

LITERARY TRAUMA THEORY IN MAYA ANGELOU'S I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

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ABSTRACT--*The desideratum of this study is to evaluate the literary trauma theory which strikes ably in the works of Maya Angelou, predominantly in her first autobiography I know why the caged bird sings. Maya Angelou unveils the desperate traumatic encounters of her life almost in all her works. Literary Trauma Theory basically aims at flashing the background of the trauma experienced by the writer while penning the autobiography. The trauma studies related to this area were brought into the limelight by Cathy Caruth, a renowned author and professor at Cornell University. The text considered for the study exhibits the past and the epoch-making hardships in life which Maya Angelou has faced, that has infused within her the attribute of forbearance, tenacity, and firmness of purpose. The main objective of this study is to analyse the concept of literary trauma theory as it plays a pivotal role in fabricating the concept of the texts written by Maya Angelou, which has a firm background interconnected to her life story.*

Keywords-- *Literary trauma theory, suppressed, racism, background, cathexis, bildungsroman*

I. INTRODUCTION

The theory of literary trauma deals with the events in a person's life that destroy his or her identity and stay beyond the usual memory that emerges through fictional representation that is the way writers and authors convey the trauma they have encountered throughout their childhood. *I know why the caged bird sings* is an autobiography which brings into the limelight Maya Angelou's life events. She was born as an African and later moved on to the United States where she progressed and focused on her economic as well as psychological betterment. This autobiography spills out the purpose of her grief, agony, and objective of life which has paved way for persistent growth of her soul received by learning life through the hard way. The concept of literary trauma theory brings out the psychological setbacks and outbreaks experienced by Maya Angelou from youth to adulthood during which she was abused and raped, the nerve racking incident turned her to be a silent speaker for several years.

According to the proverb, a pen is mightier than a sword, Maya Angelou took up literature as a weapon to fight racism which was spreading like an endemic. To drop her life struggles into the public eye, she outpours her self-confidence, power and hope not only into the struggling race but also to the women who are stuck in a similar situation like that of hers. She brings in the concept of bildungsroman to highlight to a coming-of-age story. She owned an immense love and flaming passion for literature which made her overcome the trauma. The shades of evolving from a moody, timid person to a complete woman can be observed in Maya Angelou. She wanted to write

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an autobiography which was also depicted as a fine piece of literature. Though it was categorized as an autobiographical fiction, the core critical analysis outlines it to be an autobiography.

Maya Angelou brings in the frolics of Black motherhood, review of racism, the power of family, and the search for independence, personal importance, and self-esteem. Through her autobiography, she discovers answers for unanswered questions in her life and she explores subjects such as rape, identity, racism, and self-improvisation. (Mohsinet al.2018) Clarity related to a writer's background and life can be observed through the concept of literary trauma theory, as one can explain the reason for writing a text and the writer's mindset which lead to the creation of a specific text.

II. THE TRAUMA AND MAYA ANGELOU'S IDEOLOGIES

In view of the fact that Maya Angelou would have undergone various situations in life while writing every memoir, and that this would have acted as a portal to penetrate her emotions. The human mind is built to put more emphasis on the condition that appears to cause distress at that point of time, which triggers a desire to write about it as writers find pleasure and comfort in communicating their pain or joy through this process.

I know why the caged bird sings is a gateway to the soul of Maya Angelou as she keeps it forward for the readers to read and imbibe her life story where she has extremely opened up about herself. The idiosyncrasy of Maya Angelou can be viewed in all her texts as they focus more on the life of black women, emotions and the struggles of blacks. In the autobiography *I know why the caged bird sings* she mentions:

As I'd watched momma put ruffles on the hem and cute little tucks around the waist, I knew that once I put it on I'd look like a movie star. 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. (4) (Angelou, M. 1997)

Nevertheless, when viewed from the rear side, this expression may seem uncomplicated, the depth of the words may be interpreted that she admires the ruffles and the way she looks in that dress. While being persuaded, she should look like a white girl or a movie star. This particular part reveals that she hasn't embraced herself or taken pride in being born a black because she wants to be like everyone else instead of cherishing the look and being content with what has been bestowed upon her. While she subtly puts her infantile actions into words, it exposes the fact that she always had an affinity towards whites during her childhood days and wanted to be like them. In particular, she was overjoyed with her attire.

At this point, Maya Angelou behaved like any other child who does not want to bear any burden because she was subtly aware of the inequality around her, but she wanted to lead a beautiful life in which blacks are considered equal. Even though she was a child, she could acknowledge the biased situation in which whites were favored and blacks were showered with prejudicial treatment. Perhaps, she may have thought that the Whites had been kindly handled because they appeared pleasing to the eyes. Children's ideal psychology can be seen in this sentence as described by Maya Angelou. She appears to talk of her mother during her adolescence as she mentions her in a friendly manner:

Even if mother hadn't been such a pretty woman, light-skinned with straight hair, he was lucky to get her, and he knew it. She was educated, from a well-known family, and after all wasn't she born in St.Louis? Then she was gay. She was gay. She laughed all the time and made jokes. He was grateful. (74) (Angelou, M.1997)

Angelou states through this that she has always admired her mother who was an angelic figure to her because her aura, attitude and charisma have been loved by Angelou like any kid who will love their mother unconditionally. A mother will always be the central figure and every child wants to grow up like their parent, specifically their mother, because mothers balance their lives to build a smooth and surviving place for their children. They would want to educate their children well, perhaps because they want to create a subtle bred-up atmosphere. Angelou exclaims that she has seen her mother as a flexible and powerful woman who's always concentrated on her children's development and progress, which the only primary concern for her mother.

Maya Angelou was extensively stuck and focused on bringing out the fact that she was an undemanding and a plain sailing person though she wasn't a fair skinned American woman but she was beautiful in her own way as she always loved the warmth of her mother and the way she brought up her children with faith and goodness. The trauma of adapting and mimicking her mother's mannerism and characters show how well she has received her goodness and warmth along with the gracefulness of her mother.

Maya Angelou has always expressed her emotions and philosophies in a distinctive way. We can particularly witness a figurative language used as a tool to strengthen and elevate her writings. For instance, the phrase "The caged bird sings with a fearful trill" is in fact personified beyond doubt rather than using a simple form of expression. She chose to compare her situation with the usage of powerfully constructed phrases which can bring out the best and create a lasting impression among the readers. The title as well holds a meaty denotation since Angelou refers to "*the caged bird*" to herself. The portrayal that "the caged bird sings" is a true fact revealed to the readers, in which Angelou conveys that she expresses her opinions and beliefs like a caged bird that sings. She had a tormented feeling within her, as she often felt like she was inferior to the whites due to bigotry and favoritism which was also a force behind her. She was basically a "caged bird" when her parents were divorced. She was taken from her paternal grandmother to her mother's house, eventually faced sexual assault by the lover of her mother (Pradeep et al.2018).

Speaking of Maya Angelou, the apotheosis of curve she has highlighted can only be felt as she also gave a style and dimension, brought in a period limited to female identity as she proved to be an epitome in framing an age for her. She always wanted to stand out while she hadn't keenly concentrated on capturing the limelight. She just wanted to be concise and hit straight on the mark by sharing the ideas she wanted to express to the readers. This particular autobiography was also seen shortly after the era of civil rights as a satisfying autobiography, as it was still on the best sellers list.

They ran out of copies after their publication which forced them to reprint multiple copies again because the readers were consistently growing. *I know why the caged bird sings* wasn't really an autobiography which most readers would ever want. Angelou dissociated herself from each and every kith and kin of hers, which often gave the readers a bleak sensation.

Angelou portrays her aversion to prejudice, sexism and deprivation, which she subtly expresses in her language and style, probably because her approach is not conventional and paves the way for a wider perspective. In *I know why the caged bird sings*, a sly glimpse of her spiritual outlook serves as a catalyst to meet the struggles of life with a positive mindset.

Angelou has also displayed characteristics through which her emotional side is seen prominently. In a PBS interview with Bill Moyers, Angelou puts forth that when she picked a pen to write, she would have to scrape it

across the scars to sharpen the point which indeed reveals the deep psychological setback she still seems to have been carrying for many years. This particular phrase is a real proof of a long ongoing psychological trauma which is undergone by Angelou wherein a deep found horror and agony has been acquiring a part of her which seems hard hitting. (Angelou, M.1999)

III. REINCARNATION OF ANGELOU'S PSYCHOLOGICAL FACET

In Maya Angelou's life story, her psychological wellbeing took a break after the horrific incident of rape in her life. Her situation continued to grow worse as she could hardly come out of the dreadful incident as she had marked it to be the most evil-smelling scene which turned her life to an entirely new phase. A woman writer who can write about the most frightful episode of her life brings into spotlight her daring and valiant spirit which is admired by a majority of her readers. Though she had a deadly trepidation regarding the patriarchal society she wanted to push herself to neglect the views of the society which inclines towards a woman's attire and appearance. (Vermillion, M.1992)

Maya Angelou conveys the grim truths along with the elegance of tyranny and liberty. The novel is an achievement of the Post-Colonial Era, reflecting in a proper manner the essence of the time and the racial discrimination. Over time, along with the other factors listed in the autobiography, literary criticisms as well as political economy were founded alongside ruthless exploitation. (Abdelmotagally, N.F.2015)

The painful events proved the writer's journey from a traumatic experience, where she was also abused. It is also estimated that Maya has only tried to resolve the situation through her actualization-confidence and self-development. The entire novel was recognized as a Bildungsroman book because of its focuses on a person's spiritual development from the traumatic situation. Practically, this form of novel highlights a person's self-development after a massive struggle that makes them spiritual. All the explanations have made it clear that when designing Maya's life and whole path, there is psychoanalysis amid strong discrimination. Bildungsroman novels are based on an individual's formative years, Maya's formative years in this case. *I Know Why Caged Bird Sings* portrays how complicated the formative years' war has been for her. (Jayasree, K.2020)

IV. CONCLUSION

The life story of Maya Angelou tends to bring out hope as well as fear since various shades of life can be seen on the first hand. The literary trauma theory sheds light on the proclivity of Maya Angelou since she focuses on showing her life story to the readers. She believes that the struggles she has encountered and endured in life will help to provide answers to unanswered questions of life for those who are seeking for it, just as they are looking for hope and love. However, since Maya herself, the heroine in the story, recognises that survival is an everyday battle and that it is not the loss that implicitly condones disaster, but divine submission which makes her into a strong person. The literary trauma theory unfolds gingerly to manifest the transition of Maya Angelou's life and the shades of emotions which unwind throughout *I know why the caged bird sings*. The suppression of Africans, the way of life and the ideologies with which she was bred have haunted her throughout her life which has brought a lot of traumatic experiences.

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