

# Towards the Black Psychology: A Journey from *Caged Bird* to *Still I Rise*

Rakhi Gupta

Research Scholar, Manipal University Jaipur

Rakhigupta0508@gmail.com

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**Abstract:** Autobiographical genre plays an important role in the construction of personal identity. Though it is written with the purpose of self-revelation and self-exploration but it also focuses on memoir, anecdotes and some time it also works on ethnography- a large socio-cultural group or the socio-economic hierarchy of bourgeois culture which is also famously known as cultural hegemony- the term or theory coined by Antonio (1891–1937) where the world always follow the path of the fixed sets of norm, ideology or belief, which is created by dominant class and supported the notion of binary opposition where one is always perceived as inferior and other as superior or typically one of the two opposite assumes a role of dominance over other. The purpose of this study is to disclose the darkness in the mind of the black people through a critical examination of the soul of the black folk, causes of their invisibility and an evolution of self-image in the world of dualism. Maya Angelou, through her poem *Caged Bird* and *Still I Rise*, has not only become the spokesperson for her community but also break away all given oppressive, patriarchal, male dominated order of the society and transform an imaginative space to real space for her and all women.

**Keywords:** Binary Opposition, Black Feminism, Cultural Hegemony, Deconstruction Self-Esteem, Transcendentalism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explore about gender construction (butler, *Gender Trouble*), dominant socio-cultural imposition and a relationship between power and categories of sex and how and why society psychologically perceives and gives physical appearance or beauty all power. Along with it, the aim of this paper is to find the deepest yearn of all African American writers for total transformation of man and society. It also applies the two field of vision of African American: first how they (African American) view themselves and how other views them, with it, through literature they also reveal their latent desire to bring Transcendentalism (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*) instead of inferiority complex where 'Feeling of inferiority' is experienced by everyone who is not fit according to the established norms created by society and not willing for revival.

A journey for the acceptance of the naturalness and beauty of blackness is now firmly rooted in African American culture. It also took them into the world of self-worth, self-esteem and self-acceptance which also has become a source of peace in their mind because their long struggle for liberty and equality for the aim of reconstructing their identity who are once known or treated as inferior class or other (Said, *Orientalism*). Writing is the medium through which the suppressed voice of the human finds release especially the one who find himself/herself in the caged world, where the soul of the black folk has been captured in the pre-established boundaries and stereotyped norms generated by the white supremacist society. Therefore, significant literary and ideological movement such as Harlem Renaissance or Negritude Movement became a weapon for the struggler to find their voice and can explore and expose bravely about their physical and psychological exploitation, subjugated double consciousness (Dubois, *The Soul of the Black Folk*) experiences through literature.

Further, this study also focuses on the existence of black American women's voice, which is burning under the concept of triple consciousness (race, class and gender), prioritization of feminism that alienates women of color or marginalized women's bitter experiences both as sexism and racism.

The present paper is about the gift of optimism, given by the African American writer Maya Angelou. Her writing presents hope for not only her community but also becomes the voice of the soul of black female. Her autobiographical works comes under the list of education works which describes the formation of the protagonist’s mind and her personality from youth to maturity. As through her both poem *Caged Bird* and *Still I Rise*- she describes her journey from ‘darkness (only darkness, not ignorance because dream of freedom comes in the mind of child too) to knowledge’ (successful to find the ways to achieve dream) thus she talked about the struggle of being a black author and poet where she often felt that her words were not heard because of the color of her skin. Hence,through her biography she successfully portrayed women as powerful, articulate, self- reliant and radically different from any women character encountered in literature. Angelou, through her autobiography spread the message that “ To believe, what is true in your private heart is true for all but once if an individual scorns personal intuition and chooses other’s path or rely on other opinion will always lack the beauty of creativity and will never understand the blessings of freedom (Emerson, *Self-Reliant*).

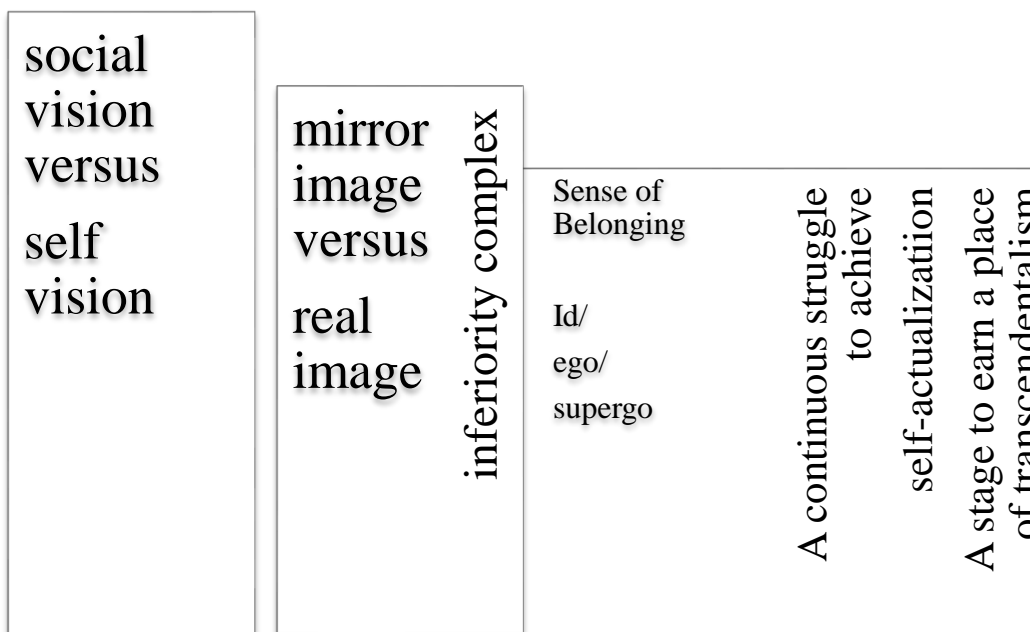
**2. CAGED BIRD REPRESENTS HIDDEN VOICE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS:**

Caged Bird symbolically represent the hidden desire of African Americans for ultimate freedom and space as the poem *Caged Bird* by Maya Angelou tells a story about the African American wings, which are clipped and their feet are tied and their urge for living is standing on the ‘grave of dreams’, where bird is striving for opening his/her mouth to sing and make an attempt to reaffirm their identity from stereotyped thoughts and reveal to the world that it is created to be a free no to be a slave of anyone.

The poem *Caged Bird* representing the real story of African American community, it paints the picture of two bird- one is trapped in cage (African Americans), while the other flies freely in the sky (Caucasian society). Such two world leads towards the notion of binary opposition that can only understand with the deconstruction approach. Binary opposition which, according to Ferdinand De Saussure, is sets of two thoughts that are against with one- another. Thus it creates boundaries between groups of people and leads them to prejudice and discrimination.

Experience of physical and psychological slavery is indispensable for a clear understanding of the emergence of African American’s socio- culture, art and literature. It established the foundation for all writers (male and female) to write in multiple genres such as slave narratives, autobiography, and novel based on bildungsroman theme (journey of self-discovery) with hidden psycho-analytical literary theory such as: Double Consciousness, Intersectionality, Inferiority Complex and Freudian most famous theory to understand human’s mirror self and real self clearly such as: Id, Ego and Super-Ego.

**3. A JOURNEY FROM CAGED BIRD TO STILL I RISE:**



**Table 1: (Human Stage from Double Consciousness to Self-Actualization)**

African American literature becomes a source for a reconstruction period, women's suffragette movement and the 1920's Harlem Renaissance that saw 'flowering of negro literature' and that also lead to the Negritude Movement (an intellectual movement (1930-40)). Whose focus is not only to assert their cultural identity but also to avoid the traumatic experience of physical and psychological slavery that includes cruelty, indignity and ultimate dehumanization. Therefore, *Caged Bird* symbolizes their (African Americans) entrapment state, continuous struggle to express desire for ultimate flight and above from earthly rules which are based on binary opposition where one has to be inferior to show other as superior or logocentricism- where centre of attention will always be on the Master (white supremacist society) and fringe place automatically goes to the Slave (African Americans).

*Caged Bird* is also a symbol of darkness, an invisible pain and fear. These all emotions are expressed by the black women who is not even experienced the tag of *Angel in the House* but remained only with the identity of *Slave in the House*. Angelou, known as Renaissance woman, encourage the concept of Intersectional Feminism, where black women are suffering with multiple insecurities such as rigidly segregated social setup, humorous and disgust social gaze upon black community and of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well-dressed. Angelou represent all black women by giving a raw and honest account of own experiences of difficulties while growing up as a black girl in Arkansas yet triumphed despite persistent institutionalized discrimination. Thus, her metaphorical poem *Caged Bird* depicts human of any race who comes under the label of marginalized class journey from caged to rise. As confining themselves within four walls where black people are trapped and limited because of their color, reveal their inner most desire of singing, singing represent a hope or desire to treat them as human not as animal because they are also created by God. Even in the Bible, it is very clear that all men are created equal and every single person can be a child of God, receiving the full inheritance of heaven. We can look toward the Bible to learn how to love and serve everyone no matter what their age, color, or ethnicity, gender or nationality.

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 (Angelou 21)

The word 'Still' signifies that the fight and struggle is still continue to overcome against all prejudice and injustice pervaded by hegemonic class, (Gramsci 123) where the ruling class has all the power to manipulate the psyche of the marginalized class, their belief, values, culture and perceptions so that ruling class's socio-culture (white supremacist) values and mores can easily become the accepted one for everyone. The choice of words and use of tone intensifies the effect of the poem and inspires not only her community but becomes the hidden voice of all those subaltern (Spivak 206) who are trapped in an exploited world and their stage is also like a *Caged Bird*. In this way, Angelou, through literature express the stage of self-revelation, which only comes when each individual avoid conformity and false consistency, as Emerson says in his well-known essay *Self-Reliance* that A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of the little mind. When individual begins to believe in his/her worth or esteem and will remain truth within oneself then inferiority complex or a self-doubt and a feeling of uncertainty will never drive subconsciously in human mind.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

literature is a platform for invisible voices and the causes of their invisibility are that people for certain reason such as for his/her racism, sexism and classicism refuse to see African Americans. Despite, the places they (African Americans) go and tries to build relationships, the world continues to ignore them then literature becomes a source for them to protest against racism and the clock of invisibility or traumatic experience of alienation that is placed on black people by white supremacist society. Human tries to follow mirror stage; it is a stage of mind that begins to process according to the society's set of norms. This stage is also considered as an ideal image of human or a mediator (ego) between id and superego. As According to Sigmund Freud Id is the primitive and instinctual part of the human mind. There is an eternal battle between the id (desire and wishes) and ego or superego. Angelou highlights the differences of id between her community and hegemonic class (white supremacist society) by portraying realistically African American community's life that is full of struggles and challenges with physical and psychological stress through repressed id. Therefore, Id is a human desire for regaining self-esteem and metaphorical meaning of *caged Bird* is to rise above the limitation of adverse surroundings with the flight of a bird that is free.

Self is the result of human social interaction with other people. In this study self is scrutinized with the theoretical study propagated by the well-known social scientists: Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead. Charles Horton Cooley introduced the concept of *Looking-Glass- Self* in his work *Human Nature and the Social Order*, which reveals person's self-growth in the interpersonal interaction environment or their living experience under 'white gaze' in America. Which becomes the consequences of self-loathing and inferiority and the desires of the black society to acquire the same appearance beauty as white community has, led them (African American) to the complete destruction as in this stage they are away from their self-actualization. Whereas, George Mead provide his contribution towards the self-evolution stage from the critical study of social psychology which explains that how the self is directly related to the social world and how development of self-arises in the process of social experience and activity. When the subject is constantly runs away from 'I'. In other words an individual will run away from 'Real Self' and trapped into the world of 'Ideal Image'. Ideal Image can include all imagination or stream of thoughts that are associated with other's views, behavior and vision. In such environment, it becomes difficult for a common human to emerge from ideal to real self, which is also known as the stage of transcendentalism (Emerson 203) or anagnorisis (Aristotle105) but once individual comes out from the caged chain of ideal image, it becomes easy for him/her to achieve the stage of Catharsis or self- purification (the process of releasing strong or repressed emotions) (Aristotle109) that provides the result of a new step into the world of re-generation where people believe in utopian (More 89)society (equality, freedom and fraternity)

In African American Literature, there are many writer, poet and fictional characters, who fearlessly transformed their captured voice (*Caged Bird*) to free voice (*Still I Rise*) and explored racism, physical or psychological abuse and violence. Over the years they have been the voices of their generation and inspired the generation that followed them.

Table: 2

Name/Author/ Fictional Character	A Journey from <i>Caged Bird</i> to	<i>Still I Rise</i>
James Baldwin	Blacks Struggle in America <i>Giovanni's Room</i> raised the issues of race and homosexuality	Explored his experience as gay black man in white American society (Id) James Baldwin provided inspiration for later generations of artists to speak out about the gay experience in Black America like Staceyann Chin and Nick Burd.
Amiri Baraka	Explore the anger of Black American against biased society poet, writer and political activist Amiri Baraka used his writing as a weapon against racism	focusing on Black Liberation and the rights of African Americans
Ralph Ellison	A pain for Existentialism and a strong desire for sense of belonging	Published in 1952, the first lines of <i>Invisible Man</i> struck a chord with hundreds of thousands of readers, "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . ." (10)
Toni Morrison/Roxanne Gay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social and psychological restrictions make coloured people to feel inferiors.</li> <li>Self-hatred leads to self-destruction</li> </ul>	The nature of the cloured people's struggle for their race and endurance in a predominantly multicultural post-colonial white America. <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , (1970) by Morrison <i>Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body</i> (2017)

Zora Neale Hurston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• novel explores main character Janie Crawford's "ripening from a vibrant, but voiceless, teenage girl into a woman with her finger on the trigger of her own destiny."(22)</li> <li>• A struggle for self-fulfillment or an individual psychological and moral growth from youth to adulthood</li> <li>• Focus themes are <i>Bildungsroman</i> /</li> <li>• Sudden Manifestation/Epiphany: a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• famous work <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> 1937.</li> <li>• Hurston,"published in <i>Ms.</i> magazine in 1975. This essay, alongside her edits of notable works like "I Love Myself When I am laughing and Then Again When I am Looking Mean and Impressive," brought Hurston to the attention of a new generation of readers.</li> </ul>
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Therefore Harlem Renaissance, New Negro Movement or Negritude Literature- these literary movements worked as a battle against all evil activities or injustice given by the society. Besides this, this paper endeavors to illustrate African American's journey from slavery to self-sustaining or self- emancipation. As, in the last stanza from *Still I Rise*, Angelou clear this meaning that the journey of transcendentalism is still on process and from past to present writer will continue to express their ideas and write against the shortcomings of the society or individual. Thus, it is truly said that an author play a major role to re-birth a society from its previous under-developed stage and their writing is characterized by the adoption of a humanist philosophy and the recovery of the classical antiquity.

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise (Angelou 21)

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