

Representation of White and Black in Maya's I know why the Caged Bird Sings and Lorde's Power: A Comparative Analysis



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Abstract: This study explains the violence, racism, and suffering of black people in Maya's poem I know why the Caged Bird Sings and Lorde's Power. And this research also explores racial injustice, prejudice, discrimination, and Power throughout the poems. Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde are Afro-American poets and writers. The authors sadly explain the suffering and discrimination they faced in the white community. I Know Why Cage Bird Sings and Power are Based on Racism, violence, injustice, and Discrimination. In the power poem, there is a white police officer named Thomas Shea who murdered a black boy named Clifford Glover, who was killed in 1973. The colonizer beats him very badly. In the caged Bird, there was also a white man who treated Maya Angelou badly and raped her only because of her black skin. Subaltern will be the theoretical framework of this research that shows give voice to voiceless people.

Key Words: Subaltern, Violence, Racism, Colonizers, Discrimination

Introduction

Maya Angelou was an Afro- American author, memoirist, writer and great activist. And she was also an actor and director of plays. Marguerite Ann Johnson (1928-2014) is also known as Maya Angelou. She wrote seven amazing autobiographies, three books of essays, and numerous books of poems. Maya was born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis Missouri. Maya Angelou wrote "Caged Bird" over thirty years ago. The poem is masterfully written, but it also tells a dreadful, miserable truth about racial discrimination and oppression in the US. Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird" describes the two opposed differences between two types of birds: free and caged. According to the author's historical analysis, white masters were oppressors and colonizers who were content and able to live in nature from their point of view. They are content with their existence and perceive their tribes as strong. They only favour white colours. White is everything to them. In "Caged Bird," the poet portrays prejudice and violence towards lower-status people.

"Caged Bird" by Angelou stands in for the black community, whereas "Free Bird" represents the white community. According to the author, the black community is an imprisoned bird rather than a free bird. They were unable to openly express their thoughts and opinions. They are unwelcome and subordinate in the white community. According to the author, they were made exclusively for cages and currently live as inmates. Despite being regarded as untouchable creatures, they are not permitted to go outside and live their lives. They are for the white community, according to the author. According to the author, white people are free birds who can do anything. They were free to live their lives as they saw fit and travel anywhere they pleased. The free bird had the option to live, according to the poet. They're content and joyful right now. White masters always do ownership and do violent behaviour with the black community. They also claim ownership of things in the poems. The Author claims in the second verse that the imprisoned bird is dark and tied. Their white

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master exploits them and makes them feel alone. Their feet are tied in one spot where they experience discomfort and suffocation, and their wings are clipped. They simply sing a song for freedom. Lorde Audre. was a poet, writer and novelist in African American literature. In America, Audre Lorde was an extremely talented and creative individual. She talks about sexism, racism, brutality, and inequalities. She was born in New York Before receiving her diploma from Hunter High School, she joined Catholic schools. Audre Lorde wrote twelve books throughout her lifetime. She also published a few of her poetry in anthologies. Love, terror, ethnic brutality, sexual oppression, survival, and urban struggle are all depicted in her poems. She was a successful author who clarified the emotions and suffering of oppressed communities. All of these experiences, as well as how things developed over time, were mirrored in her poems. She writes in opposition to sexism and racism. In her work, she gives voice to voiceless people. One of Audre Lorde's outstanding masterpieces is Power. "Power" demonstrates the dominance of white people. Black people are consistently subjected to assault, murder, and repression by the white community. The white community violently murders innocent kids in the Power poem without any wrongdoing. Adure is a symbol of the cruel treatment meted out to black people by white men. A ten-year-old young man was killed solely because of his race. According to the poet, the white police officer who killed the innocent child said that he had only looked at the kid's colour and not his size or anything else. It serves as a reminder of the black community's brutal behaviours to readers. It was and still is a reflection of how wrongly the black community is treated in America.

Research Objectives

1. To describe the violence reflected by Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde of afro American people in "I know why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Power".
2. To explore an image of racism in "I know why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Power".

Research Questions

- Q1:** How do Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde describe violence in I know why the Caged Bird Sings and Power?

- Q 2:** How do Maya and Lorde show an image of racism in "I know why the Caged Bird Sings" and "Power"?

Problem Statement

This study examines the texts of Audre Lorde's Power Poem and Maya Angelou's I Know Why Caged Birds Sing. This research examines the oppression, brutality, and suffering experienced by Black people. Additionally, this research highlights white men's dominance over the black community. Racism, brutality, and discrimination are the foundations of Power Poem and The Caged Bird. Both poems portray colonizers as extremely nasty and unkind people who never accorded the black community any value simply because of their skin colour. Black males are viewed as subordinates and inferiors, whereas white men are free men who saw themselves as supermen. They did not value them because of their black tone. Black people are viewed by white people as untouchable and like beasts. They abuse them greatly.

Significance of the Research Study

This study offers a wealth of insights for scholars, practitioners, colleagues, researchers, and students. It will encourage readers to research Afro-American literature. This study will assist the researchers in learning about the marginalization, aggression, and abuse that black individuals experience due to their skin colour. White oppressors slaughter black people. The memoirs of Maya Angelou contain several elements. They pose as a mother, a politician, a social activist, and a daughter. The researcher seeks to close the knowledge gap in subaltern critical considerations to comprehend the issues of violence and racial marginalization that Negroes are dealing with on their trip. This research also informs the youthful generation that they are not differentiated based on their skin tone. Additionally, avoid making decisions about people based on their skin tone and instead consider their souls. Face colour is nothing compared to the human soul.

Literature Review

Maya Angelou experienced abuse and brutality during her voyage only because of her skin colour. Due to the disconnect between the liberal conception of American society and her existence as an African-American as a

result of her replacement, the author also experiences an environment of aggravation, grief, and offence (Sari, 2017). Krishna and Soelistyo (2013) one of the most well-known African American poets of the 20th century is Maya Angelou. People of colour are referred to as "African American slaves." They encountered many difficulties throughout the civil war; as a result, Angelou defended them in her poetry. She decided to write an autobiography to relate her experiences as an African American woman. She has done a fantastic job as a strong leader fighting for the rights of all black people. She has received numerous accolades for her contributions to activism and literature (Krisna & Soelistyo, 2013). According to Roşcan(2019), "I know why the caged birds sing" denotes oppression, marginalization, prejudice, aggression, and stereotyping. She talks about the ongoing problems faced by African Americans in a separate society. In addition to bringing about human dignity and social equality, the author wishes to put an end to violence and discrimination in society. According to Wongpinit (2006), Angelou experienced inferiority and dishonour. She experienced racism as a child and continues to endure it today as a woman of colour. She remembers the past events, comprehends her current predicament, and is aware that she protects not just her own rights but also the rights of her community. According to Collins (1989), the poems of Maya Angelou demonstrate that colonization is to blame for both men and women who suffer from racism, misogyny, and subjection. In addition, Angelou talks about the oppressive conditions faced by black women in the white community. One of the fundamental themes of African American literature is the search for identity. The writings of African Americans inspire black people to fight for power and defend themselves from repression and brutality. One of them is Maya Angelou, who likewise exhorts the members of her community to speak up and demand their fundamental rights. Delgado and Stefancic (2001), based on Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), depict the African American community's fight against prejudice and persecution. In *Caged Bird*, racism and bigotry are depicted. Caged birds are treated poorly and with disdain in every element of life. Under the social, economic, and political dominance of white people in Stamps, Arkansas, in the 1930s and 1940s, black Americans were treated with contempt. Maya Angelou said, "In Stamps, the segregation was so complete that most black children did not really, absolutely know what whites looked like" (p. 27).

Since there was no black doctor or dentist in Stamps, she stated, "My mother had treated previous toothaches by pulling them out." As a black woman, Angelou, according to Malika (2016), endured a great deal of misery and unhappiness throughout her life, but she never gave up; rather, she held on and overcame her setbacks. In his book *Invisible Man*, Ellison (1952) offered his remarks regarding the captive bird. He claims that because of their skin tone, white people oppress and inflict great suffering on black people. White people are aware that black people lack a sophisticated culture and are instead barbaric and uncivilized. Black people are shown to be at the mercy of white people. Ellison (1952) mentioned that white people believe black people lack identity and a name. Numerous difficulties affecting the black community are depicted in the book *Invisible Man*. A significant character in the book is the narrator, who believes that others stare at him because of his skin tone. The white community only perceived the narrator as nameless and worthless because of his race. According to Kohl (2021), the excellent writing of Audre Lorde inspires readers, particularly those in the black community. Young Lorde was interested in reading and writing because she needed to express her creativity (Kohl, 2021). Lorde spent the majority of her life devoted to her passion for poetry, which became a part of her identity. Afro-American poet Audre Lorde uses violence and racism as themes in her works. She had dealt with sexism and racism. She was greatly oppressed in the community only because of her skin colour. She fought to liberate all communities from oppression, not just for herself. She uses poetry to communicate her suffering. Pierre A. Walker (1995) previously, racism was based on the idea that the racially exploited were not human beings. In reaction, African American writers wrote poems that proved the opposite, saying they were humans who did not earn such ill-treatment. By producing literature, African American writers tried to struggle with the beliefs of racial groups that classified them as low-class people. "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" shows this opinion, being written to prove just how undeservingly Maya Angelou had an inferior category in white culture in her youth, just based on her skin colour (Walker 93). In *The Caged Bird*, the white dentist in Stamps ignored Maya's tooth pain. Although she was serious, no one considered her a patient due to her skin colour, although Momma had previously lent him money as a favour. After Momma entered his office to speak, Maya imagines her as a superwoman

who threatens the trembling dentist. Ultimately, Maya and Momma left that place and look for another Dr, leaving Maya's fantasies unfulfilled. This fantasy view is the only such scene in Maya's life Critics believe it has been written to reveal how limited Momma is in fighting racial discrimination (Walker 102).

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The current study, which explores the experiences of black people in Lorde's *Power* and Maya's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is descriptive in nature. The textual study of the poetry is the main focus of this research project. From the viewpoint of subaltern theory, the researcher analyses poems. While secondary data is based on examining research studies that other researchers have conducted in the Afro-American literature, the primary research approach is represented by a close reading of the text. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian political figure who practised Marxism, coined the term "subaltern" in his well-known book "Prison Notebook." The term "subaltern" was coined by Marxist leader Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) to describe any group of lower status based on ethnicity, gender, or identity. Through its work, the term "subaltern" has been widely used and extremely well-liked in the social sciences.

Subaltern Theory

The theoretical foundation for this research article was Subaltern. Postcolonial studies and subaltern studies are related to academic disciplines. Writing against colonialism in 1980 set off the trend of subaltern studies. Any person who is subordinate because of their community, caste, rank, colour, customs, physiology, gender, and sexual orientation. The word "Subaltern" depicts how low-ranking people endure abuse and discrimination from colonizers and ruling class members who have complete control over everything. Due to their poor status, upper-class individuals also oppress and dominate them. They do not have any social rights. In his paper *Notes on his Italian History*, published in *Prison Notebook*, Italian Marxist political leader Antonio Gramsci used a subaltern phrase. Gramsci opposed the policies of Italian dictator Mussolini, whose regime persecuted and repressed the working class. Due to their race, the subalterns are marginalized and subject to violence. The poet claims that white masters have mistreated subalterns

throughout the poetry. Black people are viewed as inferior and subaltern. They describe their sorrows through their words, yet no one pays attention. Black people are viewed as weak, barbaric, inferior, and uncivilized just because of their skin colour, as poets in *The Caged Bird* and *Power* demonstrate. People of colour perceive them as inferior and subordinate because of their skin colour. Both poems depict how black people are oppressed, killed violently, and killed by white people. The goal of subaltern studies is to expose the History of groups that, inside the nationalist and colonial records, were mostly ignored or unrecorded. Subaltern studies strive to provide opportunities for lower-class people within the network of capitalism and colonialism by turning to popular accounts of public records and memory to counteract what Ranajit Guha (1989) called "elitism." One of the most well-known opponents of post-colonialism is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The foundation of Spivak's philosophy is the idea of the Subaltern. A military phrase that implies "of subordinate rank" is "subaltern." Spivak defined subalterns as people who simply take orders rather than give them. Subalterns are also those who lack access to citizenship mechanisms (Spivak, 1988).

Findings

Representation of Violence in *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* and *Power*

Maya Angelou and Audre are Afro-American poets, novelists, and writers in literature. Both poets faced a lot of suffering and violence at the hands of white men. They faced violence at the hands of white people. They both show violence in their works, *Caged Bird* and *Power Poem*. They said that violence is very common in African countries. White people did violence against the black community. They committed violence in the form of rape and murder. They killed and engaged in violent behaviour with black people without sin. Maya Angelou and Audre express their painful sufferings and show violence throughout their poems. Both poets say that blacks are the greatest and nicest people on earth. Moreover, they have great ideas for humanity, but in the eyes of white people, blacks are weak and inferior creatures. White people are oppressors, and they subjugated blacks. White people understand that black people are not civilized and useless. For white people, black skin is useless and meaningless. Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou explain that black has been understood

as weak and white has been understood as a powerful creature on earth. White people are freemen; they can do whatever they want. They can enjoy themselves everywhere in their lives, and they do violence against black people without any reason. But black has no right to enjoyment due to its black colour. Even they cannot touch any white things. 'Power' is a 1978 poem by the black poet Audre Lorde (1934–92), published in her collected work *The Black Unicorn*. Lorde was a black poet, lesbian, mother, and fighter. In 'Power', the poet openly explains racial inequality, racial violence, brutality, and rough treatment against very innocent kids. She tells how little kids face violence, unfairness, and brutality at the hands of the white community. The title depicts the superpower of white people and shows the misbehaviour of whites with blacks. Audre Lorde says that they are a very cruel and unkind community that usually shows their power in front of black people and oppresses them physically and mentally. Audre Lorde shows the violence of a little kid, which he faced at a very young age. The poet shows colonizers' power over the black community in the second stanza of the power poem. The poet explains a real-life incident that she had seen in her surroundings. She says that a white police officer shot and killed innocent Clifford Glover in Queens because of his black skin. The police officer killed him very cruelly and violently. A child's face is destroyed by a gunshot. Lorde says that white men are very cruel and unkind; for them, colour is important but not humanity. Maya Angelou is also an African American poet and writer. She faced a lot of racism, violence, and discrimination because of her race. Her remarkable work is *Why I Caged Bird*, an autobiography poem that shows her whole life journey, which she faced among the white community. Maya faced painful suffering and violence when she was in eighth grade. She faced racism and discrimination in her life. In her caged bird, she shows the troubles and violence that happened to black people at the hands of white people. She discussed the concept of two birds. One is a caged bird, which shows black men, and another is a free bird, which shows colonizers, oppressors, and cruel and unkind men. They are free men; they can move anywhere they want. Moreover, they fully enjoy their lives without any restrictions. Maya Angelou says colonizers came to Africa and subjugated black people through their power. And they committed violence. They suppress black people mentally and physically, rape black women, and brutally kill them. When Maya was

a baby and her age was only eight years, her mother's boyfriend, Mr Freeman, sexually mistreated her very badly and later raped her. And Mr Freeman says, "Do not tell anyone. If she says something to someone, he will destroy his brother Bailey. It shows that oppressors were very unkind to black people. They only give value to colour, money, and status, not to a human being. Maya said the white community understands that the black community is subaltern and inferior. They degrade them only because of their skin colour. A Whiteman Dr Lincoln and the colonizer He snubbed Maya as a commodified person, saying he would put his hand in a dog's slips instead to heal her trouble. Such exploitation and racism by white Doctor Lincoln delayed Maya's mind throughout her life. Maya faces racism and violence in the white community. So she was distressed. She also wants to give voice to subaltern people through her writing. She says that whites are colonizers and very cruel men. They understand themselves as supermen and ignore the black community only because of their skin colour. And she says that subaltern people are valuable and great human beings. She wants to give voice to voiceless people.

Racism in Maya Angelou's "I know why the caged bird sings" and Audre Lorde's "Power"

Racism is a term that shows the ill-treatment of one nation by another nation on the basis of colour and the faith that one race is higher than the other. It also shows worse treatment, harassment, and degradation because of race or ethnicity. Many black people face a lot of racism just because of their colour. Its influence is so bad that many families suffer, even though they do not give them the right to a job and education. As we can observe in Africa, American subalterns face a lot of racism because of their skin colour. White people understand themselves as a very powerful tribe, and they think that blacks are useless, colourless, savage, and uncivilized. In the eyes of white men, blacks are like animals. White people always engage in violent behaviour and misuse it in the form of assassination and murder. On March 16, 2021, six women were shot for racial reasons in Atlanta. In recent times, white police officers shot unarmed black Americans and nine subaltern people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. Freshly in the year 2020, on May 25, a black man named George Floyd was harshly killed by a police officer because he was black, and the officer was so intolerant and cruel

that he didn't care for humanity. He understood that George was like a beast, not a human being. Such kinds of racism happen daily, and subaltern people face them. None arise to speak for them. Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde, both Afro-American poets, face a lot of racism only on the basis of colour. They both were representatives of their country's people and wanted to give voice to subaltern people through their writing. Angelo says that the caged bird is also a human being on earth, but being human, they face racism at the hands of the white community. White only treat them poorly because of their skin colour. They degrade and put down black people. The white community makes principles for black people that black people should go outside for jobs and get an education. Mayo herself faced a terrible issue at a very young age. When Maya was a baby, she suffered from tooth pain. She had to see the doctor immediately because Maya's ache was critical and serious. But in those days, it was forbidden for a black-skinned person to get treatment from a white doctor because white people were doctors only available to white-skinned people. Her grandmother assisted a certain doctor in Arkansas, so she determined to meet the doctor so that Maya Angelou would obtain the cure. When they went into fair society, white people began to look intently at them as if they had done some kind of wrong by coming there, as if they were some kind of strangers to that location. It was so horrific that anyone could feel that white people were not mature enough to show esteem to humankind. When they arrived at the rest home of that white doctor, Maya's grandmother began to knock on the gate. The nurturer opened the door and was shocked to see the black-skinned people standing in front of the gate. Her expression was very hateful for Maya's grandmother and Maya. Finally, a white doctor came out and told Maya's grandmother that he didn't like to see black people in his hospital. And he tells Maya's grandmother, "My policy is that I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's (Angelou, 203). It seems that black people are dishonoured at the hands of white people. Later on, Angelou's grandmother puts him in the right position, so she is very powerful and leaves the city. She doesn't want to return to such a rubbish and inhuman society. Another example of racism in Maya's life is that, as a little girl, Angelou faced a lot of humiliation at the hands of white girls. White girls were tired of her losing her confidence and discouraged her, but being a black girl, she began to fight for her rights. Despite all these difficulties, she

never shows herself as weak but has very well-built power. Maya Angelou is the motivation for the black community. Maya depicts the accurate path for the Black Nation to live above all these difficulties while they situate on earth and struggle for their basic rights. She also tells her nation's people that they are not subalterns but great human beings on earth. Audre Lorde is also one of the greatest poets who faced a lot of racism, discrimination, violence, and injustice in the white nation. In her life, she faced violence and injustice at the hands of the white community. She becomes a voice for her country's people. Through her writing, she shows racism, discrimination, and inhuman treatment of white people over black people. Her famous poem, "Power," is based on racism and injustice. In this poem, she explores injustice against black people at the hands of the white community. She said that the white nation understands everything, but they are not mature enough in the real world. They are very cruel and unkind people. She said that white people kill and murder black people only because of their skin colour. For them, skin colour is everything, but not humanity. Audre Lorde shows racism throughout their innocence as a kid, which he faced at a very young age. The poet shows colonizers' power over the black community in the second stanza of the power poem. The poet explains a real-life incident that she had seen in her surroundings. She says that a white police officer who shot and killed Clifford Glover was innocent because of his black skin. Police officer Thomas Shea killed a little boy very violently. A child's face is destroyed by a gunshot. A white man told me that "I didn't see the size nor anything else, only the colour" It seems that while murdering the innocent baby, he did not see his age or size but very violently murdered him.

Conclusion

In the end, the researcher shows the reader the violence, discrimination, and racism that African Americans have faced in the past. The current research shows that in the past, Negro people faced troubles and violence at the hands of white masters. Negroes faced racism, discrimination, and violence throughout history. The authors say the white race is a colonizer, an oppressor, and a very strong nation. They are outstanding and extremely strong. Africans are often killed and oppressed at the hand of oppressors. They thought blacks had no culture or language, but they follow our culture. Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde not only tell of their sufferings; they

also represent the black community throughout their work. Maya gives the concept of two birds: one is a free bird, and another is a white bird. Free birds are white people who always enjoy their lives. And they are always free; they can go everywhere where they want, while caged birds cannot go everywhere but who are close to one cage and are tied. They only sing a song for freedom. The author says that white people show supremacy and have wrong attitudes toward black people. They misuse them due to skin colour. As we can see, Maya faced a lot of violence and discrimination. A white master had raped her at a young age. It was a miserable and horrible sight for her

and her black community. "Power" is one of the remarkable works of Audre Lorde, in which she represents her black community and how they faced violence and were subjugated by white people. She represents the brutal treatment of black people at the hands of white men. There was a 10-year kid killed due to his colour, nothing else. The author says that the white policeman who killed the innocent kid said he did not observe the size or anything else, only the colour. It reminds readers of the merciless behaviour of the white master. In conclusion, colonizers seemed cruel and oppressors who always colonized the subaltern people due to their black skin.

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