

## Synopsis

The very fact of being oppressed, of having the fundamental rights denied or diminished, elicits attempts to remediate the situation. Despite all the negative impositions of ideology, the situation of oppressed people is also characterized by resistance and resilience. In resilience, there is the potential for an enhanced, reclaimed and reinvented identity. The writings of Maya Angelou and Bama become a verbal exposure of the human document to help society to transform and transcribe its ways. In their crusade for social justice, they not only portray their hopes and aspirations but also their fight for survival. The resistance undertaken by these writers is indirectly directed to the social system which ignores the voices of the marginalized. Through an active process of discourse, the marginalized tend to change their reality. In this process, there is a gradual decoding of the world as people grasp the mechanisms of oppression and exploitation. This knowledge of the surrounding social reality leads to new self understanding for the voiced and the voiceless. The optimistic realism in the literary works of Angelou and Bama becomes the ‘strategic essentialism’ as they speak on behalf of their community and simultaneously resist their adversities.

Different groups confront specific dominant power structures which they have to confront using distinct strategies, thus making each resistance unique and significant. The displacement and reclamations of two such communities – the Blacks and the Dalits - offer interesting areas of research since several commonalities could be traced in their resistance ideologies. The literary discourses of these two representative writers from the black and the dalit community offer new insights into their history, political milieu, and their class-gender intersections. A comparative study of these two writers thus becomes the main concern of this thesis.

The emergence from ‘oppression to optimism’ often becomes strenuous, chaotic and plagued with the problem of definition when the path becomes a ‘self forged’ one. Deliberate and successful erasure of the weaker section by the dominant groups has been a continuum across the globe. However those impositions have also encountered interruptions of resistance from the marginalized, who thereby affirm and give voice to their ‘otherness’.

The thesis ‘From Oppression to Optimism through Self-spun Philosophy: A Comparative Reading of the Fictional Output of Maya Angelou and Bama’ is outlined into six chapters which discuss at length how the literary discourses of the two representative writers - Maya Angelou, the Black American, and Bama, the Indian Dalit - offer new and

positive insights into their communities. A comparative reading of these two writers exhibits their optimism despite the discrimination and disillusionment they had endured.

The first chapter of the thesis, titled 'Inchoative writers of Optimism', sketches the objectives of the study and its significance. Both the writers are introduced with their major publications, their achievements and their literary states in relation to their contemporaries in fiction. In the second chapter, 'The Genre of Literature of Resistance', the writers are categorized as literary resistentes and their works analyzed using the 'Theory of Resistance'. It discusses the theoretical frame work into which they are placed. 'Indelible History' forms chapter three which deals with in detail the undeniable history of the Blacks, development of black literature, development of dalit history, development of dalit literature, and the history of Tamil dalit literature. It also explains the advantages of comparative study. Chapter four is titled 'Imposed Oppression' and is a comprehensive study of the oppression and exploitation imposed on the Blacks and the Dalits. As the title suggests, the chapter explains how oppression is imposed on the blacks and the dalits, especially on the women of these communities. The writers have been found to expose oppression at the societal, religious and gender levels. 'Ingrained Optimism' forms the fifth chapter of the thesis. It notes how the writings of Angelou and Bama point to a marked deviation from other oppressive writers: optimism and hope generates self esteem and self identity to these writers. The concluding chapter 'Beautiful Black, Dignified Dalit' sums up all the chapters wherein the content of the thesis is revisited in terms of its stated objectives.

It has been found that there is an intense period of disillusionment in the history of contemporary marginalized women's writing. But there is also a healthier counter discourse that allows them to go beyond despair. There is a forward looking optimism within their writings that convey transformability of existing conditions. They register their protest and resist whatever is detrimental to the gynec quest of self identity, self assertion and self worth. This act of autogenesis, the process of coming into being from silence to sound, is recorded as a slow process from marginalized invisibility into central vision.

Refuting the argument of Spivak that the subaltern cannot speak, Parry cites Pecheux and Terdiman's counter discourse and affirms the power of reverse discourse that could challenge, subvert and undermine the ruling ideologies to overthrow the hierarchy of colonizer/colonized. The inconsistency of the power relations offers space for resistance which necessitates deconstruction of essentialist notions of culture, language and identity. Angelou and Bama delineate resistance based on their cultural, socio-economic and political conditions and hence their behavioural manifestations are different. The women in their

works are represented as life sustainers who contribute understanding to the notion of community as an extension of self. Resistance is found in their texts issuing forth through their narrative style, incidents in life, the language they use and it is set against a definable set of power whether it is political, social or religious. What is embedded in their texts is their success in survival though in the process they suffer displacement geographically as in the case of blacks, or socially as that of dalits in India, but there is an urgent call for revival of tradition and culture. All the representational strategies utilized by both Angelou and Bama make their texts shimmer with positivism.

It is necessary to place the black and dalit women in the context of not only their racial and colonial experiences but also in the context of their experiences arising out of their femininity. The women seeking liberation cease to be the victims; they exercise their power as rebels into the world of liberation to redirect their own destiny. In the history of the world there is nothing so brutal like slaving and bartering human beings. The physical torture inflicted upon the blacks is a black mark in the world history and it has terrorized a complete race to such an extent that they remained almost mute unable to fight the hegemonic white masters. The reviviscence of the blacks propelled them to fight for their emancipation, identity and equality. Taking the cue from the slogan “Black is Beautiful”, the dalits in India gathered to strike communal solidarity to reveal “Dalit is Dignified”. Dalit literature reveals the lived experiences of the writers and it proves that they cannot be segregated as writers of oppression but should be seen as powerful creators who could organize themselves to empower through community bonding and take recourse to armed resistance to counter orthodox biases and traditional forms of discrimination heaped upon them continually over the years. Bonding among the dalit communities and sisterhood established overseas to blacks helped these people to overcome the vulnerabilities and create self image.

The racism and casteism suffered by Angelou and Bama had awakened them to delve into the past history and culture and forced them to rewrite, reproduce and celebrate its value. Instead of becoming sadomasochistic, the blacks and the dalits are slowly occupying the lacuna with their assertion and identity. A supportive, cohesive community and familial bonding alone might reduce the damage done to the oppressed people. The lives of Angelou and Bama prove how the fortifying support of the family and community enable them to overcome their vulnerability and create an independent mind which would help in the formation of concrete self image. They refuse to be stereotyped; instead with their self confidence and resistance almost terrorize their opponents. The hope and optimism inherent in the writings of Angelou and Bama make them different from other writers of their clan.

Use of language is another mode of resistance in these writers. Language displaces not only the theme but also the revitalization of culture. The narrative style of Angelou is very unique in the sense that it diverges from the traditional format to a commitment to safeguard the African language and culture. Hence the autobiographical statement emerges as a public gesture rather than as private. The African folksongs were recast and sung before the white; the freedom that was denied to the blacks was loudly sung to vent up their feelings of revolt, rebellion and resistance.

Dalit literature has become a new and distinct stream of Indian literature. It contributes fresh experiences, new sensitivity and vocabulary, different types of protagonists, an alternate vision and a new chemistry of suffering and revolt. It is essentially subversive in character; brings forth both content and form that challenge received norms. As the experience described is social, it is articulated as collective and not individual. Usually a testimonial bridges the gap between the suffering individual and the community of listeners who provide empathetic responses. Bama sculpts new moulds of female characters in relation to culture and community they live in. She acknowledges her culture and celebrates it.

Angelou's feminism is totally different from that of other writers of her period in its optimistic vision and reformatory image. She feels proud to be identified as an African descendant. She considered her kinky hair and black skin as a marker of the African-American identity. Bama argued for the rights and freedom of the dalit women and appreciated their courage and valued those customs that allowed women freedom. It is apt to define Bama as a creator of feminine aesthetics, since her stories and novels consist of ideas produced by women that clarify a stand point of and for women. It is an aesthetic which assumes that women possess a unique perspectives shared by women as a group that demands the ideology of self definition and self evaluation. She juxtaposes feminism and casteism which stands in clear testimony that she is a writer with a difference.

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