

I. African American Women's Issues in

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The present research deals with the issues of female bonding and male female solidarity in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Angelou has used these issues as tools to counter against the intra-racial patriarchy and white racism. Strong female characters are presented in the book and they definitely struggle against racism in one way and the other. Using Black Feminism as a theoretical tool, present researcher dissects the novel and expose the sisterhood and intra-racial harmony as weapon to live in the racially and gender biased community. Among four chapters of this researches work, first chapter introduces the whole research, the book on which the research has been made and the writer. Then the second chapter talks about the Black Feminism as a theoretical tool. Like this, the third chapter shows the male-female solidarity in the novel and last chapter speaks of its conclusion.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou's first autobiography, was published in 1969. The autobiography has received much praise and criticism as a trendsetter of autobiographical writing especially in black literature. The book has also proved controversial because of its honest depiction of sexuality and Angelou's discussion of being raped as a child. Here, in this book, Angelou is praise-worthy for her powerful delineation of strong female characters. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* focuses on the growing up of a black girl in the racially segregated Southern America. It focuses on the double oppression of black women in America in terms of race and gender.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is read across race, class, gender and cultural boundaries. It is truly a popular book, a book of the people. A work that has many different meanings for many different readers. To get harmony in the society

where one race is dominating other and one gender is creating superiority over the other is very difficult task. But, Angelou emphasizes the unity between Americans and African Americans through black feminist consciousness which means unity among black people to resist against racism and unity among black and white women to resist against patriarchy.

Its presentation of women characters like Marguerite, Momma, Vivian, and Mother Baxtor brings the womanist vision in the book. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*' inclination towards racial and women's issues fortifies the triple consciousness of black women as being 'black' and being 'women'. In the book, Maya challenges the white and male supremacy supporting black people. She also challenges her own native patriarchy without hampering black male. Angelou's characters like Momma, Vivian and Marguerite herself establish their own identity without disturbing black male society. They are even ready to fight against white creating a bond with black male.

Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Ann Johnson on April 4, 1928, is an African American autobiographer and poet who has been called America's most visible black female autobiographer by scholar Joanne M. Braxton. She is best known for her series of six autobiographical volumes, which focus on her childhood and early adulthood experiences. By turning the astonishing trials of her life – a childhood rape, homelessness, drug addiction- into the frank and poignant continuous autobiography that she is best known for. Maya Angelou has challenged the boundary between life and art in a way that very few writers have been able to do well or even honestly. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was shuttled between Stamp and Arkansas, where her grandmother has run a general store and the cities where her itinerant mother lived. These early childhood experiences are described in the critically acclaimed first

installment, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1979), which was eventually turned into a television movie

In the late 1950s, Angelou has joined the Harlem Writers Guild, where she has assembled a number of major African American authors, including James Baldwin , who would go on to become her close friend and mentor. After hearing Civil Rights Movement leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks for the first time in 1960s, she joined the Civil Rights Movement, going on to organize on their behalf, and becoming Northern Coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. During the early 1960s, Angelou moved with South African activist Vusumzi Make to Cairo, Egypt, where she became an associated editor at the weekly newspaper *The Arab Observer*. In 1962, she has moved to Ghana and become an assistant administrator and instructor at the University of Ghana's school of Music and Drama. She has become recognized and highly respected as a spokesperson for black people and women. Angelou has involved as a member of the Harlem Writers Guild in the late 1950s, is active in the Civil Rights Movement and has served as Northern Coordinator of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Since 1991, Angelou has taught at Wake Forest University.

As feminist scholar Maria Lauret has stated that "the formation of female cultural identity" has been woven into Angelou's narratives (70). Angelou has presented herself as a role model for African American women by reconstructing the black women's image throughout her autobiographies, and has her many roles, incarnations and identities to "signify multiple layers of oppression and personal history"(70).Lauret has viewed Angelou's themes of the individual's strength and ability to overcome throughout Angelou's autobiographies as well. Along with memoirs she has written many poems.

Before Angelou, black female writers were marginalized to the point that they were unable to present themselves as central characters. Writer Julian Mayfield, who takes *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as: “A work of art that eludes description set a precedent not only for other black women writers, but for the genre of autobiography as a whole. Through the writing of her autobiography, Angelou has become recognized and highly respected as a spokesperson for black women.” (35)

In the series of her autobiographies the second volume *Gather Together in My Name* published in 1974 which focuses on a young single mother’s struggle to achieve respect, love, and a sense of self worth. Her battle to win financial independence and the devotion of a faithful man could hardly have been easy in the years immediately after world War second, when racial discrimination and unemployment were all on rise. Yet Angelou understands that the hurdles she has to cross on her road to success are often higher than those set by her own expectations and standards of performance. Although she spends the first year of her son’s life in California, she often faces racial discrimination reminiscent of her childhood experiences in the South. In *Gather Together in My Name*, she asks her family and her readers to gather around her and bear witness to her.

The third volume of Maya Angelou’s autobiography, *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Getting’ Merry Like Christmas* published in 1976 concentrates on the early years of her career as professional dancer and singer, actor, activist ,her related experience with racial prejudice, and with the guilt suffered through separation from her young son. Motherhood is a continuous thread in Angelou’s autobiography. As Angelou develops herself as a professional entertainer, she worries about her responsibility to care for her young son and provide him with a secure family life. She gives birth to her only child at the same period in life when she begins to actively seek

identification .Symbolically, she gives birth to her changeling self at the time of Guy's birth. Thus, as Guy grows through his mother's volumes, Angelou also matures, increasing her self awareness in a manner not dissimilar from that of young son.

Throughout *Singin' and Swignin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmus*, she studies her attitude toward white people and explains her growing familiarity with their life style. When she first meets her future husband Greek-American Tosh Angelos ,she suspects that her racial heritage precludes a possibility of any kind of permanent relationship of any kind of permanent relationship Her Southern childhood is too close , too vibrant in her memory : "I would never forget the slavery tales, or my Southern past ,where all white ,including poor and ignorant ,had the right to speak rudely to and even physically abuse any negro they met .I knew the ugliness of white prejudice"(23).

The most significant similarity between their childhood years is the condition of displacement in a familial as well as a geographical sense. Both Angelou and Guy are displaced from their immediate families several times during their youth. They have placed in the care of relatives or family friends and are moved from neighborhood to neighborhood and state to state .In a brief flashback in the second chapter of *The Heart of a Women* ,the writer reminds us of the displacement which characterized her youth and links this aspect of her past with her sons present attitude .

Angelou's fifth volume of Autobiography, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* published in 1986 has swept Angelou to new heights of critical and popular acclaim .Her life story resumes exactly where it ended chronologically and geographically in *The Heart of a Women* with guys recovery from his automobile

accident in Accra .Although only portions of to earlier volumes of her autobiographical narratives occur in Africa, this volume text place in Ghana. In *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, however Angelou focuses primarily on the story of her and many other black American's attempts in the early 1960s to return to the ancestral home in Africa .As in her four previous autobiography she explores the theme of displacements and the difficulties involved in crating a home for oneself, one's family and other one's people.

Take as a whole, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* recounts the sequences of events that gradually brings the autobiographer closer to an understanding and acceptance of the seemingly unbreachable distance between the Ghanaians and black Americans expatriates. Within the first few weeks of her stay in Ghana ,Angelou suspects that “she has mistakenly followed the misdirected foot steps of other black Americans who had not come home ,but had left one familiar place of painfully memory for another strange place of none”(40).In times she understands that their alienation is most likely based on the fact that they, unlike the Ghanaians are the descendants of African slave .But Angelou eventually settles into lasting friendships with both Americans and Africans and finds work through her talents as a journalist and a performer .

A Song Flung up to Heaven is the continuation of Maya Angelou's series of autobiographical narratives. It opens as Maya Angelou returns from Ghana to the United States to work with Malcolm X. Malcolm X got assassinated and she was heart broken. After this she tries to put her life back together but she is again jolted by the assassination of King who had previously asked her to become his coordinator in the north. Maya Angelou completely withdraws from at this stage. She feels that she is unable to deal with this horrible event. Finally James Baldwin forces her out of

isolation and insists that she accompany him to a dinner party – where the idea for writing *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is born. In fact *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* ends as Maya Angelou begins to write the first sentences of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

In addition to her well-known prose Angelou has returned several volumes of lyrical and jazzy poetry, including the Pulitzer-nominated *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie* (1971), *I Shall Not Be Moved* (1990), *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*, *And Still I Rise*, *Shaker*, *Why Don't You Sing?* and *Now Sheba Sings the Songs* are her five volumes of poetry. Angelou's poetry draws on the rhythms of jazz, blues and spirituals; despite its tough look at the hard facts of black life, it is ultimately forgiving and celebratory. Angelou's long poem *Our Grandmothers* perhaps her best is emblematic of the entire work. It features the refrain, *I Shall Not Be Moved*, epitomizing the love and determination of black women. Indeed although Angelou presents a harshly realistic picture of black life she also sees the humor, joy and triumph of it.

The title of her first poetic volume *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie*, comes from a poem that beautifully utilizes the everyday in forming a complex sensation. This phrase from a simply entitled *No No No* speaks quite literally of a mundane action, and the simple description of cool water evokes an image in mind's eye and a sensation in one's imagination.

In 1993, she recited her poem *On The Pulse Of Morning* at the inauguration of president Bill Clinton, becoming the first poet to make an inaugural recitation since Robert Frost at John F Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Angelou's long and extensive career also includes poetry, plays, screenplays for television and film directing, acting, and public speaking. Angelou's struggles as a black woman are

chronicled in her transformation from abused child, teenage mother and civil right worker to a gifted writer. As one of the first black women to make the best-seller list, she also paved the way for African American women in the film industry.

Maya Angelou's memoirs, beginning with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) give us a split mother figure: her own, her mother's, momma's. Momma was a store-keeper and a proud landholder in a small Arkansas town who knew her place and kept it with disdain but defended it with fury. Maya's mother was a sophisticated woman on her own in great cities. When the child at seven, was sent to her grandmother so she decided that their mother was "too beautiful to have children, that's why she sent us away"(50). The care she gave seemed to demand gratitude in return and Angelou, like Maxine Kingston, found she had a rebel. Reconciliation came only years later, when seventeen year-old Maya, having concealed her pregnancy until the last moment, turned to her mother for help and the help was given.

The first best known and most highly acclaimed, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), focuses on the first seventeen years of her life, brought her international recognition, and was nominated for a National Book Award. With the publication of "*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou was heralded as a new kind of memoirist, one of the first African American women who was able to publicly discuss her personal life. Angelou's works are often characterized as autobiographical fiction. Angelou has , however made a deliberate attempt through her work to challenge the common structure of the autobiography by critiquing, changing, and expanding the genre. Her central themes are such as identity, family, racism, motherhood, gender issues and so on. Regarding this autobiography, a critic Yolanda M. Monora states in an article "WHAT

YOU LOOKING AT ME FOR? I DIDN'T COME
 TO STAY": DISPLACEMENT, DISRUPTION AND BLACK
 FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN MAYA ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY*

THE CAGED BIRD SINGS as:

As Angelou writes it, that story of subject formation is one fraught with tension between the subject in the process of becoming and those external forces that would define the possibilities of her being. Certainly, the opening scene can be reread as emblematic of that struggle: the black girl child feels herself the object of the gaze, confronts and challenges those who are imposing the gaze, and asserts her intention to elude that gaze and disrupt the power of those who "look at her" to define her. (365)

In the above lines Yolanda M. Monora writes that this book is a process of identity formation of a black girl. She says that this book tells about the confrontation between the becoming subject and its external forces which help to shape her. From the opening scene onwards, Angelou confronts against external forces to become the object of gaze and disrupts the power of gazers.

Likewise, the another critic Pierre A. Walker dissects this autobiography through the formalistic perspective in the article named *Racial Protest, Identity, Words, and Form in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She writes:

To claim thematic unity is to argue that form and content work together, an assertion that is an anathema to much current literary theory. However, the formal in Caged Bird is the vehicle of the political, and not analyzing this text formally can limit one's appreciation of how it intervenes in the political. Critics should not

focus on the political at the expense of the formal but instead should see the political and the formal as inextricably related. Indeed, some of the most well-received works on American literature in the last decade offer compelling demonstrations of such a symbiosis of form and content. (93)

In these lines, Walker says the form and the content of the book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* supports to create thematic unity and to maintain episodic quality of the novel. She says the formal aspects of the book carry the political aspects or themes of the novel. So people should not focus only one aspect.

Similarly, other critic Opal Moore sees this book as a jumble of themes. He states that:

Self empowerment, faith, struggle as quest, survival, intellectual curiosity, complexity of choice--these ideas are the underpinning of Maya Angelou's story. To explore these themes, the autobiography poses its own set of oppositions: Traditional society and values vs. contemporary society and its values; silence vs. self expression; literacy vs. the forces of oppression; the nature of generosity vs. the nature of cruelty; spirituality vs. ritual. Every episode of *Caged Bird*, engages these and other ideas in Maya Angelou's portrait of a young girl's struggle against adversity--a struggle against rape: rape of the body, the soul, the mind, the future, of expectation, of tenderness--towards identity and self affirmation. (307)

Opal Moore wants to say through these lines that the book has been loaded with much more ideas and themes. It is about self empowerment, faith upon Christianity, about intellectual curiosity and so on. And such themes are explored through the sets of

oppositions such as spirituality versus ritual, generosity versus cruelty, and silence versus expression and so on. All themes support the struggle of a young girl against rape of body, mind, soul, future and so on.

Again another critic Tom Dillard analyzes this book through the perspective of individual difference against whites' habit of viewing the Negro race as a whole. He writes:

For blacks this book is a remembrance, for whites it is a revelation.

Many whites have a habit of viewing the Negro race as a whole. This autobiography helps to portray the individual differences, the varied personalities and the uniqueness of each black person. Perhaps this failure to understand the black man lies at the base of the current racial mistrust which grips our country. (79)

In given lines, the critic Tom Dillard has taken this book as a remembrance for blacks as a revelation for whites. He says this book is about the individual's uniqueness of each black male or female. White people always see the black people in a typical frame of stereotypes but according to Dillard, Angelou subverts such tendency.

Likewise, another critic Myra K. McMurry dissects this novel as a artistic tension between Angelou's recollected self and her authorial consciousness. She states that:

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, is not an exorcism of or escape from the past, but a transmutation of that past. The almost novelistic clarity of *Caged Bird* results from the artistic tension between Angelou's recollected self and her authorial consciousness. Implicit in this dual awareness is the knowledge that events are significant not

merely in themselves, but also because they have been transcended.

(109)

In above lines, the critic says that this book is not an escape from the bitter past but it is a confrontation with past, which is racially segregated. As the author Angelou is aware of her past self and her authorship. Through this dual awareness, the knowledge emerges that the events are significant not merely in themselves, but also because they have been transcended.

In this way, the numerous critics and reviewers have diversely interpreted Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Aforementioned critics have analyzed this autobiography from different perspective but this research analyses from Black feminist perspective. Therefore, the present researcher attempts to analyze it from the Black Feminist perspective. Through the spectacles of Black Feminism, the text has been analyzed from the black women's perspective. This research deals with the troubles and struggles of black women in American society who are doubly marginalized: by mainstream whites and by black males and how black women take the help of Sisterhood and Male- Female bonding to overcome the segregation.

II. Black feminism

Feminism is a political discourse aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protections for women. It involves various movements/ theories and philosophies, all concerned with issues of gender difference that advocate equalities for women and that campaign for women's rights and interests. According to Maggie Humm "Feminism incorporates diverse ideas which share three major properties :that gender is a social construction which oppress women more than men; that patriarchy shapes this construction; and that women's experiential knowledge is basis for a future non-sexist society"(Humm,194).

In fact, 'female' means biological difference from male sex but this sexual difference has been changed into social and cultural fabrication of gender differences. This gender construction shapes male as rational, dominating, active and creative, adventures, protective and with all positive references whereas female as passive, weak, nurturing, emotional, conventional, submissive and all negative references. Feminist critics attempt to explain women's situation, to understand gender asymmetry, or to understand unequal distributions of privileges and power using gender as an element of their analysis. In the book *Critical Theory Today* Lois Tyson writes:

The belief that men are superior to women has been used , feminists have observed , to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power, in other words , to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political and social power. That is, the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically produced. (86)

Feminist theories examine and try to explain the causes and conditions in which men are more powerful and men's production, ideas and activities are seen as having greater value and higher status than women's. For many feminist theorists this comes to mean examining and explaining all structures of domination whether based on gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, or some other differences.

On the basis of the above perspectives, we can say that feminism strives to demolish patriarchal /masculine society's norms and values which are against the nature. Feminism is all about a wide ranging complaints against the patriarchal monopoly. It emphasizes on economic and political equality of women and revolt against gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination against women laid down by patriarchy based on the presuppositions that women are irrational, fragile, and submissive and so on.

'Feminism' is not a homogeneous and singular concept, but is rather a multidimensional and diverse grouping of heterogeneous ideas that are often contradictory to each other. However diverse the ideas may be, all are concerned with women's inferior positions in society and the discrimination faced by them because of the social, economic, political or cultural order. The evolution of numerous distinct forms of feminism includes many accepts of women's suffocation and sufferings.

Anupama Chowdhury writes:

Together with post- colonialism and post-modernism, feminism opens with frontiers of knowledge in the field of literary theory and criticism.

The emergence of several diversified forms of feminisms: 'Liberal' feminism, 'Marxist' feminism, and 'Social' feminism, 'Radical'

feminism, 'French' feminism, 'Black' feminism, and 'Womanism'

'Multiracial' feminism, 'Individualist' feminism, 'post-structural' and

‘postmodern Feminism’, ‘Ecofeminism’, encompasses so many aspects, that even the use of the term in a plural sense fails to do justice. Its use as a plural is rather a conceptual approach- still ambivalent and rather slippery. (28)

There are many types of Feminism which studies women’s condition from different angles of life as social, economic, gender, racial, colonial and so on. Particularly, Black Feminism which is a brand of feminism, studies women’s position in society based on the racial discrimination. In other words, Black Feminism analyzes how race being complicated with gender and class enforces the suppression on black women. At the same time, Black Feminism advocates the solidarity between gender against racial oppression and solidarity between races against gender discrimination.

Aforementioned discussion regarding feminism suggests that feminism is not a inclusive term. Although heterogeneity of the word feminism from western to non-western, cultural to psychological, liberal to radical, social to racial, it is often treated as a single somehow concerned with gender equality and freedom. Generally, ‘feminism’ the vary term always refers to the rich, privileged, and well-educated group of white women who have enough time and economically sound for themselves on their own.

But these white feminist scholars have not given any space to other non-white and color females. They only think about themselves and their experiences in ever more refined forms. In actual sense this is not feminism. As Barbara Smith argues: “Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working class women, lesbians, old women as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism but merely female self aggrandizement” (61).

But the feminists' theorists of color ground their rationale in the assumption that the women's lives cannot be understood without also understanding role of race, ethnicity, in shaping their experiences. Black Feminism analyses the conditions of black women in terms of race, gender, and class. In another words, the real subjectivity of black women can be traced out through the intersection of gender, race and class.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many black women writers rose to the literary and critical forum and raised their voice for their miseries as marginalized through their literary works. Alice and other Black Feminists have pointed out that black women have experienced a different kind of oppression from that of white women. They point to the emergence of Black Feminism after earlier movements led by white middle class women ignored oppressions based on race and class.

The phrase "the intersection of race, gender, and class" is naming of the realization that women's lives are not shaped by gender alone but rather that individuals are multiply constituted by gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality and social experiences. The phrases, like bell hooks' interlocking system of domination" and Deborah King's "multiple jeopardy" also refer to the same understanding. They have been victimized by black male because they are female. Meanwhile, they have also suppressed by white women because they are colored people. The experiences of black women are characterized by the interlocking oppressions of race, class, gender and other factors

Political philosophies for black people such as Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism, and Black Feminism from the socially constructed categories of individuals created by historical reality of racism and sexism. It is obvious fact that feminism does not intuitively reside in female bodies and sexism does not reside in male ones.

African American male cannot have black women's experiences but they can support black women by recommending the anti-racist and anti-sexist philosophies. Focusing on gender as a structure of power that works with race, black intellectuals should provide the much needed space for dialogue among black women, among black men and between black women and men. Such a dialogue is related to different kinds of consciousness on black intellectuals.

Because of racial oppression and their settlement in their colonizer's country, black people of America are in the position of 'inbetweenness'. They are confused to choose as to which side is suitable for them; whether they have to choose African culture, tradition and language or do they have to follow white tradition which is their oppressors'. On the one hand, the whites have created a myth that whites are superior in terms of human civilization which is rooted in black's mind; on the other hand, blacks have nostalgia for their own native culture. This inbetween condition creates double consciousness in the black people. As Lois Tyson puts it "For many black Americans this(double consciousness) means having one cultural self at home and other cultural self in white dominated public space, such as the work place and the school"(383).

For black writers, double consciousness means having to decide whether to write primarily for black audiences or both. But in the case black women of America this double consciousness turns somehow into triple consciousness such as consciousness about women, consciousness about native culture and also consciousness about their present society or American white society. Such a pluralist vision enriches a black feminist thought which considers the interrelated issues of race, sex class, and gender. To subvert these challenges they have formed their own

movement called 'Black Feminism'. The Black Feminism helps to make their voice stronger, abler to be heard by the white, the male and the concerned stake holders.

African American Feminists have been especially helpful in revealing the political and theoretical drawbacks inherent in white mainstream feminism. The mainstream feminism neglects the cultural experiences of black women which are different from white women's. For example black feminist have understood that gender oppression cannot be understood excluding racial oppression. Black feminists observe that black women are oppressed by patriarchy ,not just because she is a woman but because she is a black woman , a category that has been defined historically as less valuable than the category of white women in America.

The Victorian ideal of true women as submissive, fragile, and sexually pure, still influences patriarchal thinking today. The black women and the poor women of all races are excluded by this definition of women, whose survival demand hard labor and who were vulnerable to rape and to sexual exploitation in the work place. Louis Tyson writes in the book *Critical Theory Today*:

A Woman whose racial and economic situation forced her into hard labor and made her the victim of sexual predators was defined as unwomanly and therefore unworthy of protection from those who exploited her. This view was widely held by men, both white and black, and by white women as well. Black women, therefore, were in a double bind. They could expect neither gender solidarity from white women nor racial solidarity from black men, the two groups on whom they should have been able to count for help. (106)

White mainstream feminism, while it has tended to marginalize black women because of their race, nevertheless encourages them to prioritize gender issue over racial

issues, arguing that black women are oppressed more by sexism than by racism. At the same time, the black male community, while it has tended to marginalize black women because of their gender, nevertheless encourages them to prioritize racial issues over gender issues by saying that black women are oppressed more by racism than by sexism. As Lorrain Bethel observes, an understanding of this double oppression forms the basis of African American Feminist criticism:

Black Feminist literary criticism offers a framework for identifying the common socio-aesthetic problems of authors who attempted the midst of racial/sexual oppression. It incorporates a political analysis that enables us to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievement black women ...made in establishing artistic and literary tradition of any sort, and to understand their qualities and sensibilities.

(178)

Such understanding requires a consciousness of the oppression these artists faced daily in a society full of institutionalized and violent hatred for both their black skins and their female bodies. Developing and maintaining this consciousness is a basic tenet of Black Feminism.

The writing of African American women, who are marginalized by African American literary canon, defined by both African American male writers and white writers. They represented African American women in their literary works as stereotyped characters. As a result, black women writers have been concerned, throughout their literary history, with portraying black women as real people with all the complexity and depth that black women have. As Mary Helen Washington puts it: "One of the main preoccupations of black women writers has been the black women

herself –her aspirations ,her conflicts ,her relationship two her men and her children ,her creativity”(X).

Black women must mediate the conflicting requiriments of their relationships to the black community as a whole: their solidarity with the black men against racist oppression and their solidarity to women of all races in an effort to resist sexist oppression. In fact, the confusion created by the conflicting requirements of black men’s demand for racial solidarity and white females demand for gender solidarity has forced many African American women engaged in literary criticism to address gender issues in black women’s writing without mentioning feminism .The focus on black women identity in writing by African American women is embodied in various recurring themes. As Lois Tyson puts these themes in her book *Critical Theory Today*:

The victimization of black women as underpaid workers forced into the lowliest jobs and as victims of violence and sexual exploitation ;The black women as suppressed artist ;The importance of black women’s community for psychological (and sometimes physical and economic) survival ,which includes relationships among grandmother’s ,mothers and daughters ;the initiation of young black girls into the harsh realities of racism and sexism.(389)

Black Feminists write under some particular themes that makes easier to explore the identity of colored women. For example, black women are shown as underpaid workers at lowest jobs. Likewise Black Feminism advocates female bonding in writing, the relation among sisters, mothers, grandmothers are presented in detail. Similarly, the importance of relation between black women and men also discussed in Black Feminism.

Likewise, African American women's narratives include a number of literary strategies. For example, black women writers frequently use a black character as the narrator in the novel or as the speaker in a poem in order to give black women authority as tellers of their own stories. When third person narrator is used, the point of view is usually of a black woman. Sometimes the narrative is presented as a conversation between two black women to emphasize the importance of relationships between black women. As Lois Tyson writes in her book *Critical Theory Today*: "In order to evoke a world that resonates with black women's experiences, the use of imagery associated with black women's domestic space and activity is also a frequently employed strategy" (391).

For example imagery associated with the kitchen and other locations within the home where such traditional skills as quilting, canning, the performance of garden farm chores, and the passing down of family and cultural heritage to children occur. Or the world of black women may be evoked by imagery associated with black women's physical oppression, such as clothing, hairstyles, skin colors, cosmetics, and the like.

In general, literary devices have emphasized the struggle of black women to assert their own identity in either the form of sacrificing oneself for the good of family, the community, or race. But whatever form it takes, the complex psychological, social, and economic dynamics of black women's self-definition occupy an important place in their writing. In the 1960s, Black women participated in feminist movement but the Racism hindered them to get the liberation. They were excluded in conferences meetings and they were not proportionally represented on the faculty of women's studies like white women. In most women movements writing the

white middle class women's experiences are stated as the universal women experiences; black women's experiences are ignored completely.

Black women also have faced sexism in Black Liberation Movement/ Civil Rights Movement. Though there are several movements for blacks but none of them have helped to enhance black women. The Black Liberation Movement also failed to address female's issues, it only worked for black males. Then black women started a movement for the liberation of their own as the Black Women Liberation in 1970s. But their movement has not excluded blackmales and whites also. They insist on the communal living for African American people which is their cultural mode of living. Mary Ann Weathers writes in an article named *An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force* as:

This now brings us to a very pertinent question: How can we seriously discuss reclaiming our African Heritage _cultural living modes which clearly refute not only patriarchy and matriarchy, but one entire family structure as we know it. African tribes live communally where households let alone heads of households are not existent. (176)

African American people prefer to live communally. By making community stronger African American women become empowered, that same community can serve as a source of support when black women encounter race, gender, and class oppression.

Black women are not male haters as white women. Black feminism is unique; it has its own distinctive features unlike mainstream feminism. Black Feminism is inclusive whereas mainstream excludes males. It prefers humanity not any particular groups. Mary Ann Weathers further puts it as "Let it be clearly understood that Black Women's Liberation is anti_male; any such sentiment or interpretation as such can

not be tolerated. It must be taken clearly for what it is prohuman for all peoples (178).”

Generally, black women thinkers feel that Feminism is divisive force in the black community. As a result, some have either abandoned feminism to reconcile or sought ways to reconcile it with the concerns of the black community, as Alice Walker did when she called herself a ‘womanist’ because she works for the survival and whole of her people both man and women (X). ‘Womanism’ is a term that Alice Walker coined to help define a way for African American Women to be feminists in ways relevant to black people. According to Alice Walker:

Womanism is opposite of girlish i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious. A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mother’s to female children, “you acting womanish”, i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than each consider “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable, with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown”. Responsible. In Charged. Serious. (XI)

In short, Womanist is one who loves other women sexually or non sexually, appreciates and prefers woman’s culture, woman’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength. A womanist also loves individual man sexually or none sexually. Womanist is not a separationist. Walker posits a concept of womanism to distinguish the struggles, African American have faced from the mainstream white woman’s rights movement which has sometimes been hostile to African.

African American women while strong and independent are not likely to be gender separationists. They appreciate their womanhood but do not necessarily criticize the men. Instead African American women or womanists desire economic independence and mutually beneficial relationship with men. Unlike males think, understanding a woman is not a threat to anyone if who intends to treat women fairly.

Walker's theory attempts to address a strong consistent critique of sexism and racism into African American intellectual discourse. The goal of Womanism is to eschew hierarchies constructed by men for men in favor of inclusive pluralities that stand in sharp contradictions to tradition. It requires women making full use of their voices and their creative capacities however they might be manifested. In African American fiction especially Walker's own , such possibilities may be offered either by portraying them in imagined worlds through the actions and words pivotal characters.

While preferring 'womanist' in comparison to 'black feminist' Walker gives different reason why she prefers it. Walker believes that womanism is rooted in black women's concrete history in racial and gendered oppression. As Patricia Hills Collins observes:

Taking the term from the southern black folk expression of mother's to female children "You acting womanist", Walker suggests that the black women's concrete history fosters a womanist world view accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women.

Womanish girls acted in black women outrageous, courageous and willful ways, attribute that freed them from the conventions of limiting white woman. (10)

Walker's much cited phrase, "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" clearly seems designed to set up this type of comparison black women are 'womanist's' while white women remain merely 'feminist'. (XII)

Womanism provides a way for black women to address gender suppression without criticizing black men. Sheryl Williams in her essay "The Truth that Never Hurts" argues, "Womanist inquiry assumes that it can talk both effectively and productively about men (70)"

For Walker, Womanism is a place where the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity. The relative silence of black feminist on this dimension speaks to black women's continued ambivalence in dealing with the between the race, gender, class and sexuality.

There are many debates among black feminists regarding the term. Although some theorists prefer 'Womanism' and the other 'Black Feminism'. Likewise some other prefer 'Afrocentrism' but there are some people who cite neither rather they prefer on 'work'. For them the naming does not matter but the work on women's right is necessary. If there is a difference between Womanism and Black feminism then this difference is minimal. As Patricia Hills Collins views: "Perhaps the time has come to go beyond naming by applying main ideas contributed by both Womanists and Black Feminists to the overarching issues to analyzing the centrality of gender in shaping a range of relationship within African American communities." (14)

Black Feminists have related themselves to the sufferings of black people not about the debating on term. In this context they have considered on the rights of black people whether they are male or female. The empowerment of their race is felt necessary. In short, Black Feminism encompasses the idea as a process of self

conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community.

Most of African American women intellectuals have launched their visions that women's struggles are the part of wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment. They take their stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life and the injustice of all favoritisms are not bearable, whether of race, sex, class, country or condition. As Collins further argues:

African American women intellectuals embrace this perspective regardless of particular political solutions we purpose, our fields of study or our historical periods. Whether we advocate working through separate Black women's organization, becoming part of women's organizations, working within existing political structure [...] Thus, the primary guiding principles' of black feminism is a recurring humanist vision. (385)

Whatever the politics may be behind the Black Feminism, its core motive is to uplift humanist vision as Black Feminist movement is a part of larger movement called humanist movement.

Generally, Black Feminism is appreciated as the part of feminist movement but it is more than that because it is associated with race and its culture at the same time. Black feminists of America have to bear double responsibility to liberate their gender and race. They have significantly contributed to maintaining gender solidarity to liberate women from patriarchal domination and have formed an alliance with black males to challenge the white racial dominance. Because of their coalition with white women for gender solidarity and with black men for racial solidarity they possess superior vision in comparison to white woman and black men.

III. Female Bonding in Maya Angelou's

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings discusses about the race, class, gender and cultural boundaries. It is a very difficult task to seek harmony in the society where one race and gender is dominating and holding superiority over another. Angelou emphasizes the unity through womanist consciousness which means unity among black people to resist against racial segregation and patriarchal oppression. The novel which inclines towards racial and women's issues fortifies the double consciousness of black women as being 'black' and being 'women'. Maya challenges the white and male supremacist culture supporting black people. She also challenges patriarchy in her own race without abusing them. Angelou's characters like Momma, Viviam and Maya herself establish their own identity without disturbing black patriarchy. They are even ready to fight against white creating a bond with black male.

Angelou uses sisterhood or female bonding as a tool of resistance against racism as well as patriarchy in her own race. Angelou portrays her mother and grandmother as women strong enough to challenge racism as well as patriarchy. In her journey from childhood to maturity, she has faced many hurdles in the journey of her life. The female characters of the book always provide Marguerite the sisterly help when she is in need. In chapter 15, Maya remains mute after her rape, Momma knows Maya cannot stay mute forever and that something should be done to help her. Maya remains quiet nearly for a year and then becomes acquainted with a woman.

Mrs. Bartha Flowers is one of the few aristocratic blacks in their town. Maya has decided to keep quiet except Belly but meeting with Mrs. Bartha Flowers tenderly inspires her to recite poem loudly. Angelou writes, "she was one of the gentle women I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a

human can be” (78). Mrs. Flowers inspires her to speak by saying that she knows the young girl reads a lot which is necessary for human voice to infuse the written word with deeper meaning.

Angelou in her autobiography delineates female characters, Momma, her mother, Mrs. Flowers, Louise positively and portrays male characters as irresponsible persons except Bailey. Through her characterization we can say that she loves females than males. Her hurdles are cleared by the female characters rather than the males. When her parents abandon Angelou and her brother, Momma accepts them. She writes:

When I was three and bailey four, we had arrived in the musty little town, wearing tags on our wrists which instructed - “To Whom It May Concern”- that we were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson Jr., from Long Beach, California, en route to Stamps, Arkansas, c/o Mrs. Annie Henderson. (4)

Momma and Bailey accept and support Maya when she is abandoned by her parents and this picture clearly illustrates the bond between male and female. Angelou’s project is to present black women’s story as compassionate to each other, loveable against the stereotypical representation of them as mammy/ nanny for white children. She does this by shifting the point of view of autobiographical novel to black female as herself.

The sisterly compassionate behavior of Mrs. Barth Flowers towards Momma and small Angelou proves it. Mrs. Flowers rescues Maya from her self-imprisonment of muteness by convincing her:

Now no one is going to make you talk- possibly no one can. But bear in mind, language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow

man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals, that was totally new idea to me, and I would need time to think about it. (82)

Likewise, in the course of communication small Maya has felt proud upon herself unlike past. Maya dislikes the child Maya who feels proud upon herself. In her early years Maya abhors herself for her blackness, her big body, kinky hairs but later due to the sisterly behave of Mrs. Flowers she feels that she is respected not as Mrs. Henderson's grandchild or Bailey's sister but for just being Marguerite Johnson. In such way, Angelou wants to show a kind of bond among females in this book.

In general, women depend upon males but Angelou always advocates independence of black woman .To overcome the oppression from black men, black woman forms solidarity among women. For Magruerite her momma, her mother, Mrs. Flowers and grandmother Baxtor all are the source of strength. They all are independent enough to succeed to have influence upon others. She says grandmothers are "strong, independent, skillful women who are able to manage their families and to insure their survival in a segregated and hostile society" (52). Momma, Vivian, Grandmother Baxtor and Bartha flowers have very different personalities and views on life, but their dignity and self respect. None of them ever capitulates to racist indignities. Just as America's racial, gender or sexist myths are challenged in the novel.

The oppressive African mentality, sexist Africans are very much like white people back at home and they think they are the center of the universe and that everything rotates around them. Angelou questions such biased thoughts. Angelou's female characters are economically strong and independent to sustain not only themselves but their family too. Maya says that most of the strong black women in her

novel are survivors. They are strong characters quite simply because they show heroism, courage and strength. Momma's confrontation with Dr. Lincoln, a white dentist, proves how she is powerful in her society. When the dentist has denied to treat Maya, grandmother strong react with a white male dentist. Momma says:

I wouldn't press on you like this for myself but I can't take No. Not for my grandbaby. When you come to borrow my money, you did not have to beg. You asked me, and I lent it. Now, it wasn't my policy. I ain't no moneylender, but you stood to loose this building and I tried to help you out. (160)

The subject of color and female beauty are recurrent features in the oppressive experience of black women in the white culture. In black community, big breasts, big hips and thighs straight hairs are meant for the symbols of beauty. But Maya feels she lacks all these things. Maya is unhappy about her body. She is concerned not only with her ugliness but also with her lack of femininity, and reach to the conclusion that she might be a lesbian. She turns to her mother for help when she feels herself unable to discern if she is a lesbian. She reads about her anxiety taking her body "Mother shot up put her arms around me. There's nothing to worry about baby. It happens to every woman. It's just human nature" (136). Consultation with her mother from her terrible suspicion that she may be a lesbian. When she tells her mother about her suspicion of being a lesbian she tries to convince her

I made arrangements a long time ago, to have a boy and a girl. Bailey is my boy and you are my girl. The Man upstairs, he don't make mistakes. He gave you to me to be my girl that's just what you are. Now, go wash your face, have a glass of milk and go back to bed. Even

up until the end of the book, Vivian continues to look at Maya not out of the corner of her eye but “out of the corner of her existence. (229)

The autobiography ends with an overwhelming positive picture of Vivian. He makes mistakes along the way, but she nevertheless survives with the strength and honesty that provide sustenance for and rub off on May in the end.

When Maya becomes pregnant, Vivian supports and encourages her without condemnation. Angelou says that mother supports her decision not to marry with the boy ruining three lives. Maya praises her mother by saying that “She was Vivian Baxtor Jackson. Hopign for the best, prepared for the worst, and unsurprised by anything in between” (244).

Angelou places both Vivian Baxter and herself within the tradition of black women with strong characters and honorable survival mechanisms. She says she often hears people’s reaction to the formidable characters of black women in America as if they are surprised or offended. This in turn, surprises Angelou. She feels that black women must struggle so much to survive and this inevitable strength of characters should be respected. Maya demonstrates that the universal struggle of adolescence combine with the stresses of race and gender to make black women’s struggles all the more challenging.

Maya shows male characters as marginalized ones to trivialize the role of man in the society. The men, who couple with women, are either in effectual shadows, womanizes or deserters, such as Big Balley, Mr. Freeman, the husbands of momma, the father of Vivian and so on. The protagonists are not the males rather the three year to seventeen year old girl. Angelou proves herself the strongest women among others. At first, she is abandoned by her parents. After few years she is also taken to her mother where she is raped by her mother’s boy friend Mr. Freeman. After rape, she

begins to strengthen her opinion of herself as an experienced woman unlike eight years old girl. When she enters courtroom filled with the unsavory characters and slinking mouth. She remembers that the nurses have told her that she has nothing to fear. They have said the worst is over for you and she uses their words to bolster her confidence. She says, "I was eight, and grown" showing how the incident ultimately sharpens her precocious sense of self (69). She feels herself womanish unlike girlish in early age. However throughout the book Maya must continue to struggle with growing pains particularly associated with sex.

The book presents the painful experience of growing up as a black girl in the segregated American South to having a razor at one's throat. Looking back on her childhood experience, Maya notes that she not only fell victim to a hostile, racist and sexist society, but only to either forces as well including the displacement she feels from her family peers. She assumes herself adult and perfect woman in childhood. Because of her constant struggle with discrimination in South and North America, she gains maturity in early age. When she goes for a summer picnic, she wants a book to read instead of playing with other children. She argues "feeling ages old and very wise at ten, I could not allow myself to be found by small children squatting behind a tree" (117). She herself accepts that she is being womanish. She feels her maturity when she meets with Louise Kendricks in the same picnic. Louise's friendship provides her Maya with her first opportunity to enjoy her youth and to a certain extent her independence. Maya's experiences prior to their friendship have matured her beyond her years and Louise is her first childhood friend with whom she makes a sisterly bond. Maya moves and interacts largely in a world of adults with the exception of Bailey. With Louise Maya begins to experience being a young girl for the first time playing games, inventing languages, discussing boys and young love. As

they spin each other around and look up in the sky, their meeting takes on a magical quality, suggesting its importance in Maya's development as a strong individual.

Male – Female Solidarity

Angelou shows African American woman strong and independent who are not likely to be gender separationists. She appreciates black female's womanhood but does not criticize the black males totally for black women's predicament. Instead, Angelou desires the economic independence of black women and mutually beneficial relationship with males. She does not describe hostile relationship between black males and black women except Marguerite herself and Mr. Freeman's. The relationship of Marguerite and Bailey or momma and Willie or Vivian and her brothers and Bailey Jr. very cordial. Angelou wants to show that cooperation between males and females which is necessary to overcome the hurdles and live a respectable life in American society. Marguerite accepts Bailey as her life time rescuer. Uprooted and sent away from her parents at the age three, Bailey her dear brother saves her and takes her to their grandmother, who lives in stamps. Angelou in this book states Bailey's name without an explanation of whom he is, as if he is so much a part of Marguerite's life. He almost is an extension of herself and therefore needs no introduction. Bailey guides and helps Marguerite when she is in trouble who is only a year older than her. When Marguerite is raped, no one can know the name of rapist from Maya because he threatens her by saying, "If you scream, I'm gonna kill you. And if you tell, I am gonna kill Bailey" (65).

She tells the name of a rapist to Bailey. When he has convinced her he can not kill her. He said "he won't let him free. And of course I believed him. Bailey didn't lie to me. So I told him. She also says that Bailey cried at the side of my bed until I started to cry too" (69). After being raped she wonders whether Bailey will still love

her. She fears she is dying and asks Bailey to take her away to California or France or Chicago. Angelou tries to show the invention of male female bodies but worst of all she is a child. It is the invasion in terms of sexuality and only Bailey helps thoroughly in her bitter situation. When she refuses to speak with people except Bailey she thinks she loves him so much that she never hurt him, but if she talked to anyone else that person might die too. The young Maya is horrified of losing Bailey and even can not talk to him.

When the family at St. Louise becomes unable to handle her silence, Maya is sent back to stamps, Arkansas. Bailey comes with Maya again even in her returning back to rural and segregated South. He does not leave her alone. Bailey misses Vivian, but Marguerite finds herself relieved to return to the barren world of stamps. On the agony of leaving his mother “he cried his heart out down the aisles of the coach, and pressed his little-boy body against the window pane looking for a last glimpse of his mother Dear”(74). Marguerite does care very much, however, that her best buddy Bailey is completely unhappy and distraught over leaving. He remains kind only to Maya. She understands Bailey’s frustration, and he understands her silence.

Marguerite and Bailey have begun to grow naturally apart which perhaps exacerbates Maya’s isolation and confusion. But Bailey remains the most important person in her life. He persuades her to reveal the identity of the rapist, and his tearful reaction to learning that the man who lives with him rapes his sister reveals the loving support he gives her. Bailey doesn’t betray her trust. He never blames her for the rape or for their sudden return to stamps. Marguerite writes that “Bailey was the greatest person in my world. And the fact that he was my only brother and I had no sisters to share him with, was such good fortune that it made me want to live a Christian life just to show god that I was grateful”(17).

Though, Angelou internalizes the white standards of beauty she rebels against white oppression. When Mrs. Cullinan a white woman renames her, she feels her sense of self-worth is wounded. She can not stand being named as 'Mary' by a white woman only for her convenience. She quickly wants to quit the job but the problem is going on to be how to do it. Momma would not allow her to quit for just any reason. Then she remembers her life time rescuer Bailey.

Bailey solved my dilemma. He had me describe the contents of the cupboard and the particular plates. She liked best her favorite piece was a casserole shaped like a fish and the green glass coffee cups. I kept his instructions in my mind. So on the next day when Mrs. Glory was hanging out clothes and I had again been told to serve the old biddies on the porchs I dropped the empty serving tray. When I heard Mrs. Cullinan scream " Mary! I picked up the casserole and two of green glass ups in readiness. As she rounded the kitchen door I let them fall on the tired floor. (92)

In this way, with the help of Bailey she takes her revenge breaking the white woman's heirloom china by taking the help of her brother Bailey.

Angelou prefers female's independence and empowerment and at the same time she is not male hater. She helps when they are in need and she also takes help from if she needs. When she finds herself pregnant she is consumed with fear, guilt and self revulsion, realizing that although for so much of her earlier life, she had been like a storm tossed ship at sea. In this instance she is nearly completely responsible for this new catastrophe. She finally turns to Bailey for help, "who cautioned her against telling the condition of her mother. She says, " we both knew her to be violently opposed to abortions, and she would very likely order me to quit school. Bailey

suggested that if I quit school before getting my high school diploma, I 'd find it nearly impossible to return" (242). Maya takes Bailey's advice, and the evening that she graduates she writes a note to her mother and daddy Clidell.

Black women do not condemn the black males for their poor economic and social status rather they take help of black males to fight against white racism. Momma, a black woman does not accuse her husbands for her condition as she is abandoned by them and a strong and healthy son to care for a crippled son Willie and to poor grand children, who is also left by their parents.

She is kind enough to help people who are in needs either they are males or female. In the autobiography she accepts Maya and Bailey when they are rejected by their parents. She doesn't hesitate to help white people when they seek it. Dr. Lincoln, a white doctor asks for economic help in the era of depression to save his house and mamma provides it.

As an African American female writer, Angelou is always concerned with the Africans especially African female. She presents Momma a very powerful and courageous woman who helps a black man who is accused of assaulting a white woman. She aids that man escaping from a lynch mob despite the danger. Such actions present her bravery. That man was hunted down for assaulting white womanhood in trying to escape he ran to the Store. Momma and uncle Willie hide him behind the chiffon robe until night; she gives him supplies and over land journey and sent him on his way. Momma emerges as a strong determined survivor and she chooses her battles with white's well. For example, although Mama does not go out of her way to confront whites and their racism, she offers her help to those who find themselves mired in such confrontations, with racist white. She even helps black males for the racial upliftment.

As a black female writer Angelou wants female's strong position in society but she does not scorn or avoid males. For the women's betterment, she shows the needs of males or she wants to offer the lesson that black women have to achieve their success not being estranged with males but having solidarity with male. Momma is the one character who always helps males and females when they are in trouble. One stormy night, a fellow townsman named George Taylor comes to the store and Momma welcomes him. She writes:

When momma saw him she invited him to stay for supper and told me to stick some sweet potatoes in the ashes to stretch the evening meal.

Poor Brother Taylor had been taking meals all over town, ever since he burned his wife in the summer. Brother Taylor, you not suppose to sit around that lonely house feeling sorry for yourself. The lord given and the lord taken away. (130)

Angelou presents her grandmother not only a strong but also a wise enough to solve riddle about spirits. When Mr. Taylor says that he sees a fat, blond, blue-eyed baby angel laughing at him, the night before he hears his wife's moaning voice. Eventually, Mrs. Taylor's voice moaned that she wanted children. After hearing him momma suggests that may be it means sister Florida wants us to work with children. Momma further says that Sunday school needs more teachers, lord knows that's so and Florida may want him to take a Sunday school class.

Not only Maya takes help from Bailey, but also takes help from Vivian, their mother. Vivian is a strong black woman who is economically independent, Bailey; a previous innocent childlike boy grows up into a man. The growing confrontation between Vivian and Bailey ends when Bailey leaves home in anger at one o'clock in the morning and lives in a rented room. When Maya meets him next morning he says

that he calls her. Bailey tells Maya, “I came by here. We had a very fruitful discussion I understand completely. There is a time in every man’s life when he must push off from the wharf of safety into a sea of chance...anyway, she is arranging with a friend of her in Oakland to get me on the Southern Pacific” (223).

Maya learns that mother in fact has not abandoned him. Actually he is excited to tell Maya that mother is arranging to get him a job. Even Bailey stops Maya when she wants to disrespect mother *I Know why the caged Bird Sings* describes about different kinds of histories and events and lifestyles. She wants to show the differentiations and uniqueness of Black society compared to whites. She presents a kind of honking among black females and black females are not anti-male like white women. Momma in this book take cares of a rippled son who is now an adult youth. Maya and Bailey are so much entangled with each other that it seems impossible to have a separate existence and live without each other. Though Vivian can not keep the children with her all time, she does her best to make her children strong and capable. Through this autobiography, Angelou praises black cultural and communal lifestyle than white’s.

Intersection of Race and Gender

I Know why the Caged Bird Sings presents the upbringing of a black girl in America’s racist and sexist society. Through this autobiography, Angelou tries to raise the voice of black women to achieve dignified identity in the white racist and sexist America looking back on her childhood experiences. She notes that she not only fell victim to a hostile, racist and sexist society, but also to other social fixes as well including the displacement she felt from her family and her peers. Angelou’s autobiography expresses the experience of painful growing up as the Southern Black

girl being aware of her displacement which is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.

Angelou has already internalized the white standards of female beauty as skin should be white, eyes should be light and blue, hair should be long and blonde; but she never finds herself meeting these standards. By the age of five or six, Maya has already begun to equate beauty with whiteness. As Maya has watched her grandmother mending a taffeta dress for her, she says “she knew when she puts it she would 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”(1) .

She tries to show how badly racial discrimination is imprinted in a childhood mind. From her early age, Marguerite has been told that she is ugly who notices the good looks of her brother and mother, Maya’s maternal uncle Tommy often told her, “Ritie, don’t worry cause you ain’t pretty. Plenty pretty women I seen digging ditches or worse. You smart”(56). By the American racist culture also, she is taken ugly because her skin is dark and her hair is kinky. Maya totally acknowledges the racist concept of beauty as she takes her ‘blackness’ as curse by “a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understanding 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 that would hold a number-two pencil”(2). Angelou further believes that her blackness is a dream from which she wake up out if it and her “real hair which was long and blond, would take the place of the Rinky mals- her light blue eye. Most black children in Stamps, Arkansas, has rarely had contact with white people, because the segregation was so complete” (36).

The opening scene demonstrates the pervasive effects of raises on a black southern girl’s consciousness. Angelou, in her childhood feels imprisoned by both her

race and gender as well as a female body, and these two things mean she will never be beautiful or heroic like her comic book figures. In her childhood Angelou has wished her soul that she had been born a boy because she finds all heroes are always good, always won and were always boys in the book she has read. It is the burning example of the racist and sexist society of America in which society simply a child can wish to be white and to be a boy. Maya's favorite stories and fairy-tales teach her that culturally accepted notion that women can not be heroes, causing her to wish that she could be a male.

Angelou shows the victimization of black people as underpaid workers forced into lowliest jobs. During the cotton harvesting season, the store becomes the gathering place in the morning, when the black workers are full of hope about how much cotton they will pick. Yet at the end, in the dying sunlight, their supernatural expectations are ruined by sore of fingers stiffening from the day's work. Angelou tries to show the exploitation of poor black workers by the remains of slavery's plantations owners. Angelou further writes the dominated black workers' always repeating lifestyle:

They would face another day of trying to earn enough for the whole year with the heavy knowledge that they were going to end the season as they started it. Without the money or credit necessary to sustain a family for three months in cotton-picking time the late afternoons revealed the harshness of Black Southern life, which in the early morning had been softened by nature's blessing of grogginess, forgetfulness and the soft lamplight.(7)

From a young age Maya knows that white people bear responsibility for the suffering of the cotton pickers.

In American racist society race is more dominant than class. Though blacks are richer than poor whites, they are dominated and insulted by whites. In Angelou's period, stamps were so much segregated, she that "whites in our town were so prejudiced that a Negro could not buy vanilla ice creams" (40). Maya develops a fear admiration contempt for the 'white folks' cars and white glistening houses, so many clothes. It is because of white racism that if the blacks have more money, lands, houses, they can't use them properly. If black people wear good clothes than white, live in better houses than whites; it becomes white peoples insult and it can become threat to the black people's life. Angelou's captures the child Marguerite's confusion and questioning about this she argues:

I couldn't understand whites and where they got the right to spend money so lavishly. Of course, I knew God was white too, but no one could have made me believe he was prejudiced. My Grandmother had more money than all the powhitetrash. We owned land and houses, but each day Bailey and I were cautioned. (40)

Maya's experiences in store tell much about black rural small-town life during the 1930s. If one black man has done any mistake, the mad white man punishes and black man they find. Maya recounts Mr. Steward's warning "Annie, tell Willie he better lay low tonight. A crazy nigger messed with a white lady today. Some of the boys will be coming over here later"(14). Willie even a crippled and handicapped man has to hide in the potato and onion bins in the case the mob comes looking for scapegoat to lynch.

The meanness of whites has been presented in the book. Whites are the people who have not any sense of respect towards blacks and even blacks are older than whites. The exploitation of the black people by whites had begun with the age of navigation. This trend still continues. They looted black's property and sense of self-

respect. Maya describes “powhitetrash children” as living on Momma’s land but still treating her uncle Willie and Momma not only in the most disrespectful manner but as if they were more servants. Maya describes the mocking scene of Momma by white girls is the most painful and confusion experience she ever had with her grandmother. These girls mimic and tease Momma one of the girls say, “Now, Helen, you ain’t standing like her. This here’s it.” Then she lifted her chest, fooled her arms and mocked that strange carriage that was Annie Hendersom. Another laughed. “Now you can’t do it. Your mouth ain’t pooched out enough it’s like this” (24).

White exploited black physically as an animal before emancipation. But after the emancipation they became cruel to black. They looted everything better from them. If blacks couldn’t satisfy white, they have no way to live. Though Maya wishes to throw a handful of black popper in their faces, to throw lye on them, to scream that they were dirty, scummy peckerwoods, she can’t do anything because she is imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside were confined to their roles .She recognizes the deranged societal machine at work.

Momma keeps her faith and self-respect against the backdrop of such terrifying events. Her confusion with the white girls is another example of overt insidiousness of racism, which becomes a victory for Momma because she refuses to be displaced. While Maya feels apprehension, Momma’s refusal to retreat inside the store at their approach diffuses any threat the children pose to her authority or her identity. Under her silent impassive gaze, their antics become an embarrassment to them, not to Momma. Momma addresses the girls with respect, demonstrating her maturity and poise. She knows that, though these girls may be above her on the social ladder, she is better and stronger than they are. In the context of the girls’ ridiculous an terrible behavior, a level to which Momma never stoops herself.

In America, if blacks try to resist white domination they should have to do it at the cost of life. Momma knows it very well. She has believed that one has risked one's life if one speaks to a white person and that even in their absence they could not be spoken of too harshly unless we used the sobriquet. Even if she is soft to whites she calls herself a realist rather than a coward. White exploits the consciousness of resistance of Africans and colonize them. As Momma, Black Americans become unable to read and know their own history.

In America, especially teaching of girls is also racially segregated. Admittedly the training was not the same for the white and black girls written that while white girls learned to waltz and sit gracefully with a tea cup balanced on their knees the black girls have to learn embroidery, art of crocheting and tatting, to iron and wash and finer touches around the home like setting a table with real silver, baking roast and cooking vegetables without meat. In the case of education black girls are exploited in terms of race and gender. They are trained domestically not academically worst of all, they have to finish their schooling through the kitchen of a wealthy white person.

In the period of Angelou's childhood though black people are emancipated white racists exercise power upon blacks. In the book when Mrs. Cullinan attempts to rename Maya as "Mary", Maya revolts it. It is notable that the confrontation is caused by the woman's not accepting Maya's name or identity. Maya's indignation toward Mrs. Cullian for renaming her attests to Maya's deepening sense of self-worth and race consciousness. When Mrs. Cullian says about Margnerite's name which is too long. She's Marf from now on, Maya becomes angry. She thinks

Every person I knew had a hellish horror of being 'called out of his name'. It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could

be loosely constructed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dings, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks.(91)

Angelou determines not to let rename some white woman to herself for her convenience. Mrs. Cullinan does not bother to learn Maya's real name, Marguerite, and she chooses to change it for her own convenience. She does not exhibit violent racism, but she perpetrates an indignity that American blacks have faced throughout history.

Maya's reaction to Mrs. Cullinan exemplifies the subtler forms of resistance available to American blacks. According to social codes, Maya could not directly demand recognition of her identity, but she finds a subversive forms of resistance. When Mrs. Cullinan yet again calls her Mary, Maya breaks some of her favorite dishes and then pretends that it was an accident, as Bailey recommended she do Mrs. Cullinan drops her veneer of gentility and begins screaming racist remarks at Maya, showing the power of Maya's action to expose Mrs. Cullinan. Moreover, by switching back to Maya's original name Mrs. Cullinan unwittingly relinquishes control over Maya and admits defeat. "Mary" is her property but "Margaret" is not Mrs. Cullinan has learned her lesson, and this is the first time in the book that Maya successfully fights against racism and for her dignity Maya regain her name and her sense of self.

The victimization of black people as underpaid workers forced into lowliest jobs and as the victims of violence and sexual exploitation are the contemporary features of American society and Angelou sketches the same society's picture in this book. She witnesses the African American 'have allowed themselves to be worked like oxen. When one worker tells Momma he is going to the revive mealing even after the whole day's hardworking, Maya wonders whether her race is full of masochists

and that not only was it was it our fate to live the poorest, roughest life but that we liked it like that. Angelou explains and illuminates the condition of African Americans in United States. She also promotes the importance of hardwork, a common theme, throughout autobiography in order to break the African American stereotype of laziness.

Angelou not only demonstrates the poor and dominates lifestyle of blacks but also demonstrates their attempt of resistance against white's dominating tendency. The black southern church is an avenue for subversive resistance. At the revival, the preacher gives a sermon that criticizes white power without directly naming it. He never mentions white people, but his diatribe against greedy, self-righteous employers clearly attacks whites for paying miserable wages to black field laborers. The minister's sermon is about charity, but more importantly about what charity is not. He questions white's charity as, "How can you claim to be my brother, and hate me? Is that charity? How can you claim to be sister and despise me? Is that supposed to be charity? How can you claim to be my friend and misuse and wrongfully abuse me? Is that charity?" (108).

The minister further criticizes people who give charity with the expectation that recipient will, in return, humble him or herself. He implicitly unleashes a diatribe against so-called charity from whites. He argues that charity don't go around saying that he provides her a job, and she gets the chance to call him master . Often white people expected the black recipient of their charity to accept their oppressors burning in hell with the support of divine will. The sermon promises divine revenge and divine justice. He says the people that let the white folks have their money and power and segregation and sarcasm and big houses and schools and lawns like carpets, and books and mostly let them have their whiteness. It was better to be meek and lowly,

spat upon and abused for this little time than to spend eternity frying in the fires of hell. The people at the revival could entertain fantasies of their oppressors burning in hell with the support of divine will. For the most part, they shoulder the burden of their disadvantages of poverty and discrimination with resignation, attributing their suffering to God's will. However, on occasion, the black church provides an outlet for their smoldering anger against white racism.

The racial bias of white people and its humiliating effect on black people can be understood through the happiness upon the Joe Louis's victory. Maya's description of the symbolic meaning behind the boxing match between Joe Louis and white challenger attests to the pervasive nature of racism in 1930s America. For Maya and the members of her community, Joe Louis's victory is an empowering repudiation of the negative stereotypes heaped upon blacks. Maya argues, "My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped" (49). This might be the end of the world. If Joe were back in slavery and beyond help, it would all be true, the accusations that we were lower types human beings. Only a little higher than the apes. True that we were stupid and ugly and lazy and dirty and unlucky and worst of all, that God himself hated us. The store is tensed until the fight ends and Louis wins and keeps his heavyweight champion title. There is a great celebration in the store after the referee's declarance "The Winnah and still heavyweight championship of the world-Joe Louis" (42).

In fact, Angelou presents the fight; the victory over white boxer is a kind of subtle resistance of black against white superiority. Despite recognizing the personality empowering nature of these instances of resistance, Maya's descriptions illustrates that such resistance rarely affects great change, even within African-

American community. Instead, such resistance often simply serves to save black community from drowning in the desperation and despair that envelops them. Before emancipation, educational opportunities for African Americans were rare, especially in South. After emancipation, black Americans faced hostility toward their education from their former masters. Underlying their joy, however, the desperate fact remains; Louis must bear the hopes and dreams of the entire African American community. Maya says “We didn’t breathe. We didn’t hope. We waited”(113). They all wait for Louis’s victory.

As Angelou conveys in this event, the entire black community has its hopes and psychological salvation bound in the fists of Louis, ‘the Brown Bombar,’ Angelou describes the precarious nature of black pride in the face of hostile oppressions, highlighting the staggering and wrenching significance this boxing match held for the community. The rarity of black people achieving public acclaim in both the black and white communities meant that the few who managed to do so had to bear the expectations of the black community. The match becomes an explicit staging of black against white. Louis’ loss would mean the ‘fall’ of the race and return to the idea that whites had a right to denigrate black people. His public victory, however, proves to blacks in the store that they are the most powerful people in the world and enables them to live another day with strength and vigor in the face of oppression. Racism plays many psychological games with blacks and whites, and perhaps Louis’s public recognition helps to teach both whites and blacks to accept African American as equals. Though, this is only fleeting victory, people who live far from the store stays in town that night because it is not safe for a Black man and his family to be caught on a lonely country road on a night when Joe Louis had proved that they were the strongest people in the world

This book is almost the whole picture of racist America of 1930s, it demonstrates the racial segregation prevailed in Southern Black schools. Black students are discriminated and deprived of all those facilities and advancements whereas in Central School all facilities have been given. The Central School has already been granted improvement. Mr. Edward Donleavy has said “A well-known artist was coming from little Rock to teach art to them. They were going to have the newest microscopes and chemistry equipment for their laboratory” (157). He further has assured the black people that “ if he won they could count on hearing the only colored paved playing field in that part of Arkansas”(106).

Edward Donleavy’s speech is a slap in the black community’s face. In stamps, the graduating eight-grade and high-school classes surmount the pressure poverty and racism to earn their diplomas. Donleavy’s speech indicates that their achievements in education are worthless and misdirected. Marguerite desperately compares that “White kids were going to have chance to become Galilees and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys would try to be Jene Oweness and Joe Louises” (157). Angelou writes “boys” for black students because the girls are not included even in games. In this case the black girl students are exploited racially as well as sexually. It is black patriarchy that dominated black woman by imitating the values of the whites.

Maya feels that he has blemished the joy of the graduation day by insinuating that black children only achieves greatness through sports not through academics. In fact the white folks think that there was no nobler in the mind for Negroes. The members of the eight grade class hang their heads in shame because in fact they are maids aspired to was farcical and presumptuous. Maya laments the fact that she has no control over her life and wishes that, “Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner had killed all

white folks in their beds and that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated before the singing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and that Harriet Tubman had drowned in the *Santa Maria*” (152). Donleavy’s speech makes Maya terribly angry to the point where she imagines a retelling of history that is just as murderous and violent toward white people as toward blacks. At the last with the help of Black National Anthem she has begun to take serious pride in being a member of the wonderful, beautiful, Negro race.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings demonstrates white’s meanest behaviors. White people have treated black people as they are animals even less than animals. They hate black murderously without any reason. One day Bailey returns home from an errand, pale and shaken. He asks Uncle Willie what colored people had done to white people in the first place. In fact, Bailey has seen a dead and rotten body of a black but the white man stood there looking down and grinned. Bailey desperately say “Uncle Willie, why they hate us so much (167)”. The white man has grinned upon the death of a black man and says that one nigger nobody got to worry about no more as if the death of a black is as valueless as the death of a rat or cat. This event means that in contemporary America even white people have nothing to do with people, they ‘grinned’ and ‘laughed’ upon black people’s death. But in South there is no chance of resistance against segregation.

But in San Francisco, Maya encounters a more brash form of resistance to racial inequality. Whereas Momma thought it sinful yet necessary to insist that Dr. Lincoln pay ten dollars in interest when she had not asked for it initially, Daddy Clidell’s friends lie and cheat to make \$40,000 off white men. Maya can not regard the con men as criminals because she says, “We are the victims of the world’s most comprehensive robbery. Life demands a balance. It’s all right if we do a little robbing

now” (191). Ethics, she notes, depends upon necessity and are therefore different in the black community. Despite the difference between Momma and the con men’s methods, Maya shows that in both cases the ethical standard is based on necessity and justifies the means used to produce change. Fair play ceased to have moral value when the rules of the game proved unfair.

Marguerite always acts in a womanish manner. She always acts as grown up. She thinks herself so much wiser and older in the age of fifteen. Maya’s growing her sense of self which enables her to gain a job as the first Negro on the San Francisco Street cars. Maya has had to grow up more quickly than the children around her. Her experiences as driving the car in Mexico living in the junkyard returning to witness Bailey move out of the house, and the successfully fighting to get a job as the first black conductor on the San Francisco Street cars rather than go back to a school where she would not belong, have made her feel displaced and older than her years. Maya is already on her way towards becoming a formidable character as a result of many assaults she deals with in her tender years but this doesn’t mean that Maya is an adult. Maya’s discussion of the common forces of nature foreshadows how her journey of survival has yet to meet the obstacles adolescence, sexuality, and teenage pregnancy. Those obstacles falls all as children but for black females they exacerbate an already difficult situation. Angelou writes:

The black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice white illogical hate and Black lack of power. The fact that adult Negro Female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence.

(231)

The image of female bonding through out work is one that is repeated through out the book. Maya and Momma's co -operation, Maya and Vivian's solidarity, Mrs. Flowers help to Maya and so on. It seems women have strong relationship among women than with men. This bonding becomes cross sexual after Bailey's inssassunt help for Maya, Mamma's help for black men. As an African writer Maya is always concerned with the Blacks. She does not only see the problems in life she hopes for bright future of African Americans. Angelou in her *I Know Why The Caged Birds Sings* seems as a feminist but she is more than that she is black at first.

As Feminist trend, the novelist satisfies the most of the female writers needs. The novel's protagonist and most of other characters live successful lives and gets what they desire. There develops a feminist unity among female characters. A woman gets everything what she desires. She gets identity, family, money, ownership. Most of all she gets respect and love; she gets freedom of choice. An abandoned and dominated girl changes into a free and self independent woman as Angelou writes herself as "so much more independent with a bank account and clothes that I had bought for myself that I was sure that I had learned and earned the magic formula and mine. Totally mine. No one had bought him for me. No one had helped me endure the sickly gray months"(112).

IV. Conclusion

Maya Angelou's *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* advocates the male – female solidarity for the betterment of the whole race\black people. It is a novel which encompasses male-female solidarity, sisterhood among black and white women, strong women characters with black feminist vision which are used to dismantle the whites' Eurocentric view and patriarchal hegemony launched upon the black women's autonomy. The novel deconstructs the Eurocentric patriarchy but does not replace it with matriarchy. Angelou is clear that supplanting matriarchy over patriarchy and Afrocentricism over Eurocentricism is not the solution. She demands autonomy of everybody whether they may be female or male, blacks or whites.

As we know, a black feminist must walk with the black people because it is their own race and identity. Similarly she must work with the women of other race because it is their own gender. So black feminist creates a bond with black people while fighting against white racism and creates a bond between women while concerning the patriarchal hegemony. As black women believe in communal lifestyle, they strengthen themselves by strengthening community itself. They advocate male-female solidarity to uplift their community in white dominated society.

Black Feminist must consider the view that without liberation of black community there is no possibility of emancipation of black women. So they must approve with womanism because it is the feminism of color. Because of their kinship with black male and female most of the black feminist define themselves as womanists. A womanist is feminist of the color. As womanist does not turn her back to men of her community a womanist or black feminist is directly related to the concrete history of racial and gender oppression. A black feminist is committed to the survival wholeness of gender but also for the entire race. So black feminist cannot

aside herself from the suffering of her entire race and advocates male-female bonding for racial betterment.

From the beginning of the novel we see how Angelou advocates for women's empowerment by taking a girl child as its narrator. Her life journey till her becoming of 17 years is the story of the autobiographical novel. Angelou presents all major characters as females in her autobiographical novel which act gives emphasis to the women. Though Angelou prefer to give agency to women in her book, she does not completely turn her back towards black males. In the novel she gives equal emphasis to the black males in the process of struggling against white domination. Momma has helped a black man at the cost of her life because he was accused of abusing a white woman and they have searched him for Kill.

As novel progresses ahead, the child Marguerite's life is shaped under the influence of different strong woman like Momma, her mother Mrs. Flowers and so on. Momma is the moral center of the family especially of Maya's life. While in stamps, Momma teaches Maya how to conduct herself around white people. And when Maya becomes pregnant, Vivian supports and encourages her without condemnation, and it is Vivian who gives Maya her first and most important lessons about trusting her maternal instincts like that, Mrs. Flowers helps Maya to build up confidence upon herself through the medium of communication.

The book is a autobiographical novel with full of black feminist discourses. Angelou is an innocent oppressed servant like girl grows up into mature women having child, family, identity, money, freedom and friends. Angelou's identity which was in under erasure at first gets full blossom at last. In other words 'I am' turns into 'I am here'; 'I've nothing turns into 'I've everything' little Marguerite in the process of acquiring identity does coalition with males as equally does with females. In every

hurdles of her life, she is rescued by her brother Bailey. She develops herself as a strong woman with the enormous help of her dear brother. Bailey uses his skills and status to protect Maya. With his charms he defends her against criticism and insults. Bailey and Maya share not just in tragedies but also in private jokes and a love of language and poetry. When moved around from place to place, Bailey and Maya depend on each other to achieve some semblance of stability and continuity in their lives.

Thus, *I Know why the Caged Birds Sings* creates a black society having the idea that there needs a unity among the black people while challenging the white mainstream society where it forwards the view that a bond between women is a must to challenge the patriarchy whether it is local or not. And this book also forwards the view that a bond between black males and females to challenge the white racially segregated society. The novel brings the perfect vision of African culture that comes into existence through the unity of black women and men dismantling racist Anglo-Saxon culture. For Angelou, womanist value is the best for solving problem in white racist society. It neither challenges nor supports any race of gender rather seeks and moves towards the harmony and humanity among different races and genders.

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