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**MAYA ANGELOU'S GATHER TOGETHER IN MY NAME
AS A FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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MAYA ANGELOU'S GATHER TOGETHER IN MY NAME AS A FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Abstract:

The study aims to focus on Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel, *Gather Together in My Name*. It highlights the problems that Maya Angelou addresses in her book. It traces the events of the author's life as a reflection of the American Society through her second autobiographical book. It tries to examine Angelou's autobiography as an example of some conflicts between whites and blacks in the American society especially with African-Americans who all the time searches for chances to live, work and settle as a normal people. The novel shows how Angelou asks for her rights and those of colored women not only in the USA but also all over the world.

ملخص البحث:

تهدف الدراسة إلي التركيز علي رواية السيرة الذاتية لمايا انجلوهوي اجتمعوا علي إسمي معا وتلقي الضوء على المشاكل التي قدمتها انجلو في كتابها. تتبع الدراسة أيضا أحداث حياة الكاتبة كانعكاس للمجتمع الأمريكي خلال كتاب سيرتها الذاتية الثاني وتحاول فحص سيرة الكاتبة الذاتية كمثال لبعض المشاكل بين البيض والسود في المجتمع الأمريكي خصوصا الأمريكيين ذو الأصول الإفريقية واللذين طول الوقت تبحثون عن فرص ليعيشوا ويعملوا ويستقروا كأناس عادين. ولكنها. توضح الرواية أن مايا انجلو تطلب حقوقها وحقوق النساء ذوات البشرة الملونة ليس فقط في أمريكا ولكن في العالم كله.

Introduction:

This study analyses the historical review of feminism in the 19th century and shows how slaves were unfairly treated. It gives some examples of bad treatments in Maya Angelou's life and some instances of unfair behaviors towards the Black.

Gather Together in My Name is the second volume of Maya Angelou's autobiography. It speaks about a short period in Maya's life, between 17 and 19 of her age. The study gives a background of the novel and examines some important themes like the absence of family role, the divorce of the parents, women's work at young age, searching for love, identity and stability.

The paper follows the development of Maya's identity to the end of the novel. There is a big difference between Maya's character at the beginning of the novel and its end. After her bad experiences in the book, there is a big turn in Maya's character and thinking. She becomes wiser especially after Big Mary kidnaps Maya's son.

The study also analyses the bitter situations Maya went through as a result of dealing with deceitful men she trusted. At the end, it investigates the technique of Maya Angelou in writing *Gather Together in My Name*.

The paper focuses on Maya Angelou's autobiography because she has had a major

influence on the condition of Afro-American women in America nowadays. Her autobiography deals with her whole life and comprises seven volumes, of which the second one is the focus of this analysis.

Maya Angelou is one of the most important African- American women and in her autobiography, the reader finds illuminating ideas about the conditions of black society in America, especially concerning black women. Moreover, this autobiography deals with the life of a strong woman, with strong principles and disposition to do everything necessary to bring justice and fairness to her society.

Maya Angelou is one of the women who became active in the Civil Rights Movement in 1964. In the first volume of her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the reader can observe important aspects of the society at that time such as the way black people were treated, the differences between white and black people, the jobs the Blacks would have, and the struggles in her life. All these aspects show us the many-faceted society in which Angelou lived.

African- American writers thought that literature did not have an aesthetic dimension only; rather, they encouraged a propagandist facet in literature much following Black Aesthetics of the period. W.E.B. DuBois said in the NAACP

publication *The Crisis*, "We want everything that is said about us to tell of the best and highest and noblest in us. We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one" (*African American Literary Theory* 154). Therefore, African-American authors were concerned with a vivid, accurate portrayal of their lives in the American society so that readers could have a thorough knowledge of the hardships they endured.

African-American women, regarded as a minority within a minority, have fought to change their status in society and have achieved a better position in today's society. Maya Angelou's autobiography, as well as other stories written by African American writers, show how society treated them and how they managed to gain dignity and self-respect.

Maya provided detailed descriptions of the situations she had to face. She wrote her autobiography to make people understand how difficult it was to experience the differences not only between Blacks and Whites but also between men and women. Her autobiography is told in an episodic form beginning, middle, and end that derives from her literary experience. Her memories are classified within the genre of "novelistic autobiography", similar to the style of slave narratives of Olaudah Equiano, or Frederick Douglass.

The title of *Gather Together in My Name* is taken from a New Testament injunction for the travailing soul to pray and commune while waiting patiently for deliverance. "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them". (*King James Version of the Holy Bible* 569 [18:19-18:20]).

Gather Together in My Name focuses on the role of African-American woman, the role of Angelou in the society of her times and her identity as an African-American

woman, her evolution from working as a train-driver, dancer, cook, prostitute, driver, and finally the influence of other women in Maya's life. Maya bounced around the underside of society trying to find a job to support her son and someone to belong to. At 17, she was enough of a little girl to dream of a perfect life would be and enough of an adult to take care of her son, Clyde. Maya had taken responsibility for becoming pregnant. She said in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, "I hefted the burden of pregnancy at sixteen onto my own shoulders where it belonged" (284). She never made excuses or blamed no one but herself.

She did not do anything different after Clyde was born. She never considered giving him up for adoption or accepting government assistance. She did not even accept her mother's offer to care for him. Maya did not want to leave her two-month-old baby with her mother, Vivian. After all, Vivian had not taken care of her daughter to take care of her grandson.

Unfortunately, Maya had not learned any work skills in high school. Her job choices were limited. Blacks and whites had worked together during World War II, but racial prejudice returned when the war ended. Her choices were narrowed further. She applied to be a telephone operator, but the company official told her she had "failed" a test. Supposedly, she had not been able to unjumble nonsense words into "cat," "rat," and "sat" (*Black American of Achievement* 9). "We simply cannot risk employing anyone who made the marks you made," said the woman. Angelou described her as having "coifed hair, manicured nails, and dresser-drawers of scented angora sweaters and years of white ignorance," the woman suggested there was an opening for a bus girl in the cafeteria (9).

Maya found another job. She saw a cardboard sign that said, "COOK WANTED. SEVENTY-FIVE DOLLARS A WEEK." She decided she could do anything for \$75. "I knew I could cook Creole,

whatever that was" (11). She gave her name as Rita Johnson, thinking that Marguerite and Maya did not sound Creole. Reet, as her Creole Cafe employer nicknamed her, moved out of her mother's house into a room (with cooking privileges), bought furniture and a white chenille bedspread, and found a baby-sitter for Clyde. A boarder in her mother's house told her to just throw in onions, green peppers, and garlic, and she would be cooking Creole. Maya thought, "Surely, this was making it" (11).

Working in the restaurant, Maya noticed Curly, a customer she described as, "Butter-colored, honey-brown, lemon- and olive-skinned, chocolate and plum-blue, peaches and cream. Cream. Nutmeg. Cinnamon. I wondered why my people described our colors in terms of something good to eat" (20). Angelou wrote, "Then God's prettiest man became a customer at my restaurant" (20).

Curly had good table manners and smiled at Maya, but she did not think she had a chance with him. Her old insecurities flared up: "I never thought he would find me interesting, and if he did, it would be just to tease me," she later wrote (20). When he learned that Maya was a single mother, he was sympathetic. His kindness touched her heart, and she quickly fell in love with the 31-year-old man. At last, she belonged to someone or so she thought. They dated for two months. She bought him rings, a watch, and a sports coat. She took an interest in fashion and bought herself new clothes. It did not matter that he told her he would marry his real girlfriend in New Orleans when her job in San Diego ended. She pushed that fact out of her mind when they played with Clyde at the park or rode the Ferris wheel.

When Curly finally left, Maya was crushed. She moped around, rarely eating, losing weight, whining, and crying. She felt unhappy, wasted her time, and was apathetic and gloomy. She might have gone on like that indefinitely, but her brother, Bailey,

told her, "Now, My, if you're happy being miserable, enjoy it, but don't ask me to feel sorry for you. If you want to stay around here looking like death eating a soda cracker, that's your business" (30).

He gave her \$200 to make a fresh start away from San Francisco. Her mother did not object and said, "You're a woman. You can make up your own mind" (31). She gave her a piece of advice, "Be the best of anything you get into. If you want to be a whore, it is your life. Be a damn good one. Do not chippy at anything. Anything worth having is worth working for" (31). Maya contacted her father's family in Los Angeles, hoping they might help her. She met with her aunts and uncles. They praised for Clyde but made it clear they expected them to leave. Maya and Bailey got on the train to San Diego, thinking they were the "meanest, coldest, craziest family in the world" (36).

Maya found a new job as a waitress in the Hi-Hat Club, where sailors, prostitutes, and thieves made contacts under the blaring music. Johnnie Mae and Beatrice, two lesbian prostitutes asked Maya to be friends. Maya managed the money the two women earned and dressed up in long skirts, Mexican off the shoulder blouses, sandals, and beads. She drove around in her new pale-green Chrysler convertible. She also spent her time in more appropriate ways. She discovered the Russian novelists Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Maxim Gorki whose world was just as gloomy and lonely.

Maya's career as a madam, lasted only two and a half months. In an argument about overnight customers, Johnnie Mae threatened to tell the police about Maya. Angelou later wrote, "A numbing thought sidled across my brain like a poisonous snake. I might be declared an unfit mother, and my son would be made a ward of the court... The tiny glands in my armpits opened and closed to the pricking of a thousand straight pins" (72).

She packed up Clyde, abandoned her green car at the train station, and headed back to her big, courageous, loving grandmother in Arkansas. She did not realize that Stamps where her grandmother lived, had not changed. It was still divided by hate, and blacks were expected to know their place. Maya, however, had changed. She had experienced racial equality in San Francisco. Blacks could ride public transportation on a first-come/first-seated basis. More often than not, they were called Mr. or Mrs. at their jobs or by salesclerks.

Eight days after her arrival in Stamps, Maya crossed into "White Town" to go to the white general store. Dressed up San Francisco style, she walked the three miles in high heels, starched clothing, and gloves. In the store, a white salesclerk ordered her to move to the side in a narrow aisle and demanded, "How do you pronounce your name, gal? Speak up". (*Gather Together in My Name* 92)

Maya had never been called "gal" nor been ordered by any white person to do anything. She drew herself up to her six-foot height and told the clerk:

If you have occasion to use my name, which I seriously doubt, I advise you to address me as Miss Johnson. If I need to allude to your pitiful selves, I shall call you Miss Idiot, Miss Stupid, Miss Fool or whatever name a luckless fate has dumped upon you.... I'll slap you into the middle of next week if you even dare to open your mouth again (93).

News of the incident got back to Momma before Maya walked back home. Momma met her at the store's steps, and as Maya tried to explain herself, Momma repeatedly slapped her. Momma said,

You think 'cause you've been to California these crazy people won't kill you? You think because of your all-fired principle some of the men won't feel like putting their white

sheets on and riding over here to stir up trouble. Ain't nothing to protect you and us except the good Lord and some miles (94, 95).

Momma quickly packed up Maya and Clyde and sent them back to San Francisco. Maya decided to join the U.S. Army for job training and money to buy a house. After passing the medical tests and signing a loyalty oath, she was set for induction. However, the army discovered she had attended the California Labor School that was on the list of the House Un-American Activities Committee, suspected of being a Communist organization, the army rejected her.

Her life took a dramatic turn after she got a job as a swing shift waitress at the Chicken Shack. There, she met R.L. Poole who was looking for a dance partner. Dancing was the one thing Maya had studied. So, she was accepted.

Her audition, in her mother's kitchen, was a joke. She slid into the splits, her skirt ripped, her left foot got caught on a table and the other one tangled with the gas heater. Maya tried to free herself, so she pulled a pipe away from the stove. Gas escaped into the room until R.L. turned off the valve. He opened a window and moved the kitchen table so she could free her foot. She was humiliated. Maya said, "My feelings were so hurt by the stupid clumsiness that I just rolled over on my stomach, beat my hands on the floor, and cried like a baby" (119). All R.L. could say, "Well, anyway, you've got nice legs" (119). He hired her, though, and took her to a rehearsal hall to learn the glides, taps, and slaps that would highlight his complex tap rhythms. "To be able to let my body swing free over the floor and the crushing failures of my past was freedom," Angelou wrote. "I thanked R.L. for my liberation and fell promptly in love with him" (120).

Maya quit her job as a waitress. On stage, she loved the lights, music, tap rhythms, and the audience's applause. She

rented a top hat, a cane, and a bathing suit-type costume with red, white, and blue sequins for her duets with R.L. She danced barefoot solos to "Blue Flame" and "Caravan," her ostrich feathers fluttering and Indian bells tinkling at her ankles. She believed that "Poole and Rita's dance team" would rocket into fame (122).

Then R.L.'s former girlfriend and dancing partner came to town. R.L. decided to replace Maya with her. Maya's world shattered. She said, "All the doors had slammed shut, and I was locked into a too-tall body, with an unpretty face, and a mind that bounced around like a ping-pong ball," Angelou wrote, "I gave into sadness because I had no choice" (139).

Instead of weeping and wilting, as she had done after Curly left her, 19-year-old Maya pulled herself together. "I had to find a job, get my grits together, and take care of my son," Angelou wrote. "So much for show biz, I was off to live real life" (140).

Maya moved to Stockton, about 80 miles from San Francisco, to become a fry cook in a restaurant owned by a friend of her mother's. She found Big Mary, a neighborhood babysitter, to take care of Clyde during the week.

During her shift, Maya noticed L.D. Tolbrook was as old as her father, but he had a roll of money in his pocket and a diamond ring on his finger. He drove a silver-blue Lincoln. His official job was gambling, and he took Maya to neighbor towns to visit his business houses. Though he was married, he promised to leave his wife for Maya. His politeness and kindness impressed her. Once again, she fell in love.

He told her he had run up a \$5,000 gambling debt. She volunteered to be a prostitute and give him the money. She might have fallen the slippery slope to cocaine addiction, but she went back to San Francisco to be with her mother, who had had emergency surgery. There, Bailey found out about her prostitution career and opened her eyes to what she might become.

Maya returned to Stockton to get Clyde. Big Mary had moved, taking Clyde with her. Maya frantically searched for them and finally found them in Bakersfield, 200 miles south. Reunited with three-year-old Clyde, she realized, "I had loved him and never considered that he was an entire person. He was three, and I was nineteen and never again would I think of him as a beautiful appendage of myself" (193).

Back in the Bay Area, another man she met, Troubadour Martin, took Maya further into the dark, dangerous, slimy underworld. She was attracted to the tall, thin, handsome man. He told her, "Every time I used to see you, I thought to myself, 'that's a real nice lady.' Sure did" (208). He asked if women could use her house to try on clothes, which he had probably stolen. Though he was heavily into drugs, Maya fell in love again. She decided she would shoot up heroin if it would attract Troubadour to her.

One night she pressed him, cried, and threatened to leave him unless he told her what he was, "Stop hiding what you do. I can take it," (210). Martin took her to a waterfront hotel. There, people sprawled on beds and sat on the floor in various stupors. Maya quickly realized she was somewhere she should not be. "This was a hit joint for addicts. Fear flushed my face and neck and made the room tremble before me. I had been prepared to experiment with drugs, but I hadn't counted on this ugly exposure" (211), She wrote later.

Troubadour took her into a bathroom and cooked heroin in a spoon. "Shut up and watch this," he commanded. Before her horrified eyes, he bared his arm. There were black scars and fresh sores covered it. He tied his arm tight with his tie, filled the syringe, and shot the heroin into his veins. He told her, "You a nice lady... I do not want to see you change, "Promise me you'll stay like I found you. Nice". She waited until the drug wore off, and thought about what she had seen (213). She later wrote:

No one had ever cared for me so much. He had exposed himself to me to teach me a lesson and I learned it... The life of the underworld was truly a rat race, and most of its inhabitants scurried like rodents in the sewers and gutters of the world. I had walked the precipice and seen it all; and at the critical moment, one man's generosity pushed me safely away from the edge (213,214).

The next day, Maya takes Clyde and her belongings back to her mother's house in San Francisco. She is done with the dark, dangerous underbelly of life.

Maya Angelou's Identity Formation and Development in *Gather Together in My Name*:

Gather Together in My Name retains the freshness of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, but it has self-consciousness absent from the first volume. Author Hilton Als states that Angelou "replaces the language of social history with the language of therapy" (*The New Yorker*).

The book highlights the narcissism and self-involvement of young adults. Rita is the focus and all other characters are secondary. They are often presented "with the deft superficiality of a stage description" who pay the price for Rita's self-involvement. Much of Angelou's writing in this volume, as Als states, is "reactive, not reflective".

Angelou chooses to demonstrate Rita's narcissism in *Gather Together* by dropping the conventional forms of autobiography, which has a beginning, middle, and end. For example, there is no central experience in her second volume, as there is in *Caged Bird* with Angelou's account of her rape at the age of eight. Lupton believes that this central experience is relocated "to some luminous place in a volume yet to be" (*Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* 130).

Gather Together in My Name, as much as African American literature, depicts Rita's search for self-discovery, identity, and dignity in the difficult environment of racism, and how she, like other African-Americans, can rise above it (*Black American Literature* 58).

Rita's search is expressed both outwardly, through her material needs, and inwardly, through love and family relationships. In *Caged Bird*, despite the trauma and parental rejection, Rita's world is relatively secure, but the adolescent young woman in *Gather Together* experiences the dissolution of her relationships many times. The loneliness that ensues for her is "a loneliness that becomes, at times, suicidal and contributes to her unanchored self" (61).

Rita is unsure of who she is or what she would become, so she tries several roles in a restless and frustrated way, as adolescents often do during this period of their lives. Her experimentation was part of her self-education that would successfully bring her into maturity and adulthood (62). Lupton agrees, stating that Rita survived through trial and error while defining herself as a Black woman. Angelou recognizes that the mistakes she depicts are part of "the fumbblings of youth and to be forgiven as such" (*Gather Together in My Name* 211), but young Rita insists that she takes responsibility for herself and her child (*Black American Literature* 66).

Feminist scholar Maria Lauret states that the formation of female cultural identity is woven into Angelou's narrative, setting her up as "a role model for Black women". Lauret agrees with other scholars that Angelou reconstructs the Black woman's image throughout her autobiographies and that Angelou uses her many roles, incarnations, and identities in her books to "signify multiple layers of oppression and personal history" (*Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* 120).

Angelou begins this technique in her first book and continues it in *Gather*

Together, especially her demonstration of the "racist habit" of renaming African Americans. Lauret sees Angelou's themes of the individual's strength and ability to overcome throughout Angelou's autobiographies as well (120,121).

Cudjoe states that Angelou is still concerned with what it means to be Black and female in America, but she now describes "a particular type of Black woman at a specific moment in history and subjected to certain social forces which assault the Black woman with unusual intensity" (*Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* 18).

Lupton remarks that Angelou was concerned about what her readers would think when she disclosed that she had been a prostitute but her husband Paul Du Feu encouraged her to be honest and "tell the truth as a writer" (*Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* 14).

Cudjoe recognizes Angelou's reluctance to disclose these events in the text, stating that although they are important in her social development, Angelou does not seem "particularly proud of her activity during those 'few tense years'" (*Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* 19).

Angelou states that she wrote the book, despite potentially harming the reputation she gained after writing *Caged Bird*, because she wants to show how she is able to survive in a world where "every door is not only locked, but there are no doorknobs ... The children need to know you can stumble and fumble and fall, see where you are and get up, forgive yourself, and go on about the business of living your life" (*BBC*, 2005).

Some Aspects of Feminism in the Novel:

Human civilization attached a divine and sublime status to women. However, in reality, the position of women is pitiable in modern societies, especially for black women in American society. The fair sex is subjected to different types of exploitation in their day-to-day life in the male-

dominated society: physical, financial, emotional, and psychological. Only a few women put an end to their lives, but most of them surmounted their traumatic situations in and out of their domestic arenas and survived from several personal misfortunes. They proved that they were not inferior, but could succeed in different spheres of life. A few women came forward to articulate their poignant position in society and their varied experiences in their day-to-day life through literary expression. Maya Angelou's life is a fine example of this.

The major themes like racial discrimination, oppression, a celebration of black beauty, self-acceptance in her poetry, and plays were her autobiographic novels. Through her these novels, we understand the fact that she was the first African- American writer to discuss life as it is in her autobiographies. The majority of African- American writers do not dare to evoke their nugatory or non-important lives in their writings. Nevertheless, Maya Angelou succeeds in exhibiting her life in her autobiographies with pride and pleasure. Out of her seven autobiographies, the first two novels are critically acclaimed.

Though her seven novels account for the different stages of her life, the first two autobiographies reveal unifying themes like the quest for identity, gradual realization, identification of black grandeur, acceptance of black womanhood, and motherhood. The greatness of Angelou is that all her themes are caricatured with her peculiar style of writing and it haunts the readers' memory.

Gather Together in My Name is the successive novel of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. In this novel, Angelou tries and withdraws various jobs. The novel reveals her life from 17 to 19 years. In these two years of journey, Maya, as a woman, goes into unsuccessful relationships and comes out dissatisfied. This novel depicts the joys and burdens of a black mother in America.

Angelou exhibits her struggles to lead a promising life. Throughout the two years of

journey of her life, she longs for a safe and secure life but her dream never comes true. Though many men betray her, she never blames them. On the other hand, she can comprehend the situations better.

In the novel, one can witness Angelou's trials and triumphs in her life. Through autobiography, she shares her quest for human individuality. Because of her untiring efforts, the African- American woman has gained wider respectability and greater reception. Her valor and vivacity make her stand as a role model for African- American women. She richly records the African American feminine experience from the early days of the Civil Rights Movement to the present day.

There is no doubt that Maya Angelou's realistic depiction of her life is only possible through her wonderful narrating techniques and peculiar style of writing. The unifying themes of her serial biographies like black womanhood, motherhood, racial brutality, self-acceptance, survival, hope, revival penetrate the heart of the reader and reveal the very contemporary African- American situations. Maya uses a range of techniques and styles to make her autobiographies thoroughly interesting.

Angelou encounters many defeats in her life but she remains undefeated. The situational irony is evident at every stage of her life. Though these circumstances are traumatic, Angelou faces them with boldness. She narrates these situations in a highly lyrical language. Though she was shattered, Angelou comprehended the situations and continued her life with alacrity.

In *Gather Together in My Name*, one could witness her trauma and painful experience when she tried to enroll herself in the US Army. She passed all the oral, written examinations conducted by them. Maya even managed gynecology tests conducted by them. The US Army could not identify that Maya had a child, as stretch marks were not visible on her. She dreamt

as if she stood before the flag with a Bible in one hand and the other clasped to her breast.

She even gives all her clothes and traditional garments to charity. At last, the American Army rejects her as she attended California labor school when she was young. They said California labor school was on unAmerican activities list. Maya said, "My clothes were gone, I had no job and I had been rejected by the Army. The damn institution, which accepts everybody, had turned me down. My life had no center, no purpose" (*Gather Together in My Name* 112).

In *Gather Together in My Name*, though many men deceived her, she never lost her hope. She said, " My charming prince was going to appear out of the blue and offer me a cornucopia of goodies. I would only have to smile to have them brought to my feet" (115).

In the early and mid-African-American writings, women are portrayed as treacherous. The main images of Black women were Black Mammy or Mulatto. However, Maya replaced the degraded stereotypical roles. Her black women characters are strong, willed, and authentic. They are economically independent and deeply religious. For example, Maya's grandmother Momma owned a general merchandise store and she managed the family. Vivian Baxter, Maya's mother ran her own business and Maya admired her as a beautiful woman and for her encouragement and casual approach to sexuality.

The grandmothers of Maya are strong and independent. They can manage their households. Mrs. Bertha Flowers, the aristocrat of Black Stamps helps Maya to recover from muteness when she is in a traumatic situation. Maya herself drives the car in a steep mountainous region when her father is in an intoxicated state. She even works as a streetcar conductor. She is the first black woman conductress.

Angelou sparingly used humor but it provokes laughter and provides amusement.

She enjoyed living in pathetic situations, especially in her brother's presence. When she was a little girl, she noticed the religious impact on the people. Some behaved crazily in the name of religious rituals.

Gather Together in My Name is a travel book. It traces Maya's emergence into the world of work, carefully recounting her pursuit of economic stability as she moves from job to job from crude cook, to dancer, to prostitute, to fry cook. During the autobiography, she sometimes acts irresponsibly when she endangers the safety of her son who is kidnapped by a babysitter. She also exposes herself to many risky relationships with men; a dancer; a married man who sells stolen clothes; a vein-scarred drug user.

The book "depicts a single mother's slide down the social ladder into poverty and crime" (*Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation* 120). As Angelou's biographer, Lupton states, "she was able to survive through trial and error, while at the same time defining herself in terms of being a black woman" (*Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* 6).

Despite the great difficulty Angelou, as the main character of the book experiences, she remains focused on the book's themes of "survival with style, finding her true self, and admiration of literacy" (*Heart of A Woman, Mind of A Writer, And Soul of A Poet: A Critical Analysis of the Writings of Maya Angelou* 86). Reviewers found merit in the new volume. Phoebe Adams, for example, in *The Atlantic*, said *Gather Together* was "excellently written". *The Library Journal* Almeida commented that it was "tremendously moving" and choice felt that Angelou was a "fine story teller" (1974: 920).

Selwyn Cudjoe thinks that *Gather Together* is well-written than *Caged Bird*. *Gather Together* does not succeed because unlike *Caged Bird*, it lacks "moral weight and an ethical canter," thus denying it an

organizing principle and rig our capable of keeping the work together She said:

If I may be permitted, the incidents of the book appear merely gathered together in the name of Maya Angelou, they are not so organized that they may achieve a complex level of signification. In fact, it is the absence of these qualities, which make the work conspicuously weak (*Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation* 20).

In an interview published in *Black Women Writers at Work* Angelou noted that the title of *Gather Together* has a "biblical origin" (154). It is a "New Testament injunction for the travailing soul to pray and commune while waiting patiently for deliverance" (33). As for the motive for writing the unvarnished experiences in *Gather Together*, Angelou said:

It comes from the fact that I saw so many adults lying to so many young people, lying in their teeth, saying 'you know, when I was young, I never would have done . . . why I couldn't... I shouldn't. . .' lying. Young people know when you're lying; so, I thought for all those parents and nonparents alike who have lied about their past, I will tell it (154).

Writing *Gather Together* when she is in her mid-forties and having been frank previously about her life experiences, in *Caged Bird*, Angelou was hardly worried about public reaction to an even more candid recounting of the adventures of a "reckless" and "foolish" young girl. A strong enough concern existed that Angelou admits to conferring with her son, her mother, and her brother to solicit their comments. She said, "This is what I want to do. I want to say to young people you may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated" (*The Atlantic* 19).

The principle that Angelou feels is challenged was that her "personhood" is violated. As Hannah Nelson observes:

The most important thing about black people is that they don't think they can control anything except their own persons. So, everything black people think and do has to be understood as very personal. As a result, the inviolability of the Afro-American's personhood is so closely guarded that any assault upon his/her person is frequently resisted. (*Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation* 8)

When Maya first tried to tell her story, Angelou confesses to her difficulty with a point of view. She felt that she was fragmented, that to convey her personality she would have to split herself into two women, one respectable and the other improper, one the autobiographer and the other her seamier self: "I wanted this fictional girl to do all the bad things and I was Miss Goodie Two shoes" (*Maya Angelou: A critical Companion* 77).

Maya explains in an interview. She thinks she needs to have "a fictional character go alongside, I guess in the Margins." She tells her editor, Bob Loqmis about the plan and he said, "Try it" (77). However, it does not work. Therefore, her husband Paul encourages her to reject this split point of view believing that the truth of her experience was real and whole: "Tell it. Because if it happened to black girls it happened to black boys, happened to white girls it happened to white boys. This is true"(77).

Angelou tells Dolly McPherson before *Gather Together* is published; she becomes increasingly worried about the adverse effect her autobiographical truth saying might have on her family. Thus, she gathers them together: Bailey, Vivian Baxter, her husband Paul Du Feu, and Guy, the name used throughout this companion for her son and reads to them the sections on

prostitution and drugs. She said, "I want to read you this. If it hurts you, I won't put it in". Each accepts what she writes about her life - Vivian with a joke, Bailey with absolute trust. "My brother said, 'I love you'. One tiling about you, you do not lie. I love that". "As for Guy", Angelou continues, "He came between me and my husband and just took me and said, "You are the great one (77).

Like the literary titles of the other four autobiographies, the title *Gather Together in My Name* is elusive. As Sondra O' Neale argues, to a New Testament passage that calls the "travailing soul to pray and commune" (*Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation* 33). Although Angelou does not discourage a religious reading, she offers a more specific interpretation, explaining that too many parents lie to their children about the past. She says, "Somebody needs to tell young people, listen, I did this and I did that. I thought, all those parents who lie, and fudge, and evade and avoid could gather together in my name and I would say it" (*Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* 82).

Gather Together has an expanded consciousness that enables the reader to identify with an African- American woman experiencing life among a diverse class of people including prostitutes. Sondra O' Neale writes that Angelou "so painstakingly details the girl's descent into the brothel that Black women, all women, have enough vicarious example to avoid the trap" (*Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation* 32).

McPherson argues that the fragmentation of character and plot in *Gather Together in My Name* is a merit rather than a flaw since it artistically reflects the "alienated fragmented nature of Angelou's life" (*Black American Literature Forum* 63). The word "fragmentation" is used in this context to convey a sense of incompleteness or disconnection.

Maya Angelou's Technique in the Novel:

Maya Angelou's writing style is distinguished due to her unique use of language. It is a fact that Blacks are oppressed and treated badly in many areas, but they often accept the circumstances with muteness. Maya Angelou uses her autobiography as an opportunity to exhibit her violent anguish with her idiosyncratic language.

In the development of the themes of identity, racism, motherhood, and marriage, among others in her novels, it is important to note that Angelou uses a unique blend of narrative techniques and literary style which attracts scholars; the literary techniques Angelou used have attracted lots of commentaries. Several writers have commented on Angelou's literary style of presentation with different remarks.

For example, Kelly explains that Angelou accommodates her literary style to the various settings her story comprises. She claims that Angelou describes a rural vignette, which is "sweet-milk fresh in her memory..." and a San Francisco rooming house where "Chicken suppers and gambling games were rioting on a twenty-four-hour basis downstairs" (*Bloom Reviews Comprehensive Research and Study Guide* 24). She identifies that Angelou uses very strong and appropriate metaphors but to Kelly Angelou's similes are less often so. However, despite these recognizable facts, Kelly explains that these lapses in poetic style are undeniably balanced by the insight Angelou offers into the effects of social conditioning on the lifestyle and self-concept of a Black child growing up in the rural South of the 1930s.

On another platform, Walker believes that the first volume is not even "accurate," and to him, when the book is looked at critically after almost thirty years on the shelves, it is full of bias, authoritative, and is almost wildly funny, like certain urban myths.

Walker again reveals that Angelou has the right instincts, which anyone who is

given to prattling about his life seems to possess. Walker in his critical review develops the theory of "mythomania" and refers to it as Angelou's forceful power of narration. He suggests that this particular quality of Angelou in her narratives gives life to her stories and makes them seem so real to life. Walker suggests that this "mythomania" quality in Angelou's narration is something that "she applies cannily, preserving the fiction that one can recall and, from a distance, whole conversations and surrounding thoughts as if she were a reel of recording tape, consuming for later regurgitation a problematic life" (*Black American Women Fiction Writers* 7). Further, Walker argues that Angelou is schooled in situation ethics, licensing them retroactively to cover her having been a prostitute and indulging in so many other immoral acts, and yet, she makes them seem almost enviable that she pulled them off so well.

In the February 1991 edition of the *Journal of Reading*, Graham writes in "Making Language Sing: An interview with Maya Angelou" that Angelou explains personally that she deliberately chooses to write in a language that will be universal. Graham questions Angelou to explain what Angelou means by the choice of the word "universal" since Angelou writes her novels in standard American English (*Journal of Reading* 406-410).

Angelou explains that it is not the language type she is referring to but the simplicity of the language. Angelou adds that her choice of very simple words and familiar diction has made her novels universal. She uses language that goes down well with all her readers, be it young or old, highly educated or less educated. She explains that in order to drum home her message further, she tries to achieve verisimilitude by enhancing her descriptive ability.

Angelou describes incidents into their minutest detail using many adverbs and

adjectives as far as possible so that vivid images are created. She explains that it is for the sake of enhancing her description and narration that she uses many metaphors, similes, and a few examples of personifications and hyperbole that in totality help to explain her message of celebrating motherhood and enhancing the role of women in the institution of marriage.

Still, on Angelou's narrative style, Walker again suggests that she possesses an ear for folkways; the fact that they spawn abundantly in the warm stream of narration, adding enough mother wit and humor to give the events a "rightness." To Walker, Angelou is to some extent coy, and never allows her readers a good, voyeur's glimpse into the conjugal bed that several male characters enjoy with her; rather, she teases.

Walker is rather praising Angelou in this enterprise for not being so "raw" and "sexy" in her narration of incidents related to her bedroom, and to some extent, her "behind-closed-doors" interaction with her male bedfellows she meets during her relentless search for romantic love bliss encounters.

Walker explains further that though the author is never insincerely sentimental, she shows herself to have been, like most people, silly, only more so, than many of us will admit. Despite all these shortfalls in the life of Angelou, Walker concludes that she is still so proud, as depicted in her narratives. She stumbles, falls, but like the phoenix, she rises renewed and becomes completely again.

Suckernick also wrote a review on *Gather Together in My Name*. In this review, Suckernick carefully criticizes the book as an entertaining piece of funny elements, and more specifically. What she calls "chain of anecdotes" that places too much importance on the tale and not the teller even though the other way round (the focus should be placed on the teller rather than the tale) is rather the correct option (*Contemporary Literary criticism* 12).

Suckernick's review, to some extent, adds more value to the assertion made by Arensberg who is very critical of Angelou's work saying that the humor in the narrative helps to tone down the seriousness in the message, and this is no different from Suckernick's argument. Suckernick, therefore, believes that the "chain of anecdotes" makes the narrative lack the temperament needed to "linger and infuse [readers] long after the anecdotes are forgotten" (*African American Autobiographies: A Sourcebook* 12). Suckernick and Arensberg, therefore, have the opinion that it is the funny elements (comic elements and pieces of anecdotes) Angelou injects into her narratives that help to sustain the interest of readers in their reading of each narrative from cover to cover (12).

On another platform, Lupton analyzes the first five volumes of the narrative with respect to the autobiographical tradition. Lupton wrote an essay "Singing the Black Mother: Maya Angelou and Autobiographical Continuity" and He concluded that Angelou is considered a major contemporary author and contributor to the black autobiographical tradition whose literary reputation is based on her volume of autobiographical series and her poetry (*Black American Literature Forum* 14).

Maya's storytelling abilities are marked with wisdom and humor as she reveals herself to the scrutiny of the reader with an often painful but honest candor. Angelou's memoirs inspire hope in the face of adversity and reveal the resiliency of the human spirit as she "leads her readers to recognize that the human spirit needs not cave in to ignorance, hatred, and oppression" (14).

In her discussion of Angelou's literary style, she writes in *Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* that "the writing techniques Angelou uses in her autobiographies are the same devices used

in writing fiction: vividly conceived characters and careful development of the theme, setting, plot, and language" (*Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* 30). Another feature of Angelou's work that Lupton identifies is the employment of the serial autobiography style to convey her story. Lupton contends "the volumes of Angelou's series far exceed the standard number of volumes in an autobiography...so that they are in a sub-genre known as "serial autobiographies" (32).

Successfully highlighting the subject of motherhood, Angelou uses literary style to present it in the way she wanted. Some of the aspects of style that Angelou chooses to highlight in her narrative are her blending of the first-person narrative point of view, and some elements of dialogue, the story-within-the-story technique, time and time distortion, figurative language, and the use of the serial autobiography style.

Angelou uses the first-person narrative technique, which is very normal for every writer of an autobiography. This technique aims at making the story achieve a sense of reality. Readers, therefore, see the narrator using expressions mostly dominated by the first person singular and plural pronouns. However, in Angelou's autobiography, even though she uses the first-person narrative technique, she uses this with a special blend of dialogue with the characters she meets.

Even though the blend of dialogue with the first-person narrative is quite unusual with autobiographies, Angelou chooses to do this for the reason of bringing her readers close to the heart of the narrative to have a first-hand feel of her actual experiences. She does this by using direct quotations to present her actual words and that of her speakers in the various narratives.

Throughout her book, she admitted her true self. This sort of narration in black women's writing was unprecedented. Women writers did not dare talk about their marginalized lives and conditions through central characters until the mid-twentieth

century, but Maya Angelou took those stories to public notice.

This strong voice was the ultimate product of Maya's personality. Maya was no longer ashamed of her race or sex; instead, she was proud and gained confidence as a 'Negro female'. Her struggle and triumph over prejudices and barriers like racism, sexism, personal desolation, loneliness, and low self-image of herself illuminated her strength and beauty. She proved that a strong determined soul could overcome any kind of situation in the world.

In her narration, it is clear that she is victimized by some people because of her unprivileged birth and upbringing as a black woman. She learns to forgive her exploiters and tries to live a normal life. Her story tells about her unflinching faith in her identity and beauty of her race taking pride in being a colored woman.

In *Gather Together in My Name*, Maya Angelou records her odyssey with her newly born baby, who comes out of impulsive testing of her sexual identity. She chronicles the struggles to reach a promising life and carries both the beauty and the burden of motherhood and womanhood.

Throughout her two years of life's journey, she encounters many hurdles and failures. She deeply longs for a secure life, but the dream never comes true. Her persistence, confidence, and human concerns create hope to expand her vision for life.

Though she is cheated by Curly, R. L. Poole, and L.D. Tolbrook, she never blames them; instead, she tries to discover her flaws and comprehend the situation better. She never drifts away from her world of fantasy as winning an ideal man's hand that must yield deep quench for both physical and spiritual love, and accomplishing a secured life.

At one stage, she learns that money alone cannot bring happiness, but it can create threats and chaos to life. Many times, her tenderness, sensuality, and innocence

lead her to the questionable arena regarding failures in her life. Every time, she dreams of living she and her man together: first with Curly, next with R. L. Poole, and then with L.D. Tolbrook and Troubadour Martin respectively. Gathering all these events together is her life's unforgettably experiences.

Her multiple vocations mirror the pathetic situations and constrain lifestyles of African American women in the so-called promised land, United States of America. Her story represents the tragic lives of young black girls. At the end of the story, though she finds no mission or destination for her life, she realizes her innocence and swears not to give up her struggle. As a result, she can come out of the crisis of identity.

Maya Angelou's first two autobiographical works, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *Gather Together in My Name* create a unique place in black autobiographical tradition, by their ability through a circumspically fashioned form to measure both the vulnerabilities and the intrinsic grandeur of black folk and cultural traditions. They go into the peculiar mission of the creative and contradictory self.

The autobiographies reveal the author's strong appetite for the ultimate existence and accepting the bitter realities in life with lion-heartedness. The psychological phenomenon of Maya Angelou makes her a distinguished personality in the course of her divergent experiences. She blames neither the society nor the family institution for her suffering and critical situations, whereas many great black authors neglect this aspect and projected it negatively.

Through the device of writing an autobiography, Maya Angelou shares her quest for human individuality, identifying her struggle with the general conditions of the Black Americans, which makes her play a representative role not only to Black Americans but also concerning the very idea of America. Her autobiographies celebrate the richness and vitality of Southern Black

life and the sense of community that persists in the face of poverty and racial prejudice.

Initially, her celebration of Southern Black life is revealed through the portrait of the author's life as a black child in Arkansas of the 1930s in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The second delineates a young woman struggles to create an existence striving to achieve a promising life and love in America during post-World War II in *Gather Together in My Name*.

Maya Angelou's serial autobiography recaptures her own subjective experiences. Throughout her work, she describes the personal, social, cultural, and historical influences, which shape her life and personality. She explores herself, individual identity, and her relationship with the family, the community, and the world.

Of course, the divergent experiences, which she confronts in her life, represent the stages of her spiritual growth and awareness. Her study of autobiography is significant as it offers her deep insights into personal and group experience in America. Her work echoes her conception of herself as a human being and the survival strategies available to a black woman in America.

To conclude Feminism in Maya Angelou's *Gather Together in My Name*, the chapter sheds the light on the main themes and problems that Maya writes in her second autobiography. It discusses how she survives from racism in American society especially after her son's birth.

Maya writes about her many relationships that she suffered at the hands of the deceiving of men but she does not blame anyone except herself because she was very young and innocent. Maya writes about the feminism in her novel and shows how colored men treated her oppressively for all time of her novel. Maya occupies many jobs to provide her son's needs. She has dignity and respect for herself that prevented her from asking anyone for help. Some men tricked her but she continued her life and supported her son.

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