



Molestation and Assultation in Coming of Age Novels : A Study of Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar and Maya Angelou's I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

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Abstract :- A coming of age novel also known as Bildungsroman, is all concerned about the protagonist's voyage from being a child to being an adult. It is a journey that brings a young person from naïve to wise, from visionary to realist, and from immature to mature. The way of the protagonist, or main character, can differ from story to story. Probably he had to go to war, or lost his mother, or experienced extreme injustice, or went on some great worldwide journey. There will usually be in agony and aching along the way - developing isn't easy. Nonetheless, no matter the narrative direction, the result is that the hero grows from his experiences and in some way loses the childhood purity that helps steer him towards adulthood. This research paper aims to elucidate the molestation and assultation of the characters in the Coming of Age Novels. We can find lots of examples in the history of English Literature where the protagonist of coming of age novel suffers throughout his/her life. They are compelled to confront uncertainties, take accountability for their actions, come to terms with the unreasonable behaviour of the world, and more.

Keywords:- Sexual Assault, Development, Psychological Condition, Society, Sufferings, Disillusionment, Racism

Introduction:- Sylvia Plath and Maya Angelou both are the famous writers of English literature. Their works mainly focus on the theme of love, music, discrimination, racism, struggle, death, destruction, mental violence and disillusionment. Plath is prominently recognised as an American poet, novelist, and short-story writer. She is associated with expanding the genre of confessional poetry and is best remembered for two of her published anthologies, *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965), as well as *The Bell Jar*, a semi-autobiographical novel published instantly before her death in 1963. The *Collected Poems* were published in 1981, which contained formerly unpublished works. For this collection Plath was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1982, bringing her the fourth to attain this honor posthumously. Plath was suffering from depression for most of her adult life, and was treated multiple times with electroconvulsive therapy. She committed suicide in 1963. On the other hand Maya Angelou was also an American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, many books of poetry, and is attributed with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received several awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best perceived for her sequel of seven autobiographies, which emphasis on her childhood and earlier adult incidents. The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), explains of her life up to the age of 17 and gave rise to her international glory and recognition.

The common thing in both of them is that they always write about their own lives experience. In her work *The Bell Jar* Plath portrays a thinly veiled autobiography, chronicles of a young female's mental deterioration and eventual healing, while also analyzing societal expectations of females in the 1950s. Esther Greenwood is the main character of *The Bell Jar*. The plot of the novel proceeds with her downfall into and return from -madness. *The Bell Jar* tells an abnormal coming-of-age story: rather than suffering an optimistic, developed education in the paths of the world, concluding in graduation into adulthood, Esther learns from madness and graduates not from school but a mental institution.

“Look what can happen in this country, they’d say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for 19 years, so poor she can’t afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car. Only I wasn’t steering anything, not even myself. I bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolley-bus.”(Internet)

The emotion of numbness that Esther explains here is the kernel of the madness that will quickly surpass her. Ultimately, the rift between societal possibilities and her own emotions and understandings comes to be so large that she thinks she can no longer live. Esther behaves unconventionally in response to the society in which she resides. Society anticipates Esther to be frequently friendly and joyful, but her dark, depressing behaviour avoids perkiness. She becomes distracted by the enactment of the Rosenbergs and the cadavers and pickled fetuses she sees at Buddy's medical school because her brooding temperament can find no reasonable means of manner.

“ Instead of the world being divided up into Catholics and Protestants or Republics and Democrats or white men and black men or even men and women, I saw the world divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another. I thought a spectacular change would come over me when I crossed the boundary line.” (7.50-1)

These lines reflect Esther's naïveté about lovemaking. It's not apparent actually what kind of "sensational change" she was determining, but it's fascinating to see her use the same speech about losing her virginity as she does about suicide. In fact, every time Esther strives a sexual meeting in the novel certainly ends in her receiving pain. Society expects Esther to remain a virgin until her marriage to a nice boy, but Esther sees the duplicity of this law and decides that like Buddy, she needs to lose her virginity before the marriage. She undertakes a loveless sexual clash because society does not provide her with an outlet for healthful sexual investigation. Plath distinguishes Esther's understandably bizarre attitude from her madness.

Somewhat, madness tumbles on her, an illness as unpreventable and harmful as cancer.

Primarily because of her mental illness, Esther acts selfishly. She does not regard the effect her suicide endeavors have on her mother or her friends. Her horrifying world occupies her feelings entirely. Though inexperienced, Esther is also attentive, poetic, and kind. Plath feels passion toward her protagonist, but she is unswerving in portraying Esther's self-absorption, turmoil, and naïveté. The novel ends with a reborn Esther about to encounter the assessment council, which will determine if she can go home.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is one of the most famous works of Maya Angelou. It was first published in 1969. It is an autobiography depicting the young and early life of American novelist and poet Maya Angelou. The first in a seven-volume series, it is a Bildungsroman that demonstrates how vitality of character and a love of literature can assist overcome discrimination and trauma. The novel starts when Maya was three year old sent to

Stamps, Arkansas, with her elder brother to live with their grandmother and ends when Maya becomes pregnant at the age of 16. In the course of *Caged Bird*, Maya changes from a sufferer of discrimination with an inferiority complex into a self-possessed, dignified young woman able of reacting to racism. In the introduction of the novel we find that , Maya is an intelligent young girl suffering not just from the typical pains related with being black and women in America, but also from the trauma of expatriation.

"A light shade had been pulled down between the Black community and all things white, but one could see through it enough to develop a fear-admiration-contempt for the white "things"—white folks' cars and white glistening houses and their children and their women. But above all, their wealth that allowed them to waste was the most enviable." (p.53)

Clever and creative, Maya however thinks that people believe her unfairly due to her unwieldy image. Feeling misunderstood, she dreams of that she is a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl imprisoned in a “black ugly dream” and will shortly wake up and disclose her true individuality . Maya illustrates her social and domestic deportation as “unnecessary insults” on top of the common anxieties related with developing as a black girl in the segregated American South. The South presents Maya with three enormous impediments: white prejudice, black powerlessness, and female domination. In addition to these broad societal obstacles, Maya endures many personal traumas in her lifetime as well. Her parents reject her and Bailey when Maya is three, and her sense of abandonment and her desire for physical affection lead to further clashes. Five years later, she must leave the only residence she has known and live in a different city where she strives relief in Mr. Freeman, who assault and rapes her. At age ten, having already witnessed insensitive whites mistreating the people she adores most, such as Momma, Maya starts to encounter racism presently. Mrs. Cullinan strives to rename and demean her, and the racist, white dentist Dr. Lincoln says he would rather glue his hand in a dog’s mouth than behave toward Maya’s problem. In San Francisco,

Maya’s difficulty about sexuality comes to be fused when she becomes mother at age sixteen. Angelou’s autobiography reports her accomplishments and prosperity as well. With Bailey’s and Momma’s relentless love and later motive from Vivian, Daddy Clidell, and various role prototypes and friends, Maya gains the strength to withstand complications and understand her full ability. She discovers to ignore discrimination energetically and ultimately ensures a role as the first black conductor aboard a San Francisco streetcar, which is probably her crowning success in the novel. She also realizes to ignore her own deteriorations with confidence and esteem, never

ignoring her remorse about telling an untruth in court and, in the Los Angeles junkyard, understanding the desire to believe not just in terms of black and white, but in terms of society in all its multiplicity.

“The quality of strength lined with tenderness is an unbeatable combination, as are intelligence and necessity when unblunted by formal education.”(Internet)

She demonstrates the strength of compassion as she attempts to find optimistic personalities in Big Bailey and to express sympathy toward Dolores. She stays insecure, extremely about her sexuality and behavior, but ultimately she learns to trust her own capacities, as we watch in the final scene, when she feels that she will be able to look after for her newborn son.

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