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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES IN THE FICTION OF MAYA ANGELOU

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Abstract:-The Present paper focus on the Autobiographical narratives fiction in the works of Maya Angelou. Marginalized and oppressed writers have actualized their own individual , social and racial past beings taking up in the process of identity.

Keywords:Marginalized, identity, gender, narration.

INTRODUCTION

Self Narration has been a longstanding standing practice in the history of mankind. As part of the humanist tradition , life narratives have served to centralize and subjectivize the individual , legitimizing the authority of the author to narrate lived experiences. Autobiography can be regarded as an attempt to persuade the reader to view the submerged aspects of the narrated self from writer's perspective . Autobiographies represent the struggle of the self to create order out of random experiences and often incorporate discursive elements of history and culture. Autobiographies usually attempt to examine ,interpret and find the meaning and purpose of their lives. The genre also has a political for socio-political transformation ,especially in life-writings which narrate the experiences of oppression.

Through the confessional and autobiographical modes , marginalized and oppressed writers have actualized their own individual ,social and racial pasts and beings , taking up in the process issues of identity , marginalization, gendering and culture. A Striking aspect of their writing is the strong feeling of oneness writ large in their works. African Americans as well as Dalits in India are the sons and daughters of darkness journeying through untold sorrows and suffering . Although Dalits are the native sons of India, the and savor of an ancient land, he is in a sense rejected by his own mother. He is an untouchable pariah in his own native land. The African American too faces such a dilemma –America remains a land of travail and trauma to him. It is the tragic laughter and steaming tears of the African American that has paved the path to progress in America.

The aim of my study is an attempt at analogy to examine two entirely different literature. It brings out their similarities and commonalities and discover homogeneity in apparent heterogeneity.

Maya Angelou a multi faceted personality-singer,dancer script writer, actress, performer, and an established serial autobiographer has carved a niche in the genre of philosophy. The serial autobiographies of Maya Angelou capture the different phases of her life and formation of an identity that gives both meaning and purpose to her existence . Maya Angelou's memoirs and autobiographies inspire hope in the face of adversity. The focus of the narrative is on how angelou struggles to weave the diverse strands of her personal, political and artistic life into the tapestry of a whole or unified life and how her unique and private experience is transformed into a self that reflects the experiences of coloured women in general and the representation of her experience as universal. As an autobiography , I know why the caged Bird Sings adheres to many conventions of the autobiographical genre; It features first-person narration, is organized chronologically, and is focused on the development of the self.

However, Angelou also uses many stylistic elements more common to fiction works, like dialogue , fully fleshed out characters, and detailed descriptions of sensory details from her past. The work could also be thought of as combining fictional techniques with autobiography since the story is told by an adult ,who is recreating a childlike voice and point of view for the novel. This autobiography which covers Maya's life from age 3 to age 16, is often considered a bildungsroman since it is primarily a tale of youth and growing into young adulthood. However,

unlike a typical novel form bildungsroman, the story does not with the achievement of adulthood. In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* Maya Angelou describes her coming of age as precocious but insecure black girl in the American South during the 1930s and subsequently in California during the 1940s. Angelou continues to write about her life in the four other volumes, all addressing her life chronologically from her childhood to the accomplishments of her childhood. It is important to keep in mind that this is an autobiography, rather than a novel and that the narrator and author are indeed one and the same, and the events described in the book are intended to relate a very personal portrait of a person's life.

The difficulty of being black in the south is a theme that is important throughout the work; financially, it is difficult to make ends meet and black people also face social hardship. Angelou reminds us that living in the segregated South during this time is never easy, "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." (4) Maya parents' divorce when she is only three years old and she and her older brother Bailey to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson in rural Stamps, Arkansas, Annie whom they call Momma, runs the only store in the black section of Stamps and becomes the central moral figure in Maya's childhood. As young children, Maya and Bailey struggle with the pain of having been rejected and abandoned by their parents. Maya also finds herself tormented by the belief that she is an ugly child who will never measure up to genteel, white girls. Angelou records

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.... A cruel fairy stepmother who was understandably jealous of my beauty had turned me into a too big Negro girl with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth. (2-3)

Growing up in Stamps, Maya faces a deep-seated southern racism manifested in wearying daily indignities and terrifying lynch mobs. In the Black American ghetto the Negro were offered only the crumbs from the rich man's table. They were the victims of the world's most comprehensive robbery. They were the society's pariahs.

To Maya's relief but Bailey regret, Maya and Bailey return to Stamps to live with Momma. Momma manages to break through Maya's silence by introducing her to Mrs. Bertha Flowers a kind educated woman who tells Maya to read works of literature out loud, giving her books of poetry that help her to regain her voice. During these years in Stamps, Maya becomes aware of both the fragility and the strength of her community. She speaks of lynching, ambush and rape, whipping and maiming of black boys and white women slapping negro maids for their forgetfulness. Yet the blacks fill their lives with loud laughter and enjoyment. Maya also observes the entire community listening to the Joe Louis heavyweight championship boxing match, desperately longing for him to defend his title against his white opponent.

Maya endures several appalling incidents that teach her about the insidious nature of racism. At age ten, Maya takes a job for a white woman who calls Maya "Mary" for her own convenience. Maya becomes enraged and retaliated by breaking the woman's fine china. At Maya's eighth grade graduation, a white speaker devastates the proud community by explaining that black students are expected to become only athletes or servants. When Maya gets a rotten tooth, Momma takes her to the only dentist in Stamps, a white man who insults her, saying he had rather place his hand in a dog's mouth than in hers. The last straw comes when Bailey encounters a dead, rotting black man and witnesses a white man's satisfaction at seeing the body. Momma begins to fear for the children's well-being and saves money to send them to Vivian their mother, who now lives in California.

When Maya is eight, her father, of whom she has no memory, arrives in Stamps, unexpectedly and takes her and Bailey to live with their mother, Vivian, in St. Louis, Missouri. Beautiful and alluring, Vivian lives a wild life working in gambling parlors. Vivian's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, sexually molests and rapes Maya. They go to court and afterwards Mr. Freeman is violently murdered, probably by some of the underground criminal associates of Maya's family. In the aftermath of these events, Maya endures the guilt and shame of having been sexually abused. She stops speaking to everyone except Bailey and uses silence as a weapon.

She spends one summer with her father, Big Bailey, in Los Angeles and has to put up with his cruel indifference and his hostile girlfriend Dolores. After Dolores cuts her in a fight, Maya runs away and lives for months with a group of homeless teenagers in a junkyard. She returns to San Francisco strong and self-assured. She defies racist hiring policies in wartime San Francisco to become the first black streetcar conductor at age fifteen. At sixteen, she hides her pregnancy from her mother and stepfather for eight months and graduates from high school. The account ends as Maya begins to feel confident as a mother to her newborn son.

Angelou wrote this autobiography for several reasons; one was as a reminder not to give in during the trials of growing up. Angelou has said, "Somebody needs to tell young people, listen, I did this and I did that. You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated." (Elliot 18) Angelou's book although it is meant for a broad audience, is also concerned with conveying the difficulties of being black and a woman in America. Angelou addresses these issues in such a way that they appeal to all readers and more importantly she speaks to all African American

CONCLUSION:

Literature has universal parameters and literature of the world tend to converge towards certain issues and creative artists often immerse themselves in the socio-political sphere. The unity of literature is that it strengthens

universal human relationship. Love, hatred, envy, revenge, grief and joy are universal human passions. Throughout the ages literature has explored human values and their relevance. Oppression and exploitation are external attributes of human Society. A major preoccupation of contemporary writers has been the problem of man's survival in the face of complex conditions. The struggle to survive under hostile conditions at the fringes of society and the related struggle to transform society are motives behind the creations of the marginalized.

On exploring the autobiographical narratives of Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* finds that they speak of Survival. The strategies for survival are almost identical. In Angelou's work we find that blues lift the downtrodden soul of the Negroes. The irrepressible black woman though insulted holds her head up; she is essentially strong inside and it is this strength that helps her overcome the confines of race, class and gender oppression.

Exploring the relevance of her life in the context of the universal human experience Angelou States "I Speak to the black experience but I am always talking about the human condition; about what we can endure, dream, fail at and still survive"(Elliot 158) Although she speaks of the universality of application, she sees through the eyes of an African American woman.

In the ending of the *Caged Bird* the young Maya finds reason to live with the birth of her son. She is like a bird ready to fly out with outstretched wings. She is waiting for time to heal her wounds and find the strength to fly again.

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