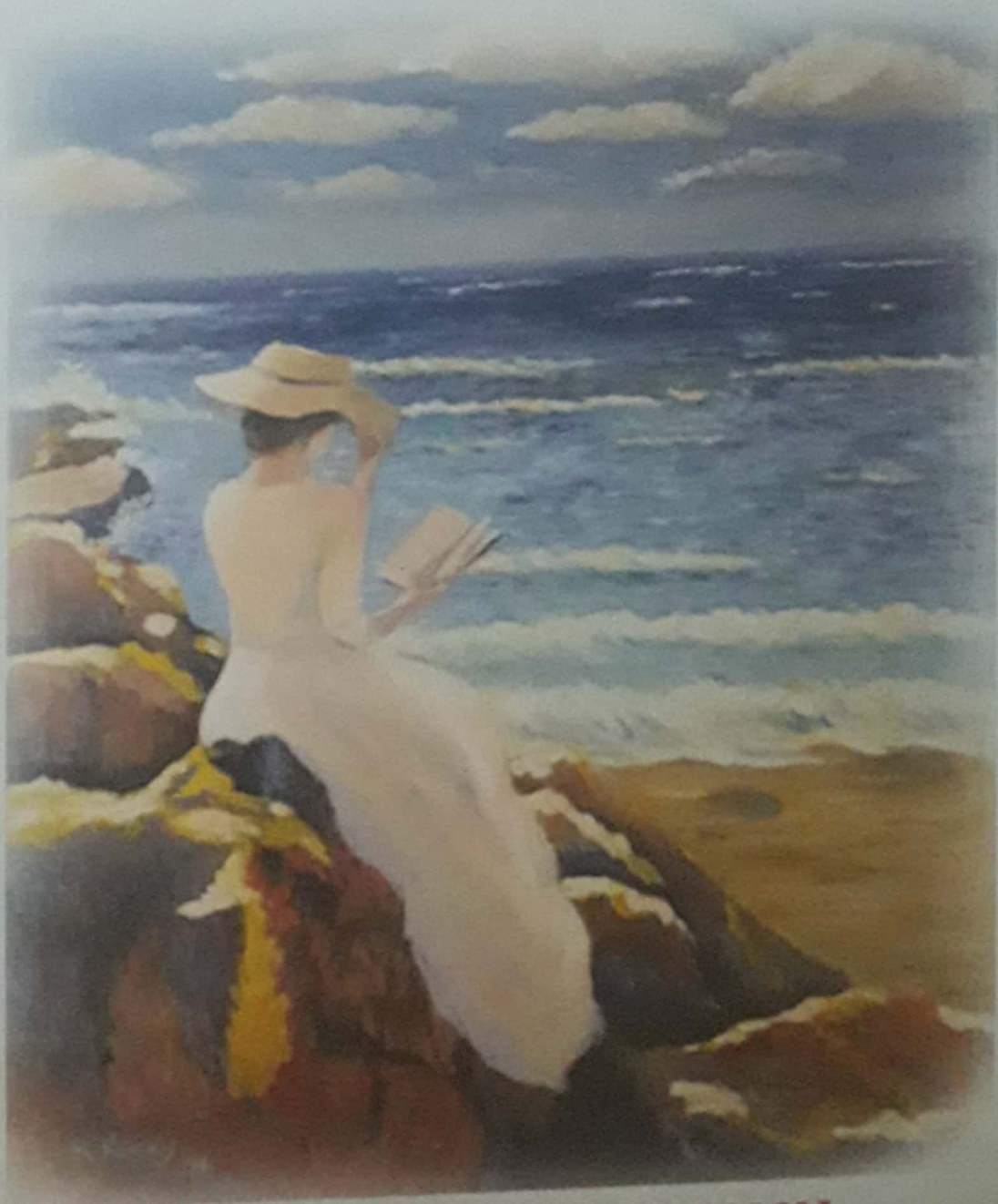


FATHOMLESS OCEAN

GOMEZ SOPHIA
U. ANAMICA



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
JAYARAJ ANNAPACKIAM COLLEGE FOR WOMEN
(AUTONOMOUS)
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VOICE OF FEMINISM IN MAYA ANGELOU'S STILL I RISE AND PHENOMENAL WOMAN

G. SARADHA

Just like moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just like hopes springing high,

Still I rise

(9-12)

Maya Angelou as a very bold and very powerful woman. She was an poet, singer, storyteller, activist and an autobiographer . Angelou had a broad career as a singer, dancer, actress, composer and was Hollywood's first female black director. She was also an educator and served as the Reynolds professor of American studies at Wake Forest University. Maya Angelou is recognized as "one of the first African American woman who was able to publicly discuss her personal life she is highly respected as a spokesperson for Black People and women". She was awarded the National Medal of Arts by president Bill Clinton in 2010 and Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, by President Barack Obama. Angelou's career has seen numerous accolades, including the Chicago International Film Festival in 1999 for *Down in the Delta*. She also won two NAACP Image Award in the outstanding literary work (nonfiction) category, for her 2005 cookbook and 2008's *Letter to My Daughter*. Maya Angelou was awarded over 50 honorary degrees before her death.

Maya Angelou's first autobiography, *I know why the caged Bird Sings*, she recounts the story of her life up to the birth of her child. Though she faces many hardship in her life, including being raped and living in a junkyard, she's able to find love and happiness as a mother. Her other autobiographies are *Gather Together in My name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a woman* (1981), *All God's children need Travelling hoes* (1986) and *A song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002).

She published several poems such as *A Brave And Startling Truth*, *Equality*, *In All ways A woman*, *Million Man March Poem*, *Old Folks*, *Laugh*, *Our Grandmothers*, *Son to Mother*, *When I think about my self*, *The Mothering Blackness*, *the Rock Cries Out to Us Today* ect.,

Her popular collection of poems, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water' Fore I Die*, which was nominated for the Pulitzer prize. *On the Pulse of Morning* she wrote this poem especially for and recited at President Bill Clinton's inaugural ceremony in January 1993.

Her poems mostly express the themes of economic racial, sexual subjugation and identity. Angelou's *I Know Why Caged Bird Sings*, she discussed aspects of her personal life, she was raped by her mother's boy friend, she has become conscious of the dual peril of race and gender. She was respected as a spokesperson for black people and women, and her work has been considered a defense of black culture. Throughout her works we can see Angelou as a confident black woman.

In 1905, a period of heightened racial oppression, educator Fannie Barrier Williams viewed the African-American woman not as defenseless victim but as strong willed resister. Williams saw Black women as "irrepressible." She is insulted, but she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect...the most interesting girl of this country is the coloring girl (Collins, 2000:151).

Feminism is a range of movements and ideologies that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A feminist advocates or supports the rights and equality of women.

The term, feminism is about challenging gender inequalities in the social world. While we fundamentally recognize differences in social location, such as orientation, age and race, as structuring the way women experience their lives as women, we believe that at a basic level feminism recognizes the organizing of the social world by gender. As Patricia Maguire sums up more concretely: "Feminism is (a) a belief that women universally face some form of oppression or exploitation, (b) a

commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and (e) a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression".

Black Feminism emphasizes the complexity of Black women's demand for social economic and political equality and being understood.

Along the history of women's movement, especially in the United States, there existed the movement of Black women who were put on the last rank of the social class, on the fourth rank after African American man since the slavery time. The Black women were being discriminated against every aspect of life. The Black women struggled for racism. It was also experienced by Maya Angelou who was born as a Black woman. As shown through her poems.

The African-American literature is undoubtedly a protest literature that fights against racial discrimination, marginalization and social injustice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, African-American writers faced a plethora of serious issues: race and class inequality, challenges to morality and religion, interrogations of political nationalism and cultural ancestry they encounter the problem of how to achieve a truly African-American identity in the face of complicating diversity.

" You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes

You may kill me with your hatefulness..."

These lines show that how Africans were treated by white people and their struggle. We can know that they were not in equality with them.

African-American literature explores the issues of freedom and equality long denied to Blacks in the United States, along with further themes such as African-American culture, racism, religion, slavery, a sense of home, segregation, migration, feminism etc.,

Some of the poems of Maya Angelou portrays the spirit of black feminism. Two of them are "Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal Woman". "Still I Rise" talks about Black women who are willing and trying hard to rise from the oppression of white male, and the poem "Phenomenal Woman", also talks about woman, especially Black woman, who is confident of herself.

the poem, "Still I Rise" talks of the physical pain except a casual mention of it in the line, "You may trod me in the very dirt..." it highlights the mental agony caused due to unwarranted detestation and condescending looks.

You may write me down in history

With your bitter, twisted lies

You may trod me in the very dirt

But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Maya Angelou declares that nothing and no one could oppress her or keep her down. She does not care about their discrimination in history. She knows they are full of "twisted lies". She will not let it bother her that others "trod" her "in the very dirt". She proclaims that if she is trodden in the dirt, then she will rise like dust. "you may write me down in history" meant that the oppression toward woman did not only happen in Angelou's life but also since ancient women have got into oppression.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

His shadow shouts on nightmare scream

His wings are clipped and his feet are tied

So he opens his throat to sing

This stanza illustrates the attitudes black people experience during segregation. Angelou used the word "caged bird" to represent the black who always got discriminated. "his wings are clipped and his feet are tied", it showed that during this discriminatory era, blacks were in a

state of oppression due to the stolen opportunities and the hatred they regularly encountered. The last line showed that the black people race knew it was necessary to have voice and finally sing for their freedom.

Angelou's *Phenomenal Woman* she speaks as a self-confident woman, she wants to show the world what makes her beautiful and she expresses it in a different way.

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies

I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion

Model's size:.

In those lines, Maya Angelou explains that even though her appearance is not of what is considered typically ideal, she is still confident in herself and not ashamed of her body.

It's the fire in my eyes,

And the flash of my teeth,

The wing in my waist,

And the joy in my feet.

The above stanza, Angelou describes the image of a confident woman. She is showing herself off, and how woman can portray themselves as true individuals. It also shows how they should have the ability to choose what they want to do because they are powerful, confident, and independent.

Phenomenal Woman is an anthem of women's strength in their own womanhood. The almost childish rhyming cadence is haunting in its simplicity.

Black feminism focuses on two things, the struggling against male domination and the struggling against racism. *Still I Rise* depicts Black women struggle against white people domination, whereas *Phenomenal*

Woman depicts Black women struggle against standard of beauty in the society.

Still I Rise and *Phenomenal Woman*, these two poems of Maya Angelou inspires me, she is not only the voice of Black women but also to every women in the society. Her works make me as a confident woman, especially the poem *Still I Rise* and I learned that we can face all the problem around us.

In Maya Angelou's *My Graduation day* she was excited and predictable because she knew how happy she was and how graduation ceremony was. But the chief guest of ceremony gave a speech, he dominated the black people may Angelou feels sad but she never get discouraged instead she was proud to be African – American.

Scripture says that *Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid them. (Deut 31:6) Do not be anxious about anything. (Philp 4:16)*

Maya Angelou's work emphasizes that we should not worry whens people insult instead we should be strong and overcome all the problem.

I am the dream and the hope of the slave

I rise

I rise...

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