

Exploring black woman consciousness in

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



Maya Angelou is one of the poets who uses her poems as a medium to convey her feelings about her society. She was born on April 4 1928 in St. Louis Missouri. She was a poet, a novelist, an actress of drama and movie, a director in Hollywood, and active in the human right associations (petra, 2005). She is a black woman living in America. Most of her works are based on the confidence and self-esteem of African American women. She stated that she speaks on behalf of herself and other African American women (petra, 2005). Basically she represents her way of thinking and the way of thinking of African American women through her works. The Black Consciousness philosophy in South Africa was born from the realization that “ the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”.

Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life. The philosophy of black consciousness expresses the pride and determination of blacks that they are not inferior from anyone. If one is free at heart he must be knowing his worth and no man-made rules can affect him but if one’s mind is bound and manipulated by the oppressor he surely loses his worth, he becomes the slave of the oppressor. Black consciousness leads black man and women to see themselves as complete person and not inferior from anyone. This consciousness theory gave black people their own separate identity.

Quraish Patel described Black Consciousness as “ a negation of white superiority, not a negation of whites as people. Black Consciousness is at the same time a positive assertion of our being what we want to be. (2). It defined Black on the basis of political and socio-economic factors. Black people, in the Black Consciousness philosophy, were defined as those who

are by law or tradition, discriminated against, politically oppressed emancipation. To the contrary, Black Consciousness is and has always been for true integration which is, “ free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people. ” (biko, 1981). economically exploited and socially degraded and who identify themselves as a unit in the struggle for their emancipation.

Background of the study

Literature is something that is in written form, basically literature reflects society, it represents traditions, norms, beliefs, human behavior and social practices of a specific society in written form. In other words we can say that literature is a mirror of life because it reflects reality of our society. It can be written in many different forms including poetry, novels, short stories, drama, essays etc. All these genres of literature are either fictional or non-fictional in their form and content. Poetry is one of the creative form in literature. Laurence Perrine says that poetry is a universal language and most as ancient. Poetry is read and listened by all people in all ages. Some people read it to get delight and pleasure and a few read it to fill their spare time. For poets, poems are the media to spread and express their feelings and their sufferings based on their situation and imagination. Poetry deals with the poet's historical background. America is a liberal country that always shouts about freedom and equality. Every people from different gender, race, and social class should live in harmony without perceiving any discrimination experienced by the people of this country. Race, class,

gender, sexuality, nationality, age and ethnicity are the target of oppression that happens in America (L, 2013).

Problem statement

Otherness in English literature is one of the common themes that one comes across so much so it penetrates into women writing, where black women are further marginalized and degraded. Maya Angelou, picking this contention in her writing, puts forward the case of black women which is a huge concern in discrimination towards black people especially in America. This study intends to highlight the consciousness of black women and responds to the white ones by exploring the imagery, figures of speech etc used in her poems to tell the world that they are no more inferior to anyone.

Feminism is considered as a political movement that includes acting, speaking, writing and advocating on behalf of women's issues (b, 2012) in its development. There are several kinds of feminism which represents the different struggle which are experienced by women in the world. They speak as though all of the women's voices in the world (b, 2012) that are oppressed by patriarchal systems. Feminism is of different kinds like radical feminism, socialist feminist, cultural feminism, liberal feminism, Islamic feminism, black feminism etc. Black feminism is a political and social movement which focuses on the liberation of black women by ending the interlocking system of racism, sexism, and classism on the economic, political and ideological levels (collins, 2000). This term black feminism is actually the representation of black women who suffers from discrimination and inequality and fight for her rights and get rid from oppression and

discrimination. This black feminism further includes the theory of black feminist consciousness in it. This theory was originated by Steve Biko, according to which Black consciousness is an attitude of mind and way of life. He says that in a society where Black people were referred to as non-Whites, Black Consciousness gave the oppressed their own separate identity that had no one else as a point of reference.

According to black consciousness theory blacks are defined on the basis of political and socio-economic factors. Black people, in the Black Consciousness philosophy, were defined as those who are by law or tradition, discriminated against, politically oppressed, economically exploited and socially degraded and who identify themselves as a unit in the struggle for their emancipation. The philosophy of Black Consciousness therefore expresses group pride and the determination of the black to rise and attain the envisaged self. Biko asserts that freedom is the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities held back not by the power of other people over one but only by one's relationship to God and to natural surroundings. Black Consciousness is and has always been for true integration which is, according to Biko, " free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people. " Similarly Black consciousness makes the Black women to see themselves as a being, entire in themselves. It makes them less dependent and more free to express their personality. Many other researchers have been done on the black feminism and there are many black feminist writers who talked about the self esteem and worth of black women in their poems.

The researcher in one of the research thesis talked about African American women's self-esteem reflected in Maya Angelou poems *Woman me* and *Seven women's blessed assurance* (kinash, 2015). The researcher in this research has presented the very fact that undoubtedly African American women have their positive self esteem and high confidence that they are not inferior from anyone through the imagery and figures of speech used which show the confidence, the pride, and positive self-evaluation of African American women. Another research has been done on the images of black woman in Maya Angelou poem *Still I Rise* and *Equality* (rahmawati, 2011). The researcher of this research aimed to highlight the images of black woman in these poems. Black women in these poems are independent, strong, brave, confident, outspoken, explicit, honest and mysterious. Nevertheless, the researcher in the intersection of race and gender: An Examination of black feminist gender (clawson, 2004) investigate the black feminist consciousness, he argues that according to black feminist consciousness black women are discriminated against on the basis of both race and gender. Moreover another black feminist consciousness element is seen in the research article *An empirical analysis of the simultaneous effects of race and gender on political behavior* (simien, 2001) which focuses almost entirely upon race and gender differences separately. Furthermore in the research article by (patel, 1981) described Black Consciousness as “ a negation of white superiority, not a negation of whites as people. Black Consciousness is at the same time a positive assertion of our being what we want to be, it restore our being human even if the environment is hostile and

inhuman for it prepares us for participating in the historical movement towards a free society.