

Critical analysis of narrative autobiography, “I know why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou

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Abstract

The narrative autobiography of Maya Angelou is creative nonfiction. A recognized “genre” which covers the factual personal experience and includes oral history and the observation of the author as the observer. It incorporates memoir and oral history. The narrative autobiography of Maya Angelou deals like the biography of every black woman deeply gnawed by the stings of racism and discrimination. The personal scars of Maya Angelou are the scars, every black woman carries; therefore, the trauma of sexual assault is shared. Analyzed lines of “I know why the caged bird sings” vouchsafe an insight into the pain, grief and problems that black people in America encounter thus helping readers to understand America from the black prospective. The theory of Marxism is modified in order to tailor it to the needs of this article. The application of a theory helps readers to understand cleavages tearing society apart on ethnic grounds. The narrative autobiography of Maya Angelou deals like the biography of every black woman deeply gnawed by the stings of racism and discrimination.

Keywords: narrative autobiography, racism, discrimination, scars, Marxism theory

Introduction

A brief introduction of an author and her contributions

Maya Angelou was born on April 4, 1928, Marguerite Johnson in ST. Louis, Missouri. She was a daughter of Bailey Johnson and Vivian Baxter. When father of hers divorced her mother; then, Maya Angelou and her brother Bailey were sent from California to Stamps, Arkansas, to stay with her uncle Willie and, paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson. She and her brother, Bailey lived with their Uncle Willie and grandmother in Wm. Johnson General Merchandise store (Angelou, 1969). Maya Angelou wanted to forget the hardships of her childhood, such as racism, poverty, and sexual assault. Maya Angelou's a friend, author, James Baldwin persuaded her to write about the experiences of her life as an autobiography and omit them. So she contributed, “I Know Why the Caged Sings” a non-fiction creative autobiography about her childhood challenges and problems. She illustrates each and everything about the trauma of sexual assault and racism faced during her childhood in autobiography. (Malika, 2015, p, 30)^[4] It was a first literary contribution of her in 1969. It took Maya five years to write it. It went successful. Her autobiography made Maya Angelou as a first non-fiction bestseller African American “woman” author. And this autobiography is still considered as most famous autobiography.

In her non-fiction creative autobiography, she stated that when she was just seven years old, she was raped by her mother's boyfriend, named Freeman. She regarded responsible herself for being raped in her autobiography, Later, when one of her uncles who killed him (Sornaambiga, 2002, p, 6). She made also responsible herself for the murder and stopped speaking at least five years. Maya Angelou was impressed by an educated black woman, named Mrs. Bertha Flowers with her personality and dressing style in Stamps (Angelou, 1969). Maya Angelou was fostered to study the literary contribution of William

Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dickens, Austen and many other poets loudly, by Miss Bertha Flowers. So she received appreciation and love for the spoken words from Mrs. Bertha Flowers. (Sornaambiga, 2002, p, 6).

The grandmother of Maya Angelou, Annie Henderson took both Maya Angelou and her brother, Bailey to live with their mother, Vivian Baxter in San Francisco, because of the discriminations of racism and dangers encountered by the black men in Stamps, Arkansas, where Maya Angelou joined “Mission high school”. In that school, she finished her higher education, and took the classes of the drama and dance at evening. After getting the class of dance and marrying Tosh Angelou, an inspirable musician, she became a professional dancer and singer. She also sought the work as a dancer in the night clubs. (Innes, 2014, 28 May)^[9]. Having written for TV and film, Maya Angelou performed on the stage as an actor. In 1973, she was awarded “Tony Award nomination for acting in a play, “Jersome Kilty's Look Away”. She depicted her talent and charisma by playing a key role in “Roots”, a play. It was regarded as a most famous television miniseries of that time. That play went on the peak of success. Then she was selected for “Prime Time Emmy award” for her best acting. Maya Angelou became famous after the success of “Roots”. Then her bestselling non-fiction autobiography, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” was nominated for a TV movie that was broadcast on CBS. And she became a TV actor and playwright. Brandon Latham. (2014, 28 May)^[11].

Maya Angelou was one of the common banned authors. Her nonfiction narrative autobiography “I Know Why the Caged Bird sings” has been continuously one of most challenged books in America since its publication in 1969. This autobiography is one of the most banned books from American libraries and classroom. Sexual content, abuse, racism, and explicit language, are the most common reasons for its ban from the reading lists. It was allowed to the

public school curriculum to be taught in 1980 early. It was banned again by the Alabama State Textbook Committee, because it considered it to foster “hatred and bitterness” toward the White people, and after some years later, it was banned by Bremerton, Washington for graphic expression of sexual assault.

Maya Angelou became so famous after her autobiography that she was summoned to recite one of her famous poem “On the Pulse of Morning” on President Henry Clinton’s inauguration in 1993 (Juan Du, 2014, p 65) [3]. Henry Clinton praised her courage and bravery to face the challenges of racism on her inauguration. In 2000, Angelou received the “National Model of Arts”, an award from President Bill Clinton. The 2010 award, “the National Medal of freedom” was bestowed upon her by Barack Obama, an highest civilian honor in America during a ceremony in White house, Washington on 15 February 2011. And was also rewarded around 50 honorary degrees (Sornambiga 2002, p, 6).

Maya Angelou is one of the best American writers. She is not only a source of inspiration for the black women, but is an example of motivation to all the women of the world who face many challenges in their society and life. The autobiography of Maya Angelou, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” specially is a record of her birth, childhood, struggles and experience of the black women in American society. Her autobiography describes the struggles and life of the every black woman of the American society of that time Kotteeswari. R and Anbarasi. U (2017, p, 552) [5]. She is a source of inspiration to all who read her work. She is respected greatly by everyone who read her contribution in Literature.

Maya Angelou was looking for the title of her autobiography. She turned to gaze at many of her favorite writers; she ultimately chose the title for her narrative biography as “I Know Why the Caged Bird sings” from the poem “Sympathy” written by Paul Laurence Dunbar, an African American poet, whose works inspired her (Angelou, 1969). Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of the favorite writers of Maya Angelou also being cited in her narrative biography. In the above poem “Sympathy”, Dunbar applied the image of the caged bird to communicate his feelings on the life and freedom. In this context of Paul’s poem, the bird which pushes continuously itself against the bars of a cage to find its freedom and struggles, while singing. The caged bird in bar provides an image that serves as a metaphor for Maya Angelou’s life. Angelou compares the struggle of the caged bird against the bars with her personal hardships and struggles such as incorporating racism, oppression, rape, abuse and poverty. These are those issues which formed the symbolic cage, in which Angelou’s life was wrapped at the early age.

Maya Angelou employs her autobiography “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” to illuminate rap, racism, identity and literacy encountered by black girls in America. She indicated herself as a real picture of black girls in her autobiography in America. She is considered as representative of the black people who face the afflictions in her autobiography (Abinaya, 2017. p. 111) [10].

Reasons for the choice of why the caged bird sings for critical analysis

There are three main reasons: Firstly, this nonfiction narrative autobiography is marked by the direct description,

and Secondly, portrayal of behavior and thirdly, sensory language. The critical analysis of the use of these elements will help the readers or budding writers to learn how to apply them in their own writing. The caged bird in a bar provides an image that serves as metaphor for Maya Angelou’s life. This nonfiction narrative autobiography is the source of inspiration for all those caged birds against the bars. The analysis of Maya Angelou’s life will help people to know the life of Maya Angelou.

Objectives

The purpose of this article is a detailed analysis of the important features of “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”

1. Direct description
2. Portrayal of the behavior
3. Sensory language and tries to discover the racial discrimination whether there exists in it.

The purpose of this article on the other hand is to help the readers to understand the applications of these techniques and methods in the book “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou and on the other hand to help and encourage the budding writers of the creative non-fiction to understand them and apply them in their own writing.

Methodology

This research article applies “content analysis” technique in this study to find out the lines of direct description, portrayal of behavior, sensory language and answers from a creative non-fiction autobiography “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou. “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” (Krippendorff, 2004, p, 18) [6, 12]. Content Analysis entails systematic way to analyze text. Content analysis as a research technique offers new glimpse, insights within a text and helps a researcher to comprehend events, situations and particular phenomena within a text.

Marxist theory

A brief introduction

Marxist theory deals with oppression, power, economy and politics. Carl Marx observes human history as a struggle between two classes. Therefore, he divided all people into two classes, the oppressed and oppressor on the basis of the socio-economic status or natural resources. However, for this analysis, class is to be defined differently. In this non-fiction autobiography, class is not created because of the difference in the socio-economic status, but here class is created because of the differences in color and skin. Therefore, the class is created on ethnic reasons rather than on the socio-economic grounds, here Marxist theory is applied to demonstrate the black people as oppressed, and white people as oppressors.

This research paper applies Marxist theory to a book “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” to find out the answers of the following questions.

1. What role ethnicity plays in America as portrayed in “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”?
2. How ethnicity creates two classes?
3. How does author analyze ethnic relation?

A brief description of the terms

“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” 1969 is a creative non-

fiction writing that employs the techniques and methods such as 1, Direct description and 2, Portrayal of the behavior and 3, Sensory language

Below is a brief description of the creative non-fiction

Creative nonfiction is a newly recognized “genre” which covers the factual personal experience or informs the experience of other people. For writing best creative non-fiction one needs to involve research process, including oral history and the observation of the observers. Creative nonfiction mostly incorporates biography, autobiography, memoir and oral history. It requires actual events occurred in one’s life or in the lives of others, by transferring one’s message by applying literary techniques or methods such as plot, setting, characterization process, dialogue narrative, and personal reflection. (Thompson, p, 1).

Below is the brief description of the direct description The use of the content analysis to find out lines of the direct description

1. Direct description is a method of describing the character in a direct way in literature. It happens when a writer discloses traits of a character in a direct way. Direct characterization plays a significant role in indicating praise, love, want, hate, threat, fear, and offensive behavior of a character. The authors apply direct description to show the conflicts among the characters in a literary piece. This type of method is used to convey the information about a particular character within the story. The authors employ comments and adjectives to produce a clear picture of a character to a reader in a straightforward manner. In direct description a reader does not need to draw the conclusion on the basis of imagination, but it is offered to a reader directly by the author.

The following are examples of direct description taken from, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” 1969 by Maya Angelou.

“She had owned some twenty-five years” (Angelou, 1969, p, 8). Here writer introduces the age of a character to the readers by applying an adjective “twenty-five” years. “Uncle Willie had been dropped when he was three years old by a woman who was minding him” (Maya Angelou 1969 p, 12). The author narrates the readers that Willie was thrown when he was just three years old by a woman because she did not consider him as a physically fit child, in these lines one may perceive hatred. “I saw him pretend to himself and others that he wasn’t lame” (Angelou, 1969, p, 13), the author depicts the personality of a character to the readers by commenting that he was deceiving himself and others to be a healthy person. “His eyes seemed to hold me with a mixture of threats” (Angelou 1969, p, 13). Here the writer indicates a critical situation to the readers in which she specifies the threats of the character to the readers that she was terrified with threatening eyes.

“Mr. McElroy, who lived in the big rambling house next to the Store, was very tall and broad” (Angelou 1969, p, 19), here the writer creates a vivid image of a character for the readers by describing the tallness, broadness and also praises the house of a character, so that they judge the personality a performer in an autobiography. “Mr. McElroy never laughed, and seldom smiled, and to his credit was the fact that he liked to talk to Uncle Willie” (Angelou, 1969 p, 12). The author explains the personality of McElroy to the readers that he just liked to talk to Willie. His laughter and

smile appeared hardly, hence, one can notice the want of a character “Willie” here “Bailey was the greatest person in my world” (Angelou, 1969, p, 20) Here the writer demonstrates the personality of Bailey to the readers that she has an intimate relationship with him only. One can notice her want for Bailey in this sentence.

“My pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come” (Angelou, 1969, p, 21). The writer states the importance of her brother in her life to the readers directly. Her brother is most significant portion of her life by indicating him as a kingdom. Here one can notice her love for her brother. “The girls had tired of mocking Momma and turned to other means of agitation” (Angelou, 1969, p, 27), the writer designates the offensive behavior of the girls to the readers directly, because they were making a fun of a woman. “Her face was a brown moon that shone on me” (Angelou, 1969, p, 28). Utilizing metaphor, Maya Angelou expresses the personality of a particular character to the reader within autobiography in a straightforward manner.

“People spoke of Momma as a good-looking woman and some, who remembered her youth, said she used to be right pretty” (Angelou 1969, p, 38), here she expresses the point of views and comments of the people about a woman “character” to the readers that she was attractive and a beautiful woman. “His shoulders were so wide I thought he’d have trouble getting in the door” (Angelou, p, 44), the author remarks about a character’s wide shoulders to the readers by using an adjective “wide” in her autobiography. “She appealed to me because she was like people I had never met personally” (Angelou, 1969, p, 74), an author describes most important personality a person to the readers directly, who impressed her. She narrates that she had never met a great personality.

Below is the brief description of the portrayal of behavior

The use of content analysis to find out the lines portrayal of behavior

2. Portrayal of behavior means behavior that is communicated or conveyed through actions, habits, attitudes, psyche, bossy statements, remarks, ignorance, inconsiderate statements, habitual questions, good relations, facial expressions and gestures e, t, c.

The following are examples of the portrayal of behavior taken from “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”, a creative non-fiction autobiography by Maya Angelou

“Uncle Willie was the only person in the family who wore ready-to-wear clothes all the time” (Angelou, 1969, p, 40), here the writer describes the habit and behavior of Willie to the readers that he was only a person in her family who loves to sport ready-made clothes. “He ate the biggest, brownest and best parts of the chicken at every Sunday meal” (Angelou, 1969, p, 29), here the writer portrays the behavior of one character that he used to consume the brownest and biggest parts of the chicken on every Sunday. Here the author illustrates the behavior of a performer in her autobiography via his action. “Momma was famous for pulling the quilts off after we had fallen asleep to examine our feet” (of children) (Angelou, 1969, p, 24). An author demonstrates the psyche of a character through her action; she says that Momma would assess the children’s feet after they slept.

“Here’s sugar, Miz Potter, and here’s baking powder. You didn’t buy soda last month; you’ll probably need some.”

Momma always directed her statements to the adults” (P, 25). Here the author shows the pleasant behavior of character to the readers using her bossy statements. “Bailey was especially good at it. Thomas would push away the hand and encircle my brother for a few seconds” (Angelou, p, 30). The author explains the excitable behavior of Thomas that, whenever, he met with Maya Angelou’s brother, he used to embrace him rather than shaking hands only. “I couldn’t understand whites and where they got the right to spend money so lavishly” (Angelou, 1969, p, 40), the writer describes the careless behavior of the white people. She remarks that they squander money extravagantly. “I hated him unreservedly. He was ugly, fat, and he laughed like a hog with the colic” (Angelou, 1969, p, 29), here the author states her aggressive behavior regard a character to the readers. She says that does not like him, because he was nasty and fat.

“We were struck by the ignorance of our schoolmates and the rudeness of our teachers” (Angelou, 1969, p, 50), here the author portrays the ignorance of other students and rude behavior of the teachers. “Bailey would not refrain from remarking on our classmates’ lack of knowledge” (Angelou, 1969, p, 50), here the author states the inconsiderate behavior of her brother “Bailey” to the readers that he could not remain commenting on their class fellows and accusing them because of their lack of knowledge. “Mr. Freeman would have already asked his habitual question, “Hey, Bibbi, have a good time?” (Angelou, 1969, p, 57), here Maya Angelou reveals Mr. Freeman’s behavior via his routine question that he used to ask the same question from her wife. “She chose to smile on me, I always wanted to thank her” (Angelou, p, 15), here the author wants to communicate the charming behavior of a character to the readers. Here one can distinguish good behaviors and relationship between two characters.

**Below is the brief description of the sensory language
The use of content analysis to find out the lines of sensory language**

3. Sensory language or detail: Sensory language is as it sounds, entails five senses. When an author applies sensory language, he employs details to portray what he feels, smells, tastes, sees, and hears. By using five senses, an author wants to engage a reader’s interest in a world that is believably created by an author. Five senses are used to describe the scenes and situations by an author as he visualizes them. These senses are universal and the most basic sources to all humans to comprehend the environment, (Gallagher, 2002, p, 68) ^[2].

Applying sensory language, therefore, is a best technique as its application enables a scene in a way that all readers can understand the scene or situation readily. It is significant to remember that all humans become aware about the world through five senses. Writing which includes the sensory language that affects the reader. The writers of creative non-fiction make use of a sensory language so that they capture or attract the interest of a reader within a literary piece. Maya Angelou is of one of the creative non-fiction writers. She is famous for the sensory language. She uses it in her non-fiction creative autobiography.

Maya Angelou applies sensory language to express her childhood filled with racism, neglect and abuse in "I Know Why the Caged Bird sings", non-fiction autobiography, and the main purpose of sensory language or detail is to make

reader sense the situations as they are with an author, feeling exactly as the author felt it. Sensory language or detail makes the exact word selection to sketch a place, or a person or an event in a tale in such way that makes senses more active. Sensory language or words are used to assist the reader to imagine the feelings, sights, smells, sounds or the observations in a better way. Maya Angelou utilizes a number of sensory words in her non-fiction creative autobiography, “I Know Why the caged bird sings”, to describe her life being wrapped with the abuse and racism.

Below are the examples of sensory language taken from “I know Why the Caged Bird Sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou. Examples of sight of sensory language from “I Know why the Caged Bird sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou

“With nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil” (Angelou 1969, p, 6). Her wrapped black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that can catch two pencils. “The minister’s wife leaned toward me, her long yellow face full of sorry” (Angelou, 1969, p, 6), the use of word yellowness has one intended purpose, yellowness of face indicates weakness such as a color of the patient is yellow because of the lack of the blood, but here the writer wants a reader to realize the effects of sorriness reflected in a yellow color of a face.

“I had never in my wildest fantasies imagined I would see. Brownd photographs leered or threatened from the walls and the white, freshly done curtains pushed against themselves and against the wind” (Angelou, 1969, p, 77). Wild fantasies show the growing pleasant situation of the author after looking at leering brownd photographs and curtains pushed against the wind. Here the write wants the reader to visualize the fabulous situation. “Her skin was a rich black that would have peeled like a plum if snagged, but then no one would have thought of getting close enough to Mrs. Flowers to ruffle her dress, let alone snag her skin” (Angelou, 1969, p, 73). By using the simile “like” the author compares the black skin of Mrs. Flowers to a plum to provide a vivid picture of back skin to a reader, because the color of a plum as black as a color of black people.

“The eagle-eyed women would say, “Put some more in that sack” (Angelou, 1969). The terms “eagled eye woman” here illuminates the sharp “eyesight” of woman (Henderson) over the things, he the author uses “metaphor” so that the reader imagine the eyesight of a woman by comparing with sharp “eyesight” of an eagle. “I remember the sense of fear which filled my mouth with hot, dry air, and made my body light” (Angelou, 1969), he terms “hot” “dry” and “light” indicate the bad physical condition of an author. The purpose of using these terms is to make the reader feel that the fear made the mouth of an author dry, hot and he was trembling.

Examples of sound of sensory language from “I Know why the Caged Bird sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou

“She was nearly singing. I wanted to look at the pages. Were they the same that I had read? Or were there notes, music, lined on the pages, as in a hymn book?” (Angelou, 1969, p, 78) Here the author praises the reciting of the poetry of Mrs. Flowers that keeps the author in a confusion that either she recites the poetry or sings a piece of music from a hymn book. Using such expressions, the aim of an author is to realize the reader how much melodious voice is of a character.

Examples of the taste of sensory language from “I Know

why the Caged Bird sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou
“The sweet vanilla flavor (of cookies) was still on my tongue and her reading was a wonder in my ears. I had to speak” (Angelou, 1969, p, 78), the terms “vanilla flavor” show the sweet taste of biscuits and term “wonder” indicates the melodic pronunciation of Mrs. Flowers. The purpose of using these words is to make a reader realize the taste of biscuits and aesthetic pronunciation of her.

“I jammed one whole cake in my mouth and the rough crumbs scratched the insides of my jaws, and if I hadn’t had to swallow, it would have been a dream come true” (Angelou, 1969, p, 77). Applying the term “jammed” the author wants to demonstrate the sweet taste of a cake, even he could not wait to break the cake into the pieces and swallowed it. The objective of using the terms “jammed” is to make the reader realize the sweet taste of a cake.

Examples of smell of sensory language from “I Know why the Caged Bird sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou

“The odors in the house surprised me. Somehow I had never connected Mrs. Flowers with food or eating or any other common experience of common people, “The sweet scent of vanilla had met us as she opened the door” (Angelou, 1969, p, 55) Here the writer applies the term “surprised” to display the wonderful effects of the perfume so that it may create a clear picture of the fragrance for a reader.

Examples of touch of sensory language from “I Know why the Caged Bird sings”, 1969 by Maya Angelou

“She bent down and touched me as mothers of the church “lay hands on the sick and afflicted” and I quieted” (Angelou, 1969, p, 28). Here the author expresses love and affection of a woman to the reader. She uses “simile” to generate the comparison such as a mother touches a sick child with and affection and love.

The use of Marxism theory to find out answers of the following questions

1. What role ethnicity plays in America as portrayed in “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”? Author Maya Angelou portrays in her autobiography “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” (Angelou, 1969, p, 137) that ethnicity plays an important role in creating ethnic discriminations in America. She indicates that the children of “white people” are given opportunities to become Edisons, Galileos, Madame Curies, and Gauguins in American schools, where, the children of black people are not provided such chances and they try to become Jesse Owens and Joe Louise only. Ethnicity determines the fate, fortune, lives and livelihood for the people. She describes the conditions of the white students that they have more resources to reach their destinations. She believes that the white people have more opportunities in America to progress; she says that the well-known teachers teach art to the black children, they are provided microscopes and other instruments of chemistry for their science laboratory and black children are ignored (Angelou, 1969, p, 137). They are going to be the scientists and the Noble prize winners and black people are away from same opportunities in America.

2. How ethnicity creates two classes?

Ethnicity creates two classes in America on the bases of skin colors. Maya Angelou signals that in Stamps, the segregation was so extended between two classes, the black people and white people that blackest kids, even, did not come to know how the white masses look. (Angelou, 2009,

p, 22), Maya Angelou says that ethnicity generates such separation and fear between the black masses and white masses in a way. Whenever, she crosses the territory of the white people, her pleasure was going to end. She was realizing it as she was departing without weapons from man-eating animals’ area (Angelou, 1969, p, 22). Maya Angelou depicts her class hatred against the white people. She narrates, “The white people who live near her town, I dislike all of them, since their pale skin colors” (Angelou, 1969, p, 23). Ethnicity also generates injustice in America. She illustrates that the black youths hoe corns, pick the cottons and also study at night the books for at least twenty years and they engage as farmers, maids, washerwomen, carpenters and baby nurses (Angelou, 1969, p, 138), she describes that the black people has neither control on their lives nor on their black skin. She says that it is not their fault to be Negroes, and black people have to listen to the charges against their skin from the white people. One may recognize ethnic discrimination of the classes here. One may perceive how ethnicity creates two classes here clearly.

3. How does author analyze ethnic relation?

White related to black in a contemptuous manner “The black people employ respectful appellations for addressing the people such as uncle, cousin, auntie, mister, miss, brother, sister and missus but the white children do not use such words to speak to the black people, since their skin colors (Angelou, 1969, p, 24). The white children summon her uncle by his first name, and white girls used to make fun by parodying of her grandmother (Angelou, 1969, p 27).

Conclusion

Maya Angelou is most still famous for her creative non-fiction autobiography “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”. It made her as a first African-American non-fiction woman author. In which she shared her life’s real experiences such as encountering racism, poverty, rape and ethnic discrimination due to her skin color in American society. It represents the lives and challenges of black people black in America. Thus, it was prohibited from American libraries, since of unethical use of a language. This autobiography demonstrates her as a real picture of the life of black people in America. She got an idea of the title for her autobiography from a poem “sympathy” by Dunbar, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”, the life of a caged bird matches with the life of Maya Angelou as a caged bird sings in a cage in a search of freedom. Where, Maya Angelou’s life is surrounded and enclosed by oppression, racism and ethnic discrimination. This literary article tried to elaborate the techniques and methods such as direct description, portrayal of behavior, and sensory language. Maya Angelou’s autobiography circles around ethnic discrimination. Therefore, Marxist theory is applied and modified to pick out ethnic discrimination in her autobiography on these basis of the skin color rather than economic grounds.

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