

# *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem*

Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)

Volume 12, Issue 8, July 2021: 7938-7946

## ***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem***

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### **Abstract**

Language is vehicle to transfer and exchange of information, it is not a plain thing but it carries with itself a very dangerous poison though not always but it is more dangerous than any other weapon in the world. This research paper discusses with critical discourse analysis of '*I know why the caged bird sings*', a brilliant and fascinating poem of Maya Angelo. to evaluate of discrimination against Negro people. It highlights on racist ideology of underestimating black men. The key aims and objects are to investigate lexical, structural and rhetorical tactics which have been used for this purpose. In this study, researcher would analyze poem with Mills (2008) and Van Dijk (2006)*selective eclectic model*.

**Keywords:** Identity, Racism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Segregation, Ideology.

### **1. Introduction:**

Language which humans use as members, participants in conversational settings for exchanging the information, ideas, feelings and emotions to others and it is also considered as expression of the individual's identity. Language is vehicle to transfer and exchange the information, it is not a plane thing but it carries with itself a very dangerous poison though not always but it is more dangerous than any other weapon in the world so Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates, unveils, demystifies, explores, identifies that how a language explodes social powers, discrimination, abuse, dominancy, authority, and variations are used, reused, repeated. It is used to analyze discourse and utterances different settings, social and political Van Dijk (1993).

The origin related to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is in classical oratory, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and text linguistics (Wodak 2008). The philosophies of power, ideology, gender,

pyramid and abuses, uses, re-uses are seen in analysis of the texts and discourses. Different issues, i.e. of gender, race, media or identity in a social setting and dimensions have been very significant in the context of social setting Wodak and Meyer (2008).

Critical discourse analysis has been of great importance as it mainly focuses on a problem from different aspect in a societal setting. It sets disparities as conscious and fundamentally essential (not abnormalities, twists, or dysfunctions), which are inherent in different views in a social setting (Williams, 1975). Discourse if only conceived as a hobby in a social setting figures out the labelling or used of lexical units from semantics and pragmatics point of view. These studies, having no doubt, posit constructive outlook with positive attributes and characteristics of the discourse highlighting the fully recognized lexical units and items in context. Moreover, they promote different aspects of journalism instead of establishing opposite and exceptional point of view keeping in view the context and discourse. Therefore, its assessment of citizen journalism usually takes the form of wars and unbalanced mergers, rather than opposing positions or the comparative strength of fully realized hybrids.

The extent to which hypotheses of different perspectives are left behind may be visible in the spread of work. Robinson (2009) described the very complicated relationship between citizen journalism and expert journalism in a news report written and published after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and other areas of the Gulf Coast in the United States in 2005. The censors did not oppose citizen news and expert news. Instead, they identified a complex series of different characters, themes, opinions, general information and Authoritative claim. These findings support the deficiencies of the claim about which aspect (professional or citizen) prevails or the combination of the two. Contrary to this statement, Robinson pointed out that there is "a patchwork of journalism and citizen paintings that represents the appearing out of the tensions from those position shifts" (p. 810).

Moyo (2011) outlines involving writing for a blog by nonprofessionals inside the 2008 political decision in Zimbabwe inside changes presently not just in period, but likewise inside changes inside the actual idea of news-casting progressively described by "extended investment, multimodality and multidirectional streams" (p. 756). The accentuation on 'multi' instead of paired (both resident or master) widens consideration of the intricacy and interrelatedness of resident reporting with various circles and practices. Resident news coverage isn't consistently a spotless opposite, nor essentially elite from master news-casting, but a temporary leisure activity created by means of perplexing connections just as the specific setting in which it happens. While Moyo(2011) observes on one hand the development of "a hermeneutic, constructivist, and postmodern way to deal with news coverage" exceptionally extraordinary from the master mode, this resident news-casting in any case imparts to the expert mode "the optimism of the neoliberal talk that engages (both of) them as the watchdog of the country, yet this at the same time denies them of the ability to conceptualize the option in most certainly extreme ways" (p. 758).

Critical Discourse Analysis is quite new discipline of studying discourse and language in social institutions. It is concerned with spoken and written text that how these things construct, reconstruct, produce and reproduce ideologies, power, and knowledge relations in schools, classes, institutes, and communities.

Maya's poem has background of Arkansas is area in America which is divided from racism perspective in Whites and Blacks, females and males. Angelou Maya uses metaphor bird as struggling one to get free from its cage, bird is symbol of freedom, bird is free for fly but caged and free birds are metaphors for two different races The White and The Black, so the caged bird is metaphor for the Blacks, Negros, the caged bird sings for freedom destined in cages of the race, class and gender.

## *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem*

Critical tactics to discourse evaluation first commenced from the start of nineties known to be a recognized paradigm having cohesiveness (Billig, 2003; Wodak & Myers, 2001) as a result of collaboration of different scholars in a Dutch city, Amsterdam (van Dijk, 2001), who launched *Discourse and Society*, a unique magazine, which uplifted and attained influential popularity among critical discourse evaluation books such as Fairclough's (2001) *Language and Power and Language* and Wodak's (1989) *Power and Ideology*. Billig (2003) notes that Fairclough (1992 & 1995) plays a pivotal role in making CDA a popular and of vital importance in the realm of analysis of discourse critically, signifying in the importance of this phenomenon in evaluating texts, discourse and speeches from every aspect.

Critical Discourse Analysis, having high hand in other kinds of evaluations of the discourse, considers language as a social phenomenon, described as a shared viewpoint at maximal level highlighting different functions i.e. linguistic functions, semiotic functions and discourse functions (van Dijk, 1993, p. 131) resulting from different and opposite methods and approaches i.e. methodological and theoretical by means of different linguistic units and items (van Dijk, 2001, p. 2) whose roots are present in classical rhetoric, text- and socio-linguistics in addition to pragmatics and applied linguistics. Meanwhile, it also signifies the continuity of linguistic repertoire in the discourse (van Dijk, 2001, p. 3).

CDA is a different paradigm from sociolinguistics related to the investigation of a problem in hand in general. Myers (2002) defines it that the aim of CDA is to clearly highlight clear and unambiguous relationships, which underlie text, discourse or speech to acquire hidden results that are sensibly relevant (Myers, 2002, p. 15) as the basic and important principle of CDA is that discourse is hard to comprehend if it is not connected to context in which the discourse is uttered highlighting different factors and methods (linguistic) (Myers, 2002), especially such structures and procedures which are related to society (Wodak & Myers, 2001).

CDA emerged as an important and a unique paradigm when different paradigms were being developed in different fields such as anthropology and psychology (Billig, 2003). Billig (2003, p. 37) is of the view that the word critical appeared in the context when the time itself became critical in different genres in different academic studies. Weiss and Wodak (2003) suggests that the philosophers, Foucault and Habermas, and a great and distinguished impact in the development of CDA as a pivotal paradigm in evaluating the discourse critically.

The term 'discourse' has been defined differently by different scholars and philosopher but all are unified on the point that language during utterance and writing acquires the shape of social practice (Fairclough, 2009) in which discursive practices, when technically re-created, acquired and evaluated and interpreted, take important shape of social influence which contributes to frame societal recognition which include cultural, racial and international identities (Pennycook, 2001).

The use of language has not been observed as a powerful mean unless it shows the energy during discourse at different levels (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Discursive practices make a contribution to present different inequalities in family members during social businesses, namely societal, cultural and gender inequality, having ethical and ideological outcomes. The attention of different studies pertaining to CDA is therefore on discursive norms and practices, representing the power related to world, society and family in the pursuits of unique social businesses (Fairclough, 2001; Pennycook, 2001; Wodak & Myers, 2001).

Fairclough (1995) says that it's language which guides and misguides the people. It also can "rhetorically mystify, hide realities, and support ideologically unfair power relations". Most of the research and language scholars believe CDA is the field which is only concerned with interpreting, evaluation, justification and analyzing texts either spoken or written as social exercise of decoding and encoding discursive of the power, discrimination, dominance, inequality, and racism.

Major aim and object of this paradigm is to uncover the relationship of different structures from discursive and ideological point of view. It studies how ideologies are presented in the different discourse and how discourses depict ideology of an individual, whereas ideology is a mental belief and attitude of an individual which is set to share from different members/institutions regarding a certain phenomenon or concept related to society.

### **1.1 Ideology**

Ideology is a kind of idea and a system of belief. The concept of ideology requires material component which may be properly responsible for the notions and systems of a belief. These systems belief all members of society share are social actors in societies collectively asserts Bloor and Bloor (2008, 2013).

Ideology is said to be social and cognitive as well. Its function as interface among cognitive illustrations and practices underlie action and discourse in social situation and common benefit of the members of communities of social groups. Ideology is intangible mental system and just organizes attitudes which shared collectively by social groups. However, ideology controls belief and social opinions which group members of communities and societies share, says Van Dijk (1998).

For Critical Discourse Analysis, ideology is said to be very essential factor for the establishment and maintenance of relations of unequal power. Following Thompson opinion, ideology is a study of methods and procedures which forms and conveys the meaning in different symbolic ways and forms highlighting different and unique types in a social context in which those methods and forms are employed and deployed. The researchers of this type of studies always focus in determining the sustainability and establishment of domination.

All the theories assume that some particular bygone motives that why individuals feel, aim, imagine and wish as actions they do. The attitudes and beliefs branch out from ideologies and individuals necessarily not always consciously held. Individuals may be intensely deep-rooted in language and thought patterns. Individuals question or can come out against them. Ideological aims and objectives of the people may be veiled in used words. Major concern of Critical Discourse Analysis attains aims explicitly the hidden sides of the ideologies which reinforce social contact.

Ideologies localize in societal and mind structures of members of societies. Individuals are social actors and this allows them in translating including their identity, position, social properties and goals in beliefs the and knowledge to solid simulations of routine practices which are their mental pictures of actions and discourse used by them Fairclough (1995).

According to Van Dijk (1998) use and abuse is central idea in ideology in use of language. These uses and abuses need interdisciplinary and multi approaches where a diversity of elements and extents as cognitive and social factors. Usage of lexical item is very important and renowned field in expression of ideological intentions of individuals. Sexist disgraces are engaged or used against women who direct and pass affiliations of power abuses stranded in unrestricted ideologies.

Van Dijk (1998) distinguishes critical discourse analysis as the analysis of ideologies, meanwhile in discourse and communication ideologies are expressed and reproduced by social actors of group members. His analyzing approach for ideologies comprise cognitive, social and discourse analysis. Social analysis examines complete structures social life and the context, the discourse analysis is primarily text based such as sentences, lexical, meanings, topics, etc. For Van Dijk (1998), this is social and personal cognition which facilitates discourse and society. He explains social cognition as mental system and depiction and processes of members of group.

# *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem

Therefore, for Van Dijk (1998) "ideologies are intangible psychological structures which organize shared attitudes socially. So far Ideologies influence indirectly personal cognition of members of the groups in act of understanding of discourses in activities and exchanges.

Dijk (1998) calls "models" to mental representations of individual's social activities and exchanges, these models control people's actions, speaking or writing and how people understand particular practices in society and communities.

## **1.2 Identity and Racism**

Identity crisis has been defined by Oxford dictionary as uncertain and confusing time when person's sense of identity becomes insecure; specially change in person's ordinary objectives, aims and roles in societies. Identity crisis was coined by Erik Erikson, he thought it as major in conflicts which individuals in society and it challenges them in development.

Majority of the people around globe are confronting with the issue of identity crisis reason behind is ethnic background. Concept of identity crisis originated in developmental psychology, identity factor plays key role in individual's life. It gives sense of unhappiness, stress, confusion and social pressure when individuals do not understand one and purpose in their life. It is so defined situation of confusion and despair in institutions and organizations concerning the nature and directions.

*"It is worst thing in the life of a person as no death, no doom, no anguish can arouse the surpassing despair which flows from a loss of identity"* (H.P. Lovecraft).

Racism, Oxford dictionary explains as abilities, characteristics, specific qualities of races, which all participants of every race own and it distinguishes as inferiority or superiority to other race(s). Discrimination, Prejudice, Enmity against other race(s) on the belief of one's race is more superior to other race(s). Both Discrimination and Racism are used as the most potent weapons which provokes fear and hatred in the conflicts and war times and in economic crisis. "Sivanandan explains racism as culture of xenophobic in globalization across the globe. Racism may be conditioned and negotiated through religion, culture, art, science, literature, and media economic imperatives.

## **1.3 Prejudice**

The poem depicts a vivid picture of Maya Angelou's captivity causing from oppression, prejudice and racism. Maya Angelou reveals, from side to side her association with the Black and Negro community of Earmarks and her vivid and realistic presentation of racism and impoliteness of Southern white race's arrogances to Blacks, Negro or African-Americans, her emerging appreciative understanding of biased social system for survival in the racial society.

The flora fauna of Black, Negro struggle in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* shows these shapes of hostility contrary to racism. It has a very submissive demonstration in contradiction of mistreatment of white race tailed by obvious complaint from the Blacks, Negros against racism.

## **1.4 Segregation**

All around the globe is very much aware about the conditions of Blacks, Negros, and African-Americans in the southern States of America where they were treated with hatred by the race of the white people. America was distributed in segregation there was an official plan for the Black people, they were not permitted to get education in good schools or institutions, to get lucrative jobs, living in cherished houses or get proper medical and health treatment, even they were prohibited to be seated with white people on public transport buses and to drink from same sources of water, they were seen unworthy and unequal to whites.

The Civil War fetched the end of social injustice and inhumanity, even though after Civil War they seen as

sub-human. In other words, the policy of segregation ensured its power that people of Blackrace would remain ignorant, poor and submissive and under the influence and power of the white people and also below in order of privilege and power.

Arkansas grieves of segregation and Angelou Maya's world completely is confined in Blacks it was also very difficult for her to imagine about white race and how they look like. They seemed supernatural, weird powers and glorious possessions which Blacks do not possess.

Segregation witnessed biased education service for Black race as compared with white race students in America, separate educational institutes for Blacks and whites and Black girls were not privileged in education as compared to that of white girls.

## **2. Methodology**

The Research Methodology of this study is qualitative research and paradigm is descriptive and explanatory so qualitative data textual analysis has been used for this research.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Eclectic model of Mill's (2008) and Van Dijk ((2006) has been used to analyze the poem. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) traces and addresses social problems, Power discursive, ideological, historical, text and society are mediated.

Critical analysis of conversation is very different from an analysis of news reports in the press or of lessons and teaching at school. It follows certain conceptual and theoretical framework or analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Follows notions as ideology, power, hegemony, dominance, gender, race, class, discrimination, interests, and social order.

## **3. Model of Analysis**

To analyze the data properly, an eclectic model is framed out of two models, Mills' model (2008) and Van Dijk socio-cognitive framework (2006) by applying different strategies which will highlight the elements mentioned above. Those strategies are as under:

- Rhetorical strategies
- Semantic strategies
- Metaphor
- Simile
- Presupposition and implication (i.e., contextual assumptions embedded within a sentence or a phrase. Things that are assumed, but not stated directly)

### **3.1 Introduction of the Author**

Maya Angelou a very famous and influential literary personality of America. She is the most celebrated historian, poet, novelist, educator, memoirist, producer, actress, dramatist, filmmaker and civil rights activist. She was born on 4th April, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was raised in Arkansas. There Angelou faced racial brutality of discrimination, never the less she captivated unchanging African-American faith and values of family, culture and Community.

At the age of 14, she dropped out of the study and desired to become female cable car conductor. After the tragic end of Civil Rights movement in America Maya Angelou wrote I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, she was inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Luther was a leader in civil rights movement, Baptist minister, in very early age of his life he became a civil rights activist, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1968 he was assassinated in the city of Tennessee Memphis.

# *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem*

In 1977 Luther was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and in 2004, Congressional Gold Medal. She was given a dozen of achievement awards, around fifty honorary degrees. In 1993 she recited "*On the Pulse of Morning*" her poem at Bill Clinton's Presidential inauguration ceremony, she left this inconstant world leaving millions of her lovers across the globe on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

## **3.2 Poem: *I know why the caged bird sings***

Title of poem itself is explanatory, poet feels same pain and misery what one feels in victimized, discriminated and segregated due to being just Black race, Maya Angelou protesting against racism through her poem by using metaphors such words like free bird and caged bird because what sensitive souls feel and only sensitive souls can understand miseries, pains of the sufferings. (Title of the poem)

*A free bird leaps on the back  
Of the wind and floats downstream  
Till the current ends and dips his wing  
In the orange sun's rays  
And dares to claim the sky.*

The caged bird symbolizes the people from the black race that were discriminated by the white society who is symbolized by the free bird. As birds are free to fly, Maya uses free bird metaphor for white race, free from confinement of racism and all kinds of biasness, white people attain what, whenever they wish but for caged bird nothing possible because they have certain restrictions to enjoy and feel that of whites. White race as free birds attain all the fringes and benefits from east to west and from north to south from dawn to dusk whatever is possible, they achieve and possess and claim that all these opportunities belong to them and no other is there to win race to grab opportunities. (Stanza-1)

*But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage  
Can seldom see through his bars of rage  
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
So he opens his throat to sing.*

Using word "But" Maya believes though Blacks are restricted in the boundaries of racism, slavery, even though in these restrictions they rarely see sky, enjoy nature because they (Blacks) restricted (wings clipped, feet tied) in the boundaries of racism, caste and gender discrimination, imposed by the white race of people. (Stanza-2)

*The caged bird sings with a fearful trill  
Of things unknown but longed for still  
And his tune is heard on the distant hill for  
The caged bird sings of freedom.*

Blacks talk about their rights, freedom in fear but are fully aware about the consequences Angelou Maya is willing to break all restriction, shackles and obstacles imposed by the society of white people which is thin local walls of gender, caste, color and racism. She wants having desire for fresh air breath in environment equal for all races, caste, and gender for whites and blacks for men and women. Angelou yearns this would be barrier (restriction, obstacle) free world, where everyone equally enjoys their happiness and beauties of nature. (Stanza-3)

*The free bird thinks of another breeze  
And the trade winds soft through  
The sighing trees*

*And the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright  
Lawn and he names the sky his own.*

White race people after getting and enjoying earlier opportunities desire for other chances and surpass from one to others and yearn for greater chances and opportunities as early bird catches the worm and whites claim or state that they own all the sky, while Blacks putting back in cage of racism, gender, identity and set obstacles for compete. (Stanza-4)

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
So he opens his throat to sing.*

Angelou tries to present her identity in her own native country, America. She says this is the struggle of all blacks of United States. Shepunders blacks have losttheir identity in mist of confusion, caste, gender, racism i.e , like caged bird they have no any direction ,blacks live just in day dreams and she cries to telltheir sufferings and conditions, miseries of the blacks Negros to people of rest of the world. The identity's theme is proven from the openingline of Caged Bird which predicts Angelou's own personalinsights. Angelou wants utter to rest of the globe about their (Blacks) identity crisis. (Stanza-5)

*The caged bird sings with  
A fearful trill of things unknown  
But longed for still and his  
Tune is heard on the distant hill  
For the caged bird sings of freedom.*

Caged bird (Black) people talk about their rights, liberty and freedom but they are fully aware about the consequences as Martin Luther, Malcom X, and Abraham Lincoln faced killed to death just because they talked about civil rights, freedom, equality and fraternity for every individual without discrimination of caste, race, gender, religion etc. Even being in a state of fear blacks talk, sings about their rights and people across the globe hear their voice which definitely is voice /song of rights and freedom. (Stanza-6)

#### **4. Conclusion:**

Angelou was a great poet and personality of 20<sup>th</sup> century, she witnessed discriminations of race and identity crisis in her native homeland, for which she dedicated her life for America. She efforts her best to fight against racial discrimination, identity crisis.

She says:

*You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise. (Still I Rise, PH)*

She finds herself as hope for black people for men and women and she accepts the gifts which her ancestors handed over to herand she fights the case and to rise from racism, discrimination and identity crisis.

She addresses repressions which Blacks face in the America, Blacks who face racism, racial prejudice, sexism, sexual abuse, Classism, segregation, and displacement.

# *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem*

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