

## MAYA ANGELOU'S WOMANISM IN HEART OF A WOMAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Maya Angelou, who is an African American autobiographer renowned for her six series of her biographical volumes. This paper talks about one of the autobiographies of Angelou's *The Heart of a Woman* which is mainly focused on her adulthood and motherhood. This paper attempts to focus on the writings of Maya which reflect mainly about the racial discrimination, issues related to Gender inequality, political aspects and her struggles for survival in this contemporary society. Angelou carried out different themes like acceptance of black womanhood, racial brutality, motherhood, self-acceptance for the situations of African American society. She has neatly recorded the African American feminine experience from the early days of the Civil Rights Movement to the present day.*

**Keywords:** *Autobiography, Womanish, African American Society.*

### Introduction

#### Objectives

- To focus on the writings of Maya Angelou which reflect mainly about the racial discrimination, issues related to Gender inequality
- To study Maya Angelou's conscious efforts to analyze predicament of women from different angles through her works.

This paper focus on the analysis of the womanish and feminist issues in Maya Angelou's autobiography. To support my argument I have taken *Heart of a Woman* which is one of the series of Maya Angelou autobiographies. In this book she has strongly wrote about her motherhood and her adulthood and the loveless life. All her series of are in fictional style because of her development in her narration, dialogues and characterization and thematic development. Maya Angelou is a renowned writer especially for her sequel of seven series of autobiographies. These series reveal the life story of Maya who made the reader to know about her life with so detailed way. I Know why the Caged Bird Sings (1970), Gather Together in My Name (1974), Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas (1976), Heart of a Woman (1981), All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986), A Song Flung up to Heaven (2000), and Mom & Me & Mom (2012).

While reading Angelou's *The Heart of a Woman* the reader gets the impression that the story is about the struggle against the men's power, being a mother, a wife, a writer, a singer as an activist she fought against the racial conflicts because of this, the black women's problems become more complicated so most of the black women were not willing to move forward and victimized by patriarchal beliefs. Therefore Angelou investigate her life experience as an individual to empower herself to come out from many difficulties. Maya Angelou faced many kinds of oppressions when she was young. Her struggle started when she and her brother separated from their parents. Both took shelter and brought up by their grand-mother in Arkansas where she faced much racial discrimination. When she was eight years old she was raped by her mother's boyfriend. Later she had a relationship

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with a boy and became pregnant but she made a strong decision that to take care of the fatherless son alone and encountered many traumatic experiences in her life. She confronted more complicated experiences in her thirties, regarding political conflicts, racism, economic problems, and Gender limitations.

Frequently she took part in the struggle of black Americans for their rightful place in the world. Maya was the member of CAWAH (Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage) a man was shot dead by the whites. She took leading role to participate in a general assembly to show the power of blacks. On the assembly day, she bravely announced to the public that "Nothing could please the whites more than to have a reason to shoot down innocent black folks. Don't give them the pleasure.". She took the lead role in this political issue and confidently she delivered her opinion to the public. Her thoughts she expressed in her writing confidently. Politically she became known in Africa for her contribution to the Blacks. She has given much attention towards political life. Her contribution to the political is more.

In her political life journey she met with great persons like Billie Holiday, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X Make are such historical figures she shared her life in different situations. Maya helped to organize a benefit Cabaret for the southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) later appreciated by Bayard Rustin and she was appointed as the coordinator for SCLC. Being organized to give cultural programme in the name of „The Blacks“ mean time her life took change. She left New York and also left her bail bondsman Thomas Allen to whom she intending to marry and she fell in love with a South African freedom fighter named Vasumzi Make who swept off her feet. He was fascinated on her beauty and workmanship to which she showed more concern about and also her love for the black people attracted to him whereas Maya also impressed by his struggle and his dedication to his nation people. He gave speech on how African people struggle to get their own country by the whites.

Moreover Make needed Maya and he appreciated her son guy who was so talented, intelligent and his manliness. Finally she accepted his proposal and married to him and named as Maya Angelou Make. He took her to London and then to Cairo. He gave the father love to her which made Maya happy about guy who craving for the father love. Later the marriage broke down because he cheated on her. There was financial crisis Vus facing so, she decided to do job if she earn money she could take care of her family. Soon she got the job in Arab Observer journal with the help of David DuBois who was a friend of Vusumzi Make and work in the same journal. Maya internally broken because she married him because she could help him in all matters but he just treated as his wife who serve the house and him in frustration she says:

Say you need me. You need a woman, not just a hostess. Your struggle is my struggle. I need to be more involved than serving dinner to refugees and keeping your house." (226) He started to interrupt her but she continued. "If I work, you can spend the living allowance on the office. Instead of a quarterly newsletter, you could send out a monthly. We would be able to buy some warm coats for the new escapees. My salary could take care of the house expenses." Vus was so angry but controlled himself tried to console her but she says, "Vus I have a job. Associate editor of the Arab observer. I start tomorrow." Vus angry turned to rage. "You took a job without consulting me? Are you a man?" (p226) Being African husband who followed the tradition of male authority. She felt guilty for handling things badly herself. Though Maya being an American she could understand the African custom and tradition she balanced to follow the two cultures and was strongly followed her thoughts to have a secured life. She thinks "I stayed in a pretty living room, thinking. I had a son to raise, and a lovely house. I had a job for which I was unqualified. I had an angry husband, whom I no longer loved. And I was in Cairo, Egypt, where I had no friends." (228) "I'm leaving you, Vus. I'm not sure when or where I'm going But I'm leaving you." (p248) Then story took serious term where Maya made her mind to leave Vus they confronted a meeting to decide their separation legally. Eventually Vus failed in his argument but Joe asked Maya behalf of the assembly like, "We ask you, from your righteous pinnacle, would you please give the man one more chance?" (p254) Maya keenly observed each one who stood beside Vus; all were expecting her to accept. She knew that in that odd time she hadn't get date to leave the country. On that moment if she acted graciously her name in Africa would be golden. Joe asked six months' time to be with Vus that she could give him a last chance. Maya was so calm and determined and so calculated that she thought that Vus never knowingly or wittingly mistreated her immediately she says: "I will stay." Vus took her in his arms and whispered. "You are a gorgeous woman. My wife." (p254) After five months she began to think that her son's future to enrol him in Ghana University which was known to the best institution of higher learning on the continent. Soon

guy encountered with a sudden accident and injured badly. Angelou describe it in detail about the accident and the injury and his recovery scene. Somehow problem solved and Maya worried lot for guy's injury. She succeeded to get the job in Ghana University as an administrative assistant. Guy got seat in the same university and became independent and let her mother to be independent and not to worry about him from then. Maya was so happy and she became ready to grow herself with full of freedom.

IJELLH Volume 6, Issue 10, October 2018678 In the narration Angelou's women characters were strong, authentic, willed and courageous for instance Maya's mother Vivian Baxter became merchant marine owner. Before that she worked as a surgical nurse, a realtor, had a barber's license and owned a hotel. Many women characters supported Maya in many incidents in her public life and private life her friends helped her to sort out things in which she encounters. The narrating style of Angelou is so unique. The way she writes the dialogues were so usual that she makes reader to feel that the lines were so natural. For instance, Maya more often shifted from place to place in the search of job with her son. This constant moving became usual thing to both of them. Maya was so worried about guy's schooling if they keep moving place to place but guy was not able to have more friends in every place. The conversation between mother and son became so official there was no any intimate emotional things works because guy was so practical if compared to his mother. Angelou used the sentence structure with unique style of narrating while the dialogues were expected to be in complex sentences but the responses for the dialogues were common and natural. In one moment Maya decided to move to New York then she says: "Guy, I want to talk to you. Please sit down." He was so obvious on this type of conversation with her he sat and listened attentively. "Guy, we are going to move." A flicker of interest in his eyes came but he quickly controlled and said "Again? Okay, I can pack in twenty minutes, I've timed myself." (p29) She also used fantasy in the story and brought flash backs too. Maya wished to experience about her future that somewhere made readers to go through the story within—a story. Maya used fantasy concerning about the marriage life includes romantic love life, taking care of children, carrying domestic responsibility of where husband works and look after the house maintenance. Hence she discarded such hallucination dreams from her mind and knew that these dreams never make any sense and could not materialize. Those dreams and hallucinations created a kind of fantasy but not real. Moreover she wanted live a real live with practical mind-set. Maya was strong and brave enough that she confronts many risks with great courage and she never cared for anything. Even though she fell and stumbled she rose back again and became whole again for the life. She explored subjects such as Gender inequality, identity and racism in her writing. She used flash back technique to narrate her story. In the beginning of the story shortly she described the flashback about her mother's life and her critical situations having baby worked as singer, dancer, educator, editor and writer in the novel.

IJELLH Volume 6, Issue 10, October 2018679 Many crucial situations Angelou had recorded and carefully interwoven them in the mainstream narration in this autobiography. There are more aspects which Angelou brilliantly used such as figurative language. It is important to note that she used similes, metaphors, personification and imagery that helped Angelou to sketch the picture in the minds of the reader. Angelou used humour to enhance her narration so realistic. Intervention of her mother in a hotel is the good instance for the use of the humour. When Maya and her mother took a room in the hotel except them all were whites, all of them were in shock to see blacks in the lobby. When a uniformed black man came inside the room for bar service he surprised to see them and says: "Good evening. You all surprised me. Sure did. Didn't expect to see you. Sure didn't." Her mother walked toward him holding money in her hand. "Who did you expect? Queen Victoria?" (p28). Though it makes reader to laugh at this dialogue Maya's mother shrewdly sort out the situation that the attendant refused her to give room because of the racial undertones. Vivian Baxter here bravely burst out her anger verbally on the room service man and protected her daughter from the racial oppression. Maya was feared of being black her mother gracefully says: "take care of yourself. Take care of your son and remember New York City is just like Fresno.

Just more of the same people in bigger buildings. Black folks can't change because white folks won't change. Ask for what you want and be prepared to pay for what you get." (p29) At the end part of the text the conversation between mother and the son, when he was about to leave to his college, she was so worried but when he said that she has to grow up in her life. In her entire life she had never had any freedom or liberty. For the first time in many years she enjoyed the entire chicken breast alone. The *Heart of a Woman* gives readers that the entire marital experiences of Maya with Vusumzi and her motherhood in this series of autobiography she expressed every single detail with first person

narration which makes readers to feel Angelou herself lively telling the story. Though there are less dialogues as we see in fictions this book also contains the characters techniques and themes. Moreover she exposed herself as a model to the readers. She presented the autobiography using stylistic technique to write her narratives where she wrote a serial autobiographies which tells her different modes and chronological developments capturing in particular period of her life.

### **Conclusion**

Thus the features of literary techniques employed to narrate the autobiography *The Heart of a Woman* with standard stylistic features like narrative point of view, first person point of view. The literary techniques help to adopt the dominant subjects like marriage, motherhood and search for identity, racial discrimination. She has differently used the dialogue with twist in it blending first person point of view. The dialogue usages were carefully used to explore the readers a real feel and experience. Maya's intention is to make readers should get the message. Being a writer she attracts the reader with her crafty style of writing and the way she narrates which feels so factual and artistic.

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