

**A BREIF STUDY ON FINDING THE CHARACTERIZATION OF
PHENOMENAL WOMAN WRITTEN BY MAYA ANGELOU**

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ABSTRACT:

Maya Angelou's poetry thus is not merely a rhythmic collection of words; rather it becomes a call for action against injustice. Through her poems, Angelou attempts to challenge the conventional male-centric prejudiced portrayals of woman and replace them with authentic, real, alive selves. She uses her writing as a tool for resisting against and altering those ideologies, hegemonies and methodologies that have silenced and marginalised black women. This Paper describes, Maya Angelou as a poet of the Multi-faceted personality by dealing especially with her poetical themes. It is the lyrical witness of racism in the U.S. A phenomenal woman has just passed into history where she will illuminate its pages as she did with countless people whose lives she touched with her incandescent words in her poetry.

Keywords: *Phenomenal Woman, Affection, afflict, intrinsic element, Maya Angelou.*

INTRODUCTION:

Maya Angelou (1928-2014), hailed as “the black woman’s poet laureate” by reviewer Elsie B. Washington, carved her niche in the hearts of people as a chronicles of her own life, as dancer, film producer, television producer, playwright, actress, civil rights activist, film director and above all as a poet. In 1970s, Angelou published her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and “its success signal’ [led] the existence of a market for works by black women.” Maya Angelou wrote poems about segregation and discrimination toward African-American in the United States and some of her poems talk about identity and the issue of racism. Maya Angelou is one of woman writers who use feminism approach in her work. In her poems, Angelou expresses about the woman during racial discrimination, segregation, and male domination. That is why the researcher chooses Maya Angelou’s works to be analyzed. She is also known for her long poem “On the Pulse of Morning” which she was invited to read out at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993. Lyman. B. Hagen aptly points out that Angelou “has always had a dedicated audience...At her public readings, a generally balanced cross-section, male and female, black and white, are in attendance. Some admirers of her poetry have been so impressed with its rhymes, rhythms, and content that they themselves have been encouraged to write” (Hagen,118) Angelou thus has continued to inspire generation of poets, artists and even ordinary people. She has produced a number of collections of poetry, her popular volumes of poetry are ‘Just Give me a Cool Drink Of Water ‘for I Dillie’(1971), *And Still I Rise* (1987), *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (1993), *Phenomenal Woman* (1994), *A Brave And Startling Truth*(1995), etc.

Angelou’s poems are platform to champion the cause of all black women. Her works have been duly noted for their empowerment of the female voice. The focus on women’s space led to her moving away from the surrounding predominantly male, angry voices of protest. Rather she took upon herself the responsibility to refute hegemonic, malignant, negative stereotypical images that the society perpetuated about black womanhood. Angelou

thus put into practice what bell hooks in her book succinctly stipulates, "It is essential for African American women to recognise the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to understand the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create counter-hegemony to take action". Angelou's work very well demonstrates such usage.

The Poetic World of Maya Angelou

Her poetry is Political, trenchantly critical of American history. She is also a love poet and a feminist poet. Indeed, the black political writer and the woman writer cannot easily be separated. Now, let us examine all these issues by going into the study of some of her poems.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Jayageetha P et al (2018) Feminist critics analyze how women are showed, how the text discussed gender relations and sex differentiation. Maya Angelou is a feminist writer and her work encompassed the struggles and triumphs of a black woman in America. This poem celebrates the power of a woman and the speaker is portrayed as a strong and confident woman. Her power, her behavior and her confidence become the inner mystery that makes her to be a phenomenal woman.

Indiani Eka Permatasari et al (2016) This study analyzes discrimination toward black woman which appears in Maya Angelou's poems. In this case, the researcher chose three poems of Maya Angelou. Those are "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird". In other to discover them, the study was conducted by using feminism theory and also historical and biographical approaches. It focuses on words, lines, and stanzas of the poems. The research was conducted with the following statement of problems: (1) What is the dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou's poems? (2) What are the reasons of using feminism perspective in Maya Angelou's poems? (3) How are the images of black woman described in Maya Angelou's poems?. The research is conducted by descriptive qualitative because the result of the data is word, sentence, and language.

Rohmania Rista (2014) This research focuses on intrinsic analysis on Maya Angelou's Phenomenal Woman and Still I Rise poems. Intrinsic element is one part of structuralism approach. The aim of this research is to find out the intrinsic element of Angleou's poems and how the intrinsic elements describe the woman figure in those poems. The design of this research is descriptive qualitative. It describes the intrinsic element and the figure of black woman in those poems.

Phenomenal Woman

Phenomenal Woman is a lyrical poem that sends out an important message to the world of convention and stereotype: empowerment comes from being confident in your own female skin, no matter if you are not seen as cute or fashionable by the masses. Maya Angelou published this poem in 1978 when it appeared in *And Still I Rise*, a collection of powerful poems that set many an oppressed woman free. Since then, the poem has been adapted and used by associations and groups world-wide involved in protest and political issues around inequality. *The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart.* Phenomenal Woman is a direct and passionate poem no doubt, you can feel the speaker's need to lay things out just as they are, yet it also contains the seed of self-knowing, of self-confidence. *'A wise woman wishes to be no one's enemy; a wise*

woman refuses to be anyone's victim.' And it does convey the idea that no matter the pressures of society to conform and be who others want you to be, inner self-belief is the phenomenal bit. Once this is accepted, you will be a happier and more complete person, a phenomenon. I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life's a bitch. You've got to go out and kick ass.' In short, this poem boasts that a woman is more than the sum of her parts, much more. She is enigmatic, magnetic and is also capable of defining her own beauty.

“Phenomenal Woman” is another great inspiring poem of Angelou and one of her most famous ones. The poet through this melody glorifies the inner beauty of the black woman which makes her phenomenal. The "Phenomenal woman" according to Angelou, "should be tough, tender, laugh as much as possible, the struggle for equality continues unabated” (Angelou 1993: 7). The poet gives a message of self confidence, pride and courage to the black woman and warns the male dominated society not to underestimate the power of black woman. She says:

*Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them
They think I'm telling lies. (Stanza 1)*

The poem is written in free verse enabling the poet to inculcate her ideas of inner strength and beauty without any interruption. Although the language used is simple, it has underlying means which signifies the inner beauty of a black woman. The poet stresses upon the fact that a woman's beauty, grace and power comes from her intrinsic womanliness. The author uses imagery in the poem to describe physical appearance of a confident and empowered woman. In the first stanza, she enumerates: “It's in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips, The stride of my step, The curl of my lips”. The poet is very confident and proud of her physical appearance and is not ashamed of her black skin. Angelou thus refuses to conform to the white standards of beauty and feels joy in her own sensuousness.

Image of Black Women in poem “Phenomenal Woman”

Maya Angelou published “Phenomenal Woman” in 1978. As we know, in that time she also published “Still I Rise”. The content of those poem is about the black women who lives among Whites. But in this poem, Angelou tried to send a message to the readers to appraise themselves although their physical appearance is not perfect. Similar to the poem “Still I Rise”, this poem was also written on second waves because the second waves is begun on 1960. That was why in this poem found some liberal feminism which shows the woman capability and power.

In this poem the researcher also found marxist and socialist feminism because according to the time this poem published, Women's liberation grew out and provided alliances with Marxist and Socialist feminisms in areas such as the criticism of the dual workload for women working outside as well as inside the home, the demand of equal pay for equal work, and a breakdown of the gendered division of the educational system and the labor market.

Maya Angelou as the poet and the speaker in this poem described a woman as a great woman and has high confident. The reader could see in every line of this poem showed that Maya was so proud of herself because she always said that she was a phenomenal woman.

*It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally. Phenomenal woman,
That's me.
(Phenomenal Woman, 1st stanza)*

One most often defines the word as meaning extraordinary and impressive, and Angelou was certainly reveling in being an extraordinary and impressive woman. In every stanza, she showed that she was always proud of her part of the body. Angelou addressed this poem to those women and men who believed that being beautiful meant having slim body, thin lips, and small hips.

Maya Angelou also tells how the society see her, how the men see her, and how the history see her as the black race. It is showed by the third stanza:

*Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch My inner mystery.
(Phenomenal Woman, 3rd stanza)*

Those lines showed that when men try to understand why some black women are so confident to take such drastic action, they never really understand why. Men believed that since majority of black women did not take action to try and change their inequality that it was crazy to believe only one woman would take such action.

Maya Angelou also tries to show her inner beauty by caring to each other as a woman and mother below.

*It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
(Phenomenal Woman, 4th stanza)*

Angelou tries to show that as a woman she has positive side. In line "It's in the click of my heels", Maya Angelou wanted to show her confidence as a woman. Meanwhile in line "The palm of my hand" showed her caring to others. From the whole stanza the researcher concluded that being a phenomenal woman was not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it was about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself.

Stanza 1: "Phenomenal Woman" begins with a savage attack on stereotypes. She proudly declares that neither she has an hourglass figure, nor she has a cute face. Her success without essential feminine traits surprises pretty women and they often want to know the secret of her success. She describes her secret saying that it comes from her confidence, the way she stretches her arms, the way she walks, the rhythm of her hips and also the way she smiles. Her entire body is an expression of womanliness. She concludes the first stanza by declaring

herself as a 'phenomenal woman'. This phrase is a double-edged sword. The word 'phenomenal' signifies her talismanic physical structure as well as her towering personality.

*I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.(2nd Stanza)*

Stanza 2: Next up are the men who are instinctively drawn to the phenomenal woman, some even start to worship her, or else cannot sustain a standing position so overcome are they. There's a sort of spell cast over these males who act as honey bees around the hive.

There is chemistry at work here and the reason why the men are all a buzz? It's the fire, flash, swing and joy - the passionate heat as she looks at them, the gleaming white set behind the smile, the sensuality and sexuality, the enthusiasm of the dance.

Despite not being what society thinks she should be - ideally beautiful - the phenomenal woman can attract the opposite sex to her simply by entering a room.

Stanza 3: In the third stanza, she says she remains an enigma to men. Men leave no stone unturned to unravel her mystery but they fail miserably. She indicates to them that her mystery is not obscure but clearly expressed in her body language from the curve of her back, to her smile and rhythm of her bosom. This unresolved mystery, Maya feels, makes her so coveted amongst the men. She says she is a supreme woman, "Phenomenally/ Phenomenal woman/ That's me."

Stanza 4: In a direct appeal to the reader, the speaker lays it on the line and attempts to clarify all that has gone on in the previous three stanzas. She can hold her head high because of what she is: proud of being an individual without the need to kowtow to society and its false stereotypes, its idea of what a beautiful female should like and aspire to be. It's the click, bend, palm and need - the way she is full of energy and verve, the way she lets her hair fall naturally, her open and honest approach to life, the way her compassionate nature is a necessary thing. The phenomenal woman's humility and respect for other's space, her dignity and inner strength mean she doesn't have to advertise her qualities or be brash and popular. No. Her essence, her well being, goes far deeper.

Intrinsic Analysis of Angelou's Phenomenal Woman

The intrinsic elements are the analysis of the literature itself without looking the relation with the external aspect (Robert, 1965: 11). The intrinsic element used by the author to analyze several words in this poem. Some intrinsic elements that find in this poem are:

Explication of the Poem

In this poem the speaker tries to send a message to the readers to appraise themselves although their physical appearance is not perfect. In this poem, Angelou uses simple words to register the implicit meaning about woman. Angelou illustrates and defines true womanhood. True womanhood is about character and sexuality. She shows the reader that the beauty of the woman is not directly related to a pretty face. It is about what a lady feels within herself. This poem has a message that every woman should be confident in who she is. The word "Phenomenal" in this poem is strength to the woman. To be a phenomenal woman, she will be seen by everyone especially the men. The word "phenomenal" in this poem always repeat in every stanza, it means to explicit the struggle of woman.

Imagery In this poem, the author uses much imagery. The imagery used by the author to describe a confident and proud of herself and her physical appearance. In the first stanza:

*It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.*

In this stanza the author invites the reader to image the physical things of the author arms, hips, steps, and lips. She is confident and proud with her physical thing although her physicals are not whites and not sexy like a model. But the author is still confident and proud with her physical because she believes that she has something special with that. It gives the reader a knowledge that every woman must be proud with everything that they have.

Metaphor In this poem, the writer finds the metaphor. Firstly, the writer finds metaphor in the second stanza:

*Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees*

The author compared them to bees. In this poem, they mean men. She means that the men who swarm around me like bees whose swarm around honey.

Conclusion

Maya Angelou is one of the black writer who could support herself by her writing. She is praised for her ability to say what important was to millions of black people especially black woman. She is famous for her description of Black people life. She uses her works to praise voice concern about race and woman. She often writes poems and books about racial issues and feminism perspective. From the analysis of the every line in stanzas, the researcher found the answers of the research problems. Meanwhile, in poem "Phenomenal Woman" the dominant type was Liberal Feminism because the theme of the poem was about the capability, beauty, and power of black woman. Then, in poem "Phenomenal Woman", Angelou showed that being a woman is not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it is about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself. In the poem the speaker repeats "Phenomenally, Phenomenal Woman, That's me" in every stanza. She has

aim in repeat the sentence, she wants show the readers that she is a Phenomenal Woman who with her difference she can be great woman until the fellow admire her.

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