

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND LITERARY WORKS OF MAYA ANGELOU

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Abstract:

Maya Angelou was an activist, and author noted for her work in the civil rights movement. Her best-selling autobiography is titled "The Caged Bird Sings." Maya impacted history by standing up for what she believed in and fighting for it. She was pretty optimistic and did not give up at any point. She was a phenomenal poet, dancer, director, screenwriter, and actor and a dedicated advocate for women's rights and worked as a teacher.

Keywords: autobiography, women, trauma, memory, self-censorship techniques.

Autobiography: Maya Angelou's birth name was Marguerite Johnson, and she was born to parents Vivian and Bailey Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. As a consequence of her parents' divorce when she was three, Angelou spent most of her childhood in temporary residences. The majority of her upbringing took place in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas, with her grandmother taking care of her. Maya Angelou is recognised even today for her poetry, her involvement in the civil rights struggle, and her concern for women's rights. Because Maya Angelou won so

many accolades and prizes throughout her career, it is not easy to classify her work into a single category. She was primarily recognised for her innovative and ground breaking autobiographical writing style, which made her charismatic and impassioned as well as kind and intelligent. She was formidable without being intimidating.

Marguerite Ann Johnson, better known to the rest of the world as Maya Angelou, was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, United States. When she was very young, Angelou moved to reside with her paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. This move was precipitated by the turbulent marriage and eventual divorce of Angelou's parents. Angelou's elder brother, Bailey, was the one who first gave her the name "Maya."

At the age of seven, Maya Angelou was raped by her mother's lover when she stayed with her mother for a short period. After some time, he was arrested, and shortly after his release, and he was put to death. Angelou remained silent for six years because she was sure that her disclosure of the traumatic event had a role in the man's

death. She moved back home with her grandmother in Arkansas in her teens, at the time of her mutism.

Angelou's love of writing and the English language was apparent even when she was young. She wrote essays and poems and kept a journal all through her childhood. When she returned to Arkansas, she became interested in poetry and learned Shakespeare and Poe poems by heart.

Angelou moved back in with her mother in Oakland, California, just before World War II's outbreak. At the time, Angelou's mother was residing there. She received her secondary education at George Washington High School and continued her training in the performing arts at the California Labor School. Angelou submitted her application to become a member of the Women's Army Corps shortly after the outbreak of war.

However, her application was turned down because of her participation in the California Labor School, which was rumored to have Communist affiliations at the time.

Although she was only 15 years old at the time, she decided to submit an application for a job as a streetcar conductor. She was determined to find gainful work. Because many males had quit their employment to enlist in the military, women could apply for those positions.

However, Angelou was first prevented from submitting an application due to her

race. However, she did not let this stop her. She asked for a job application each day for three weeks, but she was always turned down.

Ultimately, the corporation gave in to her demands and provided her with an application. She did this to get around the fact that she was under the age required to begin working legally, which is 19.

She inspired many as a leader and activist who chronicled and praised the Black experience in the United States. Maya Angelou has accomplished much in her life that few others could dream only.

She was the first African American woman in San Francisco to serve as a streetcar conductor after she was hired for the job, and the company approved it.

Angelou had a part-time job for a while, but she ultimately decided to return to school. She received her diploma from Mission High School in the summer of 1944.

After receiving her degree, Maya Angelou worked a variety of odd jobs in order to provide for both herself and her son. In 1949, she wed Tosh Angelos, who was serving in the United States Navy as an electrician. She took on a version of his surname and retained it throughout her life, although she divorced in 1952 after just a few years of marriage.

She is the author of twelve books, most of which are memoirs, and all of them have been top sellers. Maya Angelou has a

diverse work history and has travelled extensively globally. In addition, she has collaborated with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. At the inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993, Maya Angelou delivered a reading of her poem titled "On the Pulse of the Morning." She has been successful in various fields, but she is perhaps most recognised for her work as a poet, writer, dramatist, and educator. She was made fun of and given hand-me-down clothing from white ladies, which she had no right to receive. A great deal of misery likewise marred her upbringing. Her mother's boyfriend sexually molested her when she was only eight years old, and he did it in front of her mother. Because of this awful trauma, she remained silent for four years. Bailey was the only one with whom she would communicate.

Around this period, she started reading, and it was during this time that she became interested in poetry. Because of a teacher who encouraged her to be herself and express herself, she started talking again.

When Maya started talking again, it was like the beginning of a new universe. Maya's decision to remain silent for those four years led to an interest in and an appreciation for poetry on her part. It's possible that this was the beginning of her very successful career.

Angelou was awarded a scholarship to attend the Labour School in San Francisco

to learn dance and acting. She left George Washington High School in San Francisco for a short time when she was fourteen so that she might become the first female cable car conductor in San Francisco. However, she finally returned to finish her education there and received her diploma. Angelou gave birth to her first son, Clyde, whom she would eventually call Guy, and began working in restaurants to support her family shortly after she graduated from college.

Gather Together in My Name (1974), the second of Angelou's autobiographies, starts with her seventeen years old and continues from where *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* leaves off. *Gather Together in My Name* portrays Maya Angelou's fight for survival as a single black mother parenting a small kid. The book is titled *Gather Together in My Name*.

Angelou was the mother of a boy, but she was also a mentor to many "daughters." She coached some of her "daughters" via her writing, while others she taught directly, such as Winfrey. Winfrey claimed that Angelou "moved through the world with unshakable serenity, confidence, and a ferocious elegance."

Angelou was someone who never held back from saying what was on her mind, and she fiercely advocated for the rights of women, young people, and those who were disregarded. She moved deftly between the realms of writing and action, becoming a

trusted confidante to the pioneers of the civil rights movement, as well as those who came after them and the present generation. In 2013, Maya Angelou gave an interview to the Associated Press in which she said, "I have seen many things, and I have learned many things." "I owe it to you to tell you this because I have been exposed to many different things, and I have learned something."

Angelou recounted working with Martin Luther King as the movement's Northern Coordinator and predicting that a black president would not happen in her lifetime. At 83, she campaigned relentlessly for President Obama's victory, overjoyed to be proved incorrect. She continued to speak out on many themes throughout her later life, from the contentious aspect of honouring 'Black History Month' to the destructive impact of black rappers using the 'N-word and reflecting on her own optimistic life despite difficulties.

Angelou attributed a significant portion of her success as a writer to spending a significant portion of her youth in the unassuming community of Stamps, Arkansas, with her maternal grandmother. Young Maya Angelou had her first experience of the injustices that she would spend a career seeking to correct in that community, which at the time was wracked by racial inequity.

Within a very segregated neighbourhood, her grandmother was the only black person to own a business, and as a result, her store became a meeting place for black people living in the region. Angelou's first exposure to the power and spirit that the African-American community had when it came together was at this gathering. Her affiliation with the Black Arts Movement, a hugely significant creative collective in New York City, was fuelled by this fact. The Black Arts Movement, in contrast to the Harlem Renaissance that came before it, emerged after the assassination of Malcolm X and was associated with the Black Power Movement; as a result, it embraced a more radical and militant aesthetic. This was because the Black Arts Movement was associated with the Black Power Movement.

Angelou was one of this group's main characters, primarily active with the Harlem Writers Guild. Together, Angelou, Amiri Baraka, and James Baldwin opened doors for more African-American creativity and empowerment. Angelou was one of the foundational personalities of this group.

The forceful tone of much of this artistic production led subsequent generations to voice their indignation at social injustice via the medium of other forms of creative expression.

In 2011, President Barack Obama presented Maya Angelou with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honour, in recognition of her significant contributions to the cultural landscape of the United States.

Literary works: "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" was Maya Angelou's autobiography which was released in 1969. It was about her early childhood. Her narrative of coming to terms with her resilience in the face of childhood trauma and prejudice struck a chord with readers and earned her a nomination for the National Book Award. The book has been recognised for assisting other victims of sexual abuse in coming forward and telling their tales, although several schools attempted to get it banned due to its graphic description of sexual assault. Over one million copies of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings have been sold in countries all over the globe. The book has been translated into many other languages. Angelou wrote and published six other autobiographies, the most recent of which was titled Mom & Me & Mom in 2013.

It was evident that this title had a tremendous deal of importance for Maya Angelou since it was the title of the book that she wrote about her whole life. She detailed her challenges as a black novelist and poet in her autobiography about her

life. She often had the impression that the hue of her skin prevented others from hearing what she had to say. She had the impression that she was still being held in servitude in certain respects. Even though black people in the United States were free throughout Maya Angelou's lifetime, society still placed numerous constraints on them. As a result, many black Americans did not experience any sense of freedom at all. This stanza provides a striking contrast to the one that came before it. When beginning this stanza with the word "but," the speaker prepares the reader for the contrast that will follow. Then she speaks about the "bird that scurries about in his confined space." The mood suddenly shifts from tranquilly, contentment, and delight to one that is gloomy, unsettling, and even exasperating. She says this incarcerated first "can hardly see past his bars of wrath." The bird kept in a cage rarely even sees the sky, unlike its counterpart, which is free to soar across it. According to her, "his wings have been cut, and his feet have been chained." According to some of the text in her autobiography, Maya Angelou often experienced this throughout her life. She had the impression that she was being prevented from experiencing the freedom she should have had as a human being. The speaker explains that these are precisely why the bird "opens his throat to sing."

This is how the author experienced it in her own life. She expressed her need for independence via the written word, song, and dance since these creative outlets were vital to her. The realities of racial segregation and social discrimination against black people in American culture are reflected in the poem. The poem is about black people. Maya Angelou has brought attention to the nature of captivity and the significance of the American values of freedom and liberty via analogies involving caged birds and liberated birds. The poem focuses on two primary ideas throughout its whole. Freedom is introduced as the first primary concept in the very first verse of the poem. The idea is conveyed via the metaphor of a free bird that can fly anywhere it pleases and may be shown doing everything from playing in the water to soaring through the air. The second significant idea is that the confinement of the bird in the cage eventually causes it to become crippled. This idea is carried over when it is attempted to be said that the confined bird is made to sing a song about being set free. The free bird reappears in the poet's gaze in the fourth verse, when he describes how he takes pleasure in living on the trade winds, among the trees, and over the expanse of the sky. The following stanzas detail the anxious state of the captive bird as it tries to sing a song that will win its release while it is being held captive.

Angelou was also famous for her singing and dancer abilities, notably in the traditions of calypso and cabaret. In the 1950s, she had a successful career as a performer, travelling around the United States, Europe, and northern Africa while also selling records of her performances.

Harlem Writers Guild was established in 1950 by African American authors residing in New York City to encourage and facilitate the publishing of works by black authors. In 1959, Maya Angelou became a member of the Guild. In addition, she got involved in the Civil Rights Movement and worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a renowned African American advocacy group, as the northern coordinator.

She published many volumes of poetry, including the one nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and titled *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie* (1971), in addition to various collections of essays. She also made spoken CDs of her poetry, one of which, "On the Pulse of the Morning," earned her a Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album. Other spoken albums of her poetry include: *The Poem* had its first public reading in 1993, at President Bill Clinton's inauguration, and it had been composed specifically for that occasion. In addition, she was awarded a Grammy in the Best Spoken Word Album category in 1995 and again in 2002.

Angelou was involved in many aspects of the theatre and film industries, including roles as a writer, actor, director, and producer. *Georgia* was the first screenplay written by an African American woman to be adapted into a motion picture, and it was produced the same year that she made history by doing so. Angelou received a nomination for a Tony Award in the year 1973 for her performance as a supporting character in Jerome Kitty's play *Look Away*. In 1977, she played the part of Kunta Kinte's grandmother in the television miniseries *Roots*.

Because of her significant contributions to the literary world, many organisations honoured her domestically and abroad. Angelou was allowed to become the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in 1981. Angelou was presented with the National Medal of Arts by President Clinton in the year 2000. She was a member of the first class to be inducted into the Writers Hall of Fame at Wake Forest University, which took place in the year 2012. The year after that, the National Book Foundation bestowed upon her its Literarian Award in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the literary community in the United States. Angelou was also a frequent speaker at graduation ceremonies and received more than 30 honorary degrees throughout her career.

Angelou died on May 28, 2014. She was honoured at memorial services at several locations, including Wake Forest University and the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco. In 2015, the United States Postal Service honoured her memory by issuing a commemorative stamp featuring her image. (The United States Postal Service made a mistake and inserted a sentence on the stamp that is often attributed to Maya Angelou but was really penned by Joan Walsh Anglund in the firstplace.)

Maya Angelou was a fierce fighter who spent her whole life grappling with the complexities of being a woman. Her unwavering resilience struck me as one of the fascinating aspects of her personality, and I discovered that it was one of her defining characteristics.

She never gave up and continued to put in long hours of labour to make her life more successful, despite the fact that she faced many challenges during her life. Because I feel that she is a lady of great character, Maya Angelou is someone whom I look up to. She teaches us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps when things are tough and never give up hope, regardless of the dire circumstances. One of the worst things that can ever happen to a person is to be the target of prejudice because of who they are. She had been the target of prejudice for a very long time, but she stood up to it and

refused to give up fighting for what she believed in. She shattered the barriers and amplified her voice via her words. In her poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," she utilises the symbol of a bird attempting to escape its cage as a sign of a person seeking to get free himself from the condition of racism. She compares the bird to an individual trying to break free from racism. How well she was able to convey the meaning of her message!

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