

Tribhuvan University

Racial and Gender Trauma in Maya Angelou's

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Letter of Approval

The Thesis entitled “ Racial and Gender Trauma in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sabita Dam, has been approved by the undersigned member of Research Committee.

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Letter of Recommendation

Sabita Dam has completed her thesis entitled “Racial and Gender Trauma in Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from July 2015 to April 2016. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

Maheshwor Poudel

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Abstract

This research work analyzes racial and gender trauma evoking the tormented state of the narrator, Maya in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Taking the ideas from Jeffery C. Alexander's notion of cultural trauma, the research analyzes the experiences of depressed African American women without identities. The narrator struggles to develop her dignified self and nonconformist outlook comes to block her after she was raped by her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman. The mysterious murder of her rapist creates the guilt, shame in her psychic as she thinks that she is responsible for his murder. The narrator suffering from the guilt and self-loathing results in her psychic turmoil. She stops speaking to people except her brother, Bailey. In the novel, 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. In this regard, this research aims to show reasons that cause the traumatic situation in the narrator due to several events that erupt in African American societies. Not only this, this research work explores issues related to the cause of racial and gender trauma and discusses how the narrator succeeds in working through trauma while in some cases the narrator just acts out it.

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Hazards of Racial and Gender Inequality in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

This research analyzes the racial and gender trauma endured by the narrator of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Throughout her struggles, the narrator goes through a long period of traumatic suffering. Her effort to preserve her dignity and her distinct personality in the African American society is repeatedly hindered by the setbacks and sexual assault on her. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* published in 1969 describes Maya's coming of age as a precious but insecure black girl in the American South during the 1930s and subsequently in California during the 1940s. Maya Angelou being African American, this text mainly has the issues to counter against the double subjugation of black women in terms of race and gender. Her efforts to develop creativity, dignity, career and good standing faces unexpected difficulties. Her struggle is to build up independent mindset and non-conformist outlook come to halt as she is raped by her mother's lover. They went to the court and denied he had raped her. Aftermath Mr. Freeman was found to be murdered. The surprising murder of Mr. Freeman sows the seed of guilt, shame on her mind. Surrounded by shame, guilt, psychic instability and various other setbacks, she hopes to live meaningfully with dignity and recognition but still she has been traumatized by the racial discrimination and male supremacy in African American society.

The major thrust of this study is to explore how the narrator of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is traumatized by various practices like dehumanization, discrimination, alienation and sexual assault. This study highlights the fear, tensions, haunting memories and sorrowful situation of the narrator and her traumatic experience. This research also tries to find out the real situation of black women living in African American societies and explores how an innocent girl is the

victimized by male because of the patriarchal society. This project therefore tries to assess the traumatic experience of a black girl living in a racist society. This research work helps the reader get clear about the racial and gender bias the narrator faced.

Maya Angelou and her brother, Bailey were forced to live with their grandmother, Momma at St. Louis after their parents decide to divorced. She was just only three years old when their parents got separated. They had to struggle with the pain of having been parentless, though they were taken good care and nurture by their grandmother, Momma. Spending her childhood in Stamps, Arkansas, she faced a deep rooted southern racism. She was tormented with the belief of not being equal to other children, even black children living in Stamps.

She has kinky, curly hair and the black complexion. So, people living there used to make fun of her. But her brother used to support Angelou and console her from weeping and dehumiliation. He used to beat and scold to those who make jokes upon her. When Maya began to work for the white lady Mrs. Bertha, she manipulated Maya calling her as Mary for herself comfortable. Maya loses her identity she had. She was psychologically traumatized being identityless. It is not only identity loss of Maya. It reflects the identity loss of entire African American. When Maya got the rotten tooth, her grandmother took her to the only dentist in Stamps, a whiteman Dr. Lincoln. He insulted Maya as commodified object saying he would put his hand in a dog's mouth instead to heal her problem. Such mistreatment and racial discrimination upon Maya by white doctor Lincoln hindered her mind.

Likewise, Maya faces the traumatic event when she was in grade eight. A white student delivered his speech by explaining that Black students are expected to become only athletes or servants. It clearly makes the difference between Blacks and Whites. Such bitter and traumatic experience Maya faces, has not only been the

individual trauma but the collective trauma faced by all African Americans. She was just eight years old when her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman sexually molested her and later raped her. Maya was threatened not to tell anybody. If she said to anybody, he would kill her brother Bailey. Maya tried to keep it secret but her family discovered it. They went to the court but Maya refused to tell the truth that Mr. Freeman had molested and raped her. Later Mr. Freeman was found to be murdered. Maya found herself in guilt and shame of having been sexually abused. She was traumatized by the guilt that she was responsible for the murder of Mr. Freeman because she denied in the court that he had raped her. After that she started staying mute with everybody except Bailey. It is also the effect of traumatization.

At the age of sixteen, she hid her pregnancy and graduated from the high school. The text closes with the confidence of caring and nurturing her baby child, Guy Johnson. Throughout her life, Maya faces racial and gender segregation among blacks and whites living in American society. So, she was traumatized.

Different critics have observed this novel from different perspectives. Regarding Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Parker Mathew makes the following remarks:

Maya's personal displacement echoes then larger societal forces that displaced blacks all across the country. She realizes that thousands of other terrified on their own to newly affluent parents in northern cities, or black to southern towns when the North failed to supply the economic prosperity it has promised. African Americans descend from slaves who were displaced from their homes and homelands in Africa.(13)

Mathew critiques Maya's sufferings as every black girl's tragedy. Whatever Maya faces the terrifying lynch mobs in the south Louis is the suffering of all the black who are displaced from Africa.

Karen Weekes concentrates on the valorous and puzzling disposition of Maya. He takes Maya as the most complex character. Weeks discloses the following view regarding Maya:

Maya's real name is Marguerite, and most of her family members call her Ritie. The fact that she chooses to go by Maya as an adult, a name given to her by her brother, Bailey, indicates the depth of love and admiration she holds for him. When Maya reunites with her mother and her mother's family in St.Louis at age eight, one of her uncle tells her the story of how she got this name. Thus, finding her family is connected with finding her name and her identity.(16)

For Weekes, naming is a sensitive issue because it provides a sense of identity and close relationship with the family members in this hostile world. Maya calling as 'Ritie' by her family members and she prefers to hear as 'Maya' in her adult stage shows her core connection with her family members and finding her identity.

Scott Rettberg is of the opinion that in the mind of narrator, obsession, and guilt are represented as the ruling motive. These feelings are intense, over-mastering, passion. Such chronic sense of fear is gratified at the expense of feminine feeling. Rettberg makes the additional commentary in the following excerpt:

There are different devices that Angelou uses to communicate her message. Angelou uses figurative language to bring the reader to further understand the point she is trying to make. Angelou has strong use of Onomatopoeia. The most powerful use of Onomatopoeia is at

the end. The fact that she winced definitely makes the reader realize the determination and pain the Negroes went through just to make something of them.(12)

Scott Rettberg concerns that Maya is certainly innovative in her choice of style, diction and figurative language. She uses such forms and genres in her work to bring reader understand the point she is trying to express. The use of such diction and figurative language makes the reader go deeply with the pain of suffers.

Mark Osteen examines sensuous images in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* which goes in human life every day. Evocation of puzzling impact makes each pronouncement regarding to this aspect of the novel:

Angelou tells of little 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)

For Osteen, Angelou notes the difference between morning and the hard reality of the afternoons. In the morning, along with the sunshine, the cotton-pickers come with the hope, sounds and smells of imagination for better life but in the late afternoons revealed the harshness of Black southern life. Thus, he critiques that to sustain the family requires, go through the reality of life, and struggle to survive instead of just imagining for the better life and staying lavishly.

Similarly, other critic Tom Dillard analyzes this book through the perspective of individual difference against whites' against habit of viewing the Negro race as 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 current racial mistrust which grips our county.

Tom Dillard has taken this book as a remembrance for the black and as revelation for the white. He opines this book is about the individual's uniqueness of each black male and 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 Alice Walker dissects this text through the formalistic perspective in the article named "In Search of our Mother's Gardens" in *Womanist Prose*. 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 and the formal as inextricably related. 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)

In these lines, Walker says the form and the content of the text *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 text carry the political aspects or themes of the novel. So people should not focus only one aspect.

In this way, numerous critics and reviewers have diversely interpreted Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Some of the critics connect racial discrimination to Maya's sufferings. Other's take her tragedy in relation with the family. Furthermore, some talks about the use of figurative language in her text. But none of them examines the issues of the exploration of racial and gender trauma endured by the narrator. The torturous and traumatic effects of various events like her rape by her mother's lover, her rejection in the community of other black girls and family disintegration. The society she lives in is dominated by racially charged norms. Discriminations, deprivation, seclusion, inability to express repressed feelings are all the effects of racism. Racial politics and various manifestations of discriminations give torturous and traumatic agony. Being a black girl, Maya is subjected to various traumatic situations which arise in racially divided society. Since, the topic of the disruptive effect of late capitalism is untouched and unexplored, original topic.

Trauma means "wound" in Greek often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with the experience (Caruth 3) in this case trauma refers to a psychological rather than a physical wound. Events such as physical torture, witnessing violence, rape physical, emotional or sexual abuse and even loser the sudden death or disabling illness of a loved one generally germinates the traumatic feeling upon the people. Some people

suffer trauma from continuing attacks on their emotional stability, of course, physical and emotional wounds may be products of the same experience C. Shawn McGuffey Tate, “conceptualizing trauma as a social and cultural experience has generated interdisciplinary work from a variety of field. These new voice in trauma studies have used trauma to understand such phenomena as the context of human emotion, collective memories, and adult sexual expression”(621). For Jeffery C. Alexandra, “Trauma occurs when members of a collective feel, they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their unconsciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their further identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.” (10)

Many racial setbacks harm both the psychological and social makeup of those blacks who are victimized by racism practiced by whites. Within the black community blacks belongs to the higher level of the social hierarchy give lots of troubles and tortures to those who belongs to the lower rungs of social ladder. According to Ron Eyerman, “Cultural trauma consists of collective memory which is extremely painful. It refers to a form of remembrance that grounded the identity formation of a people. There is a difference between as it affects individuals and as a cultural process” (9). As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and reworking of collective memory. Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.” (61)

Kali Tal’s insight into the traumatization of women in the patriarchal society serves as the main methodological basis. Women are prone to various harsh forces like sexual molestation, harassment, exclusion and subjugation. Constant exposure to

these hazards and pitfalls traumatize them in *A World of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*, Tal extensively concentrates on this aspect of women's traumatization. Men who sexually abuse children are also virtually immune from prosecution. A significant part of the psychological establishment believes that young female children fantasize sexual interactions with their fathers or stepfathers. Such fantasies are part of normal development. Prosecution of abusive men is difficult or impossible without corroborating evidence. The motives of "wives or girlfriends who accuse their partners of sexually abusing their children are often questioned by civil courts, and their charges are looked upon with suspicion" (87). Incest is or rarely reported and prosecution is so rarely effective. Pornography obsessively focuses on "rape as a pleasurable experience for the male rapist, and often casts female children in the role of the seducer" (76). These views of Tal are keys to the constitution of the methodological basis of this thesis.

Exploration of Racial and Gender Trauma in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged BirdSings*

I Know Why the Caged BirdSings represents the cultural trauma. It centers on Angelou's hardships, trouble, pathos, misery and hurdles in the racist and the patriarchal American society. The author-narrator Angelou shares her traumatic agonies in American society from the first person narrative point of view. The narrator's painful description and traumatic effects of various traumatic situations which arises in racially and patriarchally divided society. Angelou, being narrator as well as writer, wrote her autobiography as an example of victim of racist society. She wrote the traumatic sufferings and feelings to represent the real conditions of all black women facing in American society. This text overcomes throughout the realistic situation of all black women living in the racist American society.

Cultural trauma somehow makes link with the social connected parts and exposing the theme of collective memories being influence of the social events. The cultural trauma is the construction of suppression in regard to identity as well. As Ron Eyerman explains in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory*: "Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some strong cohesion"(61). In the novel, it has strong connection to the narrator and intention of teaching about her trauma to the further other black women living in racist society.

Prior to this incident, when Angelou is three years old, and her brother, Bailey, is four, their parents' divorce. The traumatizing effect of their parents' unexpected divorce is obvious in the following sentences, "Our parents had decided to put an end to their calamitous marriage, and father shipped us home to his mother. A porter has been charged with our welfare-he got off the train the next day in Arizona and our

tickets were pinned to my brother's inside coat pocket" (5). At this point, the author-narrator, who was already shocked by the split of her parents, recounts her trauma early in her childhood. She remembered the past memory that her father charged to porter and put off into the train and was sent them to his mother's home. Her grandmother, Momma accepted and supported Angelou and Bailey when they were abandoned by their parents. In this case, the traumatic incident of being parentless, loveless, careless represents to entire parentless children who are traumatized.

Jeffrey Alexander is the leading theorist of trauma. He is of the opinion that it is through the narrativization of trauma that trauma effects spread like wild fire. Alexander gives emphasis upon the narrativization and representation of trauma rather than core content of trauma whether it is cultural or psychological or national. Jeffrey Alexander examines any kind of traumatic terror within the context of socio-economic parameters. He links traumatic assault in relation with the fragility and vulnerability of identity. Jeffrey Alexander delivers and divulges the following insight into the core idea of trauma:

The paradigm of trauma first of all assumes the existence of an original culture, which has clear and maintainable economical, institutional, and spiritual systems and mechanisms for strong and transmitting the experiences of the pre-aggression period. Additionally, it is supposed that the offensive culture could radically alter the identity and sustainability. Emerging from the challenge of the unknown and alien value-constellations of the trespasser, the rapid changes within the systems of original culture could lead to dissolution.(85)

Alexander says that cultural trauma is a gives an outlet of the original deviation. These deviations are necessary for reinforcing the identity and keeping the continuity.

The need for utilizing trauma becomes acute during these periods when natural balanced development becomes strongly disturbed. The continuity is ensured by widely accepted and followed norms, customs and rituals.

Uprooted and sent away from her parents at age three, Angelou had trouble throughout her life feeling that she belongs anywhere or that she has come to stay. Her sense of displacement arises in part from the fact that black people are not considered full-fledged Americans. She remembered the mistreatment behaviors of other upon her. “. . . had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would a number-two pencil” shows that even she did not feel equal to other black girls (3). She remembered the moments when other used to say unkind things about her features. She opines, “My brother as the greatest person in my world.” who used to support her and take revenge to those who used to insult upon her (22). Her brother was only the person with whom she feels comfortable to share her problems. So, she takes him as the major person of her life who care and support her in every steps of her life.

The miserable and directionless life of Angelou enables the researcher to make uses of the theory of gender trauma. When an innocent child girl is compelled to assume traditional gender role and forced to make retreat from new modernist role, conflict and crisis arise. In their search for new experiences and freedom, women have to encounter several factors which drag their progressive pace and push them ahead on the way to transformation. As a result, they are disturbed and disappointed by the conflicting attitude. Judith Hermann is the leading theorist of gender trauma. She makes the following revelation about the core theoretical notion of gender trauma:

The adaptations and responses women typically develop throughout their lives as a result of chronic abuse are shaped and determined by multiple factors. These factors include gender socialization into traditional notions of femininity, sexism, racism, poverty and other social conditions of their lives. The ways in which women are socialized to internalize these experiences and women's inequality lead to significant gender differences in women's mental issues and needs.

(78)

The way women are brought up in society makes them fundamentally different from other men. No matter how much she struggles to be equal to men, tries to create self-dignity, they remain substantially different because they grow up by assimilating different sort of norms and values. The internalized codes and conducts compel woman to act and behave in different way. The demonstration of different difference brings them in conflicting relation with society. The society is too dogmatic and rigid to make dominant practices flexible. That is why it creates traumatic agony. These differences affect the way in which women's problems are almost typically diagnosed within the mental health system.

Patriarchal insensitivity is one of the most important factor for women's agony which is doubtless traumatic in nature. The same is true in the case of Angelou. Her Uncle Willie used to keep Angelou and Bailey under his rules and commands. He was not afraid to beat and scold them when they donot pay attention to their studies. He used to test them every night after school and used to punish when they would say wrong answer by burning the kids on the stove. Such activities of Uncle Willie still hinder her psychic. The following extract represents that she is still in traumatic figure of the activities of Uncle Willie.

. . . We were never burned, although once I might have been when I was so terrified I tried to jump onto the stove to remove the possibility of its remaining a threat. Like most children, I thought if I could face the worst danger voluntarily, and triumph, I would forever have power over it. But in my case of sacrificial effort I was thwarted. Uncle Willie held tight to my dress and I only got close enough to smell the clean scent of hot iron.(11)

In the above mentioned lines, Angelou is fragmented traumatic feeling in her life.

Here, she expressed her childhood memory when she was innocent that she could not revolt against her uncle. Instead to counter against her uncle, she tried to jump over the stove to get free from the torturous activities of her uncle. The line . . .when I was so terrified to jump into the stove to remove the possibility of remaining a threat indicates that she was psychologically traumatized that she tries to commit suicide to get free from the burden of her uncle (11). She wants to involve in self-destructing manner to redeem from the torturous behavior of her uncle. But her uncle used to stop her from destroying life.

Living in the black area of Stamps, Angelou had to face various problems. She had kinky hair and dark skin. As a child, Angelou constantly hears from others that she is ugly. The line “We were explores walking without weapons into Man-eating animals territory” presents that she was traumatized by the living standard in St. Stamps (25). She presents the black community people as the explorer walking aimlessly and the white people as cruel, rude like “man-eating animals’ and the territory they live as “man-eating territory”. The cruel behaviors showing by the white to the black dreaded them to be powerless against powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed, uncivilized against civilized. It makes the researcher to raise the question is the Black really

traumatized because of the color? And why Blacks are given the negative terms like wild, barbaric, inhuman and uncivilized?

While crossing over the Black area of Stamps, which in childhood's narrow measure seemed a whole world, they were obliged by custom to stop and speak to the every person when they reached the white part of the town. She memorized the moment that they had to cross the pond and walked through the railroad tracks taking the risks of life. She never believed that the whites were the real because of the segregation behave towards the Black and the white living in the same continent St. Stamps. The line "I remember never believing that whites were really real" indicates that she never trust the white people. The whites putting authority upon the blacks show the cruelties of the whites (25). Living in the white racist society, they make the black follow their rules, commands as they desire. The black were the shadow of the white. They had to live the life as the white rules. Don't they have their life? Don't they have desires? Don't they have right to live according to their desire?

Allowing for the centrality of meditation and imaginative reconstruction, one should perhaps speak not of traumatic events, but rather of traumatic affects. While trauma refers necessarily to something experienced in psychoanalytic accounts, calling this experience "traumatic" requires interpretation. National or cultural trauma is also rooted in an event or series of events, but not necessarily in their direct experience. Such experience is usually mediated, through newspapers, radio, or television for example, which involves a spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience.

The victims of trauma are miserably haunted by depressive inclination, identity problem, guilt and shame. Kathleen Miriam argues about the traumatic disaster:

A traumatic event is an event threatens injury, death, or the physical body of a child or adolescent while causing shock, terror or helplessness. Trauma refers to both the experience of being harmed by an external agent as well as the response to that experience. Youth who experience trauma may also experience emotional harm or physical trauma which, if left untreated, can have a significant impact. Trauma typically exists along a spectrum which ranges from global to individual.(13)

The depthless trauma involves repeated traumatic events occurring over a period of time. Simply trauma usually refers to a single event, such as a rape or a shooting. Simple trauma is more likely to lead to posttraumatic stress disorder. Posttraumatic stress disorder refers to the sporadic outburst of hidden traumatic trace. Complex trauma leads to a deeper and more pervasive set of changes. Those changes involve emotional deregulation, distorted thinking, and dysfunctional.

It also consists of patterns of dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. Early researchers noted that exposure to trauma may lead to feelings of anxiety, helplessness, dislocation and behavior. These symptoms are now included within the broad category of traumatic disorder. These symptoms may be consequences of trauma. They do not always occur following trauma. Additionally, risk events can moderate the influence of exposure to trauma and the development of psychopathology.

Even within the same race, society, community, there will be the discrimination among superior and inferior according to the social rank. Momma being the superior, she fully put on her authorization upon her grandchildren. They were inferior that they were forced to obey their grandmother's decision. She even remembered the event that each night in the bitterest winter they were forced to wash

faces, arms, necks, legs and feet before going to bed. Momma used to examine their feet weather they have cleaned their legs neatly or not. If they werenot clean enough for her, she used to take the switch and woke up the offender with a few aptly placed burning reminders.

Momma's store is the center of the community. Everybody comes to the store of Momma. Even the white children discriminate to those black people. When the white children go to Momma's store, they took liberties. Her grandmother used to follow their orders, except that she doesnot seem to be servile because she anticipated their needs. Angelou began to experience racism directly which still hinders her physic. "Now, Annie "- to Momma? indicates that even the white children do not talk politely and respectfully with the black (29). It seems that the black have no identity. At least they never looked in grandmother's face. Just they threw their orders around the store like lashes from a cat-o'-nine-tails. The line "...those scruffy children caused me the most painful and confusing experience I had ever had with grandmother" clearly illustrates that she was extremely traumatized by the mistreatment behavior of whites children upon grandmother (29). Those girls tried of mocking Momma and turned to other means of agitation. The line "I wanted to throw a handful of black pepper in dirty scummy peckerwoods, but I know I was as clearly imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside confined to their roles" depicts that Angelou wants to take revenge with those children who make puppet dance by caricaturing Momma (31). She could not bear the torturous moment her grandmother, Momma was facing. She wanted to revolt against those children who insulted Momma. She could not revenge with them because of the morality. Momma was the senior than Angelou who did not do anything to those children rather she serves their needs politely and sincerely.

Even people in Stamps used to say that whites in their town were so prejudiced that, “a Negro could not buy icecream”(45). The white living in that states have the belief that the black cannot afford expensive things. Only the white are richer enough to buy those expensive things. Angelou recalls the event. It seems minor incident is still in her physic that she could not pull out the discrimination between the white and the black though her grandmother, Momma had owned than all the white. They had owned land and houses and had lavish life than the white people in Arkansas. The society still have the conceptualization that the white are superior, had lavish life than blacks. Can't the black afford the icecream? Can't blacks spend the lavish life?

When a year later her father came to Arkansas and took Angelou and Bailey with him to St.Louis. Angelou was so terrified when she found him watching at her. His voice rang like a metal dipper hitting a bucket. When her father was ready to take them with him to St.Louis, She was in dilemma. “Should I go with my father? Should I throw myself into the pond? ...Did I have the nerve to try life without Bailey? I couldnot decide anymore, so I recited a few bible verses, and went home” presents that she was traumatized whether to go with her father or stay with her grandmother (57). To get out of tension, she recited bible. The religious book became the tablet to heal her traumatic condition. It shows people remember God when they are in the problem or in the traumatized condition.

Later, though Angelou did not want to go with her father, she was compelled to go with him. She recalls the memory that “For all I knew, were being driven to Hell and father was delivering devil”(59). Here her memorization of shifting to the next place due to her father indicates that the inferior are worthless in front of superior. Though she was not interested to go with her father, she had to go with him.

Angelou memorized the struggle and the negligence in the new periphery of the school. She recalls the moment of discrimination by their classmates and even by their teachers when Angelou and Bailey were admitted to Toussaint L'Ouverture Grammar School. The line “. . . we were stuck by the ignorance of our classmates and the rudeness of our teachers. Only the vastness of the building impressed us; not even the white school in Stamps was as large”(63). She memorized the event of being racially discriminated. She remembered the moment of rudeness behavior of teacher towards them and negligence of her classmates in the school. Only the building school impressed her to go to school. Even “. . . our teacher thought that we country children would make our classmates inferior” indicates that the teacher tended to act very rudely and hegemonized upon the black student (63). The teacher use to give more priority to the white student than the black student. They have the concept about biasness treating among the black and the white which is deeply rooted in their culture. They have the superstition concept that the black will make the white inferior if both of them are taught together.

Caruth proposes “that trauma compels us to imagine that traumatic events do not simply occur in time. Rather they fracture the very experience of time for the person to whom they happen. She states, the pathology cannot be defined either by the event itself” (Unclaimed Experience 121). Caruth makes the following point about trauma:

Trauma is generally understood as wound or external bodily injury in general. It is also defined as a “mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time. In its later uses, particularly in the psychiatric literature, the term ‘trauma’ is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind. (124)

The researcher emphasizes its transfer of meaning from physical to psychical. A physical trauma is something that enters the psyche that is so overwhelming. It cannot be assimilated by usual mental process. The other aspect is emotional trauma is not confined to the single shock that comes with an assault. The form of trauma that the researcher addresses is emotional injury, sometimes sudden and unexpected, sometimes taking place during a prolonged time. The same as Caruth says about the theory has been applied in the text that the narrator was not only physically but also psychologically traumatized.

One morning her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, sexually molested Angelou, and later raped her. He threatened her "If you ever tell anybody what we did, I'll have to kill Bailey"(74). The act of rape at the age of eight was the most terrible incident in her life. The incident not only make her physically demolition but also psychologically afraid when she sees the man. Time and again though she wants to go away from the incident but it recalls again and again. It puts a very negative child psychology as well as shows how the males have vulture eyes upon the small babies. It is because they are in power. Thus, the incident of the rape is the foremost cause of her mental problem.

After the rape Angelou was confused either to tell the incident to her mother and brother or not. The confusing state makes her a lot of problem. Being small child she was unable to decide. She thinks if she tells her mother she can believe her daughter or her lover. The lines prove this: "Could I tell her now? The terrible pain assured me that I could not. What he did to me, and what I allowed, must have been very bad if already God let me hurt so much. If Mr. Freeman was gone, did that mean Bailey was out of danger? And if so, if I told him, would he still love me?"(81). Angelou was in dilemma weather to share her problem with her loving and caring

brother or with her mother. She was in fear of losing the love she has gain from her brother and her mother.

Angelou was seriously frightened by the threatened of Mr.Freeman. The event of rape came in her “memory like a bad connection”(81). Her recurrent memory of Mr.Freeman inflicts traumatic agony that she would run away to California or France or Chicago. The line, “I knew that I was dying and in fact, I longed for death, but I did not want to die anywhere Mr.Freeman. I knew that even now he would not have allowed death to have me unless he wished it to” clearly illustrates the fearless about torture, sexual assault hindered psychologically in her mind that she wanted to die to escape from those traumatic situations (82). Though she wants to die, she does not want to die in front of her rapist, Mr. Freeman. She wants to die freely, liberally according to her wishes. Even while dying, she does not want to be traumatized.

Later, they go to the court and Mr.Freeman was arrested. Aftermath,Mr.Freeman was violently murdered, probably some the underground criminal associates of Angelou’s family. In the aftermath, of these events, Angelou endures the guilt and shame of having been sexually abuse. She also believed that she bearded responsibility for Mr. Freeman’s death because she had denied in the court that he had raped her. She started staying mute except Bailey which seems as the effect of traumatization upon her.

I had to stop talking.I discovered that to achieve perfect personal silence all I had to do was to attach myself leechlike to sound. I began to listen to everything. I probably hoped that after I had heard all the sounds, really heard them and packed them down, deep in my ears, the world would be quiet around me. I walked into rooms where people were laughing, their voices hitting the walls like stones, and I simply

stood still – in the midst of the rust of sound. After a minute or two, silence would rush into the room from its hiding place because I had up all the sounds.(88)

That traumatic event causes her anxiety and difficulty for her life. She started staying mute with everybody except Bailey. It was the effect of traumatization of being rape at the child age which she had never imagined to be.

In the first weeks her family accepted her behavior as a post rape, post-hospital affliction. But they later become frustrated and angry at what they perceive to be disrespectful behavior.

According to Kali Tal, “even after an abuse experience and, experiences of violation and fear are often present for women throughout their lives, by virtue of living in a society in which violence against women and children is pervasive”(175). The phenomenon of re-victimization- “multiple experiences of sexual violence, as well as vulnerability to further sexual violence, resulting from an early experience of child abuse- is far greater problem in women’s lives than is acknowledged in the literature”(Haskell). In her book *Gender Trauma*, Judith Herman describes “coercive control as a major cause of complex post-traumatic stress. She asserts that prolonged, repeated trauma typically occurs in families and in other relationships in which is unable to flee because she is under the control of the perpetrator”(176). Total escape from the traumatizing experiences is a Herculean task for women.

Several attempts are made to help Maya recover from physic wound and injury. Momma managed to break through Maya’s silence by introducing her to Mrs.Bertha Flowers, a kind, educated woman. She encourages Angelou through books and communication to regain her voice and soul. She inspires her to read book loudly. But such attempt ends in futility over time. Angelou’s agony became

increasingly acute day by day. Angelou became aware of both the fragility and the strength of her community.

Angelou endured several appalling incidents that taught her about the insidious nature of racism. At age ten, Angelou took a job as maid for a white woman named Mrs. Viola Cullinan manipulated Maya Angelou as “Mary” for her own convenience. She never called Angelou by her original name ‘Marguerite’. Her original identity was lost. She was psychologically traumatized being identity less changing her name Maya as Mary for the selfishness of Mrs. Cullinan. So, to escape from this tension, she made a plan to quit the job, but the problem was going to escape from the traumatization of being identity less. Her grandmother would not let to quit the job. “My grandmother would not allow me to quit for just any reasons endures the lingering traces of racial trauma in her physic (109). She wanted to escape but she was compelled to do the job for Mrs. Cullinan though she did not like calling her as “Mary”.” “My name wasn’t Mary” shows that she did not like calling her as Mary (111). Calling her as ‘Mary’ makes her irritated. She is in search of her identity. She wants her boss Mrs. Cullinan to be called her real name ‘Marguerite’. So that she could find her identity which make her free from traumatic situation of identityless.

Klein Parker is another prominent theorist of racial trauma. He puts forward the new notion of the transmission of trauma. He is of the opinion that there are some of the methods whereby traumatic legacy get transmitted via interpersonal relation, mutual sense of communication and sharing of parent stories and legend. The survivors of racism tell and re-tell their children those catastrophic situations which they faced in the concentration camp. Through this way, the legacy of trauma continues to get disseminated, affecting those who are the part of broader range of the

history of racial trauma. Parker makes the following remarks regarding to the transmission of trauma:

Unconscious and conscious transmission of parental traumatization always takes place in a certain family environment, which is assumed to affect a major impact on the children. Though Holocaust survivor families certainly differ from one another in many ways, the more pathological families are described as tight little islands in which children came into contact only with their parents, with their siblings and with other survivors. In such highly closed systems parents are fully committed to their children and children are overly concerned with their parent's welfare.(46)

The effects of trauma diffuse from one generation to another. One example of the transmission of trauma is the racial trauma. Oral narration, written discourse and search for relief via confessing about the sufferings and trauma are usually practiced means whereby trauma is supposed to get transmitted. The effects of Holocaust are invincible.

She still remembered the traumatization event of being racially discriminated that once when she got rotten tooth. Momma took her to the only white dentist in Stamps, Dr.Lincoln though he had never heard of a Negroes going to him as patients. He insulted Angelouas commodified object saying, "Annie, my policy is I would rather stick my hand in dog's mouth than in a nigger's (189). He had never looked once at her. He turned his back and went through the door into the coolbeyond. Such misbehave activities of Dr.Linclon had done towards Angelou and her grandmotherwas deeply rooted in her physic. The line, "I had forgotten the toothache .

..” clearly illustrates that she even forgot the pain of rotten tooth being traumatized by the racial discrimination among the patients while treating her (191).

The last straw comes when Bailey encounters a dead, rotting black man and witnesses a white man’s satisfaction at seeing the body. The following lines clearly shows that Nigger as the matter of commodification. They said, “Boss, surely we ain’t done nothing bad enough for you to put another nigger in here with us, and a dead one at that. Then they laughed. They all laughed like these something” (198). Angelou remembers this event as even the white are cruel and inhumanity who laugh at the others’ pain which still hints in her mind. Those whites laughed looking at dead body and tried to keep away from them instead of giving sympathy to those sufferings.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, LaCapra’s notion of acting out and working through of trauma is clearly seen through narrator, Angelou. The socio-cultural events like discrimination between the black and the white at school, mistreatment of white doctor, unable to counter against white students while delivering black students are to be athletes or servants, punishment given by her uncle when they do not pay attention in their studies, sexual assault by her mother’s boyfriend at the age of eight makes her traumatized psychologically as well as physically though she gets success in work through of trauma, some act out it. Dominick LaCapra, in his book, ‘*Writing History, Working Trauma*’ talks about trauma and its symptomatic aftermath that creates problems in historical representation and understanding. He also talks about the crucial role of post-traumatic testimonies. He gives his idea about the theoretical and historical elucidation of problems related to trauma and makes his readers clear about the importance of acted out and working through of trauma by giving many examples of historical events. He further argues:

Since working-through is itself an articulatory practice that counteracts the compulsive effects of post-traumatic symptoms without pretending to achieve full mastery or total conscious dissolution of past traumas, it is vitally bound up with social and political action in the present, including the attempt to create institutional conditions and norms that further desirable forms of social bonding, the viable binding of anxiety, and the integration of affect and knowledge, including empathic or compassionate relations to others. (15)

Here, LaCapra is trying to emphasize that 'working through' is an articulatory practice or the traumatic situation. It counteracts for the resolution of the past trauma. If, somebody is traumatic by some events s/he through the medium of working through tries to lessen the past trauma. Working through is related with social and political action at the present. If somebody is traumatized, s/he through the medium of social and political action tries to console the past events. In 'working through' the person tries to go a step ahead on a problem making distance among past, present and future. In this sense 'working through' includes intuitional condition and norms that forms social bonding; the bonding or anxiety and the integration of affect and knowledge. It includes emphatic or compassionate relations to others. Overall, working through is an effective manner or practice that is used in order to reduce the psychological condition or overcome the traumatic condition of each individual.

Angelo's Concern Coping with Racial and Gender Trauma

After the detailed analysis and study of Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the researcher has clearly sketches the traumatic experiences of black females in African American society. The core finding of this research is that when racial segregation and gender domination go to limit, women are bound that Angelou, by depicting the miserable, pathetic, helpless condition of her own who is suffering from the unbearable traumatic effect because of living in racist and male supremacy society.

Angelou confronted the insidious effects of racism and segregation in American society at a very young age. She internalized the racial and gender inequity since she began to grow up in Arkansas when her parents divorced. She was sexually molested and raped by her mother's boyfriend when she was only the age of eight. This event was the main cause of psychological and mental trauma upon her from which she could not escape. Moreover, the narrator Angelou is mentally, physically suppressed, exploited, dehumanized, discriminated, alienated due to various practices she faced in racist and sexist society. Such various practices of gender and racial bias and injustice towards women evoke the psychic fallout on her. Discrimination between black and white at school, her rejection in the community of other black girls, mistreatment of white doctor upon her, unable to counter against white students while delivering black students are to be athletes or servants, inability to express feelings after she was raped, could not counter argue with uncle Willie when he used to beat are all effect of racism. Such racial politics and various manifestation of discrimination give tortures and traumatic pain.

This research endures the notion of 'acting out' and 'working through' trauma asserts by Dominick LaCapra. For LaCapra, a suffer acts out of trauma when s/he

becomes unable to forget his/her past traumatic situation and experiences is repeated as if were fully enacted, fully literalized and indulges him/herself in self-destructing behaviors. S/he exists in the present as if s/he was fully in the past. For him, in 'working through' trauma, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem to be able to distinguish between past, present and future and had to move forward and keep faith with it. In the text, the narrator Angelou success with working through trauma though in some cases she just acts out. The narrator acts out of trauma when she becomes unable to forget her past traumatic situation and indulges herself in self-destructing behaviors like unable to counter against white students while delivering speech that black students are to be athletes or servants, trying to commit suicide by jumping over the stove when uncle used to punish her, returning back from church weeping and crying she is unable to recite poem, stopped speaking with everybody except Bailey after she was raped, could not counter against her boss Mrs. Cullinan when she manipulated her name as 'Mary'.

She works through of trauma with the help of Mrs. Bretha who helps her to recite poem, engaged in reading books make calm and cool to her realizing the past that it was all she had to move forward and keep faith with it. Later in the further coming days, though she had to struggle with traumatic situation, she is able to establish her own reputation. Angelou hurdles many ups and downs on her life for self-independence and nonconformist outlook. Angelou also charts her own path, fighting to become the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco, and she does so with the support and encouragement of her female predecessors Momma, Vivian, grandmother Baxter and Mrs. Bertha. Later on her early years, she developed her as professional dancer, singer, writer, editor and so no. Though, the narrator due to the

events shatters in her life with full of pains and sufferings, she succeed to establish her name and fame.

In this regard, this research has proved how the narrator, Angelou became the victim of racist and sexist American. She gets success working through trauma while in some cases the narrator just acts out it. The writer Marguerite Annie Jonson (Maya Angelou) wrote this book confessing her personal life publically to represent not only the traumatic life she faced, but to represent the traumatic life of all African American women. Thus, this book presents the individual trauma of Angelou representing the suffering of all African American women.

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