severe crime from jail. That is why one of the uncles of Maya, though not clearly mentioned in the novel, murders him to get justice by his own.

Mr. Freeman deceives Maya by pretending as if he were playing with her without any sexual desire.

“We 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 (Ibid., p. 79).

Mr. Freeman threatens to kill Maya's brother Bailey if she tells anyone concerning the rape. After Maya lies during Freeman's trial, stating that the rape was the first time he touched her improperly, Freeman is murdered by one of Maya's uncles and Maya sees her words as a source of death. As a result, she resolves never to speak to anyone other than Bailey. Angelou connects the violation of her body and the devaluation of her words through the depiction of her self-imposed, five-year-long silence. As Angelou later stated:

In those moments I decided that although Bailey loved me he couldn’t help. I had sold myself to the Devil and there could be no escape. The only thing I could do was to stop talking to people other than Bailey. Instinctively, or somehow, I knew that because I loved him so much I’d never hurt him, but if I talked to anyone else that person might die too. Just my breath, carrying my words out, might poison people and they’d

curl up and die like the Black fat slugs that only pretended. I had to stop talking (Ibid., p. 84).

Maya chooses not to speak after her rape because she is afraid of the destructive power of words.

Maya's rape demonstrates how as a Black woman, she is violated as she moves from childhood to adolescence. The act of rape happens to another girl at the time when Joe Louis had boxing race with his white counterpart. During the process of the race when Louis fails, many events take place around the Black community. Among these, rape to the ladies is the serious one. One more woman ambushed and raped (Ibid., p. 131). In general, it can be taken as a depiction of burden and a demonstration of the manner in which the Black female is violated. The writer stated her own experience to demonstrate the complexities of rape. She 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.

4.3.3. Displacement

Maya is transferred around to seven different homes between the age of three and sixteen: from California to Stamps to Los Angeles to Oakland to San Francisco to Los Angeles to San Francisco. As is shown in the novel, Overwhelmed by the triple oppressions that are racism, sexism, and classism, young Maya is degraded at every turn, making her feel uncomfortable staying in one place.

When she is thirteen and moves to San Francisco with her mother, she identifies the city as a town full of displaced people. Her personal dislocation echoes the larger communal forces that displaced Blacks all across the country. She realizes that thousands of many scared Black children made the same journey as she and Bailey, traveling on their own to newly rich parents in northern cities, or back to southern towns when the north failed to supply the economic prosperity it had promised.

Disarticulation worsened Maya's pain of being in the centre of hostile society. She is sent to live with her grandmother at the age of three and she becomes uncomfortable with the

segregated South despite the strong and religious Momma. Her parents get divorced and none of them dare to keep the baby with them. She is a kind of useless and unwanted property as the parents forget her for a long period of time. It is her father that comes to visit when she is four years old. “A year later our father came to Stamps without warning” (Ibid., p. 52).

Looking back on her childhood experiences, Maya notes that she not only felt suffering in an unfriendly, racist and sexist society, but to other social forces as well, including the displacement she felt from her family. “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” (Ibid., p. 6). Maya feels displaced primarily because when she was three years old, her parents sent her away to live with her grandmother. This early separation, as well as subsequent ones, leaves her feeling rootless for most of her childhood. Her constant awareness of her own displacement – the fact that she differed from other children in appearance and that she did not have a sense of belonging associated with any one or any place becomes ‘unnecessary insult’ that she must deal with at such a young age. Her experiences—driving the car in Mexico, living in the junkyard, returning to witness Bailey move out of the house, and then successfully fighting to get a job as the first Black conductor on the San Francisco streetcars, rather than go back to a school where she would not belong—have made her feel displaced and older than her years.

4.3.4. Segregation

It is well known that African-Americans living in the southern United States were treated with abhorrence by the majority of white people. The nation was divided by segregation—a formal policy in which Black people weren’t allowed to attend good schools, get high-paying jobs, live in valuable houses or receive proper medical treatment for their diseases. They weren’t even allowed to sit among white people on public buses, or drink from the same water sources, as they were considered to be unworthy of equality. They weren’t slaves anymore since the Civil War brought an end to that inhumanity and social injustice, but they were still thought to be sub-human. In short, the

policy of segregation did everything within its power to ensure that Black people remained poor and ignorant, and most importantly, below white people on the hierarchy of power and privilege.

A light shade had been pulled down between the Black community and all things white, but one could see through it enough to develop a fear-admiration-contempt for the white “things”—white folks’ cars and white glistening houses and their children and their women. But above all, their wealth that allowed them to waste was the most enviable (Ibid., p. 47-48).

Angelou captures Maya’s childlike observations about what makes white people different. Her fixation on clothing as a sign of difference also refers back to the incident in church when she suddenly realizes that her fairy-tale dress is really an old, faded white woman’s hand-me-down. The church is the place where segregation takes place, for there were only blacks in the church where Maya was attending sermon.

Stamps, Arkansas, suffers so thoroughly from segregation and Maya’s world is so completely trapped in the Black community that she often finds it hard to imagine what white people look like. They appear to her more like supernatural ghosts with strange powers and magnificent possessions than as Black human beings.

Maya’s fellow men and women meet at her grandmother’s store to listen to the live commentary of the boxing race between the Black Joe Louis and the white counterpart.

My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. . . . This might be the end of the world. If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true, the accusations that we were lower types of human beings. Only a little higher than the apes (Ibid., p. 131).

Maya crowds around the Store’s radio with the rest of the community to listen to Joe Louis defend his world heavyweight boxing title. The Black community lives separately far from white’s district. The Black people meeting at Mrs. Henderson’s Store to share

their psychological hope with the metaphor of the fight between their hero and the white one. The public victory of the Black Joe Louis proves to Blacks in the Store that they are the most powerful people in the world and enables them to live another day with strength and vigor in the face of oppression. Even though, some Blacks from rural areas fail to go back to their home in the night since walking on the road too far is quite dangerous for their life since the white representative is defeated on the same day.

Segregation is noticed with unfair schooling service provided for particularly Black women and for Blacks in general when compared with the rest of white students in America. As it is mentioned by Angelou, There are separate schools or colleges for Blacks and whites. At the time when Maya attends training, she notices that Black girls had a less privileged education than white girls. “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” (Ibid., p. 101).

When Maya attends her schooling in Lafayette County Training School, the school for Blacks, up to grade 8, she observes the school quite inferior to the ‘White school’. The school where she graduated grade eight lacks many necessary things including teaching aid materials and qualified teachers.

Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy. Its two buildings (main classrooms, the grade school and home economics) were set on a dirt hill with no fence to limit either its boundaries or those of bordering farms. There was a large expanse to the left of the school which was used alternately as a baseball diamond or a basketball court. Rusty hoops on the swaying poles represented the permanent recreational equipment, although bats and balls could be borrowed from the P. E. teacher if the borrower was qualified and if the diamond wasn’t occupied. Over this rocky area relieved by a few shady tall persimmon trees the graduating class walked. ... Only a small percentage would be continuing on to college—one of the South’s A & M

(agricultural and mechanical) schools, which trained Negro youths to be carpenters, farmers, handymen, masons, maids, cooks and baby nurses (165).

Hence, segregation, as revealed in the novel, is one of the dominant experiences of Black women in America. It has been the common thing to be surprised to see a Black woman in white's school, cafeteria, hotel and sometimes road.

4.3.5. Sense of worth

Since she had been twice sent away by her parents to live with her grandmother, it is no surprise that Maya had an insecurity and identity problem. In the opening pages of the book, Maya suffered from a strong sense of racial self-hatred, fantasizing that she was "really white," with "light-blue eyes" and "long and blond" hair (Ibid., p. 4). As a young girl, Marguerite has no self-confidence. She longs to be someone else, believes she is ugly, and can almost convince herself that she is actually white instead of Black. "I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (Ibid., p. 4). Maya entirely separates her sense of self from her sense of race, and this is part of her identity crisis, since she refuses to accept being who she is and wants a foreign identity that is a compound of received ideas of white feminine beauty.

One of the crucial transition points in this evolution over the course of the entire book from the total separation of self-image and race to the connection of the two comes in the part 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" (Ibid., p. 92). This is the first statement of Black racial pride in the novel, but others appear later: Joe Louis's victory, which "proved that we were the strongest people in the world" (Ibid., p. 132), and Maya's conclusion at the end of the graduation scene that "I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (Ibid., p. 179).

Maya's sense of self-worth is still a little shaky-she thinks Mrs. Cullinan might be making fun of her because she knows about Mr. Freeman. "I wondered what they could be

laughing about...Maybe she knew about Mr. Freeman” (Ibid., p. 104-105). Maya still thinks his death is her fault. But when her mistress calls her Mary, Maya suddenly understands what she will and will not accept. She gets herself fired, not caring about the consequences, rather than be called a name other than her own.

Maya feels very proud of herself for graduating, even though the white speaker at the ceremony suggests that she and her class will never be what they really want to be. She understands that this attitude is not a reflection of her-it is racism, pure and simple. When they sing

 " 'Lift ev'ry voice and sing
 Till earth and heaven ring
 Ring with the harmonies of Liberty ...'
 ...It was the Negro national anthem” (Ibid., p. 178).

She sees that her people have not given up hope, and that in itself gives her hope. Her self-esteem is not shaken by the white speaker; it is now grounded in her own achievements.

By reading different books, she develops self-pride. Instead of a poor, unwanted ugly girl, she is a beautiful princess who has simply been mistaken for a maid. She believes desperately in the morals of the stories, and is sometimes able to forget her life for a moment. She has found something she really loves-reading-and it has given her more of an identity (Ibid., p. 189-195).

Alone on the mountainside, Maya realizes she can accomplish even the most frightening thing if she puts her mind to it. “Of course I could drive. Idiots and lunatics drove cars, why not the brilliant Marguerite Johnson?” (Ibid., p. 230). She is never the same afterward: she has a new confidence that sets her apart from most people her age. She develops confidence in herself. Following her achievement of riding a car, in the junkyard, Maya learns to take care of herself, and she begins to understand that people of all races, and all personality types, can be friends. “After hunting down unbroken bottles and selling them with a white girl from Missouri, a Mexican girl from Los Angeles and a

Black girl from Oklahoma, I was never again to sense myself so solidly outside the pale of the human race” (Ibid., p. 247). The kids accept her without questioning her. This helps her to feel less alone because of her own race, and makes her feel like a normal human being, rather than an unwanted, ugly Black girl who doesn't belong. Rather she becomes proud of her physical appearances as “...my hair pleased me too” (Ibid., p.168). Therefore, the question of self goes from self-hatred into self-pride or from the idea of taking Blackness as ugliness into the slogan ‘I am Black and I am proud of being Black’.

4.3.6. Ignorance

Lack of knowledge over different things is noticed throughout the novel under investigation. Ignorance may be made intentionally or unintentionally though, as a matter of fact, it limits a person from the world of different subjects. Maya, who is the central character of the novel, tells us that her grandmother is ignorant towards white authors like Shakespeare. Due to this, Maya confirms that this affects Mrs. Henderson from the knowledge of different aspects of the white folk.

Bailey and I decided to memorize a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, but we realized that Momma would question us about the author and that we'd have to tell her that Shakespeare was white, and it wouldn't matter to her whether he was dead or not. So we chose “The Creation” by James Johnson instead (Angelou, 1969: 14-15).

Though Momma (Mrs. Henderson) does not know who Shakespeare was, Maya and her brother (Bailey) anticipate that she would not approve of him since he was white. To Momma, race is the most important issue, but it clearly keeps her ignorant about many subjects.

In addition to her grandmother's, Maya's ignorance is pervasive in the work. Due to segregation problem, Maya, like most people in Stamps, knows almost nothing about white people. She does not even consider them human. She thinks that they are too different from her. She perceives them as creatures with see-through skin and who are unpredictable, difficult to understand and very strange. “I remember never believing that

whites were really real ...I couldn't force myself to think of them as people...White folks couldn't be people" (Ibid., p. 25).

Ignorance really affects Marguerite at the time when she understands nothing about the approach of Mr. Freeman towards her. She likes him, though, and she wishes she could know. She does not understand why he has to be so secretive and mysterious, why he can't take the time to explain anything to her, when she tries so hard to understand. Even after receiving the worst attack from him, she does not know that what happened was not her fault. In fact, she doesn't really know what happened at all. She is not sure when to tell the truth and when to lie (Ibid., p. 80-86).

If one lacks knowledge over something, it is quite difficult not only to make a decision but also to talk about. This is what happened to the young Maya when her real mother gets insulted by the new, scarcely older to Maya herself, step-mother as "she is a whore" (Ibid., p. 239). Maya is upset when Dolores calls her mother a whore partly because she is insulted, but also because she is afraid Dolores might be right. "If there was a chance of truth in the charge, I would not be able to live, to contribute to live with mother, and I so wanted to" (Ibid., p. 239). Maya has no idea whether the accusation is true or not, so it terrifies her to hear it spoken. Maya lashes out as Dolores because there is nothing else she can do. Though this is the consequence of her displacement, she commits the foul of being ignorant of her mother's true nature.

Maya is also ignorant about what lesbian means. Simply after reading the book called *The Well of Loneliness*, and looking at her undeveloped breasts and other sex organs, she thinks that she is going to be a lesbian. However, if she had any idea what a lesbian was, she would not be worried. Equipped with an overactive imagination, self-consciousness and a lot of rumors, she decides she must be abnormal. As a result, she reaches a decision to make sexual intercourse with a man that was not really her friend to check and to make her normal (Ibid., p. 265-276).

4.3.7. Maternity

Motherhood is one among the various experiences of Black women demonstrated in the novel. Like other female Black autobiographers, Maya Angelou exposes the stereotypes against African-American mothers as breeder and matriarch, and presents them as having a creative and personally fulfilling role.

Though Maya is afraid to have her baby alone, she is strong enough not to force its father to take care of her. She knows he had no part in her decision to have the child, so she knows she must shoulder the responsibility alone. Though she is afraid at first, once she realizes that she is capable of loving and caring for her young son, she relaxes and feels more confident (Ibid., p. 279-281).

Maya becomes a mother at the age of 16. She has a duty to care for her child at her teenage without any support of the husband or the father of the child. Once she gets pregnant on a single meeting with the guy, the rest of pregnancy cares lie with Maya. As she puts it “the father had stopped speaking to me during my fourth month” (Ibid., p. 280). Though motherhood is the issue that is addressed briefly at the end of the novel, it is one of the shared experiences of Black women in America. Angelou herself cleverly and broadly addresses maternity in her following autobiographical novels.

By implication Black women, like Marguerite, were servants to white people and Black men. They received no respect, and as a result, they had no hope for the future. They existed within society, but they had no opportunity of improving their positions within it. If Black men were seen as sub-human by white people, Black women were considered to be sub-sub-human by white and Black people alike.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. Conclusion

As it has been stated in the course of the paper, African-American literature mainly focuses on portraying experiences of marginalization. Like early slave narratives, contemporary writers like Maya Angelou depicts self by using first person point of view. Hence, Angelou manifested experiences of marginalized women by taking herself as a central character of her first autobiographical fiction-*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

The (novel) fictional autobiography by Maya Angelou is a specimen of resistance literature. The exploration of feminine experiences throughout the novel enabled the researcher to discover the experiences of resistance and courage in the face of adversity. As Black feminists firmly argue, Black girl in America experiences triple oppression of race, sex and class. As Angelou depicts skillfully in her novel, racial prejudice occurs to Maya at her Grade 8 graduation by the white guest, sexual abuse happens to Maya by her mother's Black boyfriend, and economical problems come about to Maya all the way through her young life in the segregated Arkansas.

As shown in the analysis part of the paper, the novel directly or indirectly deals with the power of women to survive and shape their own future despite hardships. The lesson gained out of the current study is that failure is inevitable but it is quite necessary to lift oneself up again. Angelou, in a crafted manner, tries to make visible the relationships between Black and white people via the experiences of the Black girl in Southern America.

As is known, power is still in the hands of white people and Black people are still largely dependent on them. In the USA the struggle for equality, particularly in the southern states, has been long and difficult, from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s to the political debates still going on today.

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