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**Literary Theories**

### Feminism in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

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**Abstract:** The paper brings out the feminism in the work “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou. Feminist Literature is any writing that supports women in their equality, patriarchal challenges and takes us through women’s experiences and struggles within society and asks for general rights for women. The book explores feminism through the lens of black womanhood and brings it through the characters of the book. Feminism in the book is strongly seen in and with the character of Momma and in her strength.

**Keywords:** Equality, Rights, Womanhood, Strength.



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Feminism in general aims to give a voice to marginalized, systemic gender inequality and offer alternatives to male-dominated systems, and it focuses on themes like power, privilege, identity and resistance. Feminism in the book is identified through the characters of the book and through their power, strength and courage. The character of Momma in the book stands for her boldness, which comes under feminism. This character in the book is only shown in the light of strength and not weakness.

“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” is the 1969 debut memoir by American writer and activist Maya Angelou. This book is the first of her seven autobiographical books. The book covers several of her life events from ages 3 to 16. The book also explores resistance, one of the themes of feminism, with Maya herself in the book. The book was nominated for a National Book Award in 1970 and remained on The New York Times paperback bestseller list for two years.

Maya Angelou was an American memoirist, essayist, poet and civil rights activist. 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. Angelou’s series of seven autobiographies focuses on her childhood and early adult experiences. “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” was published in 1969, which tells the life of Maya Angelou up to the age of 17. This book brought her international recognition and acclaim.

Feminism in the book is viewed through the character of Momma. In the book, Maya looks up to her grandmother, and she sees her as a strong and independent woman. Feminism in her character is seen as she goes against the stereotypes. When women of the 1930s were not very respected and seen as weak and overemotional, Momma is seen in the book as the opposite of these attitudes and ideals. She is shown as the one who is bold, courageous and strong. She even owns her own store among the oppressed place. The quote that shows the strength of Momma and her feministic ideal is “Momma walked in that room as if she owned it”.

The way that Maya mentions in her book that many of the white folks owe her Momma favours shows how powerful and independent Momma had been among the women and the black-dominated place.

One such instance is seen with her encounter with a dentist called Lincoln. It is mentioned in the book that Dentist Lincoln had borrowed some money from Momma.

“If you paid me my money, I could afford to take her”.

The theory of Feminism can be classified into Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism etc. These two types of Feminism can be viewed in the work of Maya Angelou. Liberal Feminism focuses on women achieve equality in the society. Momma in the work attains equality in the society with her own store. The Radical Feminism deals with male domination and oppression which is challenged by women by transforming it. Though we find no oppression on Momma, we find Radical Feminism in her taking care of the family than his son.

With such instances in the book, Maya Angelou makes readers view the book with the character of Momma through the lens of Feminism.

### References

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