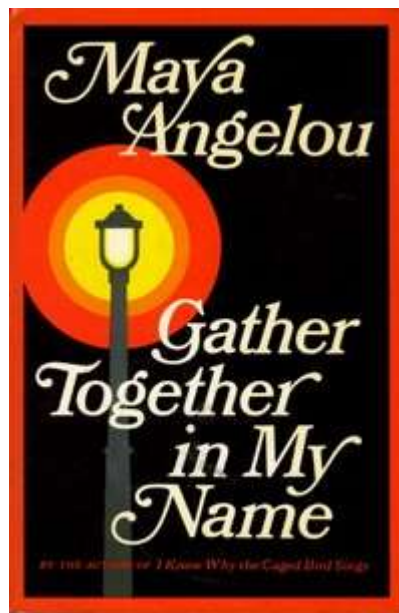


**Self-Actualization in the Protagonist of
Maya Angelou's Memoir:
A Humanistic Psychological Approach**

B. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar and Dr. K. Maheshwari



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gather_Together_in_My_Name

Abstract

Literature is a reflection of the daily life of human beings. It's a medium for a human to know about the people, society, and problems in life by authors' imagination. In some genre authors are writing their own lives and their real-life experiences that are called autobiographical narrative. In every story, the character is important. That story suppose to be movie, novel, drama or anything the people who watching or reading. The people are first observing the character only, after the end of the story impact of the character lives in everyone's heart. Something people should be observed, learned, compared, and experienced the character. To understand and examine the character in literature, the science psychology is needed. The focus of the study is to highlights how the main character achieve goals and find own potentials to reach self-actualization theory by Abraham Maslow. The present study analyses the self-actualization in the protagonist of Maya Angelou's Memoir. It also evaluates the self-actualization characteristics in the protagonist Maya Angelou from *Gather together in My Name*.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, character, psychology, self-actualization, humanistic psychology, the autobiographical novel

Introduction

The literary works described the correlation between literature and psychology. The literary works contains character study, the inner thought of individuals and expression of their moods which brought the readers into psychological dimension of human reality. In psychology, the most famous writers are Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow. Maslow became a leader in humanistic psychology. Maslow's humanistic psychology is focusing on the hierarchy theory of motivation to realize one's latent potentials, that hierarchy needs are physiological needs, safety, and security needs, belongings and love needs, self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs. The highest and last need is self-actualization. This study exhibits how the Black woman is self-actualized and overcome all sort of problems, recognizing and realizing her inner potential that achieves the self-actualization. This paper also analyses the Black woman's autobiographical fiction that was Maya Angelou's second volume *Gather together in my name*. It describes Maya's struggles and survival to get a good life by actualizing her potential. This paper shows self-actualizing person's characteristics and proves Maya is a self-actualizing person and finds the aspect of the characteristics in Maslow's perspective.

Autobiographical Creation

As a Black woman, the unmarried mother of two months baby, she tackles the difficulties in her life. Every human has their own talent and uniqueness and at one stage they should find and develop it. Maya also has her goal, desire and dream to achieve that she has to actualize herself. Maya Angelou has written seven volumes of autobiography, *Gather together in my name* is the second volume, and she travels a lot and interacts with so many new people in this volume. She searches for her identity. She wants to survive with her son in the society, so she frequently shifted the place and also job. Morally she is in a need of safety and security for both mother and son. In every volume the author is a narrator and the character of the author name in every book is different. Though it is an autobiography, the author uses the fiction techniques to tell her story. In the first volume *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* deals about her childhood sufferings, parental love, traumatic rape, long muteness, first street car conductor, first sex and birth to son. The study of inner lives of autobiographers provides the readers to examine the personal motives, needs and understanding.

Literature and Psychology

There are so many explanations about the connection between literature and psychology in the novel. There is a very strong correlation between literature and psychology for the fact that both of them deal with human beings and their reactions, perceptions of the world, miseries, wishes, desires, fears, conflicts and reconciliations; individual and social concerns, by means of varied concepts, methods and approaches. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle is used the term 'psyche' and 'catharsis' (*poetics*) in literature. So many authors from earlier time to present days all are using psychology, talking about psychology and applying in literary theory. This study is evaluating Maya Angelou's all autobiographical fiction as called as 'bildungsroman' means a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character.

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The Character Aspects of Self-Actualization

(i) Sense of Realism

The protagonist Maya Angelou is struggling to survive with her son. The character of Maya reveals the aspects of self-actualization, humanistic needs and applied humanities psychological approach. The incidents and situations are helped to reach her self-actualization needs. The first volume ends with the birth of her son. Then two months later she decided to live independently. Though her mother and stepfather ready to take care of her son and also suggested her to continue her school. In that age, nobody could think about this kind of attitude, here Maya thinks Daddy Clidell is not a blood relationship father, even for her son. She knows the reality that she and her son not genetically related to Daddy. So she make comfortable based on reality. She takes a logical decision. There is some understanding between her mother and stepfather, so that they are leading their life because already her mother divorced. Maya never want to disturb it. Moreover she feels more responsible for her child. She decides to leave San Francisco and move to Los Angeles, to Chicago and Detroit.

(ii) Self – Acceptance and others

The narrator tells her name as called as Rita; she starts her career in hotels. She starts her career as a cook, but even not having much knowledge in cooking. All she learns from stamps. Sometimes people would ask new dishes, she never says no to them. She tries and makes it for them. She has accepted and believe herself. She doesn't fear about the uncomfortable situations, place and people. She gets a job and earns \$75 a week she wants to learn cooking before she joins in hotel. So she decides to learn cooking from Papa ford. In hotel, she meets both good and bad people. She accepts all the things around her whether it a person, place, thing or self. She just wants to survive.

She has many affairs, first Curly Charles; he is a good man but for some reason, he leaves Rita and her son. For sometimes she feels lonely and bad then she agrees with reality and moves on. She accepts herself and also others by their nature.

(iii) Problem-Centered

For every difficulties and problems Rita is searching solutions to resolve it. When she is working as a waitress, regularly she notices two women come to the hotel. One is Johnnie Mac and Beatrice. They both are lesbians comes prostitutes. Once they become friends with Rita they invite her to their house. They expect Rita to involve into lesbianism. But Rita clearly says that she is not interested in it. She notices that they are earning many dollars, she thinks if she helps them she also get more money. So she asks them to give an attention to her plan, to get a good life if the plan is agreed. In the beginning, Johnnie and Beatrice scares and couldn't have the idea of manager as Rita. At last with the agreement paper, they believe and Rita to start as a manager of lesbian and prostitute. Rita doesn't know about the problem in future.

"I had managed a few tense years to become a snob on all levels, racial, cultural, and intellectual. I was a madam and thought myself morally superior to her whores. I was a waitress and believe myself cleverer than the customers I served. I was a lonely unmarried mother and held myself to be freer than married women that I met". (271)

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She is honest person in her job whatever the job is she looking for. After the jobs, she has bought a new car and some essential things for the house. But mother Cleo who lived with her in a rented house doesn't know about this whorehouse manager, Cleo is babysitter who is taking care of her son. One day without Rita's knowledge Jonnie and Beatrice works in the whorehouse, to hear about it, as a manager she acts and warns to them. The agreement becomes seriously, at last, Johnnie blames Rita that she makes a call to the police to ask about Rita's new car and other earnings. Rita gets afraid because she has a son, so she decides to go to stamps to save her and her son. The person who is away from the problem is also a solution for it. Rita leaves the place to avoid the problem creating circumstances for sake of her and her son goodness.

She uses to search jobs and way to get money, then searching for stable love care towards both Maya and her son Guy. This shows that she is in need of safety and security that was job, money, and love; it's a stepping stone of self-actualization.

(iv) Spontaneity, Simplicity, and Naturalness

In Stamps, Maya has seen different world. This time, she has more courage and very talkative. After arrived to stamps, she feels herself as Maya and forgets the Rita. Her son Guy attached with Momma very much. Momma is taking care of a baby Guy and playing with him. When Maya is at Stamps frequently meets people at the store and from the cotton picking company. She uses to attend parties at Stamps and nearby town. But every incident and party is reminding California and other cities where she lives before. She maintains her life style very simple wherever she is. After the problem with Johnnie, she may decide to go to her mother's home or stay with her mother permanently. Though Baxter is wealthy, Maya also lead her life comfortably. But she decides to live in Stamps because of simplicity.

After her parents get divorced in California, her father takes Maya and her brother to his mother. He puts identification and destination tags on their wrist sent them alone by train when she is three and her brother is four. After they arrive at Stamps, they are under the control of their grandmother and Uncle Willie. They spend times with depression and longing for parental love. They are learning Bible verses and church songs. Only they receive Momma's, undemonstrative love. Maya recalls this all when she reached stamps.

The self-actualize people have more courage to fight against injustice and expecting the self-respect. The thing is being a colored people they expecting more self-respect in front of dominated whites. After regaining her voice in the first volume wherever she has seen the injustice she never waits to raise her voice. She fights for injustice spontaneously. Already in the first volume, she has an experience that Mrs. Cullians avoid calling her real name like the same incident happens here. Once she visits the general merchandise store to get an order for the store. One clerk in the store flipped Maya's name as she calls Margaret or Marjorie or something like that. At the time Maya gets tensioned and says

“And when I’m from is no concern of yours, but rather where you are going. I will slap you into the middle of next week if you even dare to open your mouths again. Now, take that filthy pattern and stick it you-know-where” (293)

She has noticed all kind of people in the city; she gets new courage and confidence to ask questions in the right place against racism. Maya doesn't agree when people misspelled or avoid calling real name, it disturbs her dignity. She never behaves like this before suddenly she gets angry and shows her dislikeness. Momma hears all this and scolds, afraid of white people because they won't leave this incident as a casual way. They will take revenge on Maya and family. Momma fears about Maya and Guy. So she argues and scolds Maya and says that immediately get away from Stamps.

(v) Autonomy: Independence of Environment

The people who are have self-actualized, live independently. They work hard to achieve their destiny and put full determination. That person usually gets freedom from love and respect. Maya is back to her mother Baxter. She decides to join women's Army, once she notices the U.S. Requirement center it's in San Francisco, Ferry Building. Her mother too encourages joining there. After the interview and questions, Maya is dismissed physically and mentally. She is unfit for the job, even education and body. But she wants to be independent. After she rejects from army officers, she gets upset and looking for Bailey's support. She regains her positive mindset and change herself. The independence of environment established new confidence.

So she joins as a swing-shift day and night waitress at chicken shack hotel. She learns many things, how to be a positive dreamer and developed the new dreams. The first time Maya feels great about her life. She often plays with her son after her job. One day R.L. Poole comes to her house and introduces himself, he gets the contact of Maya from record shop woman who says about Rita Johnson and her dance. As he looking for a dance partner and he is from Chicago. He asks about her background of the study. She said ballet, modern ballet, and theory of dance. He is expecting her to know tap-dancing, jazz and acrobatics. But Maya has attractive character traits so that she knows where to use it. She has full rights to actualize her potencies in the social environment. She diverts his mind into the talent she has already. She starts to dance and try to impress him because she wants to prove and survive in this world. Maya realizes that she is fine human. She can determine for her future.

Conclusion

The paper concludes the importance of autobiographical fiction to study the personality, humanistic psychology approach and in- depth study of main characteristics. The human beings need a physical and mental growth for their life. They have shaped by their own experiences. Psychological view is needed in present day to understand the individual, situation and society. Self – actualization is most important in everyone's life. The study analyses that Maya is self actualized person who is healthy individual but not perfect. Her autobiographies are giving motivation to the readers that realizing personal potential and self-fulfillment. Maya's second volume is described about her struggling and survive beyond that in psychological view the inner lives and strength of female who overcomes all sort of problems in her life.

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B. Geetha, Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English

Sri GVG Visalakshi Arts and Science College for Women, Udumalpet

geethurbp@gmail.com

Dr. K. Maheshwari

Associate Professor (Retired)

Department of English

Sri GVG Visalakshi Arts and Science College for Women, Udumalpet

Krishnan.maheswari88@gmail.com

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