



THE PILOT STUDY OF MAYA ANGELOU'S NOVELS 'I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS' AND 'THE HEART OF A WOMAN'

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ABSTRACT

American literature is the literature written or produced in English language in the United States. It existed as a broader institution of the British literature, following its literary tradition. Black American literature or African American Literature is considered as the body of literature produced by the American writers of African descent which highlights the main outcome of the slaves from slavery. Their themes mainly focused on their life style and culture with special focus on slavery, racial discrimination and exploitation that they experienced in their lives. There was a vast distinction between the literature of freed slaves and the literature of free blacks born in the North America. Freed slaves expressed their oppression in a different narrative form. The central union war aimed to preserve the United States as a nation and not to perish slavery. The scope of the study dealt with the themes entangled in the novels of Maya Angelou.

Keywords: American, British, Black American literature, slavery, racial discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Americans made the Blacks as slaves before the world war started. Mostly slaves were allowed to stay in small farms and large plantations. Most of the masters took sexual liberties on women slaves. African- American literature explores the issues freedom from slavery the need for self-respect and the liberation of black American people in the United States. Their writing insists the fact that freedom, democracy and equality have not reached the lives of the blacks in its fullest sense. Afro-American literature mainly deals with the oppression of black



people. It is a kind of voice for the black American people with its several parts, eras and style. The major types of narrative technique in this literature are slave narrative and spiritual narrative. Black feminism mainly focuses on the common themes black women's oppression, rape, sexuality and inferiority complex.

African American women writers have fearlessly explored racism, abuse, violence as well as love, beauty and music through their writings. They have created for themselves a prominent place and have left a mark on the literary world forever. Crafted by these ladies scholars reverberate with self-articulation, therefore accomplishing an authoritative status and advancing African American as well as the American abstract world. These essayists compose about themselves, as well as about African American ladies. The twentieth century has been a period of intense literary activity for African American women writers.

It was a time when for the first time talented writers started to write and express their creative genius. First the interiority of an in the head, in the heart, in the raze region of a discovery called the self. It tests the desires, the longings, and the aspirations of this discovered self with and against its possibilities for respect, growth, fulfillment, and accomplishments. Their works became their proposal. Their works undoubtedly portray their growth, struggle and accomplishment.

It was fundamental as dependably when moving toward Afro-American writing in any shape verse, composition, fiction, or dramatization to give a foundation of the economics and political powers and the authentic setting before continuing to an abstract investigation or blend. African men and ladies were tormented, brutalized, mistreated and abused past creative ability. Landing in America, these African men, ladies and youngsters were efficiently and lawfully burglarized of their mankind.

Themes

The American personal possession slavery system had a shocking effect on a black woman's body as well as her psyche. This system worked through socialization, violence and objectification and in integrated effect damaged black woman's self-identity and consciousness. Shobha Padmakr Shinde and Soma Dasgupta said that:

The black woman, who suffered on the basis of class, race and gender, developed the neurosis of self-hatred. She lost self-esteem and developed self-hatred. Loss of self-esteem enhanced self-doubt. Their struggle no longer of their own but it became a part of the black struggle. (34)



A black woman was an animated agricultural implement to enlarge the services of mules and plows in cultivating and harvesting cane and cotton crop. Then, they were a breeding machine, a producer of human livestock, and potential laborers, who on being bred and brought up, would be lynched, flogged, branded and even murdered at the will and pleasure of the master, This objectification of African American people especially that of African American women had a shocking effect on them. It affected them at various levels: physical, mental, moral as well as intellectual. In this way, the black people were declined to mere human transferable capital, and dubbed as inferior and despoiled. African American ladies attempted their best to keep up their sense of pride and self-personality.

Maya Angelou clearly discusses the situation of African American lady, got in the three piece of crossfire of manly preference, white unnecessary dislike and Black absence of energy.

Collins said that: Treating race, class, gender and sexuality less as personal attributes and more as systems of domination in which individuals construct unique identities; Black feminist analyses routinely identify multiple oppressions as important to the study of Black women's sexualities. (137)

The black women have always been at the edge of society and at the receiving end of every kind of oppression. Investigating into the past, one can clearly observe that African American women have been inscribed into a process of oppression and exploitation resulting in particular rupees of these women.

'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings'

'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings' portrays clearly the helplessness of the author as a young child. The novel begins with the children Maya and Bailey in a state of helplessness, sent by the parents all alone in the train to live with their grandmother, Momma. At a very tender age, when they do not understand racism, discrimination and exploitation, they experience such evils that existed so strongly in the society they lived. The novel also portrays the vulnerable state of the black workers, who were exploited in all respects, made to work like animals and paid poor wages by their masters. In spite of their hard work, they did not earn enough money to provide good food and shelter for their family. They were treated worse than animals just because of the color of their skin. This helpless and pathetic condition of the blacks provided their masters the chance to exploit them to the maximum. They considered it their fate and willingly allowed themselves to be exploited by their masters.

'The Heart of a Woman'



The Heart of a Woman, the author describes her life as an adult, fighting all odds to bring up her son in the society. Her upliftment in life as a singer, editor and writer and the status she receives in the society after all her struggles, is brought out in the novel. This novel begins with the hope of bringing up her son in a respectable manner in the society. He was her only source of comfort and a ray of hope in life. She was ready to undergo any hardship for the sake of her son. She was willing to do odd jobs in order to provide a decent life for her son. All her struggles and tribulations that she faced in her career were acceptable to her in order to provide a comfortable life for Guy, her son. While singing in the night club about the freedom of the blacks, she was abused and humiliated by the whites. Though the blacks suffered extreme humiliation, disgrace and discrimination, they were not allowed to voice out their sufferings.

Maya Angelou always had a love for books right from her childhood. She experienced a joy and a feeling of freedom when she started focusing towards the art of writing. This profession proved a solace for her, she was able to explore many thoughts and ideas through her writings, the ones she could not express verbally. She felt excited to read out her first one act play. The world of writing helped her to voice out her inner thought that she had suppressed so far in life. Then she focuses her life towards the world of her writings.

CONCLUSION

Maya Angelou the predominant writer of the Afro-American Literature has contributed a number of works in the field of literature. Her views about the life of the black community are powerfully expressed in her works. The above said two novels bring out the most important stages of her life: her childhood and life as a young and unwed mother. It brings forth the innocence and defenselessness of childhood. The struggles, the mistreatment and the heartless are discrimination that she experienced as a child is brought out with a touch of pathos. Her adult life in the next novel, with a young son focuses on the challenges she faces to bring up her son and to live a life of dignity. In these two novels, she brings out the theme of like slavery, racism, black vulnerability, discrimination and alienation.

‘Racial discrimination’, female subjugation and the like, are not terms that are totally eradicated from the society. Though the Black Americans today prove themselves in all walks of life and have risen up in their life style, these still are places where they are not given the equal status as the white people. The sufferings undergone by the Black people are unimaginable but it was definitely given them the cravings and the courage to prove themselves as equals to the whites. Maya’s life is a perfect example of how many challenges a Black single woman faces in the society.



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