



Feminist Rights in Maya Angelou's "*Still I Rise*," "*Men*," "*Phenomenal Woman*," "*Woman Work*," and "*Equality*"

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Abstract

Literature refers to written works that have artistic or intellectual value, often using language in creative and expressive ways. It can be creative and imaginative writing, which helps readers to engage intellectually and emotionally through the written works. It can be based on someone's own experience, struggles and hardships faced by the author, it reflects the culture, social, political and economic realities. It can be in any form like novels, dramas, prose, poems, short stories, fables and so on. It provides aesthetic pleasure to the readers. Newspapers, scholarly publications, religious texts, press releases, and spreadsheets are examples of informative works that are typically not regarded as literature. There are two types of literature: fiction and non-fiction. Literature may have both positive and harmful influences on a culture. It is an essential component of the self-realisation of man and a representation of his successes and failures. It describes the character and destination of the human being. Feminism is a political, economic, or cultural movement that aims to obtain equal rights and legal safeguards for women. It involves a variety of political, sociological, and philosophical theories dealing with issues related to gender differences. Maya Angelou explains the definition of equality of rights as the guarantee that all persons are given an equal opportunity to achieve their potential and apply their skills. She states that no one should suffer reduced life chances based on their country of origin, religion, or disability. Equality acknowledges the historical pattern of certain groups defined by race, disability, gender, and sexual orientation facing institutional discrimination. The poems "Still I Rise," "Men," "Phenomenal Woman," "Woman Work," and "Equality" elicit the state of women and the need for feminist rights in a bold manner. Hence, this article decodes the feminist rights represented in the select poems of Maya Angelou.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, Feminist Rights, Poems, Feminist Criticism.

Introduction

American literature is produced in the United States, and the colonies belong to it. It began in the early 17th century with the arrival of English-speaking Europeans. Washington Irving is the father of American literature. The works belonging to American literature mainly focus on economic, political and social status. Despite the disparities in their nationality, ethnicity, religion, colour, or form of government, men and women all over the world have powerful feelings and passions that are the foundation of all of the world's literature. They often focused on sarcasm, racism, cynicism and satire. Their language plays a major role in their protest, like *The Great Gatsby* and *The Cather in the Rye*. American literature is a relatively recent development, emerging in the wake of American independence in the 17th century after centuries of colonisation. A significant portion of its works defies conventional writing styles and themes, paving the way for innovative and



distinctive expressions. Because of British Colonialism in America, they tried to resist anything colonial, which is why traditional fashion was ignored. They are more focused on contemporary style, and writers have this modern taste in writing literary works. They attempted to create their genre by writing detective stories, science fiction, and techniques similar to the father of detective stories, Edgar Allan Poe. Edgar Allan Poe's works on mysterious settings and detective stories: *The Rue Morgue Murders*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, and *The Purloined Letter*.

Individualism, romanticism, realism, modernism, and naturalism are emphasised in literary works. Americans are concerned with the value and importance of the individual, as well as democracy. Their society has a concept known as individualist culture, which is the idea of focusing on one's own goals and desires rather than acting on behalf of a company or a group. This idea is reflected in the writings and literary works of American writers, such as Tennessee William's play, *The Glass Menagerie*, which deals with American individualism. Another American theme has this touch of the American Dream, which is the idea that anyone who wants to be successful can achieve it through their efforts, hard work, determination, and perseverance. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is an example of this, as he is a hardworking boy who became successful, wealthy, and famous. More themes concern social rebellion and cultural clash. Common Genres of American Literature are Fiction, Drama and Poetry. For the category of fiction, Mark Twain wrote the well-known novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). This novel discusses racism and slavery, the two topics that are American. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is a classic novel published in 1936. The book is known for its vivid portrayal of the South, its complex characters, and its exploration of themes like resilience, societal change, and the impact of war. Yankee Doodle, The Epilogue, and Nathan Hale are only a few of the poems mentioned. American literature commonly delves into themes involving the journey from innocence to awareness, seeking the American dream, the role of land and the frontier, and hero versus community dynamics. This journey of change is at the core of many stories. Think about almost any novel you've ever read, in class or otherwise; think about the main character. It is most likely that this person was subjected to experiences that deeply changed their personality. At the end of the story, it is safe to say that the main character has become a very different individual from who they were initially. This is a common theme throughout American literature. Characters like Santiago, John Proctor, Huck Finn, and Biff Loman, whom you will meet this year, all go through their own journey of innocence to awareness. For some, as you will discover, the journey is to their destruction, as they are forever altered by what happens to them. For others, however, the journey is ultimately positive, as they are made stronger by their trials. After the American Renaissance, modernism emerged as the most significant and prolific literary era in American literature. Because Americans accepted innovation and technology by the middle of the 1900s, the era became known as Modernism. After the brutality and fear of the Civil War, enormous advancements in science, technology, and industry served as a beacon of hope for America. Realism was expanded upon by modernism, but in a deeper sense.

World War I and its perplexity drew the attention of many writers during this time. Boldness, hope, and dread were prevalent themes in the books, poetry, and short stories that were written during this time. The development of theatre writing in American literature also started around this time. Some of the notable names in American literature include John Smith, known for his contribution to some of the first literary works; Phillis Wheatley, who is credited with writing the first novel by an African American; Edgar Allan Poe, a



renowned exponent of the Romantic era; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a renowned poet; Emily Dickinson, who wrote poetry during a time that was largely dominated by male authors; Mark Twain, celebrated for his humor and realistic accounts; Ernest Hemingway, a novelist who vividly described the disillusionment of the Lost Generation; and Toni Morrison, who centered her stories on the Black experience and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993.

Life of Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Annie Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, and died on May 28, 2014, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was an American poet, memoirist, and actress whose autobiographies explored themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression. Maya Angelou's life was anything but ordinary. Born in St. Louis in 1928, she spent much of her childhood in Stamps, Arkansas, where she was raised by her paternal grandmother. The racial tensions of the segregated South shaped her early worldview, but it was personal trauma that would leave the deepest mark. At just eight years old, Angelou was raped by her mother's boyfriend. In the aftermath, when she spoke up about the assault, he was killed—an event that left her so deeply shaken that she stopped speaking for nearly five years. It was during this period of silence that she developed a profound sensitivity to language, absorbing the power of words long before she would wield them herself. Her groundbreaking 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was a raw and unflinching account of these early years, offering readers an intimate look at racism, sexual violence, and resilience. The book wasn't just a memoir; it was a revolution in literary history—one of the first to openly explore Black womanhood in America. It faced bans and controversy, yet its impact was undeniable, earning a National Book Award nomination and cementing Angelou's place as a literary force. But writing was just one facet of Angelou's astonishing career. She was a dancer, a singer, and even a calypso performer before finding her true calling as a writer. She worked as a cook, a streetcar conductor—the first Black woman to do so in San Francisco and, at one point, even engaged in sex work to survive. Far from hiding this chapter of her life, Angelou later spoke about it candidly, refusing to let shame dictate her story. By the late 1950s, she had moved to New York City, where the Harlem Writers Guild encouraged her to pursue her literary ambitions. But her journey was never linear—she was also an actress, performing in a State Department-sponsored tour of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, which took her to 22 countries. Alongside these creative pursuits, she trained with modern dance legends Martha Graham and Pearl Primus, and in 1961, she took on a role in Jean Genet's play *The Blacks*, which became a landmark production for Black theatre.

Maya's time in Africa further shaped her political and intellectual development. Encouraged by a South African activist she briefly married, Angelou moved to Cairo, where she worked as a journalist for the *Arab Observer*. Later, she relocated to Ghana and joined The African Review, embedding herself in the expatriate community that included figures like Malcolm X and W. E. B. Du Bois's widow, Shirley Graham Du Bois. It was during these years that she witnessed firsthand the connections between the American civil rights movement and African liberation struggles, a theme that would echo throughout her later works. Returning to the U.S. in the mid-1960s, Angelou threw herself into civil rights activism, working alongside both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Though devastated by their assassinations, she did not retreat from public life. Instead, she expanded her artistic and intellectual reach, hosting *Black Blues, Black*, a television series on African cultural influence in America, and becoming one of the first Black women to write a screenplay for a



feature film with *Georgia, Georgia* (1972). Her acting career flourished as well, with roles in *Roots* (1977) and *Poetic Justice* (1993), and she even earned a Tony Award nomination for *Look Away* (1973). Yet, for all her achievements in film and television, it was poetry that defined Angelou's later years. Collections like *And Still I Rise* (1978) and *Phenomenal Woman* (1995) showcased her signature blend of lyrical power, personal history, and political urgency. Her poetry was deeply rooted in Black oral traditions, gospel rhythms, and the cadences of spoken word, making her work both accessible and profound.

When Bill Clinton invited her to read a poem at his 1993 inauguration, Angelou became only the second poet in history to hold such an honour. Her poem, *On the Pulse of Morning*, was a call for unity and renewal, a vision of a more inclusive America. Later, she would commemorate Nelson Mandela's death with *His Day Is Done*, and she marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations with *A Brave and Startling Truth*. Despite never earning a conventional college degree, Angelou was named a professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in 1981, where she remained a beloved figure for decades. Her influence extended beyond academia, earning her more than 50 honorary degrees, three Grammy Awards for her spoken-word albums, and, in 2011, the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest civilian honour in the United States. Even in her final years, Angelou remained an active voice in public life, offering wisdom through works like *Letter to My Daughter* (2008), a collection of essays and reflections addressed to the generations of women she had inspired. She was a storyteller, a truth-teller, and a force of nature, an artist who transformed pain into poetry, struggle into strength, and life into legend.

Feminist Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poems

The part offers a feminist analysis of Maya Angelou's poems: "Still I Rise," "Men," "Phenomenal Woman," "Woman Work," and "Equality." Angelou promotes the need for women's education to survive in a patriarchal world, claiming that women must be given the same level of education as men. She also calls for equality in the workplace, especially in terms of wage equality between the sexes. In addition, Angelou believes that no human should undergo physical or verbal abuse since all humans are equal in God's and the community's sight. It gives a comprehensive outline of literary history, encompassing American literature, as well as an account of the author's life and writings. It discusses a feminist critique of Angelou's chosen poems on the themes of fighting for the rights of women, confidence in oneself, and appreciation of inner beauty, with emphasis on her conviction about the excellence of her own abilities compared to men. It also brings the discourse to a conclusion by carefully recapitulating and consolidating the salient points expounded within the main chapter, thus affording a cohesive overview that blends the central strands and observations.

Mary Wollstonecraft suggests that feminism involves cultural and political aspects. Feminist movements have fought for many rights of women, such as the right to vote, to hold public office, to enter employment, to get fair wages, to own property, to access education, to make legal contracts, to have equal rights under marriage, and to gain maternity leave. The writer takes a feminist approach to argue for the equality of rights of women in political, economic, social, psychological, personal, and aesthetic domains. Thematic engagement invites feminist readers to identify with female characters and their concerns. The aim is to challenge dominant assumptions and dissect patriarchal ideologies inherent in literature that is largely male-written.

Feminism has revolutionised dominant thinking in many aspects of Western society, including law and culture. Feminist activists have struggled for women's legal rights,



including contract rights, property rights, and voting rights; for women's autonomy and physical integrity, including abortion rights and access to reproductive health care; for the rights of women and girls to be protected from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and assault; for labor rights such as maternity leave and equal pay; and against misogyny and other gender-based discrimination. Traditionally, most feminist theories and movements have been led by white middle-class women from Western Europe and North America. Yet, women of different racial groups have developed alternative feminist voices since Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to American feminists. The momentum behind these other feminisms picked up pace in the 1960s, paralleling the United States Civil Rights movement and the African, Caribbean, Latin American, and Southeast Asian decolonisation movements.

Women from erstwhile European colonies and the Third World have thereafter championed postcolonial and Third World feminisms. Postcolonial feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty are critical of Western feminism for its ethnocentrism. This view is shared by black feminists like Angela Davis and Alice Walker. From *Still I Rise*: "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 21-24)

Simone de Beauvoir made the observation in her study of feminist history that the earliest woman to be found defending her gender in writing was Christine de Pizan, who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (*Epistle to the God of Love*) in the 15th century. In the 16th century, writers such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi helped shape feminist theory. The 17th century is witness to Marie Le Jars de Gournay, Anne Bradstreet, and Francois Poullain de la Barre. Feminists and scholars divide the history of the feminist movement into three distinct waves. The first wave is more specifically linked with the women's suffrage movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, addressing the right to vote. The second wave involved the women's liberation movement, which sprouted up during the 1960s, promoting women's legal and social rights. The third wave, starting in the 1990s, is both a continuation and a reaction to the perceived failures of second-wave feminism.

Poetry of Maya Angelou in Educational Aspect

This chapter analyses the educational aspect of Maya Angelou's poem *Men*, specifically looking at the lines: "As men walked up and down the street. Wino men, old men / Young men sharp as mustard / See them. Men are always / Going somewhere" (Angelou, 3-6). In these words, Angelou imparts the idea that men have the liberty to move freely within their surroundings, whereas the sentence "young men sharp as mustard" compares men to mustard, which is a different spice that adds richness to food. This comparison implies that men are even considered more precious than women in society, so Angelou emphasises the significance of female education in the modern age. Angelou hopes that women all over the world will take up education because she believes that more education makes women more respected by men. Education is a sign of respect, and Angelou believes in the abolition of educational discrimination for women, saying that both sexes need education their whole lives through. Sadly, societal expectations confine education to men and keep women as housewives.

Poetry of Maya Angelou in Occupational Aspect

The theme of occupation in Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* is discussed in this chapter, and specifically through the lines: "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 21-24). In *Still I Rise*, Angelou expresses the strength of women who, despite



being subjected to verbal and emotional abuse by men, overcome such adversity, similar to the buoyancy of air. On the other hand, there is a common perception among men that women are not capable of leadership, and they often perceive them as weak by nature and unable to run businesses. This illusion prevents the recognition that women can lead and manage businesses just as well as men, given that they have similar skills. In today's world, women often face obstacles in reaching the pinnacle of their careers. When they reach forty, most women are not satisfied with their career paths. This question has two aspects: one concerning the continuing significance of feminist issues in the workplace, and the other, how leaving a job causes women to become stifled by the tedium of life at home as homemakers. Angelou would want women to gain employment in the business or governmental sectors and thereby free them from the misogynistic comments of men. Angelou seeks to demonstrate that women can gain financial independence without turning to prostitution, even though she herself has had experience in that area for two years. Since prostitution is illegal, the economic benefits derived from it are not long-lasting. Thus, women must seek decent professions to counteract the exploitation they suffer at the hands of men. The author supports occupational equality, claiming that men and women must be treated as equals. She stresses the need to eschew segregationist tendencies, confirming that everyone is equal. The speaker introduces herself and states her capability to face her opponent. She radiates life, as opposed to her opponent's hopelessness. Comparing herself to natural elements like the moon, sun, and tides, which rise again after every fall, she speaks of hope and perseverance. Angelou uses deictic terms to claim her presence and state that there is no force that can suppress her. Using temporal deixis in the fourth stanza, she emphasises her victory over male domination.

The stanza begins with a rhetorical question, followed by two more questions that are posed in the past tense: "Did you want to see me broken? / Bowed head and lowered eyes?" (Angelou 13-14). The speaker neither asks men the purpose behind actions against women, since she is keenly aware of it. With this organisation, she is presenting a feeling of defiance, one that implies even though men attempted to subvert her, they failed because she has not been defeated and stands strong now. By asking three rhetorical questions, she is reminding them that attempts at making women weak and forcing them to submit have been in vain. She changes to the present tense with her questions in the lines to follow. This move demonstrates the dichotomy of how men attempted to control her before and what she is capable of today, displaying self-assurance. Her current state of pride and happiness is a direct rebuke to the brutality of men, which she captures in the following stanza: "You may shoot me with your words / You may cut me with your eyes / You may kill me with your hatefulness" (Angelou 21-23). In this, she concisely captures male aggression against women through strong verbs like shoot, cut, kill, and hate. The stanza culminates in a bold declaration, a sentiment of defiance that resonates throughout the remainder of the poem, with the phrase I rise reiterated seven times.

Angelou artfully structures a series of words that portray men's attempts to take away women's vibrancy, fundamental human life, and independence. However, when faced with opposition, she continues and stands firm. The name of the poem, *And Still I Rise*, forcefully emphasises her strength, especially since it starts with the conjunction and, which is a straightforward answer to the many injustices she has suffered at the hands of men, some of which are mentioned in the poem and the above paragraph. At the end of the poem, she also expresses hope, describing herself as a woman who has gone through a lot of challenges but never gave up. She compares herself to an ocean, which comes back up after every fall, just



like the persistent waves. She has passed through the darkness into the light, towards a brighter future. In so doing, she becomes a symbol of hope and resistance for women who still suffer oppression.

In *Phenomenal Woman*, Angelou references another chapter in the same narrative. In this, womanhood is compared to a book where every page presents a different story. This specific story deals with a woman struggling not just with issues brought against her by men but also those brought by her own gender. In her initial poem, *And Still I Rise*, Angelou tackles racism, pointing out the persecution of women by men, and very briefly touches on intra-racism, wherein women turn against each other. From “Phenomenal Woman”: “I’m a woman, phenomenally, phenomenal woman, that’s me” (Angelou 10-13). She uses the first-person pronoun thirty times in the course of the poem to define her self-image and herself. The refrain, “I’m a woman, phenomenally, phenomenal woman, that’s me” (Angelou 10-13), is repeated at the end of the three stanzas. She delves into her relationships with both men and women and places these in a sociohistorical context. Her everyday experiences tend to put her into difficult situations that force her to move in an intricate world. In the last stanza, the speaker also addresses the dilemmas she undergoes in the patriarchal society. Men seldom understand women, and even when trying to explain who they are, tend to fail as they cannot depict their real form. She screams that she is a human being, that she is made up of physical matter (body) and soul, but men do not hear her, so the spiritual aspect remains a mystery:

**I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
The baby to dry
I got company to feed
The garden to weed. (Angelou 1-8)**

The poem “*Woman Work*” is written in poetic form. Maya Angelou attempts to express the indispensable work of women towards balancing their day-to-day chores. A woman cannot be dependent only on her husband, as various daily requirements need to be taken care of, ranging from food, poultry, and infant feeds to cleaning floors, mending clothes, taking care of children, and caring for gardens. Angelou states that a woman can do anything, not just at home but anywhere else; she is strong. Here, we are introduced to a woman who constantly works for everyone around her and enjoys keeping everything neat and pleasant-looking. The first stanza presents a caring figure, a devoted mother who rests only to prepare herself for the trials of a new day, providing a warm home and happy experiences for her family. She cares for her children, cooks, goes shopping for essentials, does laundry, cleans the house, and nurses the sick. Her numerous contributions render it impossible for her to be forgotten, even for an instant. She starts by counting her domestic chores, naming fourteen activities in fourteen poetic lines without any grammatical or stylistic breaks; there is no punctuation until the end of the stanza, where a period is finally added. This stylistic move accentuates the ease with which women accomplish these daily chores, noting that they do not need to pause to think about their labour. It is easy for a woman to remember her life's work. Most interestingly, there is music to her language; she sings. What an amazing creature! A woman! A mother! Throughout the next four stanzas, she uses apostrophes to speak to pieces of nature, such as the sun, rain, snow, and mountains.



She feels intensely alone, abandoned and unhelped; she turns to nature for comfort. She asks nature to give her strength and comfort (cool my brow again), to blow her away from the tireless and exhausting ground for a night of rest (storm, blow me away from here), and to give her a night of peace (let me rest tonight). Unfortunately, a caring mother does not have a human companion! She is forced to find refuge in nature, since it is not available to her people. In the poem *And Still I Rise*, she compares herself to natural elements like the moon and sun, and also uses elements like fire in *Phenomenal Woman*. Nature is the source of her energy, sleep, and happiness in most of her poems.

In the poem, she does not show weariness of her everyday chores since she views them as her responsibilities; however, she resents the human race (men) for their inability to appreciate her physical and mental exertions. As a mother and wife, she feels very lonely. As such, at the end of the poem, she turns to the natural world and classifications, leaving out human beings, declaring that they are all she can call her own (You are all that I can call my own). She condemns the insensitivity of human beings to a woman who invests her entire life in providing comfort and tranquillity to others.

Poetry of Maya Angelou in Social Aspect

The social aspect in Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* deserves examination in this chapter, specifically the meaning of the line: "You can tread me in very dirt, but still, like dust, I'll rise." (Angelou 3-4). This statement means that no matter what, she will rise even when men see women as nothing but dust. This feeling provokes insult and public humiliation against women. In society, Angelou says, discrimination against both men and women is not acceptable. She supports equal status for all people. Even though she feels inferior to men in society, she remains firm in her will to rise, no matter what obstacles face her. Men tend to believe that women are less competent than men, proposing a system where men are superior and women inferior in society. It is, however, important to note that men and women ought to be treated equally because men do not have the power to belittle women.

In her poem "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou declares, "I am the dream and the hope of the slave" (Angelou 36). This declaration reflects her determination to abolish slavery throughout the world and establishes her position as a champion of human rights. Angelou poetically pictures a society that does not have slavery, reminding us that such a practice is inherently contrary to the rights of people in society. With my own feminist actions, I seek to end slavery and advocate for the acknowledgement of women of different backgrounds as equal human beings.

In the poem "Men," Angelou states, "Their shoulders high like the / Breast of a young girl" (Angelou 10-11). In this, she describes a vision of social equality between men and women. The metaphor of muscular shoulders represents men's work, whereas the use of women's breasts represents women's nurturing aspect. Angelou underlines the point that men do not need to overpower women by comparing shoulder strength with the gentleness of breasts. This contrast appeals to the reader because of its obviousness and normality. Angelou, in *Phenomenal Woman* expresses that she believes that men, being bees surrounding a hive, ought to defend women. Having encountered trauma when young, Angelou wishes to denounce rape and sexual abuse by arguing that those offences are, by definition, unconstitutional. Most women are not aware that they have been restricted by masculine definitions of femininity. The dominant stereotype of strong men and fragile women has had a great impact on women's thinking. According to some feminists, the existence of women's literature refutes the supremacy of men's stories. Female sexuality is



described as revolutionary, subversive, multifaceted, and free; if there is a feminine principle, it should be defined outside male definitions. The word wanton, combined with the words 'moving from man to man,' implies that the speaker is like a prostitute or is viewed as one in her own life: "You proclaim my ways are wanton / that I fly from man to man / But if I'm merely a shadow to you / could you ever comprehend?" (Angelou, 11-14). Interestingly, rather than refuting the accusation, the narrator counters with another claim: that those who judge their actions lack the capacity to understand the circumstances that allow for such behaviour. The vocabulary used is powerful. The speaker identifies themselves as "shadows" in the eyes of their accuser, showing an assumed inferiority in the social ranks. However, they state that the judgment of the accuser is based on ignorance, bringing home the metaphorical gap between them. This way, the speaker advances their position by maintaining their decision rather than refuting the charges. Angelou seeks to portray men and women in society.

The poem *Still I Rise* provides an intersectional perspective towards oppression that is essential to any feminist critique. It is especially important to Black feminism because it speaks to the complicated interactions of race and gender instead of isolating gender alone. The term intersectionality, developed by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, speaks to how these different types of oppression, e.g., racism and sexism, intersect to shape the specific experience of marginalised persons, specifically Black women. Angelou's poetry powerfully captures this tangled fight.

Bell Hooks and Audre Lorde are prominent feminist theorists who have highlighted the need to acknowledge particular struggles under feminism, historically shaped by middle-class white considerations. Black feminism is an ideology that centres upon the reclaiming of agency, as seen with Angelou declaring to have gone beyond these representations. At the root of resistance among women against patriarchal dominance lies a tone of defiance expressed quite vividly in *Still I Rise*. Angelou pushes against the structures of power which utilize economic relegation, prevailing mores, and stereotypes as weapons to belittle women generally and Black women in particular. Throughout history, Black women were projected as fierce or submissive beings whose displays of assertiveness and self-confidence were ignored or demonised. Angelou takes back these characteristics as positives instead of negatives. The rhetorical question raised invites the audience to consider why an empowered and confident woman, a Black woman at that, would be seen as threatening. The reclaiming of the female body and sexuality is a major theme in *Still I Rise*. Historically, patriarchal cultures have used women's bodies as tools of control, objectification, and devaluation. Angelou rebukes puritanical and misogynistic sentiments that attempt to shame women for celebrating their bodies by offering a positive and unapologetic representation of female sexuality.

Feminist theorists like Bell Hooks and Judith Butler have maintained that the freedom of women is dependent on restoring bodily autonomy. By describing sexuality as joyful, powerful, and intimate, Angelou rebukes patriarchal constructs that attempt to limit or discredit women's self-value. In the past, women and particularly women of color have encountered extreme difficulties surrounding poverty and economic disenfranchisement. The ongoing focus on ascension indicates not merely a dismissal of economic marginality but also an assertion of financial and social independence. Furthermore, Angelou's use of natural imagery, e.g., dust, air, and tides emphasize the imminence of this rise. This is representative of the feminist belief in the unrelenting push toward gender equality, regardless of the existence of historical and systemic barriers. *Still I Rise* asserts strength and collective



resilience, another key element of feminism. Feminist movements that highlight the strength of female solidarity are in resonance with this regard for ancestral strength. Black feminist movements specifically have emphasised the value of communal support and intergenerational knowledge transfer as a way to battle structural injustice. Feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis have emphasised the importance of both historical and current feminist movements being inclusive and based on the experiences of oppressed communities. Angelou's acknowledgement of her ancestors' hardships is a powerful reminder that endurance is a shared effort, constructed upon the successes and sacrifices of previous generations, and not solely an individual trait.

Hardships and Injustice to Women

The hardships and injustices that women, especially Black women, have experienced in America are reflected in Maya Angelou's life and writings. Angelou highlighted racial and gender-based discrimination through her activism, autobiographies, and poetry. She wrote candidly about experiencing childhood sexual assault, a subject that many women face but have traditionally been stigmatised from discussing. Numerous essential feminist tenets are embodied in Maya Angelou's life and writings, especially those focusing on self-expression, intersectionality, empowerment, and resilience. Women's empowerment and self-worth are among Angelou's most prominent feminist themes. Her poem *Phenomenal Woman* is a bold statement that embraces a woman's innate strength and rejects conventional notions of beauty. Feminist Principle, rather than fitting in with what society expects of them, women ought to establish themselves according to their own standards. Maya Angelou wishes all women who are interested in educational success. In terms of educational rights equality, men and women are equal. Angelou is a human rights activist in addition to being a writer. She wishes to use her literary work to advocate for human rights. Angelou wished to abolish slavery worldwide, particularly in the United States.

Maya Angelou, in her poem, *Still I Rise* acknowledges that the bitter lies of those who seek to oppress her may have distorted her image in history. They trampled her name into the ground, but she will still rise like the dust. She inquires whether her sassy demeanour has offended anyone. She walks with the assurance of someone who has oil wells pumping in her room, asking why they are so upset. She will rise with the same certainty as the sun, moon, and tides, with her hopes high. The poem, *Men* begins with an unidentified speaker, widely assumed to be Angelou herself, expressing her desire to watch behind the curtains at the men walking through town. Maya Angelou, in her poem, *Still I Rise* acknowledges that the bitter lies of those who seek to oppress her may have distorted her image in history. They trampled her name into the ground, but she will still rise like the dust. She inquires whether her sassy demeanour has offended anyone. She walks with the assurance of someone who has oil wells pumping in her room, asking why they are so upset. She will rise with the same certainty as the sun, moon, and tides, with her hopes high.

The poem, *Men* begins with an unidentified speaker, widely assumed to be Angelou herself, expressing her desire to watch behind the curtains at the men walking through town. As expressed in her works and personal experiences, Maya Angelou places a strong emphasis on emotional fortitude, respect, and mutual empowerment in the connection between men and women. She praised love, relationships, and self-worth while also acknowledging the difficulties and injustices in partnerships. According to Angelou, respect and appreciation for one another should be the foundation of a healthy relationship rather than dominance or submission. According to Angelou, a healthy relationship should be built on mutual respect and admiration rather than control or obedience. Before looking for love from a guy, she



thought women should learn to love themselves. Angelou's autobiographical works, including *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, explore both the joys and struggles of relationships. She experienced heartbreak and betrayal in her own life, yet she never portrayed love as entirely negative—rather, she saw it as a journey of learning and growth. Although Angelou recognised gender-based discrimination, she also appreciated solid marriages. She understood that, especially in patriarchal cultures, men frequently possessed greater authority in relationships. She tackles issues of exploitation and abuse in some of her pieces, which mirror the realities that many women encounter. Men's opinions on Maya Angelou's viewpoint differ greatly based on their views on equality, relationships, and gender. In addition to questioning established power structures, Angelou's writings value personal connection, love, and resiliency. Here are some possible interpretations of her viewpoint by various men, men who advocate for equality and feminism.

Angelou's support of gender equality and emphasis on respect for one another in relationships are admirable to many men. Those who uphold traditional gender roles may view her strong position on women's self-sufficiency as dangerous. Men who are motivated by her work. Men who are looking to grow personally find resonance in Angelou's teachings on love, resiliency, and self-improvement. She is a universal source of inspiration because her lessons on overcoming adversity apply not only to women but to anybody attempting to overcome obstacles. Leaders and activists respect Angelou's role in civil rights movements, where she worked alongside men like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Maya Angelou's viewpoint encourages men to pursue equality, love, and resiliency while also pushing them to reflect more deeply on their roles in gender dynamics. Her criticisms of male privilege may make some men uneasy, but others welcome her insight as a manual for developing into more sympathetic and capable people. They recognise that her feminist ideals do not exclude men but rather encourage collaboration for a more just society. In Maya Angelou's poetry, women are strong, resilient, self-assured, and graceful, frequently going against what society expects of them. She highlights both challenges and victories while celebrating womanhood in all its manifestations via her art. These are some salient features of women in her poems.

Femininity and Sensuality

Angelou's women proudly display their sexiness and are at ease with their bodies. Instead of apologising for their existence, they attract attention with their energy, charisma, and wisdom rather than merely their physical attractiveness.

The poem "Equality" by Maya Angelou makes a strong point on the value of justice, inclusivity, and dismantling structural injustice. The poem is extremely pertinent to the Civil Rights Movement and feminist principles since it advocates for true equality amongst races, genders, and marginalised populations. Maya Angelou discusses the importance of equality for all people. Angelou contends that we will not be able to achieve true greatness as a nation until everyone is treated equally. She encourages her readers to fight for equality for all people, regardless of race, gender, or religious beliefs.

The poem "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou is a potent statement of fortitude, self-assurance, and victory over injustice. Addressing the challenges of women, Black people, and anybody who has experienced discrimination or adversity, it is both intensely personal and inspirational for all. Through its themes of defiance, bodily autonomy, economic empowerment, and collective strength, Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" affirms the feminist principles of self-determination and resistance against patriarchal oppression. The poem's intersectional approach highlights the dual struggles of race and gender, making it a crucial



work within Black feminist thought. This poem is a powerful feminist text that speaks to the resilience of women, especially Black women, in the face of systemic oppression. For women everywhere, Angelou's resolute declaration that she will rise above historical and cultural attempts to stifle her is a source of inspiration and strength. The poem's message is still incredibly pertinent today, serving as a reminder that every act of resiliency is a win in and of itself and that feminist fights for equality and justice must continue. In this sense, the poem keeps encouraging upcoming female generations to take a position, own their strength, and overcome obstacles. By highlighting its main principles of empowerment, intersectionality, and resilience, the conclusion upholds "Still I Rise" as a feminist manifesto. It emphasises how the poem relates to the collective fight of oppressed women, especially Black women, to overcome oppression as well as to individual tenacity. This poem is an important work in intersectional feminism because the end highlights the twin problems of racism and sexism by situating the poem inside Black feminist theory. Feminist concepts of autonomy and emancipation are in line with the mention of self-determination and opposition to patriarchy. Further supporting the idea that development is meaningful even in the face of adversity is the belief that every act of resilience is a victory. Additionally, the conclusion suggests that the poem's message still inspires contemporary feminist movements, extending its importance beyond its initial context. It acknowledges the continued necessity of feminist fights against systemic inequality by presenting Angelou's writing as a source of empowerment and optimism. Angelou consistently rejects the victim narrative and replaces it with self-definition.

Conclusion

Angelou's feminism is not just about gender equality—it includes Black identity, history, and resilience. She connects racism and sexism, showing that Black women experience double oppression. This aligns with Black feminist theory, as argued by bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who emphasise that feminism must address both racism and sexism. Traditional feminism often focused on white women's experiences, but Angelou expands the conversation. She critiques male dominance without portraying women as dependent on men. Angelou's redefining of womanhood is one of the main tenets of her feminist philosophy. Women are frequently characterised in relation to men in traditional patriarchal civilisations, either as objects of desire, carers, or subordinates. Angelou challenges these ideas by portraying women as independent individuals with innate strength. Because it acknowledges that racial oppression must be taken into account to analyse gender oppression, Angelou's feminism is profoundly intersectional. Angelou's writings draw attention to the dual burden that Black women bear, in contrast to earlier feminist movements that frequently focused on the trials of white women. When speaking about women's bodies and their agency over their sexuality, Angelou does not hold back. Reclaiming the body has been a major issue in feminist theory, particularly in contrast to the historical commodification and objectification of women. Angelou's poetry honours the sensuality of women without demeaning them. Racist and patriarchal systems have historically suppressed women, particularly Black women, and lowered their voices. Poetry by Angelou is a form of protest against this enforced quiet. Not only does Maya Angelou's poetry support women's equality, but it also calls for it. The fundamental feminist tenets of self-definition, body autonomy, intersectionality, resistance to oppression, and hope are all reflected in her work. Angelou proposes a solution based on resilience, narrative, and empowerment, which is in contrast to feminist theories that primarily concentrate on systemic critique.



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