

**A FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM OF MAYA ANGELOU’S POEM
“PHENOMENAL WOMAN”**

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Abstract

This research is aimed to know meaning and Feminism in Maya Angelou’s poems especially in the title “Phenomenal Woman”. In order to discover the poem, the study was conducted by using feminism theory. It focuses on words, lines, and stanzas of the poems. The research was conducted with the following statement of problem: (1) What is the dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou’s poem? (2) What are the reasons of using feminism perspective in Maya Angelou’s poem? (3) How are the images of blank woman described in Maya Angelou’s poem?. The research design of this study is descriptive qualitative method because the researcher does not use statistical numerical but is requires descriptive analysis of the object. The research is conducted by descriptive qualitative and and technique of analysis data in this research are reading the whole poems, interpreting poems, and making the conclusion because the result of the data is word, sentence, and language. After collecting the data from the poem, the researcher analyzes put the poem into some groups which relates to the problem focuses. Based on the research questions mentioned above, the result of the study are as follows. First, the researcher concludes that the dominant type of feminism in Maya Angelou’s poem is Radical Feminism because discrimination toward black women are related to the bad history of black people. Second, the reason of using feminism perspective by the poet is the image of her bad life experiences. The last result is the image of black woman in Maya Angelou’s poem which shows the discrimination toward woman in her era. The result of the study can be used as a reference in the research literature itself in educational institution and so on. This study gives significance for the researcher to understand and provide more knowledge about feminism.

Key Words: Feminism, black woman

Introduction

Literary work is the result of the expression of feelings and describes imagination of the author’s. Literature is a literary work which there is a beautiful art that comes from human life. Jones (1968:1), states that literature is simply another way we can experience the world around us through our imagination. It means that literary works closely related to life. Life journey is often recorded in literature. However,

literature is not only a portrait of life. Literary works are often an expression of a person’s feeling which reflect the reality of life. As a literary work, literature has a beauty that encourages a person to read and enjoy. There are some literary works in this world, such as: nove,poe,m, and drama.

Poetry is one of the literary work which has characteristic. The characteristic which make it different from another literary work. Poetry is

written in different ways. Poetry is the result of human creativity that is manifested through the arrangement words which have meaning. Poetry is also composed of diverse elements variety. These elements include a form of words, shapes, patterns of rhyme, rhythm, ideas, or issues gained significance in the life of the poet and life to be conveyed to the reader, listener, through techniques and specific aspects. The language which uses in poetry is also different. The poem reader can not understand the meaning of the poem easily because every person will have different understanding about one poem. According to Wayne Shumaker (1965: 10), poetry is “the idea or mind of the poets are flowing as a media to express a certain kinds of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts”. For poets, a poem is a media to express their feelings based on the situation, condition, and imagination. All poets have their own characteristic in written. Some of them usually use nature as the object of their poem. Some of them also use love, affection, and friendship as the object. On the other hand, there are some poets who use their life experience in their written. Whether it is good or bad experience in their life. The poets sometimes use poem as the social criticism in the society in that era. In this study, the researcher chooses poetry to be analyzed because poetry is a literary work full of imagination which is

very entertains. Nowadays, there are so many poems which is written by using discrimination and segregation as the subject because of the condition which appears in the society. Beside, there are some women poets who write poems by using feminism touches. For example, the image of woman in the society, the position of women amongs the men, and the discriminations which occur in the women’s life. Some people try to describe that theme by using feminism perspective. Based on Bhasin and Khan (1995:5), Feminism is an awareness of women who are under man’s domination in many aspects and set of action to resist it. Feminism is a theory which explain about woman emancipation in some aspect such as politic, economy, and another social aspect where women are not allowed to take part. In many people prespective, this is because of the stereotype of men and women in the sex site. Maya Angelou is an African-American poet, novelist, educator, dramatist, actress, producer, filmmaker, historian, dancer, and civil rights activist. She is one of the most famous and influential voices in the United States. Maya Angelou wrote poems about segregation and discrimination toward African-American in the United States and some of her poems talk about identity and the issue of racism. Maya Angelou is one of woman

writers who uses feminism approach in her work. In her poems, Angelou expresses about the woman during racial discrimination, segregation, and male domination. That is why the researcher chooses Maya Angelou's works to be analyzed. As the title, In this study the researcher explains the feminism which explain by Maya Angelou by using the historical and biographical approaches related to the history of discrimination in that era, especially for black women and also the poet's life. The reason of the researcher for choosing these Maya Angelou's works because these poems are about women discrimination and those three poems are the phenomenal poems of Maya Angelou. In this thesis, the researcher wants to analyze them from a woman viewpoint and focus this research on feminism literary criticism.

Methodology

The Form and Strategy of the Study

The strategy of used in this study was descriptive qualitative. The research is conducted by descriptive qualitative because the result of the data analyzed is in descriptive phenomenon such as words, sentence and language. In this research, the researcher will describe the feminism which appears and the image of black woman in poem "Phenomenal Woman". The researcher on this

study uses historical and biographical approaches. They are used to compare between Maya Angelou's poems which consist of feminism with the biography of Maya Angelou and what happen in her era. By using this approaches, the researcher will know the reason of the poet used the feminism aspect in her works.

Discussion

In this poem, Angelou tried to send a message to the readers to appraise themselves although their physical appearance is not perfect. Maya Angelou published "Phenomenal Woman" in 1978. Similar to the poem "Still I Rise", this poem was also written on second waves because the second waves is begun on 1960. That was why in this poem found some liberal feminism which shows the woman capability and power.

the researcher also found marxist and socialist feminism in this poem because according to the time this poem published, Women's liberation grew out and provided alliances with Marxist and Socialist feminisms in areas such as the criticism of the dual workload for women working outside as well as inside the home, the demand of equal pay for equal work, and a breakdown of the gendered division of the educational system and the labor market.

One most often defines the word as meaning extraordinary and

impressive, and Angelou was certainly reveling in being an extraordinary and impressive woman. In every stanza, she showed that she was always proud of her part of the body. Angelou addressed this poem to those women and men who believed that being beautiful meant having slim body, thin lips, and small hips.

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.

I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's (Phenomenal Woman, 1st stanza)

Maya Angelou as the poet and the speaker in this poem described a woman as a great woman and has high confident. The reader could see in every line of this poem showed that Maya was so proud of herself because she always said that she was a phenomenal woman.

I'm a woman Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman, That's me.

(Phenomenal Woman, 3rd stanza)

In those lines, Maya Angelou tries to explain the readers that she is not beautiful like a model. Although she does not have perfect body, she can be confident, strong, and brave. Her power and confidence become the inner beauty that makes her phenomenal. Her knowledge and expression shows that she is confident. Maya Angelou also tells

how the society see her, how the men see her, and how the history see her as the black race. It is showed by the third stanza :

Men themselves have wondered

What they see in me.

They try so much

But they can't touch

My inner mystery.

(Phenomenal Woman, 3rd stanza)

Tose lines showed that when men try to understand why some black women are so confident to take such drastic action, they never really understand why. Men believed that sincemajority of black women did not take action to try and change their inequality that it was crazy to believe only one woman would take such action.

Maya Angelou also tries to show her inner beauty by caring to each other as a woman and mother below.

It's in the click of my heels,

The bend of my hair,

the palm of my hand,

The need for my care.

(Phenomenal Woman, 4th stanza)

Angelou tries to show that as a woman she has positive side. In line "It's in the click of my heels", Maya Angelou wanted to show her confidence as a woman. Meanwhile in line "The palm of my hand" showed her caring to others. From the whole stanza the researcher concluded that being a phenomenal

woman was not determined by the beautiful face or good looking but it was about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the every line in stanzas, the researcher found the answers of the research problems. Firstly, In poem “Phenomenal Woman” the dominant type was Liberal Feminism because the theme of the poem was about the capability, beauty, and power of black woman.

Second, the researcher found the reason of using feminism perspective by the poet. To find out the reasons, the researcher used biographical approach. After reading the autobiography of Maya Angelou the researcher found that her poems theme were influenced by three reasons. The reasons were Maya Angelou was born as a black race, her parents divorced when she was 3 years old, and she was sexually abused by her mother’s boyfriend when she was 8 years old.

The last finding of this thesis was the image of black woman in one of the Maya Angelou’s poems. In poem “Phenomenal Woman”, Angelou showed that being a woman is not determined by the beautiful face or

good looking but it is about how a woman become a good person and proud of herself.

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