

**A Socio-Cultural study of African-American Women
in Maya Angelou’s “And Still I Rise” and
“Phenomenal Woman”**

Dissertation

Submitted to

Department of English, School of Languages

Doon University, Dehradun

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the award of the degree of

Master of Arts in

English by

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in the Dissertation entitled '**A SocioCultural study of African-American women in Maya Angelou's "And still I rise and Phenomenal woman"**' being submitted to the Department of English, School Of Languages, Doon University, Dehradun for the award of Master in (English) is my original research work.

The Dissertation embodies the results of investigations, observations, and experiments carried out by me. I have neither plagiarized any part of the dissertation nor have submitted same work for the award of any other degree/diploma anywhere.

(Anushka Bhaisora)

(SLE-1273)

Date:

Certificate

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled “**A Socio-Cultural study of African-American women in Maya Angelou’s ‘And still I rise and Phenomenal woman’**” submitted by Ms. Anushka Bhaisora has been done under my supervision. It is also certified that the work in this Dissertation embodies original research and hard work of the candidate.

The assistance and support received during the course of investigation and all the sources of literature have been fully acknowledged.

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Acknowledgement

Having completed the current thesis entitled as the “A Socio-Cultural study of African American Woman in Maya Angelou’s ‘And Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman’”, the researcher is extremely happy and expresses her gratitude to God for his blessings. This thesis is a requirement for the postgraduate degree in Doon University.

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Anushka Bhaisora

Abstract

This study draws on the social-cultural perspective of African-American woman in respect of gender study on the basis of Maya Angelou's poems: "And Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal woman". Both the poems talk about the issues related to gender and black identity. Maya Angelou has been one of the most important African-American woman and in her poems, one finds various aspects of gender, including how women were obligated to follow society's rules and regulations, and how despite all the challenges, she powerfully stood against them. Therefore, the present work focuses on the issue of gender from a socio-cultural perspective. Gender is inextricably linked to other identities such as class, race and ethnicity, etc. As it is socially constructed, it also includes gender related beliefs, norms, roles, discrimination in the society. The present paper follows the rules of MLA ninth edition

Keywords: gender, black woman, identity.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Background of the study

“Literature is an expression of society” (Nodier). A very simple yet impactful statement made by Charles Nodier gives a brief view to what literature and society represents.

Through this statement, it is understood that a literary work is a picture of the spirit of the age in which it was written. Literature influences the society. A good literature reveals creativity, and it has the power to raise new questions and debates which gives a new perspective for the readers to understand the society and itself well. An inspiring piece of literature be it; poetry, drama, can influence a society in great many ways. No matter how old it gets, literature can't escape the influence of society, it reflects society at the time it was created. Raymond Williams, in his essay “*Base and Superstructure*”, points that literature is interconnected with society, he concluded that it is impossible to evaluate literature independently of society because literature evolves from it. The society relies on it. Literature is a medium to express all kinds of expressions and feelings. Literature claims truth as it shows the real face of the society and the people living in it. There are relations and interrelations between people living in the society. Literature is lived by the society. Thus, literature and society are interrelated.

Society at large consists of people who live in a specific geographical territory. These people interact with one another and share elements of a

common culture. Cultural and social influences are reflected in literature, which portrays people's ideas creatively. Culture plays an important role to form the society. A society doesn't exist without culture. Culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, discrimination, taboos, institutions, tools, techniques and so on. Culture does not belong to an individual but to the group. It is the shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills and practices about a specific group of individuals. Literature stands as a voice that expresses the values and beliefs and throws light on how people live as individual or a group. For generations literature has tried to be a voice for the voiceless in the society, representing different social issues and inequalities. One such issue being gender and its role imposed by the society.

As a social construct, gender refers to the characteristics of women and men. The social construction of gender involves norms, behaviours, roles associated with both men and women. Our society has a set of ideas about how men and women are to be represented. These are the assigned roles that society provides to differentiate between men and women. For example, women are expected to be polite, a good wife and mother for their husband and children, nurturing. And men are expected to be strong, bold, aggressive, insensitive. A woman cannot be bold as it's not her role, this is the common belief. Every society, group and culture have their own gender roles and expectations, and they may vary from each other. Gender roles are not permanent and may or may not change. Like, back in the 18th century pink was the colour associated with masculinity, which is totally different from what people believe today. Even the occupations like teaching, cooking, nursing are believed as womanly, and doctors, pilots are considered to be manly jobs. The

role of gender is viewed from different perspectives within different disciplines. Gender roles suggested by an ecological perspective is to be shaped by interactions between individuals, communities and their respective environment. On the other hand, a biological perspective proposes that women are naturally suited to feminine gender roles, while men are suited to masculine gender roles. A sociological perspective on gender role proposes that feminine and masculine roles are not necessarily biological. It claims that gender roles can be learned and unlearned, and on the other hand new roles can also be produced.

Gender roles cause an unequal and unfair treatment, especially for women, known as gender-based discriminations. Often women are confined fulfilling their roles as mothers, wives, caretakers of their family, which leads to gender inequality. It shows how in a biased way the roles are distributed. Women are limited to their houses, resulting in lack of opportunities, education, independence, etc. Women are not included in the power of decision making. They are discriminated on the basis of the rights given to men like voting rights, freedom of marriage, citizenship, divorce rights, etc.

Women are also discriminated based on various gender stereotypes. Men and women have been exaggeratedly described in ways like, it is commonly believed that females are overly emotional and they cry often, whereas men are not emotional. Being emotional is directly related to being weak. Women cry a lot therefore they are weak and cannot handle situations, this is how women are discriminated based on the stereotypes. These stereotypes are made by the male dominated society so that there could always

be a binary difference between men and women and they never fall in the same group as equals.

The society guaranteed to make women feel inferior and subordinated in every aspect of their lives. As soon as a woman marries, she lost her independence and property rights. In the nineteenth century, the church and the government discriminated between men and women by not allowing them the same opportunities and freedom. United States was highly dominated by men and the male dominated establishment denied full political citizenship to women. They were not allowed to vote, be a part of the government, go for higher education, have a job, and not even allowed to get divorce from a toxic relationship. Their voices are undervalued if even heard. Women are often sketched as someone who could not survive if left on their own, they always need a support system, and could do nothing for itself. Delicate, beautiful, obedient are some of the common words used to describe a woman. Society and culture impose their beliefs on women to control them. They have been treated as a part of men, even from the religious perspective, like the story of Adam and Eve, Eve depicting women in the society being made from Adam's bone (not as his equal but as his inferior). In order for women to remain pure and clear, this discrimination was instituted.

Over the course of history, the role of women in a society has eventually changed due to the growing fight for their rights. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote '*A Vindication for The Rights of Woman*' (Wollstonecraft) a feminist text to challenge the life-long belief that women exist to please men, she proposed that both men and women should be given

equal opportunities in education, work and politics and should be treated as rational beings. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir also talked about the binary difference between men and women and how women since history have been portrayed as negative. Movements including National Women's Right Convention, Civil Rights Movement, Right to Women's Vote, etc helped women to fight for their rights: to vote, to be educated, etc., but still didn't end the discrimination prevailing in the society, though it worked as an important tool to fight against it.

Despite the challenges faced by women in this male dominated society, African-Americans were doubly victimized, they were discriminated on the basis of their race, and were treated as inferiors by the American society. Simone de Beauvoir in her notable work '*The Second sex*' quoted George Bernard Saws familiar line to tell the situation of African Americans, "The white American relegates the black to rank of shoe-shine boy, and then concludes that blacks are only good for shining shoes" (Beauvoir 33). Black women's role was much limited in the society, they were identified as slave, wife, nurse, caretaker, etc. Even with the suppression faced by black women from all the sides of the society, they never failed to express themselves in the most creative way. They termed themselves as caged birds who were singing the songs of freedom to the society. The cage could be a symbol of sexism and racism in which women were trapped. The songs, her kitchen garden, her way of storytelling are some of the major tools used by black women in literature to depict her own text. African American women wrote against the traditional notions of the male dominated society, by creating new narrative strategies and representing women more completely. Literature and black history have

ignored women for so long. Women's literature in the African American tradition has emerged as an independent literary movement constructed on the base of veiled women writers. In the modern context, African American literature have two varieties of black women writers. The first challenges the sexist, racist world and behest their right to be treated equally, this resulted in 'The Black Feminist Movement'. Alice Walker (the famous American novelist, poet and social activist) coined the term 'womanism' for the African Americans meaning feminist of colour or a Black feminist, to differentiate them from other feminist writers. These writers wrote with the aim to change the society's pessimistic view of women's chances of obtaining gender equality and to denounce injustice suffered by women. Their focus was to build a place at least in literature where women could identify themselves as individuals and not as a part of somebody else.

Some notable African American women writers to establish their print in this world are: Phillis Wheatley, she became the first published African American poet; Maria Stewart; Harriet Jacobs; Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first women to edit and publish newspaper in North America; Charlotte Forten Grimke; Lucy Parsons; Angelina Weld Grimke; Georgia Douglas Johnson; Jessie Redmon Fauset; Zora Neale Hurston; Shirley Graham Du Bois; Marita Bonner; Daisy Bates; Gwendolyn Brooks; Lorraine Hansberry; Audre Lorde, etc.,. The common theme that all these writers include in their work was the concern for identity, freedom and independence along with women's identification and empowerment. African American women writers have brought Black woman's experience to life, for not only African-Americans but women worldwide. Talking about black women, Maya Angelou has been one

such inspirational and strong women who worked hard to attain that position in the male-dominated society. She was one of the most prominent and influential African-American women in the twentieth century. Her work influenced not only African-Americans but also people across the globe. Her childhood was the seedbed for this empowerment, and this can be majorly seen in all her autobiographies. At a very young age she realized and faced the discrimination for being a black woman. The impact was strong enough to make her feel uncomfortable in her own skin and body. For her then, beauty signified white skin, blond hair and blue eyes.

This work attempts to study gender as depicted in Maya Angelou's poems "And Still I rise" and "Phenomenal Women" (Angelou). Angelou is one of the most famous faces in Black literature and literature in general, she worked passionately for women's right. Her poem gives a detailed analysis on how black women were treated in a society by both men and women. They faced racism, gender discrimination and were always told to hold back their opinions being a woman. Angelou wrote these poems based on her own experiences being a Black woman. Therefore, the biography of Maya Angelou should also be depicted to give an understanding of why the poems were written in the first place and what influenced her to become such a strong and independent woman.

Born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri Maya Angelou was born to Mr. Bailey Johnson and Vivian Baxter. After her parents' divorce Angelou along with her brother at the age of 3 and 4 respectively, went to live with their paternal grandmother Mrs. Anne Henderson to Stamps in Arkansas. With

education and family condition Angelou was quite fortunate. Her grandmother owned a Store in Stamps which earned her well to support her family even at the time of great depression eventually followed by World War II. Her momma (grandmother) was the most influential figure in her life. She sowed the seeds of religion, manners and confidence in Maya. Another influence of her life was Mrs, Bertha Flowers who was a white woman. After Maya was raped by Mr. Freeman her mother's boyfriend, Mrs. Flowers helped her to overcome the emotional trauma of sexual abuse by diverting and motivating her towards reading poetry and literature, she added that 'It is language alone which separates him(man) from lower animals'. She was one of the few White women praised by Angelou. Maya added that Mrs. Flowers was 'the aristocrat of Black Stamps' and appeared 'warm in the coldest weather'. Mrs. Flowers influence was so strong on Angelou that she considered her as the 'richest white woman in town' (Angelou 69).

After graduating from Toussaint L'Overture in St. Louis she began working as the first African-American streetcar conductor. She married Tosh Angelou, despite having a son at the age of 16 without being married, but their marriage didn't work and they got a divorce in 1954. After having a successful career in writing and acting she got married again to Paul Du Few but got divorced again in 1981. Angelou published various poems and short books, and all her poems have been collected in The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou. She was not just limited with writing poetry, but also wrote various screenplays, cookbooks, movie scripts and biographies. Later in her life she was honoured by the most coveted Presidential Medal of Freedom by

President Barack Obama in the year 2011. She died on May 28, 2014, leaving a lasting impact on generations to come.

Angelou shares her secrets and stories primarily with the readers in her works using a direct, conversational style. She invites the reader to her personal space. Metaphors and similes are used extensively in her writing. A great example of Angelou's metaphorical use is in the title of her first autobiographical novel '*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*' (Angelou), where a caged bird is compared to her own situation. Her writings reflected her own experiences as a Black woman growing up and living in the American South, she worked as a voice for all the experiences of every woman of her community. The themes of racism, sexism and identity are examined and explored with a directness in her poems and novels. De Gout praised Angelou for her work by stating that her poetry cannot be placed in 'categories' of themes and techniques. She uses feminine and familiar metaphors and the dialect of African-Americans to express universal themes which are connected to all races. Her writing style was quite different from other writers of her time, as she used laughter and humour as a replacement to tears for coping up with the feelings of sadness and suffering of its readers. Others such as Paula Marshall and Gwendolyn Brook have been influenced by Angelou.

Angelou's works are seen as most important when it comes to the study of African American women. There have been number of studies based on the works of Maya Angelou from different perspectives. Majorly the studies found about her work includes the issues like feminism, black women's struggle against the Whites, black identity, black women as a minority within a minority, sexuality etc. Kinasih, Hindhun Sri Yuli (2015) in

his work discussed about the low self-esteem that black women have due to constant degradation from the society. He shows how Angelou encourages

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other women to not feel ashamed of who they are but to accept and love themselves. Gutierrez Pelayo, Elvira (2017), in her work presented how women in the nineteenth and the twentieth century were seen as a minority and especially African American women who were minority within the minority, based on Angelou's autobiographical novel. Krishna and Soelistyo focuses on the idea of black power in Angelo's poems. Paramita, Ashika Prajnya (2012), analysed the idea of women sexuality in Angelou's poems and considered it to be glorious and the one that needs to be celebrated. The result of her study is that how her experiences influenced her to become independent and taught her a great deal of lessons.

Most of the studies talk about feminism in her work, black women as a minority, identity, etc. Therefore, this study will investigate about the sociocultural aspects that influenced Angelou in a positive way to become such a strong and influential personality for all other women. Also, how gender can be studied through her poems and the discrimination that women face along with the assigned gender roles given by the male-dominated society. Following are the two poems of Maya Angelou taken by the researcher for her study: "And Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal Woman". The theory focused by the researcher in this work is the Black Feminist Theory by Alice Walker, which is also called womanism.

The theory emphasizes the need for women to love one another and not just other women but her own self as well. A womanist is the feminist of colour or simply a Black feminist. Black American author and activist Alice

Walker originated this term to portray Black woman who were devoted towards the happiness and soundness of all humanity. The idea behind the term 'Womanist' was to unite the different colours or shades of women in the midst of the feminist movement at "the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression". Since this thesis involves African-American Women, this theory is perfect to support the work.

Angelou is highly appreciated for her work and for being a strong influence in the life of African-American women. The researcher aims to talk about the issues related to gender and black identity in the poems of Maya Angelou mainly: 'And Still I Rise' and 'Phenomenal Women'. Her work clearly demonstrates the idea of women empowerment. Gender being socially constructed also includes gender related beliefs, norms, roles, discrimination in the society. The socio-cultural aspects are largely missing in the critical works done in the past on Maya Angelou's poems. Therefore, the present work focuses on the issue of Gender from a social-cultural perspective, by critically analysing the given poems of Maya Angelou, using Black Feminist Theory given by Alice Walker.

Research Questions

The present research focuses on how gender roles, rituals and practices are shown for in the given poems of Maya Angelou? What are the different challenges faced by Black women in the two poems? And what are the different coping mechanisms used in the two poems by the poet?

Aim of the study

This study aims to answer the questions “how roles, rituals and practices are different for women. To understand the different challenges faced by black women in the two given poems and what different coping mechanism the poet uses to deal with the discrimination”.

Significance of the study

As a result of this study, theoretical and practical aspects will be addressed. Research on the two poems ‘And Still I Rise’ and ‘Phenomenal Woman’ can theoretically help researchers to better understand their content, and also help them to understand how Black Feminist Theory is applied in this study so they can further work on African American woman.

In the practical aspect, the current study helps by offering a way in which people could rewrite and revisit the society. People should look at everything from an equal perspective, they should treat everyone equally despite to what gender, sex, race, caste or colour that individual belongs to. Therefore, behind this research is a hope to see a better world, where there is an equal treatment between the male and female and the white and blacks.

Literature Review

The following literature was reviewed in the present work: The first review is of an undergraduate thesis by Febiyanto, Gatot Hendy (2010) entitled “The Idea of Black Feminism in Maya Angelou’s And Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman”. Using a review of black feminism in the U.S. as a basis, the author explores the idea of Black Feminism. First, he discusses what

the two poems “And Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman” of Maya Angelou addresses. Then how based on these two poems Maya Angelou talks about black feminism. The conclusion the writer found is that both poems talk about black woman to do better in life, to feel confident of themselves, so that white people, black men and white women do not underestimate them and they live a better life in the society with equality.

Using a review of black feminism in the U.S. as a basis, the author explores the idea of Black Feminism.

The second review is based on the thesis by Kinasih, Hindhun Sri Yuli (2015) entitled “African American Women’s Self-Esteem Reflected in Maya Angelou’s Phenomenal Woman, Woman Me, and Seven Women’s Blessed Assurance”. The writer with the help of different figurative languages and imagery shows the pride, confidence and positive attitude of women in all the three mentioned poems. The writer concludes by mentioning that African American Women as mentioned by Angelou in the three poems have pride, confidence, a positive and a non-blaming behaviour to depict their self-esteem which encourages the readers to have a positive life.

The third review is by Paramita, Ashika Prajnya (2012) labelled as “Sexuality as Seen in Maya Angelou’s Poems, Woman Me, Phenomenal Woman and Seven Women’s Blessed Assurance”. The writer shows that the three poems set forth the idea that women’s sexuality is glorious and needs to be celebrated. The writer gives a brief view of all the women qualities as depicted in all the mentioned poems, like physical and sexual appeal; pride, strength and self-confidence; and femininity. The writer concerns to show how

these poems are the manifestation of what Maya Angelou was not, before she grew up to become confident and accepted her the way she was. Based on the research the writer found that the values reflected in the poems are obtained after years of suffering and the experiences that Angelou learned from them, to make her an independent, confident and self-accomplished women.

The fourth review of literature is by Pelayo, Elvira Gutierrez (2017) entitled as “A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY: A Study of the African American Women Based on Maya Angelou’s Autobiography I Know Why The Caged Birds Sings”. This thesis aims to analyse the situation of Black Women as depicted in the twentieth century, U.S. The author talked about the autobiographical novel of Angelou and analysed her life based on the novel. She concluded her work by describing how Angelou influenced people particularly the black women who were a minority within a minority meaning being black women under the male dominated racist society. The writer quoted Angelou as “an icon” who worked hard and dedicated all her life to accomplish her goal despite the racism and humiliation she faced by society.

The last review is of an undergraduate thesis by Oktaviany, Ziqry Charla (2018), entitled as “Woman’s Struggle Against Racism As Reflected in Angelou’s I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings”. In this work, the writer analyses Angelou’s autobiographical novel through a feminist approach. The writer throws light on the fact how Angelou was insecure about her looks when she was a child, it shows her journey from being an insecure child to becoming a strong woman. She concluded her work by mentioning that no gender or colour could stop a person from following their dreams and

achieving their goals. The writer also suggest an understanding towards the role of women I this patriarchal world.

The present work can be seen differently from the other five literature reviews which are mentioned above. The present research work focuses specifically on gender study of women based on the socio-cultural aspects in Angelou's poems, "And Still I Rise" and "Phenomenal Woman". In the present work the researcher will analyse the poems using Black Feminist Theory. The research purposes to show how society and culture influences one's gender to perform specific roles and behave in a particular manner.

Theoretical Approach

The researcher uses the Black Feminist Theory by Alice Walker to analyze the poems 'And Still I Rise' and 'Phenomenal Woman' by Maya Angelou which is also mentioned in the above paragraphs. Feminism or a feminist approach is the one that combines social theory and political activism to address issues of gender identities, expressions of gender, sex and sexuality. Different types of feminism are used to show the struggles faced by women in the world. It represents all the oppressed voices of women in the patriarchal world. Although it's main focus was to see the problems the white middle class women faces. Feminism somehow divided the feminist's based on their nationality, race religion and language. This division neglected the women of colour or the black women, while white women talked about the struggles faced by their own group. Both the white and the African American women lived in the same land still there was this discrimination based on their colour. White feminist refused to talk about and support the black women for their

rights. This led to the creation of the movement called the Black Feminist Movement, which aims to release black women from the shackles of classism, racism and sexism on a political, ideological and economic level. The women involved in this movement refer themselves as ‘womanists’ to look different from the whites who call themselves ‘feminists.’

The term womanist represents black or coloured women and their struggle from the discrimination they face. Alice Walker coined the term ‘Womanism’ in her book *‘In Search Of Our Mother’s Garden’* (Walker) published in the year 1983. In this she gave different definitions of what a ‘womanist’ is- women loving another woman both sexually and non-sexually; she is the one who appreciates other women’s culture along with the one having emotional flexibility; the one who loves man as well; and the one committed to the completeness of both male and female. It includes the everyday experiences of black women. This was the major tactic applied by Black Women to address gender oppression without an attack on Black Men. Walker majorly in her work talks about the personal experiences, one finds similarity in Angelou’s work as well.

This theory connects with the present work as it talks about the challenges and everyday experiences of Maya Angelou as a black woman. Similarly, the idea of appreciating and loving women from other women can be seen in both the poems by Angelou. She stands as a voice for the voiceless women and encourages them to rise into a new world where there is no darkness of the past, and to accept and love themselves the way they are not how the society tell them to be. The poems does not attack men or women directly, it talks about how the society encourages male and female to behave

and feel in such a way. Angelou does not blame anyone for what she has faced, rather she talks about how she rise to become such confident women and motivates others as well to do so.

Method of the research

This part of the research includes the following sub-parts: type of research, data sources, and the method to analyse the data.

Type of research

A qualitative type of research is used by the researcher in the present work. This research is non-statistical and is based on the research design that examines the motive of the study.

Data Sources

The data source in the present work contains the text of ‘And Still I Rise’ and ‘Phenomenal Woman’ poems by Maya Angelou as its primary source. The poems have been studied from the book entitled ‘*Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*’ by Maya Angelou, published in Random House, New York, in 1995. The researcher also collected the data from various other secondary data sources including the encyclopaedias, books written by Maya Angelou, other poems of Maya Angelou and web browsers containing the information for the analysis of the poems.

Methods of analysing data

Qualitative method of research has been used by the researcher to analyze the data. At first, an in-depth reading of the given text “And Still I

Rise and Phenomenal Woman” was conducted. Then the analysis of the data including the meaning of the text, the hidden symbols, figure of speeches, etc was done. Lastly, the researcher examined gender in the mentioned poems and the way it is socially and culturally constructed. In the last the research questions have been answered.

Paper Organization

There are three chapters in the present work. The first, includes the introduction, it brings forth the background of the study, research questions, aim of the study, significance of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, methods of research and the paper organization. The second, includes a brief analysis of the poems of Maya Angelou based on the study of gender. Lastly, the third chapter includes the conclusion of the research.

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Chapter II

Analysis

This chapter is further divided into four subchapters. The first includes the analysis of the poem 'And Still I Rise', the second includes the analysis of the poem 'Phenomenal Woman', the third sub-chapter answer the research questions i.e., analysing the poem on the basis of how gender roles, rituals and practices are shown in the poem differently for both male and female, the different challenges faced by black women as depicted in the poems, and the fourth includes the coping mechanisms used by the poet.

Before answering the research questions, a brief analysis of the poem is important to understand the main concept and meaning of the poem.

Analysis of the poem 'And Still I Rise'

And Still I rise

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.

Does my sassiness upset you?

Why are you best with gloom?

Cause I walk like I've got oil wells

Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just the hopes springing high,

Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head and lowered eyes? Shoulders

falling down like teardrops, Weakened by

my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?

Don't you take it awful hard

'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines

Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes, You

may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds At

the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaning and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of the terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I

am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

(Angelou, lines 1-43)

The above poem written by Maya Angelou was published in the year 1978. It is a short poem of 43 lines, with seven quatrains and two end stanzas.

The phrase 'I rise' is continuously repeated throughout the poem. Here the 'I' represents Angelou who stands as a voice for all Black women. The poem expresses the poet's strong idea that she won't let other's opinions control her.

People are jealous to see her boldness as if she has got rich. They are upset to see how a woman that too a Black woman is so bold, strong and has strong opinions. This shows that the world is afraid of a rising woman. But the poet has high hopes. Angelou uses different metaphors, including the sun, moon and the tide who have fixed time to rise and shine. She compares herself to these with a similar hope to rise and shine in the world.

The poet made guesses for everyone being so annoyed and upset at seeing her. It might be because they believe she has gained all the glory and gold without working hard, but the reality lies only with the poet. It's just the poet who knows all the hard work she did to be in this position. People may talk behind your back but only you know how hard you have worked to attain the goal. Opinions don't matter if you have confidence within yourself. They want to see her crying, broken and ravage, but she will rise like an air. She compares herself with the air, that rises no matter how hard someone tries to control or put it down. Similarly people's opinion and judgement won't hurt her or stop her from rising as a strong woman.

Her being sexy and bold is actually offending people, it's a shock for them to see how a Black women can be sexy, beautiful and bold. The notion that only white women can be beautiful and sexy is broken by Angelou. She refers to the history of oppression of the black people by the whites and how

its rooted much in pain, yet she's trying to get over it, without blaming anyone.

The imagery of white treating black as their slaves can be clearly seen in the poem. The poet has left all those memories of hardship, fear by stepping into a new world. It's a new morning for her, where there is no darkness of the past. She has made herself successful by her constant hard work and the black slaves look up to her and dream and aspire to be like her. Just like a phoenix rising from its ashes, she too worked hard to rise and be an inspiration for all her kind and all other people in the society. It's her positivity and love for her people that made her a strong woman.

Answering the research questions

This section is divided into two sub parts to answer the research questions made by the researcher. The first part includes seeing various gender roles, rituals and practices in the poem. And the second part includes the different challenges faced by black women as depicted in the above poem.

Gender roles, rituals and practices as show in 'And Still I Rise'

The poem is based on the survival of the black community in America, and how badly women were treated in the society. The poem was composed by Angelou to reveal the gender discrimination and the personal problems faced by women in the society. The gist of the poem is loud and clear, the repetition of the line 'still I rise' shows that no matter how many times she fails and falls, she will rise. A gap between women and men is clearly visible. It is evident through every line of the poem that she is desperate for freedom

and fair treatment, as an equal human being. Gender and race can be seen as dominant factors in the poem. Society and family expects certain roles from both male and female to carry out. For women, gender role includes the expectations to speak, dress, behave, act in a typical feminine way. The way Angelou represents herself in the poem shows an opposite way of thinking. The fact that women needs to be fair, shy, weak is opposed by Angelou. The repetition of the line 'still I rise' becomes a highlight for the readers to understand how the poet is opposing the gender roles. Woman is weak, she cannot stand by herself, she needs a husband or a support, this concept is overpowered by the lines, "You may trod me in the very dirt/ But still, like dust, I'll rise" (line 3-4). Society has always represented women as weak, but the poet's confidence shown in the line 3-4 opposes it. Angelou by giving her opinions and questioning the male-dominated society breaks another gender role for women who were not allowed to express their views. Another gender role which the society created for women was that women are supposed to be shy, "Bowed head and lowered eyes?" (line 14) when Angelou questions these roles, it shows her power. Society expects her to lower her eyes, but she faces the world by not just coming out of her shells, but also by boldly facing the world. The poet is bold which is the opposite of being feminine.

The roles assigned to women are attached with certain practices, like crying signifies weakness. Whereas for men, they are supposed to be strong and bold, referring to the fact that 'man cannot cry'. It can be seen from the lines "Did you want to see me broken.../ weakened by my soulful cries? (line 13-16). Society wants women to cry and be weak, they are not supposed to be

strong. Seeing the poet's confidence, the society including white men and women along with black men are confused and jealous. Men can too turn weak sometimes, and there is no shame in it. They are not solely responsible to take the burden or to stay strong even when they are not. Women too can take responsibilities and could stay strong. Crying or being weak is not assigned just for women. To cry or to be weak is a normal human nature, it has nothing to do with one's gender.

These practices are deeply rooted in the society, when one tries to oppose it, he/she is despised by his/her own community. Angelou faced a similar kind of situation; the society couldn't accept the fact of a woman being confident and bold. It's a threat for the male dominated society. Success can only be experienced by men, seeing a woman that too a Black-women standing much higher in position is quite difficult for the society to accept.

Breaking all the assigned roles and practices, the poet steps to bring equality for both men and women. These rituals, practices and roles are made to create a discrimination so that women cannot become a threat for men. The symbols in the poem signifies her urge to bring equality. The symbol of 'dust' (line 4) suggests that everyone is created from dust and will eventually return to dust. Angelou's experiences, her traumatic childhood, shaped her to become such a confident woman. From a girl who was ashamed of being black to accepting and loving herself just the way she is, her experiences became the reason of her boldness. The 'oil-wells' (line 7) and 'gold mines' (line 19) are the objects she used as symbols to explain that her body is her greatest wealth and she values it.

Culturally as well, Angelou was influenced by her paternal grandmother. She learned to turn her problems into her biggest strength. Her mother as well always supported her. Her family being her biggest strength reveals a lot about the confidence. The constant chanting of the lines “I rise” (line 41-43) at the end of the poem, sums up the fact that no matter how many times she fails, she will not let that failure decide her future. And this spirit to fight against the odds is the result of her experience as a black woman and her mother and grandmother’s influence. The final lines of the poem, “Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave/ I am the dream and the hope of the slave” (line 39-40) is a reference to the slavery that blacks did for the whites, and it depicts the cultural and racial role of a black person. Blacks were only allowed to work as slaves for the Whites, they were treated inhumanly. They had no other job opportunity other than working as a slave. It was the cultural role of a black person to work under someone, Angelou through these lines, shows her oppression. Beauvoir too quoted in her book “*The Second Sex*” that women were treated as men’s slave, so the reference to the slave could also be connected to women as a slave of men. “woman has always been, if not man’s slave, at least his vassal; the two sexes have never divided the world up equally; and still today, even though her condition is changing, women is handicapped” (Beauvoir 29). Thus, Angelou considers herself as hope for her community, she wishes to see them all rise and establish their own identity.

Different challenges faced by Black Woman as depicted in the poem

Angelou being an African-American woman was doubly victimized by not just the white people but also by black men or by men of her own community. The poem talks about Black resilience and was written to illustrate how Black people deal with racial injustice and discrimination. Historically white people had been those who had most of the power in the society. Whites created the binary difference to rule and control the Black people. The word 'rise' could also have another meaning, it could also denote how Blackness rises to overpower hate, discrimination shaped by the White people. But black women were treated much worse than black men. The poem shows the different challenges faced by women during the twentieth century. Majorly the stanzas in the poem, opens up with a question, for e.g., "Does my sassiness upset you? (line 5) Did you want to see me broken? (line 13) Does my haughtiness offend you? (line 17) Does my sexiness upset you?" (line 25). This reflects her voice calling all the oppressed black women to join her. The poet requires an explanation for the hatred and mistreatment which she and all other women faced. She is a voice for her own community especially for women. Her message is loud and clear, Black women are hated for no logical reason, it's their strength and beauty that scares the Whites especially men, so that women like Angelou could not rise from their status. With the use of simile, she compared the souls of Black women with the rich resources like "oil wells/ pumping in my living room" (line 7-8) and "gold mines/ Diggin' in my own backyard" (line 19-20). With these comparisons she proved that for

her beauty signifies a beautiful soul, and it's much expensive than oil wells and gold mines.

Perhaps if Angelou was a man maybe she would not have been questioned, other than her colour, her gender plays an important role for the discrimination she has faced. Being a woman that too a black woman comes with a challenge to establish an identity in the society. People are trying to break the hope, joy and beauty of a women, but Angelou converted this hatred into her strength to rise up no matter how many times she fails. The biggest strength for the women is their failure, the experiences from this failure would only make them more and more strong. Her past is painful she expresses, "Up from a past that's rooted in pain" (line 31). She considers herself as a 'black ocean' (line 33) taking pride in her colour and community. This shows her revolting side that she had faced discrimination all her life and yet she never gave up. The sufferings and pain of the past had made her much stronger, being a woman it was overall more difficult. To fight against the narrowminded mentality and to establish a position in the society needed resistance and a tenacious quality.

The poem reflects the theme of power and beauty in Blackness. The speaker doesn't lose her strength despite of the racial discrimination, but rather proves that her strength lies in her Blackness. Assuming whiteness as a characteristic of her audience, she challenges it. In blackness and black womanhood, Angelou proclaims humanity, power and beauty abound.

Analysis of the poem 'Phenomenal Woman' Phenomenal

woman

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.

I say,

It's in the reach of my arms,

The span of my hips,

The stride of my steps, The

curl of my lips.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

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. Men themselves

have wondered What they see

in me.

Then try so much

But they can't touch My

inner mystery.

When I try to show them,

They say they still can't see.

I say,

It's in the arch of my back,

The sun of my smile,

The ride of my breasts, The

grace of my style.

I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

Now you understand

Just why my head's not bowed.

I don't shout or jump about Or

have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,

It ought to make you proud. I

say,

It's in the click of my

heels, The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand, the

need for my care.

'Cause I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,

That's me.

(Angelou, lines 1-60)

The above poem is another masterpiece of Maya Angelou. This poem was first published in the year 1995. There are total five stanzas, beginning with a couplet in the first two lines of the poem. An alternative perspective on what defines real beauty is proposed in the poem, which rejects the narrow societal expectations for women. As a result, the poem reflects self-confidence and self-awareness.

The poet discloses a secret which the 'pretty women', here refereeing to the white women, finds difficult to understand. The poet reveal her secrets to carry that grace and be confident despite being a black woman. The poet explains that she does not have a "perfect" size according to the society, she is not a model as put forward by the fashion industry. But people don't believe her as they have a total different opinion on beauty, different from the poet's view. For them, beauty refers to being 'white'. The poet reveal her secrets that her beauty lies in her wide hips, her confident smile, her arms reach, all those parts which are not looked as attractive for a woman. There is a constant repetition of the words 'I Am A Woman', 'Phenomenal Woman' (Angelou 7) after each stanza, which emphasizes on the poet's self-confidence.

The fact that men are only attracted to the poet when she walks into a room, makes women jealous. It's difficult for them to sink-in the fact that a Black woman gains all the attention by her self-confidence. Her confidence reflect in her physical appearance which beautifies her. Not just the women but men too are confused about the poet's secret that outstands her from others. They can't see her inner mystery even after the poet tries to show them, because their definition of being beautiful is different from the poets. The poet respects her body, she admire her smile, her grace, her breasts and believes that her beauty exists in the way she carries her grace and body. Her confidence, her postures are ways to make her feel and look beautiful. It's not about your skin colour or body type, the confidence and beauty depends on the way you carry yourself.

The poet doesn't need to seek attention of people, it's all about her grace that she carries within that does the magic. She is an inspiration for other woman and men, who are not self-assured. She's proud of her appearance and glorifies it by changing the negative into positive. Her walk, her hair, her palms define her.

Rather than sticking to the standards set the society, women should appreciate their own self, which makes them different and unique. Every woman is phenomenal, it just depends on the fact of accepting and loving oneself. Society promotes insecurities, but only you can change your perception, and define beauty for yourself.

Gender roles, rituals and practices as shown in 'Phenomenal

Woman'

The study of gender looks at how gender impacts on the social roles, opportunities and interaction of people. The gender differences is a social construct, society implies various roles on men and women to create the difference. These differences where men are superior and have more power create inequalities among men and women. For e.g., violence against women, lack of respect for women, stereotyping of women, etc. Women and men were categorized into different roles depending on their gender. The poem opposes the gender roles and practices followed by the society. The poem 'Phenomenal Woman' is itself a reflection of the fashion industry in the 1960s. Before the 60's curvy women were much in fashion, but after that it switched from the curvier body types to thinner or leaner body types, as the popularity for slim models increased. Second-wave feminism also took place during this time, in which the activists discover more than just equality. By advancing feminist issues such as freedom and equal pay, women were able to expand their rights and responsibilities in society. For women being pretty and cute and of a certain size was something which the society expected from them. "I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size" (line 2), this line from the poem shows how Angelou did not follow the role assigned by the society. She discards being a 'perfect size' and love her the way she is. She is not lean or cute, but still she is phenomenal. She declined the idea that the size of a woman's waist or her weight determines her worth or beauty. When she enters the room both men and women are awestruck to see her confidence. Men are more surprised when they see a woman walking in their shoes. Even if she doesn't follow the designated role of being cute, fair, slim she, still is

beautiful. Men are still attracted towards her. Her beauty does not lie in these standards set by the society. Her beauty lies in the way she carries herself.

The common role practiced by men is to dominate women, they are always superior to women this is what they believe. The symbol of honey bees in stanza two represents men as a follower of women. "Then they swarm around me, /A hive of honey bees" (line 19-20). The bees swarm around their queen, thus the poet considers herself as a queen bee and the men as her follower. Here woman can be seen as a dominant figure. She is the queen, who is followed by these men. It is expected from a woman to be forbearing, modest and apologetic about defects and defaults, but the poet refuses to apply the same standards. Women are always expected to bow their heads, "Now you understand/ Just why my head's not bowed" (line 46-47), Angelou concluded her poem by these beautiful lines that defines that one should accept their own self and should be confident in their own skin, that's where beauty lies. The poem give a voice to women and men that instead of obeying the standards and rules set by the society, they should prioritize themselves and should value their own standards. Not just women, but men too should fight against these assigned roles so that there could be equality. Men should accept women as their equals. The poem too suggests that women are "phenomenal", they just need to embrace and accept themselves as one, instead of fitting into the assigned roles and standards. Society promotes insecurity, but acceptance can lead women to truly being phenomenal.

Therefore, the poet opposes being pretty, cute or of a perfect size, instead she proudly presents herself as strong and mysterious or phenomenal.

She rejects the gender stereotypes and encourages women to not follow these beauty standards set up by the society. The repetition of the lines, “phenomenally/ phenomenal woman/ that’s me” (line 58-60), proves that she truly believe in herself no matter what the society says. Her confidence is her beauty and by accepting herself, she became phenomenal. The confidence that Angelou possesses can be seen as an inspiration from her paternal grandmother. Since childhood she despises the fact of being black, her beauty standards lies in fair skin, blond hair and blue eyes. Seeing her grandmother as someone owning a Store, earning money and as an independent woman who was respected even by white people inspired her to be more confident about herself. As already mentioned, culturally and socially her experiences made her successful and stronger. She talks about her identity from gender perspective, the pride of being a woman who is phenomenal not physically, but mentally.

Different challenges faced by Black woman as depicted in the poem

The only point made by Angelou, sharing her own experiences in her work, is that Black Women were notably disempowered by the society, and she stood to support her culture and community. The poem implicitly rejects racism against Blacks. Just a decade after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Angelou wrote this poem during the civil rights movement where Black people achieved many protections, but the social prejudices remained as they were before. The fashion industry doubly victimized Black Women, as for them, they do not belong to the category of being ‘beautiful’. These

fashion industries made it really difficult for the Black women's to survive in the society. Their confidence was lost and that's what the society needed. The White people did not want to see a black person, especially a woman, to rise above them. The main reason of implying these beauty standards was to make them feel insecure about themselves. African-Americans living in the white society faced humiliation from the men and white women in the society. The speaker being an African-American felt the same pain and tried to voice all those challenges in her work. She tries to change the narrow-minded mentality of the society who describes women as weak. She claims that being black can also make her phenomenal. Due to the constant stabbing by the society, black women somewhere lost their confidence, but Angelou confidently accepted and admired the fact of being a Black Woman and described herself as phenomenal. The oppression from the society made Angelou see things in a total different way than others.

The very first line of the poem depicts how white women referring to 'pretty women' (line 1) in the first stanza are surprised to see the confidence that Angelou carries, "Pretty women wonder where my secret lies" (line 1). Not just men but women too are jealous seeing a Black Woman in such high position. They are surprised to see that a woman who is not fair, slim, pretty according to the standards set by the society, attaining all the attention of men in the room as she walks in. Even the men are wondering that what's about her that's making them fall for her, "Men themselves have wondered/ What they see in me" (line 30-31). It's quite impossible to see a black woman rising in her status and carrying such confidence. The most important challenge faced by Angelou was to change the narrow-minded mentality of these people.

Where women's speeches were not even heard, she claimed that she didn't need to raise her voice in order to shine, "I don't shout or jump about/ Or have to talk real loud" (line 48-49). It's all in her body, which has all the confidence she needs. Women need to embrace their own body, and should not fall into the trap of these beauty standards set up by the society. Each of her body part reflects her confidence, and that's the real beauty. To summarize this part of the research, the researcher quotes a bold statement made by Angelou, which clearly depicts that a woman is much stronger than the society had made her, it all lies in the confidence. "A wise woman wishes to be no one's enemy; a wise woman refuses to be anyone's victim" (Angelou). The repetition of the phrase "phenomenally/ phenomenal women" (line 59-60) is also symbolic as it shows the power of a Black woman who despite all the challenges fought against the odds and proved herself to be a strong and confident woman. It emphasizes on the fact that Black Women are not weak, they just need the confidence to believe in themselves.

Angelou, even in her other poems including "Weekend Glory" talked about the racial prejudice that black women faced. Black women at large have been opiated not based on reasons. The poem talks about how white people's lifestyle is seen as artificial and ungrateful. White people's lifestyle is presented in each stanza of the poem in comparison to the poet's way of life. The poem begins with the lines, "Some dighty folks" (line 1) (Angelou 11) which refer to the white people who are ignorant of black women and just talk rubbish about them. The word dighty is used as a slang expression by Angelou which means pretentious and snobbish. The second line "Don't know the

facts,” (line 2) proves that white people have no proper evidence or facts to prove their point. They just talk bad about black women or Blacks in general.

White people pretend that their life is much better than that of the Blacks, but the poet proves it to be wrong. She believes that white people only live to satisfy the needs of the society. “They move into condos / up over the ranks / pawn their souls / to the local banks” (lines 7-10). These lines prove that white people can even pawn their soul to satisfy their needs that too for the status in the society. They live an artificial life. She points to prove that her life being a Black woman is better than the whites as for her, life is to live gratefully. Even if the poet’s job is ordinary she still manages to pay her debts and live a satisfactory life for herself. She’s not rich, has an ordinary job but still manages to donate money to the Church, and that is where her satisfaction lies. “Take the church money out” (Angelou 12) (line 25).

Black women struggle a lot. They work hard at factories to earn and live their lives. Angelou in this poem too proves that she has strong opinions and personality which helps her to overcome the problems faced by African American women. Despite being a black woman she has not limited her happiness. The pride and power she uses in her poems came from her experiences being a Black woman. In the poem ‘Weekend Glory’ the word ‘weekend’ could mean a break from the long and monotonous week. The poem intends to convey what the poet thinks is ‘glory’ in a fast-changing world that revolves around money.

Black women during the eighties were limited with their jobs. They commonly worked as singers in café’s, factory workers on weekdays. The

reference can also be seen in Angelou's poem 'Weekend Glory'. Here she points that on weekends whites mainly waste their earned money to have fun, whereas black women used to work hard. The glory is for the black women who works hard on weekends but are paid less but still manages to live and enjoy their life for themselves and not for the society.

Coping mechanisms used by the poet

The various coping mechanisms used by the poet to cope up with the gender discrimination, gender biasness, discrimination being a Black Woman etc., that can be seen in both the poem are as following:

Acceptance of Identity: Angelou used her identity as a coping mechanism in both her poems and other works. The acceptance for identity i.e., being Black helped her to cope up with the social discrimination and gender biasness. She believed that her colour is beautiful and it can be highly seen in her poems. The confidence to fight against all these evils came from the acceptance of her identity. This is the reason why she used the repetition in both her poems. The repetition of the lines 'I rise' and 'phenomenally/ phenomenal woman' (Angelou) shows her confidence and acceptance towards her colour. Her identity is her power and she used it coping mechanism. Her poem doesn't blame men or women for the discrimination she faced. She only talked about self-love and self-confidence in her work, to support her community and to cope up with the discrimination. The acceptance of identity helped her a lot to cope up the prejudices prevailing in the society. Society has constantly discriminated her on the basis of her colour, gender but her acceptance is her biggest strength. The way she believes herself to be

phenomenal and strong willed is her way of coping with the discrimination and biasness.

Writing: Another coping mechanism she used is her writing. As a child she faced bullying, molestation, discrimination for being Black, and it resulted in traumatizing her. The only thing that helped her was literature especially poetry, she gained a lot of confidence while narrating poems. Her interest for poetry developed to make her write and disclosing her emotions. She learned that words are beautiful when put with right emotions. The reason she talks about her personal experiences in her work is to express the suppression she has controlled all her life. It's her outburst from all the feelings she has controlled all her life. Writing became her coping mechanism to put her views forward and to motivate women all over the world. Like many feminist critiques including Cixous, Showalter, Angelou too believed that only writing could bring change in the world. Since she has experienced the discrimination and biasness her emotions became much powerful. She used it as a coping mechanism because she knew that being a woman that too a Black woman, the society would not give importance to her opinions, and writing is to only way to express her feelings and create a change in the male-dominated society. The poems 'Phenomenal Woman' and 'Still I Rise' shows her frustration with the opiated society, who can't see her rise and being confident. Her experiences are put to words, like the lines "It's in the arch of my back, /The sun of my smile, /The ride of my breasts, /The grace of my style" (line 38-41) or "Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines" (line 19). She constantly used metaphors, personification to define her beauty. She wants to put forward the point that

women are beautiful just the way they are, it all lies in the confidence. Thus writing makes her feel powerful and it's her coping mechanism.

Family support: Family can be a biggest support system to cope with the societal pressure. Angelou was supported by her mother, brother and grandmother in all the decisions she took in her life. Being a female, she was never discriminated in her family. Moreover her brother was her biggest support system and she always shared every secret of her with him. Her grandmother was the core of her development into a confident and proud woman. Her grandmother was a very religious lady. She imparted the moral values in Maya with respect to Christianity. With her influence Maya too developed a deep connection with her community and became proud of who she really was. The confidence she carries is actually a seedbed to the knowledge imparted by her grandmother. Her mother supported and motivated her when she was sexually assaulted, she even helped Maya to deal with her infant son at the age of 16. Angelou learned a great lesson from her mother and i.e., to be kind to others, and this can be clearly depicted in her works. Even after all the discrimination she did not spoke ill about any gender or community. She just asks women to develop a self-love and self-confidence.

Thus, these coping mechanisms helped her to raise her voice against the issues related to gender discrimination, gender roles, racial discrimination and being under the minority of being a woman.

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Chapter III

Conclusion

The poems expresses Angelou's faith towards what she believes, she tries to motivate women through her poems to let them know that they are phenomenal and they should adore themselves just the way they are no matter what size, colour they belong to. Women were discriminated on the basis of roles assigned to them, and belonging to a Black community was even more difficult. Fashion industry made different stereotypes for women, making it even more difficult for them to survive in the society. These poems reflect the fact that size, colour, gender doesn't matter, a women should have confidence within her, no matter what the society says. Confidence and self-love are the only key to become successful and establish an identity in the society. The repetition in the poem is used to create an effect to stress on those words which actually define women. Like in the poem 'And Still I Rise' the word I rise is echoed to disclose the Black power and the poet's confidence. Similarly

the word phenomenal is repeated in the poem 'Phenomenal Woman' to push hard on the fact that women are phenomenal, no matter how imperfect the society portrays them. The poem reflects her struggle as a woman belonging to the Black community, she proves that no matter how hard the society tries to push you down you must rise above all. The faith she carries in herself is a reflection of her experiences and her cultural support.

Thus, the researcher tried to study gender on the basis of the two poems by Angelou, "And Still I Rise and Phenomenal Woman". The above study shows how due to gender biasness an inequality was created. Angelou works to remove this inequality and motivate women's to have confidence in themselves. She works as voice for all the oppressed women, especially Black women, for whom it was more difficult to maintain the beauty standards set by the society. The symbols are beautifully used in the poem like the symbol of 'honey' in the poem 'Phenomenal Woman' to show the change in the role of male and female. The symbol of 'oil wells' in the poem 'And Still I Rise' to show the power of a Black woman, she is rich in spiritual term. She stands in a position where no one could touch her. For her wealth is her body and she is proud of whom she is.

The poem does not talk about beauty, whiteness, or being skinny or cute to be phenomenal, but on changing your weakness to your strength. It also depicts how women were jealous of a Black woman, they were envious seeing a Black woman rise from her societal role of being a slave. Being a Black woman, Angelou knew how hard it was to establish an identity and the poem clearly reflects her personal experiences. It's an outburst of her which

she penned into poetry. It's the non-blaming attitude along with the confidence and pride that made Angelou different from others.

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