



A Critical Study of Maya Angelou's *Gather Together in My Name*

V.Karthigaiselvan¹ and R. Meena²

¹Department of English, SBK College, Aruppukottai.

²Department of English, V.H.N. Senthikumara Nadar College (Autonomous), Virudhunagar.

Abstract - Black Women Autobiography started as a subgenre of Black Autobiography in the early 1960's. It was an opportunity to black women to raise their painful voices against their racial and sexual harassments. Maya Angelou, the American poet, memoirist, actor and singer whose several volumes of autobiography explore the themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression. She is a notable figure in the history of Black American Women Autobiography. She clearly portrays her struggle as a black child and mother in her autobiographies particularly in her *Gather Together in My Name*. It talks about her struggles as a prostitute in an African society. Maya presents herself as a dominant figure and shares her personal experiences, her affection, frustration and pain. It is about the theme, style, language of Maya Angelou in this autobiographical piece. It also deals with the pain and struggle of Maya a strong and courageous woman who is surviving in an Afro-American country.

Keywords: Lesbian, affection, frustration, struggle, self-reflection, prostitution, illegitimate

1. INTRODUCTION

An acclaimed American poet, storyteller, activist, and autobiographer, Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri. Angelou has had a broad career as a singer, dancer, actress, composer, and Hollywood's first female black director, but is most famous as a writer, editor, essayist, playwright, and poet.

She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and is credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus her entire painful and struggling life.

Gather Together in My Name is of Maya Angelou's second novel. In the novel, Maya Angelou describes her life with her newly born baby, who came out of an impulsive testing of her sexual identity. She chronicles the struggles to reach a promising life and carry both the beauty and the burden of motherhood and womanhood.

2. ANALYSIS

The story begins in the years following World War II. Sixteen year-old Angelou has just given birth to an illegitimate son in San Francisco. She goes through a number of jobs and relationships in search of stability in her life. Each relationship is as disappointing as the last as men take advantages of her. In this journey she went into unsuccessful relationships and came out dissatisfied. The men with whom she developed relationships barring her brother, Bailey and her neighborhood, L. C. Smith and Troubadour Martin whom she saw at her boss's restaurant in Oakland, exploited her physically, financially and psychologically.

In this volume Maya worked as a dancer, a cook, a Madam, a waitress, and briefly as a prostitute. For one of her jobs, Maya becomes a manager for two lesbian prostitutes. Though she was iron-willed and sharp minded, she was unable to keep her life away from her vulnerabilities. Readers sense a tragic decline in her vital strength now and then. The novel depicts how most of the African American women in the urban backdrop are trapped into the world of drugs and prostitution. Maya does not shame about her job and hobbies. Simply she says, "Love is blind and hides a multitude of faults. I know what you're talking about, and prostitution is like beauty. It is in the eye of the beholder" (136).

Throughout her two year life's journey, she encountered many hurdles and failures. She deeply longed for a secure life, but the dream never came true. Her persistence, confidence and human concerns created hope to expand her vision for life. Though she was cheated by Curly, R. L. Poole and L.D. Tolbrook, she