

Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of Maya Angelou Poems: A Review of Literature

Preethi K¹, Gayathri N²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamilnadu, 632 014, India

²Assistant Professor Sr., School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamilnadu, 632 014, India

Correspondence: Gayathri N, Assistant Professor Sr., School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamilnadu, 632 014, India.

Received: March 19, 2023

Accepted: May 15, 2023

Online Published: May 18, 2023

doi:10.11114/smc.v11i4.6014

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i4.6014>

Abstract

Poetry is a form of creative art, through which many writers express their emotions, feelings, and also their bitter experiences to the world. Poetry, along with autobiography helped in the revelation of self, especially among African-Americans. Black women writers, in particular, have experienced many trials and tribulations while struggling for identity and freedom in the land of America. As women were considered inferior since the early period, their writings reflect deeply on their life stories and create a positive self-identity. Qualitative descriptive method is commonly used in the reviewed articles. This article examines the existing research on Angelou's poems with the explored areas such as racism, gender issues, figurative analysis, feminism, stylistics, etc., and identifies the characteristics of self-portrait in them.

Keywords: poetry, Maya Angelou, self-presentation, review

1. Introduction

African-American literature is written by, about and for African-Americans. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, African-American literature is a body of works written by people of African descent in the United States. Since the Pre-Revolutionary War era, African American writers have participated in a productive, frequently intense debate with American literature. As a result, a corpus of work rich in expressive subtlety and cultural intelligence has evolved, offering profound analyses of American identities and history. The genre emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries with poet Phillis Wheatley and orator Frederick Douglass, and it has persisted until the present day with writers like Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Walter Mosley. During the American Civil War, authors like Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks spoke out on racist institutions and Black Nationalism.

Africa has confronted numerous hardships throughout its long history, which has impacted the themes of its literature. The role of African Americans in the dominant American land or society, African-American culture, racism, slavery, freedom, and equality are the themes and issues addressed in the works of African-American literature. The majority of African-American writing follows oral tradition, gospel music, blues rap, and spirituals are just a few examples of how oral poems were expressed in African-American culture. Oral poetry employed in African-American writings has features of intentional repetition, rhythm and alliteration. All these have found their way into African-American literature.

As women poets were considered inferior since the early period, their writing aids them to reflect deeply on their life stories and create a positive self-identity. African-American women writers have focused on the challenging task of portraying a wide range of realistic and imagined experiences, notably their own. Their works are against the setting of generations of fights with racist oppression and gender-based violence, including recurrent rape, forcible or abrupt labour, abortion, polygamy, shattered families, and dreadful physical and mental torture. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (2016) notes,

“All subsequent black writers have evolved in a matrilineal line of descent, and that each, consciously or

unconsciously, has extended and revised a canon whose foundation was the poetry of a black woman.”

Some notable African-American women poets are Phillis Wheatley, Langston Hughes, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Robert Hayden, Dudley Randall, Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and Rita Dove. The present study focuses on Maya Angelou and her poems.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows: i) to read, re-read, examine, and categorize the poems of Maya Angelou according to the nature of the analysis; ii) to identify the key components such as the symbols, images, figurative languages, signs, and themes of oppression, racial discrimination, feminism, self-identity and survival to classify it in the review; iii) to classify it into several subtopics based on the content in the analysis.

3. Methodology

Studies which employed descriptive qualitative method and analyzed the meaning of the poems were included and the studies which had quantitative data are excluded for this review. Sources were collected from academic libraries and a thorough web database search has been analyzed. The articles with the qualitative descriptive method provide a thorough study of the poem's representation of the sufferings and struggles of the blacks in the dominant world and also their attitude of survival and strive for identity.

4. Review of Literature

One of the most popular modern poets, Marguerite Ann Johnson (also known by her pseudonym Maya Angelou), has had a diverse career that includes work as a singer, dancer, actress, composer, the first black director in Hollywood, playwright, essayist, and a poet. She is a prolific and well-known poet, in addition to being most known for her seven auto-biographies. She has been known as “the black woman's poet laureate”, and her poems have been labelled “the anthems of African Americans”. Her poems are filled with the elements of blues music, people's lives and struggles, use of natural metaphors, rhythm, and intonations (Hagen 61). Angelou employs the first person singular “I” to denote both the individual and the first person plural “We” – the whole community or a particular group. Her emphasis on individual outbursts and the use of personal narratives highlight the hardships, oppression and loss in America.

Carol E. Neubauer (1975) in “Southern Women Writers: The New Generation” noted that Angelou was regarded “as a spokesperson for . . . all people who are committed in raising the moral standards of living in the United States”.

Angelou had suffered greatly even from her childhood as she was black; her parents were divorced when she was three; she was sexually abused at the age of seven and became a club dancer during her adulthood. She ran for her life and her identity. After joining Harlem Writers Guild, writing turned out to be her passion, which helped to pour down her struggles as an African-American woman and the revelation of her identity strongly impacted the whites. As said by Angelou, “I make writing as much a part of my life as I do eating or listening to music” (Tate 150).

4.1 Figurative Language and Stylistics

As Angelou's poems are loaded with real-life images, it provides the framework for evaluating their structure, syntax, vocabulary, and rhetorical devices.

Rachmawati (2014) investigated to find imageries and symbols in Maya Angelou's poems “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” and “Still I Rise”. The identification of the imageries and symbols displayed racial prejudice in the poems. To identify the varied images and signs, the study draws on theories of imagery, symbolism, and racial prejudice. ‘Kinesthetic’, ‘Organic’, and ‘Visual’ imagery are the imagery in the poem “Still I Rise” whereas ‘Auditory’, ‘Organic’, and ‘Visual’ imagery are the imagery in the poem “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”. Three distinct types of imagery are identified by employing psychological and structural methods. The structural approach is an evaluation and interpretation strategy that emphasises opposing ideas or structural components and strives to elucidate how they relate to the overall structure. It also has the capacity to evaluate and understand literature, language, and culture. Analysis of words demonstrates the subject of racial segregation, which contributes to the examination of the poems' messages and central concepts. The examination of the themes uncovered white Americans' cruelty, maltreatment, and inhumanity towards black people in America.

Bari Khan and Yasir Khan (2014) studied each line of the poem “Woman Work” stylistically to acquire a deeper and better comprehension of the poetry. Stylistic analysis entails studying numerous linguistic styles used in a language to establish the actual message or theme of certain texts. It includes and acknowledges the numerous methods used by writers of literary works or poets to convey their message through an indirect and concealed pattern. The condition of a working woman can be revealed by critically examining stylistics or metaphorical language. The study demonstrated how difficult and tedious it to be a black woman in American society. The lack of exaggeration makes it more realistic,

and the fragmented rhyme pattern reveals the woman's unsettled mood in the poem. The study found that nature is the only cure for instilling serenity, quiet, and calm into the life of a black woman.

Hayani (2016) undertook a study to determine the types of figurative language used in five of Angelou's poems: "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", "Old People Laugh", "Caged Bird", and "Alone". The following figurative language was indeed the subject of the study: antithesis, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, metaphor, paradox, personification, simile, synecdoche, and symbolism. The study was carried out using the descriptive technique as well as content analysis. Content analysis is a research method which is employed to locate specific words, ideas, or concepts in a set of qualitative data. Researchers can evaluate and investigate the existence, importance, and correlations of particular words, themes, and ideas using content analysis. The study suggests that Angelou constructed a distinct dialect by employing figurative language to juxtapose or even represent the phrases to give them importance. The majority of her poetry centered on her personal history and the longstanding discrimination against Americans of African origin.

Martinez Lirola (2002) examined the syntactical roles of thematization and postponement using Angelou's poem "Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now" as its linguistic base. As English has a predetermined word order, one might use particular grammatical constructions to retain an author's feelings and ideas. This framework made it easier to comprehend how language was utilized in certain circumstances. The syntactic process is in charge of structuring sentences and conveying ideas to readers. The use of particular linguistic structures revealed the poet's opinions and emotions. The importance of language and linguistic systems in society was explored through extraposition and existentialist expressions. This approach facilitated the analysis of Angelou's poetry, which was about the dominant society, by assisting the study of the social language.

Raharta and Hamsia (2016) explored the perceived metaphorical readings in the select poems of Angelou: "Caged Bird" and "Still I Rise", and categorized them into three categories. The poems were examined using the descriptive qualitative approach and the metaphorical theories of Crystal, Lakoff, and Johnson. Crystal (a linguist) believes that language will continue evolving in numerous dimensions. Different styles and variants are being developed and formed, each with a distinct accent and vocabulary change. According to the philosopher Mark Johnson and the linguist George Lakoff, metaphor is more than just a feature of language; it also incorporates cognition. They contend that metaphor is so pervasive in language that it influences our perceptions and interactions with the outer world. Metaphors both highlight and establish inherently genuine connections. Hence, metaphors assist in giving experiences a definite meaning and aid in moulding our reality. The three types of metaphors that were explored in the study are conceptual metaphor, mixed metaphor, and poetic metaphor. The poet's past experience can be utilized to identify the metaphors for what they are employed, what they symbolize, and how they ought to be read. The study's conclusion stated that each poem conveyed the poet's stance on the racial disparity between blacks and whites in America.

Arbi (2018) examined the types of imagery in five of Angelou's poems: "Alone", "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", "Phenomenal Woman", "Still I Rise", and "When I Think About Myself". The poems were assessed utilizing a qualitative descriptive and structural approach. The structural framework, an evaluative and interpretative strategy emphasizes conflicting theories or intrinsic components and attempts to clarify how they connect to the entire system. Further, it has the capability of analysing and interpreting language, literature, and culture. The study utilised the structural technique to examine words, lines, and structures, which entails five steps: data acquisition, detection, categorization, interpretation, and data description. Five different types of imagery, namely visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and kinesthetic, were identified during the study, with auditory imagery emerging as the prominent one.

Using Abrams' theory, Ayuni (2019) investigated the diction in three of Angelou's poems "Equality", "Touched by an Angel", and "Still I Rise". According to him, the four elements that regularly make up the natural setting where literature is formed and studied are a writer, an audience, a social environment, and a text. Abrams claims that all literary theories can be characterized based on how much significance is placed on these four elements. He said that diction can be broken down into four categories: concrete, abstract, connotation, and denotation. A qualitative analysis of the data was undertaken for the study. In total, seventy-nine data sets were identified in the three poems: Nine concrete dictions, twenty-one abstract dictions, forty-one connotative dictions, and eight denotative dictions were obtained in the research. The study found that the connotative diction predominated in the poems and contributed to their aesthetic appeal.

Igwedibia et al., (2019) incorporated Sperber and Wilson's Relevance theory to analyze Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" pragmatically. Pragmatics elucidates meaning based on the context. The two principles of relevance proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1995), 'cognitive' and 'communicative' reflect two fundamental concepts pertaining to human intelligence and interaction. Every act of deliberate communication conveys a hypothesis of the ideal relevance, which is the ultimate goal of human cognition and is aimed to improve value and importance. Relevance theory provides a framework for understanding how things are interpreted. The poem "Still I Rise" was thoroughly examined in this study

for its extra-linguistic elements. Angelou's writing usually inspires as the majority of it was infused with the struggle against injustice and discrimination. The poem is an exploration of one's consciousness of inequity. The study concentrated on Angelou's use of words in the poetry and also evaluated the sociocultural and psychological impacts throughout the poem.

Tambunan et al., (2020) investigated the syntactical repetition in four of Angelou's poems "Still I Rise", "Caged Bird", "Alone", and "Woman Work". Syntactical repetition is employed to illustrate how the speaker feels during emotional instances. The study addressed and examined five repetition forms, including syntactical tautology, anadiplosis, epiphora, framing, and anaphora. Syntactical tautology is the repeating of a word with its synonym, while anaphora, epiphora, framing, and anadiplosis are recurrences at the beginning, middle and end of a line. The identified repetitions are employed to emphasise that the poems contain the poet's view on blacks' lives. The context's point is emphasized using the repetitions that were discovered. According to the study, the poet intentionally uses repetition to help readers comprehend and retrieve the poem's core.

Hidayah and Purba (2021) applied Perrine's theory of figurative language to evaluate the metaphorical language of Maya Angelou's three poems, "Alone", "Equality", and "Life Does Not Frighten Me". According to Perrine, figurative language is a figure of speech that adds to the meaning of a sentence and poets use metaphorical language to describe their dialects more elegantly and eloquently than in an explicit straightforward way. In addition, he claims that the use of metaphorical language highlights the poet's enthusiasm for his or her work, which strengthens its uniqueness and attractiveness. The application of Perrine's theory is utilized to determine both dominant and subordinate rhetorical devices which also aid in establishing the significance and application of the figurative language in Angelou's poetry. Figurative language analyses encompass simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, symbol, allegory, paradox, hyperbole, understatement, and irony. The analysis employed a descriptive qualitative approach and the data were analyzed using coding, data reduction, and data representation. Eleven distinct figurative language kinds with eleven distinct purpose meanings were discovered in the study. The most prevalent literary technique is hyperbole, and it's superior to irony and contradiction. The interpretation of figurative language exposes the poet's intended social message.

4.2 *Feminism and Its Types*

Since Angelou's poems primarily discuss the difficulties of repressed women and the resilience of those women who stand up against injustice, feminism is the most well-known and frequently discussed subject in analyses of her poems.

Sembiring (2011) used descriptive analysis to uncover feministic concepts or thoughts in Maya Angelou's poems "Still I Rise", "Women Work", "Remembrance", "Phenomenal Women", "Men", "Equality", and "Caged Bird". Descriptive data analysis aids in explaining, illuminating, or presenting data that enables patterns to emerge that fully satisfy the needs of the data. The study examines the instances in which men treat women unfairly and the women portrayed in Maya Angelou's poetry have struggled fiercely to obtain the power to challenge patriarchal ideals and society.

Permatasari (2016) investigated discrimination against Negroid in Angelou's poems "Phenomenal Woman", "Caged Bird", and "Still I Rise". The study explored Angelou's poetry and took a feminist stance while discussing racial concerns. The study placed a strong emphasis on feminist criticism and conducted a women-centric analysis of the poems. The research was carried out using feminist theory, as well as biographical and historical methodologies. The study has identified various kinds of feminism in the poems and has taken account of Angelou's criticism of the current socio-economic structure that exists among African-Americans using Kennedy and Gioia's theory. The poems "Still I Rise" and "Caged Bird" comprise "Marxist" and "Radical" feminism, whereas "Phenomenal Women" has resulted in "Liberal" feminism. In a feminist-based narrative, Angelou portrayed herself as a movement pioneer who fought for the liberation of black people and condemned enslavement. As a black woman, Angelou's poetry implied the belief that black people would definitely be independent.

Iqbal and Parveen (2018) investigated the representation of black women in three of Maya Angelou's poems: "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Caged Bird". This study attempted to examine certain words, sentences, and stanzas from the chosen poems while incorporating the black feminist theory. In the poem, "Still I Rise" Maya Angelou tackled conventional preconceptions about black women and positions the black female as the spokesperson for the community. The findings emphasized and illustrated a few of the characteristics of the women in the poems that are exclusive to each one of the selected poems. The study claimed that Maya Angelou's poem, "Phenomenal Woman" describe beauty as being something other than only having a lovely physique, a lean, trim body, and delicate lips. The poet asserted that the black women can thrive because of their optimistic attitudes, self-confidence, and innate patriotism. The study found that in the last poem, "Caged Bird" Angelou demonstrated how black women's inadequate growth was an outcome of their cultural heritage. The study substantially aided in carrying out research-related studies on black feminism in the poem, with a focus on the poem's diction.

4.3 Racial Discrimination

Angelou's poems explore issues such as marginalization, exploitation, prejudice, and stereotyping. She also addresses women's issues as well as the on-going issues that African Americans confront in a divided society. She is regarded as one of the most remarkable women due to her teachings on the value of humanity and social justice.

Zavitri (2012) investigated the types and roles of metaphorical language utilized in Angelou's selected poems in her thesis. The inquiry led her to discover eleven different types of figurative language, including metaphor, simile, rhetoric, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, anaphora, epizeuxis, irony, metonymy, and repetition, which allows for enhanced comprehension of the poems. The selected poems' figurative language explanations provided insight into the poems altogether. The main issue highlighted was the existence of racial prejudice and how individuals confronted it.

Palupi (2014) inspected the rhythmic patterns of African-Americans in three of Angelou's poems: "Alone", "Caged Bird", "Still I Rise", and "Equality". To examine both intrinsic and extrinsic elements in the poems, the researcher applied Goldmann's "genetic structuralism" hypothesis. Goldmann argues that a literary work cannot be totally separated from its intrinsic and extrinsic components, as the author's cultural context always impacts the work. The social setting or the literary work's history is its extrinsic element, whilst the structure of the work is its intrinsic element. The investigation of the poems' internal and external components, as well as their structure, enabled the identification of three African-American sounds within the select poems. The sound of liberty can be recognized first in the poem "Caged Bird", followed by the sound of equity in the poem "Equality", and last, the sound of bigotry in the poems "Alone" and "Still I Rise". The study concluded that Angelou's poems depict the liberation of the mind from the repercussions of external collision and the desire to re-establish one's own self.

Ilham (2016) found that Maya Angelou's poems displayed racism in the specified poems based on their textual structure and content. The selected poems for the study were: "America", "Africa", "Ain't That Bad", "My Guilt", "Riot: 60s", "Harlem Hopscotch", "On Working White Liberal", "One More Round", "Our Grandmother", "Sepia Fashion Show", "The Calling of Names", "The Thirteen (Black)", and "The Thirteen (White)". The investigation unraveled Angelou's attitude of perseverance. The researcher suspected that Angelou's poems depict the setting of racial conflict in minimal form because she contrasts the lives of both communities, one black and one white, where the discrepancy can be observed based on the way they spend their lives and what they do. The study concluded that Angelou's poems incorporate a number of circumstances of racism and slavery, encompassing prejudices, class strife, isolation, supremacy, and subjugation.

4.4 Resistance towards Racial Discrimination and Sexuality

According to Ghani (2007), Angelou's poems reflect a state of resistance to post-colonialism. Post-colonialism examines the impact of urbanization on colonial dominance over oppressed peoples and their territory. The study did not name any poems specifically, but it did assess those that had qualities that were indicative of resistance to racial discrimination. Angelou's poems depict psychological, behavioral, and socioeconomic aspects of Afro-American society. In her writings, Angelou discussed racial disparities as well as adoration, aversion, and hatred. Her writings explore a wide range of subjects, such as socio-psychological inferiority, the significance of self-determination, cultural mediocrity, the need for emancipation and fury against underestimation. The investigation also analyze the influence of white culture on black values and their self-worth. The study examined a number of dichotomies seen in Angelou's poetry, including black and white, depravity and authority, orient and occident, feminine and masculine, minor and major, and self as well as others. The poems of Maya Angelou gave Afro-Americans a forum to speak, particularly the black women who struggle to survive in the face of prejudice and hatred by white people. The research stated that Angelou was one of the revolutionary authors/poets who addressed white jurisdiction and enslavement.

The poems "Phenomenal Woman", "Seven Women's Blessed Assurance", and "Woman Me" by Maya Angelou were chosen for their prominence by Paramita (2012) for their sexuality-related elements. Angelou represents an image of black female sexuality that is significantly different from her earlier years. The study revealed that Angelou's black female characters perceived themselves as powerful, self-assured women who were content with their outward appearance and accepted their physical characteristics as constructive traits. The research was carried out by applying an expressive methodology. This method of writing served as an interpretation of the writer's thoughts and emotional states, or perhaps it remained as the product of their imagination. The study covered how women's attractiveness, enticing sensuality and grace drew men to them. The study examined women's traits and concluded that women's intrinsic femininity and strength came from acknowledging and accepting their physical attributes. Even though black women were viewed as inferior by white people, they prevail over injustice through their resilient character and optimistic nature for the years to come.

Krisna and Soelistyo (2013) examined three of Angelou's poems about the subject of black power: "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", and "Weekend Glory". The investigation assisted the notion of the Black Power movement as

well as the inclusion of metaphorical language in some of the selected poems, which aid in demonstrating the idea of black power. The revolutionary Black Power movement emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, emphasizing socio-political advancement, economic autonomy, and ethnicity. This period saw the development of direct artistic expression that portrayed the lives of African-Americans as well as the increasing popularity of black history and African heritage. The term “Black Power” describes the acceptance and perseverance of Black people predominantly in America. Writing about black power is a powerful way for black women to share their ideas and demonstrate their capacity to accept their black identity. The term “black feminist narrative” describes how the challenges faced by black women affect reading, writing, and the societal functions of literature. The study revealed the prejudice that black people in America experience primarily because of their nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. The investigation concluded that Angelou, as a spokeswoman, stood as a strong black woman and represented her community.

Angelou emphasized the voice of black women and used her poetry to convey her protest against injustice and bigotry, says Naderi (2013). Although five poems are mentioned in the discussions, the study doesn't explicitly address any literary work. The poems “Caged Bird”, “Phenomenal Woman”, “When I Think about Myself”, “On the Pulse of Morning”, and “Still I Rise” serve as focal points of reference for the subject of discussion. In addition to emphasizing the conceptual framework of the distinctiveness and magnificence of the black subject, the study found that Angelou attempted to explain how black women could thrive despite being confronted with psychic and cultural disdain by white males. Angelou gained worldwide acclaim for her poetry and artistic writing, particularly for her extraordinary memoirs. Poems of Angelou are primarily focused on African-American women's lives. All of her depictions of black women in her poems have the same characteristics.

Eid (2020) emphasized the unique existence of black women in the enslaved nation (America). The study did not focus on any particular poems of Angelou but instead examined the theme of racial inequality in Maya Angelou's writing. African-American poet Maya Angelou addresses what it means to be a woman, a black person, and someone who lives in poverty. She claims that she writes for people of her race and that her voice speaks for oppressed African American men and women. Through her aggressive voice, she conveys the attitude of triumph over hardship that permeates her political songs. Analyzing Angelou's poetry in depth reveals concerns with racial prejudice, misogyny, and social class. The aim of the study was to inquire at Angelou's poems as an expression of rebellion against the disparities in race and gender that plagued the African-American community.

4.5 Survival and Self-identity

Quest for self-identity and theme of survival plays a vital role in African American literature. Angelou carried the themes in almost all of her works.

Janouskova (2005) draws attention to the theme of survival in Maya Angelou's poetry. Instead of focusing on a single poem from Angelou's collection, the study analyzed each poem and organized them based on terms relating to survival. Black women's adversity, dignity, and fortitude displayed their belief in survival. Since Angelou delivered various odes as poems that included humor and religious thoughts, the concept of survival was defined in her poetry through the sense of humor, melody, and religious elements. According to the study, Angelou's poetry is well-known for establishing a story of their existence. Angelou emphasized the significance of a woman's identity in their fight for liberty and how her grandmother lived as a light in a sea of anguish and chaos. In accordance with the analysis, most of Angelou's writing addressed how culture affected behavior among people.

Praseeda (2010) highlighted how black women were portrayed as inferior and minimum to men and white women by evaluating poems from the book “The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou” as a whole. Black poetry has the potential to be artistic, political, and instructional. Angelou's writing has been divided into two main groups: autobiographical stories and stories from the Bible. The study examined Angelou's poems and specified the stages of development from humiliation and hopelessness to defiance of the prevailing situation. The study demonstrated that Angelou's poetry teaches readers about adversity, racial discrimination, and unproductive insult. The article concluded with a discussion of the slave trade and its terrible consequences for the people of her community who work to improve a lot in their life. It also disclosed how Angelou confronted countless reminiscences of America's most cruel institution through convictions (how faith aids in recovery and enhances her determination to live), conflict (the devastating social and political history), and rebirth (finding oneself).

By examining Frankl's existential psychology and concentrating on the three-dimensional nature of people and their essential inheritance, Harisunker and Plessis (2021) seek to comprehend Angelou's intentionality in her early and young adulthood. According to Frankl, numerous medical conditions and mental problems were the signs of existential turmoil. Frankl believed that amid tragic circumstances, the desire to find one's purpose in life propels one forward. He then divided the significance of life into three categories: employment, encounters, and the actions made during inevitable hardship. A qualitative technique was used to collect, classify, and evaluate the data. The investigation

emphasized Angelou's narrative style, which incorporated her life's physiological, emotional, and religious aspects resulting in a substantial contribution to the formation of meaning. A profound understanding of the lives of remarkable persons through the description of characters in the poetry exposed Angelou's strong will, desire for liberty, encounters, and problems throughout her life. The study concluded by demonstrating Angelou's resiliency to live a worthwhile existence and recognizing her as an inspirational person.

Shrestha and Chamling (2021) investigated Angelou's writings in which she surpasses the traumatic occurrences around and within her. The study did not mention any poems in particular but assessed them with a resilient tone. The research illustrated how African-American woman Angelou endured personal and collective trauma while creating her identity. Angelou was presented as an idol of fortitude and adaptability, and her life and growth path would not have been fulfilled without her perseverance. The internalization of trauma enables her to achieve her drive for survival and development. This study showed how the trauma that shaped Angelou's artistic works (poems) was intrinsically tied to them. The study demonstrated how writing enabled Angelou to comprehend her past and carve a way through it, making her a symbol of optimism, bravery, and resiliency.

5. Conclusion

As an African-American woman, Angelou suffered all through her life. Her passion of writing greatly helped her to overcome the hardships and inner turmoil. Crossing all the boundaries of racism, discrimination, sexuality, gender bias, Angelou strived hard for freedom and identity. From the analysis of the research articles, the researcher observes the elements of autobiography (from her early childhood to her later period of struggles) all through her poems. The researcher concludes that Angelou's unique style of writing not only represents her way of life but also the whole black community in the dominant land (America).

The analysis based on the structure, tone and rhyming patterns of Angelou's poems brings out the uniqueness of the poet and also explicitly showcases how she used those symbols and metaphors to dig the deeper meaning of the poems. The poems of Angelou were a clearer portrait of black women in white society, who suffered and survived the dreadful life in the dominant land. Angelou brought out both the holocaust images and the resilient nature of the blacks, which in turn aid in understanding the typical (haunted) lives of the blacks in America. Angelou always uses characters around her to make them a referential truth.

“Sometimes I make a character from a composite three or four people because the essence in any one person is not sufficiently strong to be written about. Essentially though, the work is true though sometimes I fiddle with the facts(...) I am using the first person singular and trying to make that the first person plural, so that anybody can read the work and say, Hmm, that is the truth, yes, hu-huh, and live in the work. It is a large, ambitious dream. But I love the form” (Angelou 9).

As a symbol of hope, courage and resilience she stood as a phenomenal woman among the blacks in the whites' land. As her poems were regarded as “the anthems of African-Americans”, it represented each and every detail of their life from the period of struggle to the period of hope (for the better future). The element of self-portrait and the representation of her community made her poems renowned all through the ages and made her a “Phenomenal Woman”.

References

- African American literature. 2021. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-American-literature>
- African American Women Poets (2016). *A history of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry*, pp.123-137. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316488560.009>
- African Americans: Creating Voice from the Written Word: What is African American Literature? (June 16, 2020). Retrieved from <https://mcallen.libguides.com/africanamericanliterature/home>
- Angelou, M. (1990). The Art of Fiction CXIX. *Paris Review*, 116, 144-67.
- Arbi, S. A. (2019). Analysis of imagery in five selected poems by Maya Angelou. *British (Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris)*, 7(1), 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.31314/british.7.1.43-59.2018>
- Ayuni, N. (2019). *An Analysis of Diction in Maya Angelou's Selected Poem* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar).
- Eid, H. K. M., Enani, M. M., & Abdel Aatty, S. S. (2020). Manifestations of Racial Discrimination as Shown in selected Poems by Maya Angelou. *Beni-Suef University International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 67-92. <https://doi.org/10.21608/buijhs.2020.88844>

- Five key themes in African American Poetry (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.africanamericanpoetry.org/themes>
- Gates, L. H. (2016). *A History of Twentieth-Century American Women's Poetry*. Cambridge University Press. 123-137. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316488560.009>
- Ghani, M., & Naz, B. (2007). Race, feminism and representation-an inquiry into Maya Angelou's poetry. *International Research Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 35, 95-106.
- Hagen, L. B. (1997). *Heart of a woman, mind of a writer, and soul of a poet: A critical analysis of the writings of Maya Angelou*. University Press of America.
- Harisunker, N., & du Plessis, C. (2021). A journey towards meaning: An existential psychobiography of Maya Angelou. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 17(3), 210. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.5491>
- Hayani, R. (2016). Figurative language on Maya Angelou selected poetries. *Script Journal*, 1(2), 131-143. <https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v1i2.30>
- Hidayah, A., & Purba, T. (2021). Figurative Language Analysis in a Poetry Entitled 'Life Does Not Frighten Me', 'Equality', and 'Alone' by Maya Angelou. *Musamus Journal of Language and Literature*, 3(02), 27-36.
- Igwedibia, A., Okeke, A., Anieke, C., & Ikechukwu, O. I. (2019). Relevance Theoretical Interpretation of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise". *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 8(4), 65-69. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.8n.4p.65>
- Ilham, R. R. H., Thoyibi, M., & Candraningrum, P. D. (2015). *Racism reflected in Maya Angelou's poems*. (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta).
- Iqbal, Z., & Parveen, S. (2018). *The Poetics of Black Feminist Narrative. A Literary Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poetry*. GRIN Verlag.
- Janoušková, P. (2005). Theme of Survival in Maya Angelou's Poetry. *A published thesis, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech*.
- Khan, A. B., & Khan, M. Y. (2016). Stylistic Analysis of the Poem "Woman Work" by Maya Angelou. *International Journal of Institutional & Industrial Research*, 1(2), 10-14.
- Krisna, S., & Soelistyo, L. (2013). Black Power in Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Woman", And "Weekend Glory". *K@ ta Kita*, 1(1).
- Martínez Lirola, M. (2002). On the use of marked syntax in Maya Angelou's Wouldn't Take Nothing for my Journey Now.
- Naderi, L., Amelirad, A., & Amelirad, S. (2013). Maya Angelou's quest for an identity as a female black voice. *Researcher*, 5(12), 228-231.
- Nelson Annie. (2015). *A Reflection on Early Expressions of Black Poetry*. Retrieved from <https://history.denverlibrary.org/news/reflection-early-expressions-black-poetry#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20sub%2Dsection,%2C%20blues%2C%20jazz%20and%20rap>
- Neubauer, C. E. (1990). Maya Angelou: self and a song of freedom in the Southern tradition. *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*, 114-42.
- Oyenyi, O. (2004). "The Critical Reception of Modern African Poetry", *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 176. Online since 17 April 2008, connection on 20 April 2021. <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/4817>
- Palupi, N. (2014). *The Sounds of African-American in Maya Angelou's Poems: Alone, Caged Bird, Still I Rise and Equality* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Brawijaya).
- Paramita, A. P. (2012). Sexuality as Seen in Maya Angelou's Poems, "Woman Me", "Phenomenal Woman", And "Seven Women's Blessed Assurance". *Lexicon*, 1(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v1i1.5298>
- Permatasari, I. E. (2016). An Analysis of Feminism in Maya Angelou's Poems by Using Historical and Biographical Approaches. *Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra*, 3(2), 152-172. <https://doi.org/10.21067/jibs.v3i2.1467>
- Praseedha G. (2010). In search of a black female self: A study of the autobiographies and select works of Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou. University of Calicut, Department of English, Mercy College Palakkad.
- Rachmawati, N. (2014). *The Analysis of imageries dealing with racial discrimination in Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"*. (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Madiun).
- Raharta, A. P., Ratnadewi, D., & Hamsia, W. (2015). *An Analysis Of Metaphor in Maya Angelou's Caged Bird and Still I Rise Poems* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya).

- Sembiring, D. B. P. (2011). An Analysis of Feminism in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems. Universitas Sumatera Utara.
- Shrestha, M., & Chamling, R. (2021). Writing, As a Means of Survival and Growth: A Study of Sublimation of Trauma in the Works of Maya Angelou. *Cogito*, 13(3), 188-201.
- Tambunan, A. R. S., Silaban, M., Haloho, R., Nainggolan, P., Rizki, O., Eko, R., & Tauhid, R. (2020). Syntactical Repetition on Selected Poems of Maya Angelou. *Linguistica*, 9(1), 249-257. <https://doi.org/10.24114/jalu.v9i1.17765>
- Tate, C. (1999). "Maya Angelou: An Interview". In Joanne M. Braxton (ed.). *Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford Press. p. 155.
- Zavitri, I. (2012). Poetical Devices in Maya Angelou's Selected Poem.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution license](#) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.