

Resistance for Self-formation in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the  
Caged Bird Sings*

This research paper uses Bildungsroman as theory to examine moral development and self-formation of a young black girl in South American society. The text describes the journey of the protagonist from innocence to adulthood and her coming of age which is significant but insecure in Southern America. Maya attempts to preserve her distinct personality and dignity in the African American society where she is doubly suppressed by white racist society. It also shows that how the black girl is forced to suffer throughout her life in the American South during the 1930s and in California during the 1940s. Being African American, Angelou mainly focuses on the socio-political context which has hindered on her life. Her continuous efforts to develop dignity and independence help her to make herself free from all kinds of discriminations. Likewise, Angelou becomes free from all social, racial, political, gender and cultural discriminations with the help of her will to act confidently so that Angelou's reflection of real life experiences of African-American women being trapped in the social and cultural barriers by white Americans in America gives her strength to fight against white racist society. In this regard, Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* explains their resistance against racist oppression and their voice for independence, self-definition, freedom as well as social change. Thus, this research paper explores intellectual growth and coming of age of the protagonist.

The main concern of this study is to explore how the narrator of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* becomes mature by confronting cultural, gender and political injustices. This study highlights Angelou's journey into adulthood, intellectual

growth, and growing sense of independence. Similarly, this research paper attempts to justify Angelou's psychological development, the complexity of familial relationships, and the journey towards knowing own self to get independence and identity. This report, therefore, tries to assess social, political, cultural and psychological maturation of a black girl. Basically, it deals with the protagonist's subjectivity and relationship between self and society. That is why, the study attempts to raise the political, racial and social issues that are experienced by all black women during their growing ages. Even, she explains the way she changed her identity as elevator Maya Angelou. Therefore, narrator-author has raised the voice from the perspective of marginal groups to refigure their identity. In this regard, Angelou remains ideal person to the African American women.

African American girl, Maya Angelou, can become successful to establish herself as a self-dignified woman in the white dominated racist society by going against societal norms and values. Socio-political systems determine identity. So, Angelou highlights social, political, cultural and even religious issues which have badly impacted on day to day life of African-American women. Throughout her autobiographical writing, she explores her painful experiences and dissatisfaction to the family members especially to her parents' decision. Further, the clash between self-development and society in which she is living helps her to bring change in her life to be activist, and helps to raise the voice of dominated mass. In case of marginalized people, autobiographical narrative can provide a means of coming to term with their identity thereby claiming agency. Sense of subjectivity and self-awareness of Angelou can work as a strong tool to lead her and all black women to the path of freedom and independence. In this way, she has always been a

representative person to excavate the real identity of suppressed blacks who were always deprived from their real sense of identity.

The protagonist Maya represents innocent life who is doubly victimized by racist and sexist society and she is trapped in social, cultural, religious and political barrier during post-colonial period. In the beginning of the autobiography, Maya is presented as an innocent three-year-old child but the text ends with representing her as a mother who gives a birth to a son. The whole story of the novel focuses on Angelou's maturing process from childhood to adulthood. It is also focused on intellectual development of the protagonist: spending night in junkyard taught her to live even in a critical situation. This context indicates her growing sense of independence. In this way, each and every struggles of her life is a part of education which helps to understand ups and downs of her life.

Most of the autobiographical writings connect some political revolutions which physically or mentally torture to the protagonist's life. Likewise, Angelou also portrays such significant events of civil right and great migration during post-colonial period. In that era, political and social revolutions were led by black people against injustices and inequality. It was also a time period of great migration that is why large proportion of black farmers left South America to northern cities for various purposes such as job, settlement, education, and career. Number of white people's business had been doomed because of political disorder but Angelou's grandmother was able to handle her business. That is why, the political revolutions brought great changed in the society. This revolution also opened the door to the marginalized groups who were underestimated. In this period, many black women writers raised their voice through a means of literature, so literature was taken as a strong tool for marginalized people to challenge social, cultural and political discriminations. In this way, Maya is one

among them who is able to meet her goal with the help of her autobiographical writing.

Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* illustrates the protagonist's actual life experiences over 13 years period. Comparing her life with a 'caged bird', she expresses her will to act freely like white people in the community but her awkward body and kinky hair always hinder her way of life. When she was eight years old her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman raped her and she became speechless. She did not talk to anyone except her brother Bailey. Meanwhile, threat given by Freeman to kill Bailey shows that she has done something wrong. This type of crucial incidents are not only faced by Maya but also experienced by all Southern African-American women who struggled with harsh realities of life. So, this autobiographical text becomes a prominent agent for blacks to fight against white racist society. By exploring her personal story, she describes the context of conservative society and political situations that are governed by white society. Thus, Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* includes all black women's sufferings in their life and their attempt to change themselves from victim of racism to self-dignified women.

The objection for self-formation in the racist society, author-narrator struggles to break norms and values. In autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* the protagonist Angelou confronts huge social and cultural discriminations in her journey from childhood to adulthood. There is restriction to the black women even though she tries to develop her personality and individuality by going against society so that she becomes first black woman streetcar conductor in San Francisco. Similarly, separation from parents generates alienation in the community so she does not feel attached to any place. However, for a black child to oppose the norms and values is very complex

task in the society, she become successful at the end of the story. That is why, her strong desire of independence is to construct self-dignity in the society. Along with self-development she highlights her maturing process. In fact, being a social agent Maya is an abstract representation of an individual or organization that has some degree of autonomy in her capacity to make choices and to act independently on those choices.

Thus, the narrator, Angelou emphasizes self-discovery in the social and cultural barrier. In this way, Angelou has an agency who appears as the master of her own story which comes in her first person narrative point of view. In this autobiographical text, her major focus is on the journey into adulthood, self-definition and intellectual development. So, Angelou continues her struggles in spite of various social and political hindrances in the path of life. Therefore, Angelou has remained a civil-right activist throughout her life.

This research explores the coming of age and process of being matured of the protagonist Angelou through Bildungsroman perspective. The whole story is centered on Angelou's maturing process because the text describes the journey from innocence to adolescence. It also focuses on moral and intellectual development of the narrator in the path of life. The text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* looks at the experiences of African-American marginalized women and the way they challenged all kind of discriminations, dominations, and isolation with the help of their will to act independently, to develop personal dignity and self-definition. To support its research claim, the research applies the bildungsroman as theory to analyze the harsh experiences of life of a black girl during growing ages in the postcolonial period. Therefore, the researcher applies Marc Redfield's idea of "Aesthetic ideology and the

bildungsroman”, Michael Beddow’s concept of “narrative form”, and James Hardin’s idea of “coming of age.”

Maya Angelou’s autobiographical text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* explores the protagonist’s journey from childhood to adulthood. It is resistance for self-formation which portrays excessive domination, cruelty, extortion, displacement, and injustices that impose up on protagonist’s life. The autobiography directly or indirectly deals with the power of African-American women to survive and shape their own future despite hardships and challenges in the white dominated society. Angelou also emphasizes on the significance of education in her life which helps her to conscious about her own identity. Angelou’s most of the writings are centered on the content of family, sexuality, identity, displacement and individuality. Based on these contents, Angelou shares her unusual, intense, poignant and actual childhood experiences being narrator through her autobiographical text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She also connects her experiences to all black women dealing with sexism, isolation, and classism. By writing autobiography, she tries to give voice to voiceless mass and Angelou also discusses the social, cultural, gender and political injustices which are faced by all African American people in their daily life. So, this novel is a strong weapon to oppose discrimination.

This issue that is depicted in this autobiography is the common issues in American society during nineteenth century. Numerous critics have examined the autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* from various point of view although it is an exploration of personal experiences. Mark Osteen says:

Angelou tells of title sensory details that make her life working and living in the store an adventure for a young girl. She recalls the smells, and unfamiliarity of the place, and the constant stream of people who made the

place seem exciting and almost magical. However, the theme of romance verses reality soon becomes plain. For even as cotton pickers come in each morning, each afternoon they come back bitter and wonder as to how to make enough money. (19)

He reveals the critical life of a young black girl in Stamps, Arkansas where she is living adventure life. For Osteen, Angelou points the different between morning and reality of the afternoon because in morning the cotton pickers come with the hope for better life but in the late afternoons revealed the harsh realities of black southern life. Therefore, they struggle to survive confronting hard realities of life.

Focusing on contemporary issues, another critic Pierre Walker complains that “African-American authors have used the same strategy to fight the belief in racial hierarchy that relegated them to second class citizen status” (92). One way to do this is to produce high art which is supposed to be one of the achievements of the highest orders of human civilization. Throughout the autobiographical work, most of the authors express their anxiety and dissatisfaction toward society. But, by writing autobiography, they are able to establish their dignity even though hindrances multiple issues like identity, sexuality, class, racism, and gender in the societies which make themselves free from all kinds of discriminations as well as help to bring social change.

While Angelou wrote her own life story, her voice portrayed the real life experiences of all African American people. She engaged with her narratives playing an active role in allowing reader to hear the voice of slave women because white people always see the black people in a typical frame of stereotypes but Angelou subverts such tendency. Likewise, the critic Alice Walker analyses this text through

the formalistic view in the article titled “In Search of our Mother’s Garden”. 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 a 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 at the expense of the formal but instead. Indeed, some of the well-received works on American literature in the last decade offer compelling demonstrations of such a symbiosis of form and content. (93)

Walker focuses on the form and content of the text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* to support thematic unity of the novel. Further, she says that the form of the text consists of political and social aspects of the novel that Maya presents by embedding multiple voices throughout the private life narrative. Angelou also reflects vivid scenes of the political, religious, cultural and social injustices which has affected to the mass. The autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an example of African American women’s real pain during the post-colonial period in the white racist society.

African American women’s quest for identity in white racist society is presented in Angelou’s autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that provides wider opportunity to the people who are dominated and it also makes black people aware of their identity. Her autobiographical work provokes sense of subjectivity and self-awareness that can work as a protector to save their identity, freedom and independence. The critic Eleanor W. Traylor in the article *The protocol*



*of wonder in the Enunciatory Narrative of Maya Angelou*, states that the “cyclopean eye” of a universalizing standard of beauty that represses Marguerite’s ability to imagine beauty, especially that of her own enunciation. She is struggling with other things” (24). Marguerite’s concept of awkward body and kinky and curly hair always represses her ability to imagine beauty. Angelou’s awkward physical structure always forces her to struggle with other things. But, finally Angelou recognizes herself as black beauty and able to change herself from victim of racism to self-dignified woman to respond to all prejudices.

Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* describes up-coming ages and development of self-definition of the protagonist. Numerous critics examine Angelou’s autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* from various perspectives like racism, tragedy and gender. Probably those ideas could not cover proper ideas. No one has done research from the perspective of Bildungsroman. So that this research paper concerns with the bildungsroman genre to demonstrate moral, psychological and intellectual development of a young protagonist Maya who is innocent black girl at the beginning of the novel but she is matured woman at the end of the text. It is also similar to a coming-of-age story which shows the early ages of a character’s growth and development, for instance; the author-narrator Angelou becomes conscious about her identity and dignity. Being a black girl, she is a victim of both racist and sexist society while growing up ages. Introducing her actual or metaphorical journey from youth to maturity, she portrays various injustices which make her too much difficult to adjust in the society. That is why, the goal of this journey is reconciliation between the desire for individuation and the demands of socialization. Connecting with her painful past experiences, she gives the voices to voiceless people to fight against social and political injustices. Therefore, she is role

model to the African American women. So, this research explores her growing sense of independence and intellectual growth by connecting political and social injustices.

In this paper, “Resistance for Self-formation in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” analyzes through a Bildungsroman genre to examine her maturing process and self-awareness up to 16 years old. It centers on Angelou’s hardships, troubles and misery in the patriarchal American society. The narrator, Angelou shares her painful experiences from the first person narrative point of view. She writes autobiography being narrator to present her coming of age which explores mental and behavioral development of Marguerite. Being example, Angelou reflects her real life experiences which faced by African-American women and they struggle without identity. The autobiographical text presents Marguerite’s innocent life at the beginning but at the end she is presented as a matured and self-dignified woman. From the development of the plot structure, we can say that it is bildungsroman novel because it revolves around Angelou’s childhood days, entrance into adolescence and confrontation of harsh realities of life.

Usually, the origin of the Bildungsroman genre is dated to the publication of Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship’ by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. At first, the genre had huge impacted on Europe even though it arose in Germany. When Goethe’s novel was translated by Thomas Carlyle into English and published in 1824, then many British writers wrote novels inspired by it. That is why, Bildungsroman genre was highly popularized throughout the world and many authors begin to write childish novels emphasizing on their coming of age.

Bildungsroman emphasizes on the education and maturity of the main character. It is centered on progression of development of the young protagonist into adulthood. It is similar to coming of age story. The focus on coming of age of

adulthood is a major feature of the Bildungsroman genre which is recognized how it educates its readers or audiences about their personal growth and self-awareness throughout her/his experiences. So, coming of age story mainly targets to the youth and adolescence because it teaches shifting process of protagonist's life from innocence to adolescence.

Most of the books based on the bildungsroman genre center around the adolescent's coming ages by showing process of maturation. In the text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, being narrator, Angelou narrates the story intertwining her personal childhood experiences with growing sense of independence. Every section of the novel highlights Angelou's awareness focusing on the education and up-coming ages. It also shows physical development within moral lesson so she is conscious about her identity and career. Even she is influenced by literature so she reads books such as Bible and novels particularly Shakespeare's books and other black author's books which shows her interest in the education. Further, the Bildungsroman genre examines how it teaches teenagers the moral lesson along with explaining importance of life. Basically, Bildungsroman theory is known to educate its readers about their personal growth and self-independence. Thus, this genre presents personal experiences to the reader to understand different stages of life.

In addition, it often tells story about coming ages of the protagonist, focusing on the narrator or major character. It also introduces the actual or spiritual journey of the hero from youth to maturity. The goal of the journey is search for individuation and the demand of socialization. So, the atmosphere around the hero is influenced by being matured. In this regard, Hardin illustrates that:

Coming of age novels present more of the people and the surroundings influencing the protagonist and explaining to us the gradual formation of his

inner self that is to be presented. Also, this types of novel shows more events and happenings with their emotional effects on the protagonist, whom we should see becoming through himself. (17)

To understand something new, we should be needed some factors either internal or external way in order to be impressed to the person. In this novel, surrounding environment influences Maya to acknowledge different places which give additional information about morality.

The majority of black people lived in Arkansas, Stamps. It was racist place where Angelou often insulted by white people so she was curious about her blackness and ugliness. In this way, every activity that is done by white people upon black people is an example of awareness which provides knowledge to go against discrimination because each and every activity has connection with emotion and education which teaches how to confront obstacles and how to adjust in the new places. Similarly, when she went to dental with her grandmother, Dentist Lincoln told that “Annie, you know I don’t treat nigra, colored people...Annie, everyone has a policy. In this world you have to have a policy. Now, my policy is I don’t treat colored people” (188). White dentist showed his inhuman behavior underestimating them. Further he said that “Annie, my policy is I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a niger’s” (189). In this way, black people did not have secure life. Therefore, she is keen to know why black people have been treated in such a way. In fact, here not only Maya suffers from the white people but also whole black people.

Likewise, Bildungsroman links idea with the culture because the protagonist displays her attitude or feeling toward community by reflecting common socio-political factors such as racism, politics, history, language, and so on which are hindered in the path of life of the protagonist. To support this idea, Marc Redfield’s

article *The Phantom Bildungsroman* elaborates “Now Bildung is intimately associated with the idea of culture and designates primarily the properly human way of developing one’s natural talents and capacities” (47). By connecting cultural idea, it demonstrates feelings or attitudes toward societal norms and values and it also shows that development of the natural capacities and talents of the protagonist. In the novel, Angelou displays cultural and ritual issues which are confronted by her being a black child during adulthood in the racist African American society.

Angelou often struggled with appalling incidents that helps to resistant to the racist community. At age ten, Angelou took a job as maid in white woman’s house named Mrs. Viola Cullinan who called Maya by manipulating her name “Marry” for her own convenience. She never called Angelou by her real name “Marguerite”. Her real identity was lost. She wanted to escape from the job but she was compelled to do. She made plan to break Mrs. Cullinan’s favorite dishes and noticed to Mrs. Cullinan by saying “My name wasn’t Marry” (111). In this way, Mrs. Cullinan realized that she did not like calling her as Marry and then she called Maya by her original name “Marguerite” so that she could find her real identity through indirect fighting with her. It explores human nature which is a way of developing one’s morality and personality.

The bildungsroman genre approaches entirely from different ways towards the story of formation. Marc Redfield talks about the novel of formation that reveals on a self-referential aesthetic ideology. For example:

Since the *bildungsroman* narrates the acculturation of a self – the integration of a particular “I” into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into to the universal subjectivity of humanity – the genre can be said to

repeat, as its identity or content, its own synthesis of particular instance and general form. (30)

Bildungsroman text presents the socio-political context by highlighting individuation of the protagonist and by integrating it with a particular 'I' in the society but finally it becomes universal subject of humanity. Likewise, Angelou in her text, mainly emphasizes on self-formation where the story begins with specific 'I'. Here pronoun 'I' is not only related to Angelou's personal life but also represents all African American female. So, Maya is an abstract representation of whole black women who are subjugated by patriarchal society.

Generally, most of the Bildungsroman genres are associated with individual subjectivity which connects with self and society and by which it generates a clash between them because they always be fighting to achieve their goals either in external ways or the internal ways. Further, most of the protagonists refuse to go into the societal norms in their personal or professional lives to get their place although accepting its values and rules which are necessary in their life. In this regard, Angelou wanted to break rules and regulations so it was a time "women had replaced men on the street cars as conductors and motormen, and the thought of sailing up and down the hills of San Francisco in a dark-blue uniform, with a money changer at my belt, caught my fancy" (265). Being a street car conductor in San Francisco provides sense of identity and independence for her and also recorded first black woman streetcar conductor in white racist society. She suggested that "Life is going to give you just what you put in it. Put your whole heart in everything you do, and pray, then you can wait" (269). So, whatever obstacles come it does not matter. If you put whole heart in it, everything helps you to become independent. It also encourages to all black women

to be independence and to fight against racism. That is why, if you do something from your heart, that helps you to achieve your goal.

Similarly, awkward feeling about her physical structure was a major problem in Angelou's life. Further, she was doubt about her sex because of ugly body, kinky or curly hair and her physical structure was like a man. That is why, Maya thought herself as a lesbian even though she did not know what was lesbian. She said, "[t]he well loneliness was my introduction to lesbianism and what I thought of as pornography" (273). Feeling of lesbian made her isolation and nervous. Her loneliness was an introduction of gay although she was unknown about the definition of lesbian. Thus, she did not have feeling of attachment to anyone and anywhere.

However, Angelou wanted to get a boyfriend; "What I needed was a boyfriend. A boyfriend would clarify my position to the world and, even more important, to myself. A boyfriend's acceptance of me would guide me into that strange and exotic land of frills and femininity" (280). She wanted to clarify her position in the world getting a boyfriend. And, she took it as an important thing in her life to avoid sense of gay. But she crossed the limitation and became pregnant; "[t]hree weeks later, having thought very little of the strange and strangely empty night, I found myself pregnant" (283). It was strong evidence for her to reduce ambiguity about her sexual organism like lesbian although the society perceived pregnant as an illegal act because she was unmarried. But her family was very supportive so this pregnancy case did not matter for her and they accepted it easily without any hesitation. That is why, it was easy for her to adjust in the society and she recognized her identity as woman.

Angelou was three years old and her brother, Bailey, was four as the story begins. Both Maya and Bailey was immature and innocent black kids who were sent

by parents from California to their parental grandmother Annie Henderson was known as Mamma at the segregated Arkansas, Stamps was a small village. They were unknown about what exactly was going to happen but readers realize that the protagonist has grown as a matured and she is equipped with the knowledge of self-independence. In the text Angelou says, “Bailey was the greatest person in my world. And the fact that he was my brother, 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” (21). Angelou expresses how much valuable her relationship with her brother Bailey is. So, Bailey is an inspiration for her to live rather than her parents.

She spent long time in absence of her parents. But, when a year later her father Big Bailey came to Arkansas and, took Angelou and Bailey with him to St. Louis where their mother lives. She finds her mother too beautiful and says, “I had never seen a woman as pretty as she who was called ‘mother’” (60). When Bailey and Angelou met their mother, they forgot everything where they felt new world of life. “Bailey on his part fell instantly and forever in love. I saw his eyes shining like hers; he had forgotten the loneliness and the nights when we had cried together because we were “unwanted children” (60). It was the happiest moment for their life because they met mother after long time period. For children, it may prevent them from being able to identify with a family, a place and community to build strong relationship, a stable identity and personality, and their feelings of reunion to the family members. But, moving children frequently in term of career formation from one place to another place has been disturbed in their life and make confused about their subjectivity. But, reunion with their mother makes happy and avoids their alienation so they feel unity.



On vacation, Angelou went to southern California with her father Big Bailey to spend summer. In this situation, she required the ability to adjust to an unknown land, unfamiliar weather and unknown people, who may be welcoming her. And it was necessary to be able to adjust oneself to a new culture and way of life. But when Angelou fought with her father's girlfriend she became homeless. "I spent the day wandering aimlessly through the bright street. On one flat street I passed a junkyard, littered with the carcasses of old cars" (251). For her, the old car became new home even she developed survival strategies associated with a gang and sleeping in the carcasses of an old cars where she found liberty and freedom although not secure. Gang was a new community in which she learnt to be humble and social. On the other hand, she learnt driving; "During the month that I spent in the yard I learned to drive, to curse and to dance" (253). It was an opportunity to be self-confidence although difficult situation.

There are some inciting incidents that pushes the protagonist into their journey in difficulties. When she was at the age of ten, she was molested and raped by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. For her it was critical situation because she was not only injured by physically but also mentally. Even she traumatized by this incident and became speechless but she spoke with her brother Bailey. Mr. Freeman threatened to kill Bailey if she told about her rape so she had compelled to conceal this event. In this regard, identity crisis in the community. She told, "In the first weeks my family accepted my behavior as a post-rape, post-hospital affliction. They understood that I could talk to Bailey, but to no one else" (88). Her family accept easily as a post-rape so Angelou feel secure of her life.

After long time she met Mrs. Bertha Flowers who was a beautiful and educated woman. Bertha told her about the lesson of the positive power of words in

conversation. Mrs. Flower advised Angelou to cope with the situation; “Bear in mind, language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone that separates him from the lower animals... Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning” (98). Then Angelou started focusing on the importance of words and pronunciation which helped to change her life. Thus, she practiced every day to read loudly to become ordinary girl. Further she began conversation with her Momma by using heavy words and elegant command of Standard English.

Although Angelou confronts various obstacles, her continuous efforts help to develop her personality. In fact, her maturation process going on along with sense of independence, finally she becomes capable to give a birth to a child name Guy Jonson. In this regard, her mother Vivian fully supported her; “If you’re for the right thing, then you do it without thinking” (289). After the birth of Angelou’s son her mother reassured her that she is going to be a good mother. Despite, happy ending, Maya does not give a close ending in the autobiography because it generates a kind of curiosity to the readers’ mind: what will be happening next.

However, most of the Bildungsroman novels are similar to the elements of autobiographical fictions because the author valorizes their own individual experiences. The autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* demonstrates Angelou’s painful childhood experiences by linking political and literary disciplines with vivid images. According to Dilthey in a *Bildungsroman*, “[a] regular development is observed in the life of the individual: each of the stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage” (qtd. in Boes 232: 390). It takes content as a specific thing. Similarly, the protagonist in every novel or story portrays shifting process of being a youth and entering into adulthood is

generally inexperienced at the beginning of the narrative. Even the story revolves around the single-protagonist's maturation process.

The term Bildungsroman is a story about education which is similar to the coming-of-age story because it illustrates the early years of a character's growth and development. In Bildungsroman, the character is more specific and has to experience some form of moral development. Moreover, coming-of-age story explains an actual or metaphorical journey of protagonist from childhood to adulthood. Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* centers on moral lesson because her each and every experiences are linked with intellectual growth and the whole story focuses on her upcoming age. With the changes in time she gets matured and becomes successful to establish herself as a mother.

First of all, the Bildungsroman genre was applied in educational curricula but later it was taken as the personal development of an individual. In defining Bildungsroman, Wulf Koepke argues:

Preceded historically all institutional changes in Germany and elsewhere that based educational curricula and methods on its application. The Humboldtian model of university in particular, with its stated aim of independence of learning and the development of the Bildungsroman, although this is done often, explicitly or implicitly. Bildung, meaning 'formation', transferring the formation of external features to personality as a whole. (130)

Bildungsroman stands for education, refinement and cultivation in term of broad humanistic sense. According to Koepke, Bildungsroman represents to the developing process of being matured from innocent to childhood. In the beginning of the text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou presents her protagonist Marguerite as a

three-year-old innocent girl but at the end of the story she is 16 years old with matured body and self-consciousness.

We can read this autobiography by using various techniques. Bildungsroman is one of them. Michael Beddow's *The Fiction of Humanity* describes Bildungsroman in the concept of narrative form. He writes:

Such novels are highly stylized, symbolic works and the expression and recommendation of a particular understanding of the nature of humanity through the more or less overtly factious narrative of the central character's development is...The most important feature which gives the novel on which study concentrates their peculiar generic identity. The feature, above all sets them apart from other works. (56)

Beddow states that stories are highly symbolic although the author had understood the nature of writing so the text is focused on the narrative technique. From the perspective of narrative way in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the protagonist Maya is the central character who presents from the perspective of first person narrative point of view.

Similarly, the title 'caged bird' gives metaphorical meaning which represents all Southern Americans especially women. Angelou, who prisms in social, political and other disciplines so that she wants to be free like a bird in her life in the racist society but laws are not favored to her that is why it is compulsion to live in this conservative society in coming days. In this way, the story is centered on the coming-of-age of Marguerite who gets maturity at the end of the story. The story is interrelated to each other parts with the sense of adulthood and begins with the difficulty of life within formation of story that is why it concerns with the maturation of protagonist.

However, in bildungsroman, the whole story often centers on the innocent children and maturation process of a single person in term of searching for meaning. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson “the bildungsroman narrates the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network larger than the family or the religious community” (102). In the religious and racial community, formation of self is very complicated one to the protagonist particularly women. Angelou is innocent black girl who has confronted different types of social or racial injustices in the racist African American society. So, throughout the autobiography, Angelou tries to save her own personality and explore her growing up age by connecting her experiences.

Typically, we often find a character in bildungsroman feels alienated and struggles with injustices although ends on a positive note with the feelings a sense of self-realization. In the text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing*, Angelou was perceived by white children as a humorous but she did not know what did make them laugh. That is why, it makes her apart from the community and also feeling awkward, kinky or curly hair, and black color which often hinders in her life. Then she expressed important of her brother; “Of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child, the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and hope of wholeness, is the unshaking need for an unshakable God. My pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come” (23). She believed that her life would be senseless and even impossible without the presence of her brother. On the other hand, it shows the self-progress of the major character, Angelou, throughout the text. In this regard, the narrator’s aim is self-development through a series of hardship encountered along the way of life. Thus, the story ends with the positive way.

The journey of the protagonist is not easy because cultural forces become obstacles on day to day life of protagonist. Jerome Buckley in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) writes that “The Bildungsroman in its pure form has been defined as a ‘novel of all around development or self-culture’ with a more or less conscious attempt on the part of hero to integrate his power to cultivate himself by his experience” (13). The narrator becomes matured through what she does and makes it her own personal experiences which give right to the readers to analyze the process to come across.

Bildungsroman also includes moral issue telling personal story because after reading the text, readers can get moral lesson like consciousness. In this regard, to clarify this issue Fritz Martini writes in his bildungsroman – *Terms and Theory* (1991) as:

The novel appears as a traditional form between reality that is, “history” and poesies. It deceives through the impression of reality wrought by prose and, in fictive narration, weaves with...the prosaic mood in which people usually find themselves into an entertaining poetic work. Moreover, it encourages the cultivation of the reader more fully than any other types of novel. It presents material according to the laws of beauty, as an artwork and it communicates to serve a purpose, to teach, and to improve. (17-18)

By connecting themselves to the protagonist and the author, readers can have opportunity to learn or understand something about moral values. Further, if the readers develop their relationship with the main character and the author, they can realize some sense of intimacy such as familiarity, reliability and the personal growth of the hero. In the autobiographical text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya has good relationship with her grandmother and brother but she has doubt on her

relationship with the parents' because they abandoned her at the very young age. That is why she feels guilty and insecure because of lack of parents' love and affection.

There is kind of inciting incident that pushes the protagonist into their journey. It is usually something to a great emotional loss, like separation from parents and death of neighbors. She is unknown about death. According to James Hardin in *Reflection and Action* (1991): "Bildungsroman readily accommodated the concern of new middle-class reading public, willing to be absorbed by the history of an individual and gratified to see how its collective experience of social mobility might be rendered as the individual's pursuit of an idea of self-development" (xxiv). Based on the idea of Hardin, we know that how the factors come around the protagonist's life thereby affecting his/her growth and development. In the text *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou feels something loss because of separation from parents which effects on her growing up ages so she feels alone. Similarly, neighbor's death also makes her pity but it teaches reality about life and death so different factors which effect on the protagonist's life is an education to understand the life.

Thus, Bildungsroman genre is concerned with the major protagonist's process of the formation of self thereby it demonstrates self-consciousness of the hero in different stages of life. Based on coming of age, the protagonist searches meaning to the questions of her curiosity. In the beginning, the hero is innocent but at the end of the novel she is seen with matured girl. However, there are some kinds of inciting incident that pushes the protagonist into their journey in difficulties such as rape. Their journey will not be easy; in fact, the protagonist will face many difficulties and failures along the way which teaches us moral lesson of the life. The hero will fight to

survive in the society. Therefore, this genre is popular in literature and main target of the book is young and adolescent readers.

After the detailed analysis and study of Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the researcher has clearly sketched the progression of Angelou's self-centered childhood to matured young woman. The core finding of this research is to achieve maturation and self-development of the protagonist, Angelou who is discriminated by the racist society during her growing ages. Each and every chapters are equipped with Angelou's past experiences which are connected with each other and convey the universal experience of the black female in African American society.

At the very young age, Angelou confronted various obstacles in American society when her parents divorced. She internalized the certain journey of her life in the racial and gender inequity since she began to grow up in segregated Stamps, Arkansas. Along with subjugation, Angelou mainly focuses on various steps of childhood life. Similarly, when Angelou was at the age of eight, she was molested and raped by her mother's boyfriend. This event was the bitter experience because she was not only injured physically but also mentally. But, after long time she was able to engage in reading books which were more helpful to recover and cope up with this critical situation. Further it also taught about ups and downs on her life and it could realize her physical growth. Along with physical development, she recognized her personality. For example; when Angelou goes to spend summer vacation with her father, the misunderstanding occurs between Angelou and father's girlfriend as a result she becomes homeless in southern California. Spending nights in junkyard where she uses old car and she engages with gang also. In fact, she learns survival strategies and adjustment in unfamiliar situation. It also helps to understand life as



well as community. Therefore, she finds better life such as freedom, and harmony. In this way, it is an opportunity to observe the outer world closely and an examination to understand value of life as well.

This research presents process of maturation and self-representation during the course of life. The bildungsroman genre is mainly concerned with the maturation process including intellectual and moral development of the protagonist. Angelou's every experiences has connection with the moral lesson thereby reader can understand her changeable journey of life. Angelou is an innocent three years old black girl who is doubly victimized in between political and social injustices. Therefore, Angelou tries to come out from that atmosphere by confronting various obstacles. Formation of self is significant issue for her although restriction for black people. But Angelou proves herself as a brave woman and does whatever she wants very confidently. So, her hard works are example of all black people who have lost their own place or identity in the southern America. Each and every journey of her life teaches how to adjust in new culture. Thus, her practical experiences represent significant voices of all black people.

Angelou is the victim of racism. Further, she has to struggle with various difficult situations though she become successful to establish her own reputation. Angelou also created her own image becoming mother and the black woman streetcar conductor in San Francisco, and she did so with the support of her family and female predecessors such as Mamma, Vivian, Grandmother Baxter and Mrs. Bertha. Later on her early years, she established her as professional dancer, singer, writer, editor and so on. Thus, the narrators succeed to gain name and fame in spite of the pains and sufferings in her life.

Finally, Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* explores the progression of the Angelou's development from self-centeredness to matured young woman. Identity is ongoing process although Angelou able to establish her identity as streetcar conductor, marguerite, black beauty and mother although a lot of hindrances of discriminated society. At the beginning of the text she is inexperienced black girl who is trapped in social and cultural barrier but at the end of the story Angelou becomes matured girl who gets her own identity in the racist African-American society. So, in the autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the narrator Marguerite Anne Jonson represents her suffering and brutal treatment but in a context that is also becomes the story of resistances.

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