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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAYA ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* AND HARRIET JACOBS' *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL*:
ESPECIALLY FOCUSING ON SLAVERY, EXPLOITATION OF BLACK WOMEN**

Bharat Arvind Tupere

Assistant Professor and Head,

Department of English,

S. R. M. College, Kudal, Dist. Sindhudurg (MS)

Abstract

*In the early human history everyone was treated equally. The matriarchal social system gave the supreme powers to the women. But at the rise of modern religions and Patriarchy, human society spilt into hierarchies. People are divided between gender, class, caste, religion and race etc. The suppression and oppressions of upper class and caste to the middle and poor class and caste made Slavery the important social system. The Slavery emerged into two forms- physical and psychological. The British made their colony in North America continent which became the United States of America. Because of the different geographical area rain falls heavily at the South and Slavery became the part of life. The Blacks slaves were brought from Africa for work in the Plantation. The slaves were treated very harshly and cruelly. Black women are doubly exploited because the Racism and Sexism oppressed them due to the color and gender. The slaves were voiceless. They could not able to talk about their exploitation. But some kind Whites taught their slaves and Blacks got their voice to talk. The Black women expressed their self-emancipation through the autobiographies. The suppressed people wanted a voice to speak up. Autobiography is a form where they can not only recreate or represent their lives but also seek the self-discovery. It is the expression of the self, and it is not only account of the writer but of the entire community, race. M. H. Abrams writes, "Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself." This literary genre focuses upon the problems of the race or community and becomes the voice of suppressed people. This paper is an attempt to bring out the issues like Slavery, Racism and Self-discovery of Black women. It is a short comparative study of Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Harriet Jacobs' autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to point out the worse effects of Slavery, Racism, and Segregation and how Maya as a black woman gets her Self-identity and Harriet got her freedom after the long struggle.*

Keywords: *Slavery, Segregation, Racism, Self-discovery, etc.*

The social hierarchies made by the powerful men who wanted to destroy the Matriarchy and establish the Patriarchy. Paganism had a special social system which was based upon the mother who was the head of the family. Women had the supreme status in the contemporary society. The modern religions reformed the social structure and made great changes. The faith from nature gods converted into supernatural gods and through it changed to a God. The Matriarchy vanished and Patriarchy became the center of the society. Because The God is a man and he made a man like him first and then

he made a woman out of the man. In later ancient and middle periods of human history Slavery has risen. People were divided between classes and communities due to their race, color, castes, religion, cultural and economical status, gender, region and language. The suppression and oppressions of upper class and caste to the middle and poor class and caste made Slavery the important social system. The Slavery emerged into two forms- physical and psychological.

In the Renaissance period, Europeans had founded their colonies all over the world. The British made their colony in North America continent which became the United States of America. Because of the different geographical area rain falls heavily at the South and Slavery became the part of life. The Blacks slaves were brought from Africa for work in the Plantation. The slaves were treated very harshly and cruelly. Black women are doubly exploited because the Racism and Sexism oppressed them due to the color and gender.

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Slavery in America was based on the race, especially on the colors. Oxford Mini English Dictionary defines racism as, "The belief that certain races are better than others, discrimination against other races." Whites supposed themselves better and superior than Blacks, and treated them very harshly. As a Black, women seek their Self-identity and try to resist the Racism. The literature of Blacks primarily consisted of memories by people who had escaped from Slavery; slave narrative concerned with account of life under Slavery and path of justice and redemption to freedom. Black autobiographies deals with Black culture, Racism, a sense of home, Segregation, migration, feminism, and more. Black lady had not legal right on her own children, on her personal life. She was sexually and physically harassed by the both White and Black men. She had to live under the rule of her White master. The autobiographers had to struggle against the inhuman tradition of exploitation and oppression.

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Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, written by Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) using the pseudonym Linda Brent, is the most widely read female slave narrative in American history. In her account Jacobs appeals to readers as a woman and mother by detailing the sexual harassment and abuse she suffered as a female slave in Edenton, NC and her eventual escape. Ultimately her story is one of triumph and a testament to her spirit. Unlike many of her counterparts, Harriet was not beaten or physically abused. She learned to read and write and spent the first six years of her life unaware that she was a slave. Her family was very important to her and she maintained contact throughout her life with her maternal grandmother and other family members. What makes Jacobs's story even more extraordinary were the seven years she spent in hiding (1835 until 1842) and her successful escape to New York City. After escaping to New York City, Harriet experienced the anxiety of many escaped slaves living after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law as she is continually pursued by her former owner.

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Anne Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. Her older brother, Bailey Johnson, Jr., could not pronounce her name when he was little, so he called

her Mya Sister, then My, which eventually became Maya. When Angelou was three years old her parents divorced and sent their children to live in the rural, segregated town of Stamps, Arkansas, with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson. During their teens, they lived with their mother, Vivian Baxter, in California. At the age of fifteen, Angelou began her career as a civil-rights activist of sorts. She battled racism with dogged persistence and succeeded in becoming the first African American hired to the position of streetcar conductor in San Francisco.

A Short comparative study:

Harriet Jacobs was born into slavery in 1813 near Edenton, North Carolina. She enjoyed a relatively happy family life until she was six years old, when her mother died. Jacobs's mistress, Margaret Horniblow, took her in and cared for her, teaching her to read, write, and sew. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written by Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) using the pseudonym Linda Brent, is the most widely read female slave narrative in American history. In her account Jacobs appeals to readers as a woman and mother by detailing the sexual harassment and abuse she suffered as a female slave in Edenton, NC and her eventual escape.

The autobiography of Angelou *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* published in 1969. It is the first autobiography of Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies. This book deals with the Maya as a three years old to the age of seventieth when she became pregnant. Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson (April 4, 1928) in St. Louis, Missouri. Her parents divorced when she was only three and she was sent with her brother Bailey to live with their grandmother in the small town of Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps, the young girl experienced the racial discrimination that was the legally enforced way of life in the American South, but she also absorbed the deep religious faith and old-fashioned courtesy of traditional African American life.

The cruelty of Slavery, Racism and segregation:

Jacobs takes great pains to prove that there can be no "good" slave masters. She argues that slavery destroys the morality of slave holders, almost without exception. Slave holders such as Dr. Flint become inhumane monsters. With no legal checks on their behavior, they inflict every conceivable kind of torture on their servants. Most slave masters view slaves as little more than animals or objects, never acknowledging their humanity. But even "kindly" slave holders, such as Mr. Sands, show themselves capable of betraying their slaves when it is convenient or profitable. Mr. Sands promises to free his slave children and may even intend to do so at first. However, in the slave system, such good intentions are easily forgotten. If a slave owner such as Mr. Sands encounters financial problems, he will likely be tempted to sell his own children to get himself out of trouble. Thus, slavery distorts even the most basic emotional instinct: the love of a parent for a child. Harriet describes the realities of life for slaves including "Hiring day" and the escape of her Uncle Benjamin from slavery. The hiring day took place at 1st January every year. The slaves who work in the farm hardly for their masters are supposed to go to their new masters. A woman had five children and they sold to a slave trader. She begged him where he would take them but he refused to answer. Slave holders tried to get rid of old slaves, whose lives had been worn out in their service. An old woman, who had served her master for seventy years faithfully, had become helpless from hard labours and disease. Her master moved to Alabama and left her for sale at twenty dollars.

The social structure of United States of America was entirely based on the race. Slavery was existed at the South part of the nation and North was regarded as Free States. But the hatred of colored people was strong in the minds of Whites. Thus whole USA has the racial discrimination against Blacks. The book reveals all these issues in the different parts of the nation. Colored people had different schools, church, hospitals and every things. Even Whites change the names of Blacks. White people refer to black people by their first names, never by the title Mrs. Momma is the only black woman ever to be called Mrs. in Stamps.

Maya confronts the insidious effects of Racism and segregation in America at a very young age. She internalizes the idea that blond hair is beautiful and that she is a fat Black girl trapped in a nightmare. Stamps, Arkansas, is so thoroughly segregated that as a child Maya does not quite believe that White people exist. As Maya gets older, she is confronted by more overt and personal incidents of Racism, such as a White speaker's condescending address at her eighth-grade graduation, her white boss's insistence on calling her Mary, and a White dentist's refusal to treat her. The importance of Joe Louis's world championship boxing match to the Black community reveals the dearth of publicly recognized African American heroes. It also demonstrates the desperate nature of the Black community's hope for vindication through the athletic triumph of one man.

Segregation causes Black people to feel contempt toward anything viewed as White. They don't understand where White people get the right to spend money. Momma has more money than the "powhitetrash" do, but she is thrifty with her money. She makes their clothes, resoles their shoes and teaches the children, "waste not, want not." The depression slowly creeps into the Black community in Stamps. The price for cotton drops to five cents a pound. In an effort to keep the store going, Momma begins to offer credit in exchange for welfare provisions. People can drop off their surplus provisions at the store and use the credit to purchase other items. Stamps recovers from the depression as slowly as it begins.

The struggle for freedom and Resistance to racism:

The autobiography describes Linda's struggle for freedom. Dr. Flint's seduction made her to lose her first love. She willingly decides to yield to white Lawyer rather than her wicked master. When she was pregnant he was troubling her. At the end she got the liberty only after the death of him. Harriet returns to her grandmother's house although Dr. Flint vows that Harriet will always be his slave. Harriet gives birth to her son, Benny. At nineteen, Harriet has not returned to her Master's home since the birth of her first child. Still Dr. Flint continues to visit her and repeatedly renews his promise to never sell her or her children. Harriet has a daughter, Louisa, by Mr. Sands and has both of her children baptized.

Harriet goes to live at Dr. Flint's son's plantation where she works long hours and her daughter suffers from neglect. During this time, Harriet makes plans to escape. Jacobs waits until late in the night, then she sneaks from the plantation house and flees into town. Harriet's family members are afraid that she will be caught until a white neighbor offers to hide Harriet. Harriet spends the next several months locked in a small chamber above the woman's own bed chamber. Jacobs spends seven years hidden in her tiny crawl space. By the end of this time the building is falling apart and she is often soaked by rain storms. Finally, her friend Peter plans for her to escape by ship. Harriet bids farewell to her family and endures a long journey by sea to Philadelphia. She is joined by another slave, Fanny. The ship's captain and crew turn out to be allies on the journey. Once in New York, Harriet finds her daughter, Ellen, who looks older and "neglected." Mr. Sands has not emancipated Ellen as promised. Harriet writes to Dr. Flint offering to finally buy her freedom but is rejected. After the failure of their anti-slavery reading room, William decides to go west to California, and Benny goes with him. Ellen continues to do well at her school, and Harriet returns to New York as a nursemaid for the Bruce family. However, times are tense in the city as the Fugitive Slave Law goes into effect. Harriet learns that Dr. Flint has found out her whereabouts and plans to recapture her. Harriet flees to New England until she feels safe enough to return to New York.

At last, Harriet learns that Dr. Flint is dead and she is being pursued by his daughter and her new husband. Again, the second Mrs. Bruce protects her and finds Harriet a safe place to live. Ultimately, Mrs. Bruce purchases Harriet's freedom for \$300.

Slavery is part of America's national identity. In grade school and high school, we learn repeatedly and in expanding depth about the slave trade, plantation life, the freeing of the slaves and the Civil War. Jacobs's narrative broadens the depth of degradation of slavery, because she blames the

institution, the system, and the business of Slavery as a force that twists humanity. She reveals that this most oppressive of patriarchal institutions affects everyone: "I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well as the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched.

When people get education and express themselves through various forms of imaginative literature, they try to resist the reasons of their oppressions. Blacks, especially women resisted the racism. Black peoples' resistance to Racism takes many forms in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Momma maintains her dignity by seeing things realistically and keeping to herself. Big Bailey buys flashy clothes and drives a fancy car to proclaim his worth and runs around with women to assert his masculinity in the face of dehumanizing and emasculating racism. Daddy Clidell's friends learn to use white peoples' prejudice against them in elaborate and lucrative cons. Vivian's family cultivates toughness and establishes connections to underground forces that deter any harassment. Maya first experiments with resistance when she breaks her white employer's heirloom china. Her bravest act of defiance happens when she becomes the first black streetcar conductor in San Francisco. Blacks also used the church as a venue of subversive resistance. At the revival, the preacher gives a thinly veiled sermon criticizing whites' charity, and the community revels in the idea of white people burning in hell for their actions.

Momma had two commandments that must never be broken: never be dirty or impudent. The only children that Maya and Bailey see who don't follow these rules are the powhitetrash children. Some powhitetrash girls walk up to Momma and begin to mimic her, making faces, and one girl does a handstand in front of Momma, revealing her lack of underwear. Momma stands still and hums throughout the display, ignoring the girls. When they can't get a response, they say goodbye. Annie and Momma say "Goodbye Miz." Maya cries and Momma tells her to go wash her face. At first, Maya is furious that Momma called the girls Miz in spite of their behavior. Later, she realizes that something happened in the exchange and somehow Momma had won. Maya goes out to finish raking the yard and rakes it in heart shapes.

This occurs purely by accident when a judge orders her to court. Momma and Willie had hidden a black man being hunted for assaulting a white woman. He was later caught and told the judge Momma had hidden him. The judge sends for Mrs. Henderson. When Mrs. Henderson arrives, the white people think it is funny because the judge is not from Stamps and couldn't have known she is black. The black residents of Stamps think it is an affirmation of Momma's worth.

These unjust social realities confine and demean Maya and her relatives. She comes to learn how the pressures of living in a thoroughly racist society have profoundly shaped the character of her family members, and she strives to surmount them. Maya is shuttled around to seven different homes between the ages of three and sixteen: from California to Stamps to St. Louis to Stamps to Los Angeles to Oakland to San Francisco to Los Angeles to San Francisco. As expressed in the poem she tries to recite on Easter, the statement "I didn't come to stay" becomes her shield against the cold reality of her rootlessness. Besieged by the "tripartite crossfire" of racism, sexism, and power, young Maya is belittled and degraded at every turn, making her unable to put down her shield and feel comfortable staying in one place. When she is thirteen and moves to San Francisco with her mother, Bailey, and Daddy Clidell, she feels that she belongs somewhere for the first time. Maya identifies with the city as a town full of displaced people.

Maya's personal displacement echoes the larger societal forces that displaced blacks all across the country. She realizes that thousands of other terrified black children made the same journey as she and Bailey, traveling on their own to newly affluent parents in northern cities, or back to southern towns when the North failed to supply the economic prosperity it had promised. African Americans descended from slaves who were displaced from their homes and homelands in Africa, and following

the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, blacks continued to struggle to find their place in a country still hostile to their heritage.

To conclude, the suppressed voice of Blacks raised into their Self-expressions which points out the exploitation, cruelty of White masters. Harriet Jacobs' autobiography represents the issues like Slavery, Racism, sexual harassment, sexuality and victimization of female slaves. This book also stresses the status of Black community, especially the place of the slave women in the larger American society. Harriet who fought to get freedom became the ideal for other women. The strength of Maya and her supporters and their love of bonding help her to overcome the great problem, Racism. The book explores the Self-discovery, rape, Racism, and literacy. At a one place, black color becomes the cause of suppression by the White male and female, and at the second sexism allows Black male to oppress Black women. Maya was raped by a white lover of her mother while at the teenage age, she fears to become a lesbian, makes a sexual intercourse with a teenage boy. She becomes pregnant at the end of the book. It was her entry into adulthood, and she decided to be a mother of her unborn child. She was the first Black woman who became the streetcar conductor. She had to face racial problems throughout her life. Finally she got her self-identity.

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