



FEMININE IDENTITARIANISM AS PROJECTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S POEM "PHENOMENAL WOMAN" – AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the inequality and issues of identity faced by African-American woman and fighting for the women, she wanted women to have the equality in rights as men in society. Maya Angelou was a phenomenal Black woman who overcome all the obstacles of her life and shows the confidence towards her appearance as black woman. In Angelou works represented African woman as selfless nature and their fulfilling roles expresses the condition of woman during racial discrimination, segregation and male domination. She admires her beauty and praise her physical beauty with the fullest joy of womanhood.

Key Words: *Self-Confidence, Feministic Perspective, Issues of Identity, Womanhood, Independent woman.*

INTRODUCTION

*I'm a Woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal Woman,
That's me. (Lines 10-13)*

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As stated by Humm, in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, that feminism subsumes maxims of equal rights of women which were attained through the movements and credos of social revamping which aspire to construct a world for women with social equality, with the point she asseverates that “Certain terms in contemporary theory, such as work, family, patriarchy and sexuality, are used to sum up the basis experiences of women” (P 74).

Still and all, African Feminism have to do with not only the rights of woman and as a part of Third Wave Feminism with the perspective of feminist, its expounding the shakes between race and culture. World-weary position that African Feminism cannot be defined by one movement that are identifiable with several movements. To the uttermost, ‘Feminism’ is just a word for the African woman, it would be contingent and different based on political eras. These eras are pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa. Gwendolyn Mikell comments that African Feminism is to be about “Women first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings”. In addition, women selflessness is expected by the society and intensifies the attitude of selflessness give rise to volitional self-construction to the African women which was collocated against Western Feminists whom are trying to obtain equality with men. Kalawole give out:

“Although many African languages have no synonym for feminism as it its defined by the west, the concept of group action by women, based on common welfare in social, cultural, economic, religious and political matters is indigenous and familiar to a majority of these women”.

Mary Jane Lupton affirms that Angelou's roving toward self-discovery takes her from “ignorance to knowledge, from silence to speech, from racial oppression to a liberated life” (46). Maya Angelou has bestowed herself as a role model for African women by refurbishing the image of African-American woman through her works. In her works Angelou has presented African woman as a creative and fulfilling roles and expresses the condition of woman during racial discrimination, segregation and male domination. Maya Angelou is an African American writer whose voices raised against the segregation, discrimination, identity and issue of racism toward African – American. She tried to convey the readers that, every human must be rightful to respect each other, learn to appraise each other, without the hesitant of their physical appearance, racial discrimination or any other differences is not perfect habitant for the human to live on the earth which was stupendous with the great powers. She debunked the world of the stereotype that the woman empowerment lies in her confidence and self – conscious and not in her skin color or physical appearances.

The poem was written to carry a torch for the beauty of woman and self – confidence of a woman and insists the women to embrace the self – confidence. Maya Angelou was a



phenomenal Black woman who overcome the obstacles and used her talents as a writer and become an inspirational leader in the black community and the world.

*Pretty Women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size. (Lines 1-2)*

These lines are expressed Maya Angelou's physical appearance is not perfect one to admire, but never she felt ashamed of her appearance still it shown the confidence towards her appearance as Black woman.

*It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips. (Lines 6-9)*

The speaker of the poem is not cute or fashionable in her body shape but she admires her beauty and praise her physical beauty with the fullest joy of womanhood. The speaker is so proud with her vast arms, hips, step and thick lips. Although her physical attributes are unlike whites, the speaker is still proud with her physical features.

*I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees. (Lines 14-20)*

She overpours the imagination to the readers that the way of walk that could dumbstruck the man and make him to stand up just to see her walking style and they fall down on their knees because they are amazed with her beauty and then he swarms her like how bees swarming honey in their hives.

*It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet. (Lines 22-25)*

In the poem "Phenomenal Woman" describe the image of a confident woman and portrays themselves as true individuals. Above lines are evident that the author has eyes which shines



like a fire, the description of her teeth is so pure and clean and it would flash like crystal and her style of walking enriches her waist, it could swing and startle to amazed her physical attributions. Angelou used metaphor and personification in the above lines. In the line, "It's the fire in my eyes" compared her passion to fire. She used personification as "And the joy in my feet", the line denoted that every human emotion is considered simple in their whole life. It shows how they should have the ability to choose what they want to do because they are powerful, confident and independent.

Below lines are from third stanza;

*Men themselves have wondered
What the flash see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery. (Lines 30-34)*

In the last line, Angelou used the words 'inner mystery' meant her inner beauty that cannot be seen by normal man who thought the beauty of woman was only from their physical appearance. The inner beauty can be represented as the power, confidence and the strength of woman.

*When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see. (Lines 35-36)*

Above lines are tries to disclose the truth that men could never understand women who had their confidence to do anything and showed how woman can be strong and self-reliant. The author attempts to clarify that she can hold her head high and proud of being an individual without heard herself to the stereotypes of woman, but she follows her own ideology of living a life in beautiful way and aspire to be.

*Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud. (Lines 46-51)*

As a woman, Angelou tries to show her inner beauty by caring to each other with palm of her hand and show her confidence to the world; below lines are proven the above words:



*It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care. (Lines 53-56)*

“Phenomenal Woman”, the poem was about the beauty, confidence and power of black woman. Angelou showed that being a woman is not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it is about how a woman become a soulless and provide their self to make others happy and being proud of herself. A phenomenal woman is one who doesn't have the pretty face, but who has strong character and to be confident with her physical appearance, with that confidence overcome those struggles and affirm their own identity from then ‘She is Phenomenal Woman’. Angelou wants to show the world what makes her beautiful and express it in a various way. In the poem “Phenomenal Woman”, she shown her level of confidence which become the inspiration to all the woman in the world.

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