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MAYA ANGELOU'S NEGRITUDE (A RESEARCH PAPER RELATED TO THESIS)



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Abstract: Maya Angelou is an outstanding and amazing artistic genius. She has furnished colossally to the evolution, potency and significance of African American literature. The global obstacles and plights experienced by the Blacks in all the ages are replicated by Maya Angelou. A humanistic onset of creativity is pursued by Maya Angelou. Her aesthetic theories are firmly based on her personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. A style unique of black consciousness and Negritude is devised by Maya Angelou. To uphold her racist policies, she maintains and strengthens her policies on race by overthrowing the negative images introduced by the Whites. Her ideas are the repercussion of her virtuosity as a writer. Her oeuvres are repositories of clarity of vision, range, depth, scope and dynamism. Hence they are the hallmarks of her originality.

Key words: negritude, black consciousness, aesthetics, typecasts, humanism, ethnic, alienation.

INTRODUCTION:

Maya Angelou is aware of the fact that African American literature do not merely focus beauty as a worthwhile thing. The chief errand of African American literature is the attainment of an idea which is an unceasing effort to convey the spiritual revival of mortal beauty. Gender is given literary treatment in her autobiographical fictions. She maintains a sharp focus on the human condition and the ageless human situations concerning the Black women.

THE PERFECT BEAUTY OF DIVINITY:

To assist perceptive and critically oriented readers to clearly visualize and open up a closed world she uses her unique power. Moral solemnity, scholarly ardor and social anticipations ascertain her works to be valid and impartial study of the society and the Establishment. So they are recognized as social documents. To Maya Angelou art has become one of the state of human life. According to Maya Angelou the function of creativity is to give delight. Association of delight with the world is ascertained by creativity. The riddles of creativity are explained by Maya Angelou from this humanistic perspective. Leopold Senghor defines Negritude as the celebration of black identity, the essence of unique Black psychology.

Regaining consciousness of women's interests is a major theme in Maya Angelou's writing. The contrasting definitions of women are explored in her fictions and dramatizes the ways in which a woman's voice becomes a means for self-realization.

THEMES:

Love, hatred, sex, motherhood, and alienation are

the renowned themes in her works. Subordinate themes like the bizarre situations of life, subordination of women and her crusade to restore the women from their adjourned state are artistic and have an ingenious outlook. Peripheral reality in its intellectual feature is replicated in her works. Her ideas on aesthetics are remarkably prominent. Objective features of reality are utilized to aid in the fabrication of this intellectual feature.

CHARACTERS:

Her female protagonists are characterized as distressed and humiliated selves and finally termed as 'Fatalists'. Maya Angelou supposes that artistically tailored fiction functions as an agency to equip new model to the survival of the individual. Contradictory perspectives of conviction and opinion in a dialectical apprehension are maintained by her. She advises women to discard their inferiority complex and fear neurosis. She affirms them to take honour in their femininity. She researches on the gender studies and focuses on the issues that are crucial to feminist scholarship. The correlation of the female identity with historic and economic events is examined in her oeuvres. With reference to Black women her works can be described as able and dominant social documents.

Perfect definition of Negritude is offered by Maya Angelou in her novels. To create the right kind of Black consciousness, the typecasts introduced by the Whites are analytically decreated. Franklin Frazier observes that, "the Negro was taught that his enslavement was due to the fact that he had been cursed by God..." (Franklin Frazier, *The Black Bourgeoisie*, p.134)

Maya Angelou, the champion of ethnic cultural

feminism instructs black women to maintain their adherence to their ethnic group and safe guard their rights and values. Though the blacks have moved away from their slave past, Maya Angelou initiates to invoke in blacks an incessant alertness of their past. Their torments and tussles of the past function as the aide memoire in the minds of black youth, thus operating as a huge fastening power of the blacks. As a result of this awareness the blacks retreat to their magnificent past and gains contentment, cogitating their heavenly past of their ancestors. With Ralph Emerson's endeavor she awakens in black women the hope for a bright tomorrow. Through her works she expects her black characters to transpire as authorized individuals with the aid of education and to soar high in social hierarchy and bash to achieve the rising pinnacle to accomplish genuine acclaim.

POSITION OF BLACK WOMEN:

She emphasizes on the state of black women and their entrapment. The black women as dependents suffer interior colonization and the throbbing of black women is underscored by her. She advocates them to upsurge above the shackles of patriarchy. Based on the milieu of the contentions, perspectives acknowledged hitherto, it can be wrapped up that Maya Angelou upholds that the black women have to defend themselves and take honour of their racial superiority and their black skin. They have endured the disgrace of racism, sexism and slavery. They have suffered the twinge of isolation, infuriation and reminiscence. They have traversed through remorseful psyche.

I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings is a story which is remarkable for its forthright description of the variations and anguish of her early life. Regardless of the grief that is embedded in her past, Maya Angelou opines that her story is advantageous to young black women. She warns black women not to be conquered by their stumbling defeats.

I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings brings out her memories of her aching childhood. Along the realm of human emotion, the novel spans in extraordinary mode. It depicts a child's obsession of romance and melodrama, who visualizes the end of her life in the dirt yard of Mexican family. It depicts the White American society in strife. It is about blackness, youth and a tender charge on White womanhood in conflict.

She wishes the black women to accomplish their uniqueness and exist with an awareness of independence, self-sufficiency. She is totally convinced by her belief and certainty of the present society and the establishment can be amended for the enhancement. As a matter of fact, the throb of the distressed humanity is experienced by every reader as the sorrowful music of humanity is heard in the works of Maya Angelou. Social evils and bias, for instance refutations and abuse of the unprivileged sections of the society, are all committed and initiated by the society and the establishment.

Maya Angelou wishes for a life of inter-subjectivity. She suggests the black women to recognize the truth and exist with an understanding and veneration to the Christian concept of love. The feminine sensibility, the opus of the society are absolutely censured by Maya Angelou in her oeuvres. She emphasizes on the wholeness in action rather than on reliance. For an expressive amalgamation in

the lives of black women, Maya Angelou like Alice Walker persists them to investigate both cultural and psychological past. As Womanism is entrenched in all encompassing female culture, she favours Womanism to Feminism.

As a Black Woman writer Maya Angelou relates the stories of the Black women as creators of female culture in the past and present. The first and foremost stress of Maya Angelou lies in her awareness of the fact that she as a woman writer is authorized to facilitate the voices of marginalized women to be heard and their histories be read. These women have been made the victims of race, class and creed from the past. Thus her aesthetic is inimitable, unique and healing. Her aesthetic keeps upright female beauty and power as she does not adopt any philosophical viewpoints that are partial and limited. To represent metamorphosis in adolescent girls and middle aged women she uses the term 'Womanism.'

SEXISM:

According to Maya Angelou Womanism is bequeathed by a young girl after a harrowing effect as an upshot of racism, rape or unexpected death in the family. The problem of sexism is equaled with economic, cultural and political issues. Some features of Womanist ideology are theorized by Maya Angelou. Her view point as an outsider in the White world facilitates her to delve deep into the complexities of the Black community and portray the issues with transparency and empathy. As Maya Angelou pry into the history and lives of many black women, she is confronted by her susceptibilities and forte. Every black woman is dragged out from her gloomy sinister isolation to the dawn of trust and a dazzling tomorrow.

She persists and promotes the theme of the black woman's struggle against constraints and abuse. She observes the experience of women as the communal and historical infringement of the female sex. Women are visualized as a succession of movements from a woman wholly persecuted by the society. The cherished regions of the innate lives of her characters are inevitably lime lighted in her works.

The span of Maya Angelou's life from three to sixteen years, and her becoming a mother at sixteen years is depicted. The novel *I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings* is narrated from the outlook of black Southern woman. Due to the constraints that are leveled on the lives of African American women are dreadfully limited.

I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings captures the vulgarity of white attitudes toward black women. The most important theme explored by Maya Angelou is motherhood. As a feminist, she explores through her portrayal of her mother, Vivian and her grandmother Annie Henderson in *I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings*.

Through the portrayal of her mother Vivian and her grandmother Annie Henderson, the theme of motherhood is explored in *I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings*. Several contemporary African American writers like Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry used motherhood as the primary theme in their novella.

"Black women autobiographers have redeemed Black motherhood from the myths of breeder and matriarch-always having babies always being domineering-by

revealing themselves as mothers and visionaries. Maya Angelou and autobiographers are consistently expanding motherhood into a creative and personally fulfilling role....”(Mary Burgher, “Images of Self and Race in the Autobiographies of Black Women,” in *Sturdy Black Bridges*, p.15)

Imprisonment, another chief theme in the novel *I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings* is expressed in the title of the novel. The title is taken from Paul Lawrence Dunbar's (1896) poem titled “Sympathy.” The poem is an expression of the sorrowful plight of the caged bird. The caged bird smacks its wings against the bars of freedom. The bird's struggle for freedom, synonym in Maya Angelou's struggle to discard her home made dresses for church services symbolizes her inability to detour from the reality, her blackness. Maya Angelou's job with regulated possibilities in remote schools for Mrs Cullinan is viewed by her as an imprisonment. To escape from this situation she believes that she has been transformed from a blonde girl to a dark girl by a wicked step mother. She opines that her body, job ..all have imprisoned her spirit.

Rape is another predominant theme in the novel. Her two sexual encounters with Mr. Freeman are described. After the rape she remains mute for five years abandoning all singing, all sound she became a speechless body and she was able to liberate herself from her self imposed silence only with the awakening of Mrs. Fowler's voice.

“Her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words. She was nearly singing” (Maya Angelou, *I Know Why A Caged Bird Sings*, P.30).

She refers herself to the caged black women poet of the past. Her reference to the caged poet is a recognition of her heritage as a black woman writer, a heritage which Maya Angelou shares with Rosa Guy, Paule Marshall.

Georgia Douglas Johnson in her work warns the Black women that, “the cage restrains not only the black body, but also the female Black body, a Black woman is doubly threatened because of her race and gender....”(Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Existential Sociology*, P.31)

Black woman's standpoint about black womanhood has been championed by the African American women in 1980's and 1990's. Their collective cause has its base in the innovative works of Alice Walker, June Jordan and Toni Morrison. Contemporary arguments on the relevance of the name Womanism or Black Feminism to the new apprehension echoes the current diversity among black women.

Womanism establishes an idea that though men and women of varied colours cohabit. The cultural singularity and veracity of the blacks are retained because womanism is resolutely fixed in the pluralistic form of black Empowerment. An enhanced version of racial amalgamation that is premised on group integration which is amalgamated with black uprightness with black integrity and cultural uniqueness is proposed by Pluralism. The term black feminism challenges black women's views on sexism and women's oppression.

As the blacks are viewed in the hackneyed images, their culture, character, feelings and aspirations have been misapprehended and misconstrued. Thus Addison Gayle

opines that the damaging colour of the blacks has become their ethnic garrote.

Focusing on Negritude it must be noted that the African Americans belong to America which is not their native land. Though the Africans are oppressed in several ways, they are able to revive their African culture. Considering all the aspects there is a total effacement of the black community and their cultures in the Caribbean.

The spirit of rebellion against the oppression of the Blacks by the whites is expressed by Claudia McKay as, “If we must die, let it not be like hogs, hunted and penned in an inglorious spot, while round us bark the mad and hungry dogs, making their mock at our accursed lot. If we must die, O let us nobly die, so that our precious blood may not be shed in vain...” (Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” in *Selected Poems of Claude McKay*, p.41).

CONCLUSION:

Negritude is viewed as an endeavour of the blacks to ascertain and avow their selves. Negritude aims at determining an exemplary identity universal to all Blacks. Her oeuvre are the records of her personal experiences and understanding of African American life. Maya Angelou opines that as blacks are intrinsically instinctive, meticulous, concerned and sensual, they have to take up the responsibility to culture themselves. She vividly emphasizes for negritude in all its distinct aspects. The bitter impersonality of the Whites is differentiated with the tender humanism of the blacks. So with updated erudition of black culture and black history she refers to the racial predicaments brazen out by the Blacks in her literary products. The hopes, yearnings, anguish, disenchantment, setbacks and infuriations of blacks are adeptly articulated by Maya Angelou. In her vision for a better world asserts blacks to achieve certain probabilities.

In her narration she follows personalized autobiographical mode, a style which incorporates different constituents from diverse modes of writing. Her extraordinary talent at fantasizing alienates her from other black women writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Lorraine Hansberry.

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