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A JOURNEY WITHIN THE JOURNEY EXPLORED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S *ALL GOD'S CHILDREN NEED TRAVELING SHOES*

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ABSTRACT : *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, published in 1986, is the fifth book of the African American writer and poet Maya Angelou's seven-volume autobiography series. Travelling shoes as used in the title of the book depict her sojourning in Africa in search for a symbolic home. And, in the process she discovers the Self. The outer quest for home takes her inwards and in this journey of discovery and exploration she lands in Africa and back to America. Angelou thus returns to the United States having been convinced that home is not a physical or a geographical location such as Africa but rather it is a psychological state. She is delighted to learn that her survival depends upon finding herself within herself, wearing her travelling shoes, like all God's children. And that she needs to pack the baggage and wear the traveling shoes to reach the eternal Home.

KEY WORDS: Metaphor of the self, autobiography, quest for Home, double consciousness, cultural identity, Inward Eye.

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR AND HER WORKS:

You may write me down in history.
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
(Angelou,1978:42)

Thus, spoke Marguerite Annie Johnson, born on 4th of April, 1928 in St.Louis, Missouri. And she expired on 28th of May, 2014 at the age of 86. Authoress, poet, playwright, editor, songwriter, teacher, dancer, film director, Maya Angelou has touched innumerable bases in her career. Seven series of autobiographies and four volumes of poetry have brought her tremendous acclaim. In February 2003, she won a Grammy for the reading of her autobiography, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002). Her works have earned her more than thirty honorary degrees, as well as nominations for a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize. She wrote "On the Pulse of Morning", a long inaugural poem for the swearing-in ceremony of President Bill Clinton in 1993. She was invited to address the gathering on this day. And, thus, she became the second poet in United States history to do so.

History, despite its wrenching pain,

Cannot be unlived, but if faced

With courage, need not be lived again.

(Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of the Morning") (qtd in Waldron, 2007).

In Maya Angelou's autobiographies, the geographical spaces that she moves in and out of, becomes the "distant land" that Thoreau refers to in his autobiographical novel *Walden* (Thoreau, 1960: 1). It is Maya Angelou's constant probing into that distant land, which is the interior self that makes her autobiographical writing so distinct. "What kind of self am I? It is this inward realm of experience", that Maya Angelou explores and reveals, and manages to capture so well in her serial autobiographies (Weintraub,1975:833).

Maya Angelou's work is expansive in its focus on which universal issues such as romantic love lost, friendship, betrayal, and loyalty thrive. Ultimately, her work is about survival, not only the survival of African Americans, but also the survival of the human race. In an interview with Sheila Weller, Maya Angelou says, "What I'm interested in is survival. But not just bare, awful plodding survival. Survival with some style, with faith [...]" (qtd in Elliot, 1989 :15). In an interview with Claudia Tate, Angelou is very clear of the intentions of her work. "My work is intended to be slowly absorbed into the system on deeper and deeper levels" (Tate, 1983 : 8).

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969) is the first autobiography of Maya Angelou. It recounts the life of Maya Angelou from age three to sixteen years. The first ten years of which were lived in Stamps, Arkansas and the last three in Los Angeles and San Francisco. When her brother Bailey and she were sent to live with their paternal grandmother as their parents divorced. Racism ran a ravine through the town, separating white from black. Stamps, Arkansas was to be the bedrock of Maya's strength and her experiences there sustained her throughout the most difficult times of her life.

Gather Together in My Name (1974) is Maya Angelou's second autobiographical installment. Maya is found as a mother hitting the streets for various menial jobs, mostly waitressing. Young and filled with romantic notions, Maya barely escapes the life that these streets often offer to black Americans. It characterizes the life of Maya as she seeks to situate herself in California from her sixteenth to her nineteenth year. In this volume, the conditions of alienation and fragmentation characterize the life of Maya Angelou. This work displays beautifully the rare ability of Maya to see goodness in even the darkest periods.

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976) is the spirited account of the years when she finally comes into her own-self. But, as Maya comes closer in her writing, to the woman she becomes, one begins to feel a distance from the issues and experiences that comprise her life. Yet, she makes up for this with the lively accounts of her life in show business. She is in early twenties and displays a sense of self-rejection. Her conflicts are concentrated in certain areas like her marriage, her responsibilities as a mother, daughter and granddaughter, and her desire to experience the joy of herself.

The Heart of a Woman (1981) is the volume which traces Maya's development as a writer and a committed Civil Rights Worker. Clear focus, psychological depth and incisive writing make this work her strongest since *Caged Bird*. It is narrated from the point of view of a mother/woman who tells much the same intimate story that she told in previous volumes, but with a difference. While she presents this segment of her life story, Angelou has accumulated a multi-layered memory that affects not only what she remembers but also what readers who have followed her previous books remember. As a serial autobiographer she continuously looks backward unveiling the various layers hidden in earlier volumes, remembering what she has already written without being repetitious.

All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes (1986), this fifth volume tells the story of Angelou's four year residency in Ghana from 1963 to 1966. Here she explores her African American identity. She explores this conflict as it exists for American expatriates living in Accra as well as for the groups of people who observe the traditions of their ancestors. Her identification with Africa is complete and the link is made. It ends in Africa with the recognition that a person is not complete until one locates oneself fully in ones time (history) and place (geography). The recognition of a self and the acceptance of one's place, no matter how grievous or repulsive the legacy, is the ultimate refuge of life. And, the celebration is encountered at the finale of the autobiography and the reason that God's children need travelling shoes.

A Song Flung Up to Heaven (2002) is like a satiation. She shares with subtlety and sometimes intimacy, experiences from a well-travelled life. Rather than struggling to recall the details of a distant past, Angelou sketches the scenes with broad familiarity, as if using a memory brush and the reader is transported just the same.

Mom & Me & Mom (2013) delves in one of Maya's life's most rich, rewarding and fraught relationship with her mother. It explores the healing and love that evolved between the two women over the course of their lives. She reveals the triumphs and struggles of being the daughter of Vivian Baxter. It was the love that fostered Maya Angelou's rise from immeasurable depths to reach the impossible heights.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A child is born. With the first breath, the child commences a life-line, a graph, an appearance (an entrance) and gets a name. Naming not due to fear of being lost, but because identification in this world stands next in row with hunger and protection. And, as the child grows, develops and formulates things in the mind – the very first disturbing thought is, who I am, where I have come from and where I am heading towards? These conscious and unconscious voices keep on nagging until it reaches to a certain level of inhaling and grasping the unheard answers.

In this world of struggle, contradictions, chaos, confusion and dilemma; free conceptual construction is the only way man has of making the universe stop pounding and washing away at his little light of consciousness. One learns to manipulate the chaos – not to control it – to ensure the individual and collective survival. And, this impulse is the roof and earth, nook and corner, the fact and fantasy of the creation of an autobiography. The inner will and outer circumstances together make the autobiographers find that self which they must be and choose to be. **A curtain raiser of self-lays bare the multiple voices buried deep into the conscience.** We have no more knowledge at the end than at the beginning, but we see things differently and relate things in different ways not because they have at all changed, but because there exists now **a new metaphor of the self.**

Subjectivity and Objectivity in Autobiography: Autobiography is closer to the self than any other genre. Despite the fact that autobiography is so difficult to write, it holds a high place today. Many scholars find autobiography to be too subjective and too self-serving to be a trustworthy source of information. On the other hand, these are the very qualities that make autobiography popular. As, it has an ability to reflect and give focus to some consistent need and sense of possibility in the community it serves. The autobiographer serves not only the self – but also the community by shifting from subjective to objective. Besides, the

autobiographer is also the reflection of the amalgamation of the past and the present. A symbol of the image of the present life – a moment of intimacy placed on the crossroads of the past and the future. **All the three tenses of life webbed together in a single genre by a single creator.**

Each autobiography is unique, as the story of the unique individual. However, because that individual – the ultimate insider – is describing her/his own life, does not mean that important parts of the story are necessarily as accurate, complete, and full of insight as a version of it by an outsider. **The quest, the search is ceaseless and it knows no edge line – horizon of life. In a touching experience, in thinking, in feeling, and in being – lies the why and wherefore of autobiography.**

Fantasy and Realism in Autobiography: In this art of creation, and in this effort to impose order form and meaning on the facts of an existence, imagination is bound to walk hand in hand with the hard facts of life. The autobiographical memorization contains dreams and figures down the lane of history. While traversing this lane the camouflage of fact and fiction is enmeshed to the superlative degree of life expression. Individual experience becomes increasingly necessary for the knowledge of the truth. And, this is how the aims of autobiography become less important. And, conveying the lessons of individual experience to men who might not otherwise know them becomes more important. The narrative forms of autobiography and the fictional forms of which they refer make sense precisely because they correspond to a universal psychological reality. The facts are a product of their time and place as of their author and they are also a product of their readers. An autobiographical expression may be considered fantasy or realism, but everything an autobiographer puts into her/his autobiography has a source somewhere in life.

To understand the configuration of the autobiography – what it emphasizes, what it omits, what it may exaggerate – the interpreter must be sensitive to the narrator’s purposes for telling the story. This sensitivity demands a profound respect for the narrator and what she/he writes. Rather than labeling any incident as true or untrue, interpreters need to look for the reasons why narrators tell their stories. When the creation of an autobiography is perceived as an exchange – a dialogue between a narrator and an interpreter – this dynamic extends to the actual production of the text itself. Ultimately, the main purpose of the autobiography is that the dialogue can become an invitation for the autobiographer and the interpreter to reexamine the life history, as a story. And, the need to produce a clearer, more critical understanding of the past and the present. **The significance of autobiography lies in making it a means of giving meaning to the autobiographer’s life and to that of the interpreter.**

Language of Autobiography: The language of autobiography has been allegorical from the beginning. It is perfectly true that in the allegorical tenor of autobiography, language becomes more noticeable when self becomes a mystery to memory. This self can also be imagined, and at this point, autobiographer gives up trying to explain the self historically or to discover it philosophically. It attempts to reveal the self in fictive metaphors whose explicit referents are not events from the writer’s own past life. Allegory becomes a way of making concrete something abstract and vice versa, and a blend of realism and fantasy find an apt expression in it. Amidst reflection and construction, the autobiographer’s actions and consciousness are restricted by objective conditions beyond one’s control.

ALL GOD’S CHILDREN NEED TRAVELING SHOES

All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes derives its title from a Negro spiritual and is partly a travel writing. The action in it takes place in West Africa, Ghana in 1960s when Angelou arrives from the States. Specific locations in Ghana include the capital city Accra, university of Ghana and Keta which is the village that the authoress visits at the end of her stay in Ghana.

This book is the fifth installment in a series of captivating narrative memoirs by Maya Angelou. It mainly focuses on her stay in Africa while in an attempt to discover Africa as her ‘home’. It is a life story of Maya and her seventeen-year-old son, Guy whom she brings to Africa to enroll for his studies at the University of Ghana after the recovery from an accident that is captured in the previous series. Partly it is travel writing by Angelou that enables her to recover her sense of self-worth resulting from the divorce process she undergoes in the heart of a woman.

The book begins with a sad episode of a long wait for her son’s recovery from a car accident and her hopes have been fading owing to the possibility of Guy’s death displayed in the following statement:

July and August of 1962 stretched out like fat men yawning after a sumptuous dinner. They had every right to gloat, for they had eaten me up. Gobbled me down. Consumed my spirit, not in a wild rush, but slowly, with the obscene patience of certain victors. I became a shadow walking in the white hot streets, and a dark spectre in the hospital (Angelou, 1986 : 4).

Guy does recover and Angelou secures a job at the Institute of African studies in Accra and she temporarily feels comfortable Eventually while living with the people of the African roots who accept her. She writes, “we were Black Americans in West Africa, where for the first time in our lives the color of our skin was accepted as correct and normal ”(Angelou, 1986 : 3). Although she meets many friends and travels to the interior parts of Ghana to discover the African cultures, she still has trouble adapting to her new way of life. The final scene of the book is at the Accra airport as Angelou goes back to the states. The closure of this book finds Guy, a college student who has become independent and is being separated from his mother. Angelou refers to him as an African prince who ‘stood, looking like a young lord of summer, straight, sure among his Ghanaians companions’ (Angelou, 1986: 208).

Title: An Indication of an Onward Journey I got shoes, you got shoes

All o' God's chillun got shoes
 When I get to heab'n I'm goin' to put on my shoes
 I'm goin' to walk all ovah God's Heab'n
 Heab'n, Heab'n
 Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout heab'n ain't goin' dere
 Heab'n, Heab'n
 I'm goin' to walk all ovah God's Heab'n
 ("All God's Chillun Got Wings" A Negro Spiritual).

According to Angelou, the title of *Traveling Shoes* comes from a spiritual. African American scholar Lyman B. Hagen reports that the title comes from the spiritual "All God's Chillun Got Wings" (Hagen, 1997). Dolly McPherson writes that, Angelou's "clever reference" to her ongoing search for a home while being aware of "our ultimate home", is very symbolic (McPherson, 1990: 107). The title demonstrates Angelou's love of African American spirituals and the deep sense of religion that appears in all her works. Critic Mary Jane Lupton finds the appearance of the word "traveling" purposeful, since it emphasizes the journey theme, one of Angelou's most important themes of the book. Like Angelou's previous volumes in her series, the title contributes to its plot and thematic impact (Lupton, 1998: 140).

In *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Angelou brings out significant themes including; acceptance, racism, survival and motherhood. It focuses on the growth, development and education of Maya Angelou as a lifelong learner. She also grows and develops into an emancipated black woman. Angelou develops into a patriotic American. She is satisfied and accepts herself as an American. This stems from her pilgrimage in Ghana that enabled her to understand racism in an open minded manner by realizing that no group of people should be entirely labeled as racists since any person can be one. This realization has been significant in building her self-worth or self-esteem that was lost in her early childhood. Angelou's double consciousness: her American and African selves develop through her strong friendships with the black women as well as the African Americans in Ghana. As she leaves Ghana, the American self is dominant.

QUEST FOR HOME

This autobiography is representative of black womens' "collective experience" of the historical conditions "or interlocking structures of gender, class and race", writes Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (Fox-Genovese, 1990:178). The appropriation of the autobiographical and the novelistic discourses by Black American women writers is aimed at a strategic insertion of a new gendered subjectivity in the cultural imagination. Thus, Angelou's act of writing her autobiographies is a project driven by the dual motives of self-empowerment and self-assertion.

Through this volume, Angelou accomplishes the achievement that any woman can attain this state, if she is capable of transcending and transforming herself through all the crisis life throws at her. African American women develop a deep kind of strength born out of the surviving the odds. Being black women were things beyond control for these women to survive, yet they could break these chains and emerge as triumphant women. The search for cultural identity is one of the fundamental concerns in the autobiographies.

The brilliance of Maya Angelou's survival in the African continent is that she finds a way to reclaim her right for freedom. She turns the social and financial conditions prescribed for her by colonization into something to be desired. She has not cut off any of her part but constantly selects her, self-individuality to emphasize and express her expressions.

In Ghana, Maya becomes part of a political circle, a group of African American émerge who called themselves the "Revolutionary Returnees". With her desire to "go native" Maya also dons traditional African costumes, braids her hair in the ethnic style and learns a few African languages. However, her pursuit for identification and unification with the "soul of Africa" is answered only with a more painful awareness of her "otherness" even in her (imagined) homeland—an acute sense that the African Americans "had not come home, but had left one familiar place of painful memory for another strange place with none" (Angelou, 1986: 40). However, on two significant occasions Maya does feel accepted and unified in the larger African collective—first by the tribal villagers and secondly, by the vendors of Keta market. On being identified as a "Bambara" woman by the villagers Maya says that "at that moment I didn't want to remember that I was an American. For the first time since my arrival, I was very nearly home. Not a Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African" (Angelou, 1986:102).

An active engagement in political activism enables Maya to view the African American problem in a broader international perspective. The sight of the American flag outside the American embassy in Accra generates several complex and ambiguous emotions (of both love and hatred) in Maya and the other protestors during the "supportive march" event. The decision to gather outside the American embassy was a gesture of rendering support to the Washington March led by Martin Luther King, Jr. on 27 August' 1963. However, the flag of America, "the symbol of hypocrisy and hope" (Angelou, 1986: 207) which they otherwise condemned and "jeered at" was a poignant reminder that the Black American identity is derived from this very flag and not from Africa. America never ceases to be the central point of reference in the consciousness of the self-exiled subjects:

Many of us had only begun to realize in Africa that the Stars and Stripes was our flag and our only flag, and that knowledge was almost too painful to bear. We could physically return to Africa, find jobs, learn languages, even marry and remain on the African soil all our lives, but we were born in the United States and it was the United States which had rejected, enslaved, exploited, then denied us...I shudder to think that while we wanted that flag dragged into the mud and sullied beyond repair, we also wanted it pristine, its white stripes, summer cloud white. Watching it wave in the breeze of a distance made us nearly choke with emotion. It lifted us up with its promise and broke our hearts with its denial (Angelou, 1986:207).

Angelou and Guy felt comfortable in Ghana. Angelou ‘falls in love’ with Ghana and its people, tradition and culture. As the culture of Ghana closely resembled with her own South American Black culture that was her native culture of Arkansas and California. She feels comfortable to be in Ghana, because there was no problem based on color, everyone in Ghana treated others equally. Angelou says, “We were black Americans in West Africa, where for the first time in our lives the color of our skin was accepted as correct and normal ”(Angelou, 1986:3).

A close investigation into the autobiography of Angelou shows that the reserved land she refers to is the internal self and the journey becomes a motif of self-discovery. This is an important part of the protagonist to return the past and try to relate it to the present survival. She experiences a sense of displacement very early in life at the age of three and therefore she starts her quest much earlier than the other people. But, later she finds her best place for survival in Africa, where she is welcomed very much. Her search is like the horizon, which keeps moving away, receding into some place beyond her reach. Dolly McPherson observes:

The world of Maya Angelou is beginning with her childhood in Stamps, Arkansas, and moving successively to California, New York, Europe, and AFRICA – is that “distant land” in which the retrospective imagination engages experience with its historical actualities and fictive possibilities.

(McPherson,1990 :8)

All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes is a search book for Angelou’s quest for home. Travelling is recommended as a means of survival, where everyone shares the same emotions of sadness, anxiety, hope and happiness. Her quest for homeland burns deep within the human psyche. Irrespective of race, mankind yearns to go back home. Africa is the Zion for the Blacks, whereas Jews longed to go back to Israel, Anglo Saxons look upon England, but on the other hand African Americans yearn for Africa as their idealized home. “Our people had always longed for home. For centuries we had sung about a place not built with hands, where the streets were paved with gold, and were washed with honey and milk” (Angelou,1986 :19-20).

Angelou is a traveler in an alien land (Africa), with a history of racial prejudice quite different from what she had experienced in America. Angelou focuses on the story of her return to her ancestral home in Africa. Her return to Africa enables her to find new experience about her mother land, where their ancestors had led a peaceful life with Nature. This book is about trying to get home, which for Jews would mean Israel and for Black Americans would mean Africa.

CONCLUSION

Working in the process of realizing one’s own stillness, hearing the unconscious mind, merging into the sixth sense, is the ultimate realization of eternity and the self. This realization may come either in a single moment or in a flash, or in hours, through the timeless journey inward. And, in this stillness lies the expression of the sublime experience and vision – which, when put in words finds form in autobiography. In a fractured universe, an evolving process provokes fantasies of the real. This evolving process is a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment, it reflects vision – the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles at the feet. No more elegant tool exists to describe the human condition than the autobiography.

Autobiography is the workshop of the self. Turning life into words, it is the journey from inside to the outside and vice versa. It is a critical exploration of the selfhood. And, in the process of this journey, a re-birth, a re-making of the soul occurs. And, this journey inward, for an aesthetic that bespeaks the soul, does not halt at a given point. Listening within the self becomes the most active and demanding process of life. And, while producing its own being – a part of itself- it is nonetheless equivalent to the labor pains of a woman – agonizing and craving for reproduction. Life, whether originating in the universe or in the womb, is “composed of the hot. And, what is recreated is – the miracle of his/her own life.” Jo Spence discovers that the subject is always in the process, that “there is no peeling away of layers to reveal a real self, just a constant reworking process” (Spence, 1988:97). And, in the process the autobiographer becomes selective, moves consciously; and in drawing the image and patterns of a human life, the marriage of opposites is celebrated. And, in this celebration gives birth to autobiography.

Each of Maya Angelou’s autobiographies is structured through the use of a journey, either an extensive one or a condensed one. Each autobiography relies on movement as equivalent to travel. The movement from journey to journey establishes the narrative line of the autobiographies as well as of her life. As she moves from one setting to the next, staying nowhere for long and nowhere for certain, Angelou orchestrates the journey, moving the action back and forth as a spiral pattern with herself at the center. Like Noah, she has the stamina to stay afloat.

She writes at the finale of the autobiography, ‘This second leave-taking would not be so onerous, for now I knew my people had never completely left Africa ’(Angelou, 1986 : 208). She is conscious that she is carrying African values and culture back with her to America just like several years before her ancestors did. Angelou thus returns to the United States having been convinced that home is not a physical or a geographical location such as Africa but rather it is a psychological state. She is delighted to learn that

her survival depends upon finding herself within herself, wearing her traveling shoes, like all God's children. Maya Angelou's work asserts that although suffering may be extremely demoralizing and painful; it can have a regenerating effect on the sensitive, intelligent, and morally aware.

In *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, African narrative is interpreted by a journey within a journey. In recording her momentous journey, Angelou's point of view is that of an aware and articulate black woman who internalizes her journey. It is this internal probing that characterizes Maya Angelou's work and marks the writings of the female black writer. She perceives the external as well as the internal reality. The 'self' is the model which she holds before black women and that is the unheralded chronicle of actualization which she wants to include in the canon of black American literature. For her it is the true Song of Myself and Ourselves.

This symbol of inn-ness links her to the eternal world of immortality. She carries the reader along with her to a ceaseless journey where she clearly indicates that we, the God's children have not come to stay here. We need to move on with the movement of the breath and the life. The inner supplies of spiritual wealth are required on this eternal journey. We need to pack our baggage and wear traveling shoes accordingly to reach consistently, securely and safely to the land of immortality. The requisite tools are to be gathered well in time before the rod of time rings out the final bell. We need to reach back our Homeland, which belongs to all alike, well padded and guarded with an Inward Eye.

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