

**RESISTANCE TO REPRESENTATION: EXPLORATION OF SELF
IN SELECTED WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis titled “Resistance to Representation: Exploration of Self in Selected Women Autobiographies” is an authentic record of my research carried out under the guidance of Dr. Fr. Babu K.T., Research Supervisor, Research and Postgraduate Department of English, St. Aloysius College, Thrissur, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition.

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Dedication

To all who augmented my intellectual and affective domains.

and

to the ones in the fringes who crave for a central space, at every realm.

List of Abbreviations

Black Panther Party : BPP

Critical Race Theory : CRT

Black Liberation Movement : BLM

Federal Bureau of Investigation : FBI.

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Abstract

The notion of self comprises physical, affective, and psychological aspects within it. Each and every occurrence in a person's life has an impact on self. On the contrary, the self affected in that way facilitates a person to alter, modify or add to the existing thought patterns as well as actions. Thus, a person's self is profoundly amended by her/his space and experiences in a social system. Society or culture seems to fix a person in a predetermined framework beyond which she/he can't act for any cause and the fixed mould acts as a stumbling stone to the self. The preset framework is constituted by a strong blend of gender, race and power with which each person is forced to be related in a social system. Self has a major role in fixative positioning of one in a social/cultural system. It is the self which determines whether to conform to predetermined class, race, and gender rules or to perform beyond them.

Race and ethnicity act as a crucial component in the formation of self. They have a deep impact on the self by affecting people's feeling of belonging to a specific culture or social group. In the case of people who are being treated in a discriminatory or unjust way, it casts a detrimental effect on their sense of self. As a result, their actions and thought patterns will be in line with the commonly accepted racial modes. But it requires a special vigor from the minority group to overthrow the detrimental effect of the age-old discrimination and channelize their actions in accordance with one's own will. Thus, an inviolable self is formed.

The resolute Afro-American activists Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Maya Angelou never allow the discriminations in name of gender and race to halt the self. Instead, they come out of all the racial and gendered ambits through their might. Society, which always forces people to behave in tune with the preset patterns,

considers this subverted performance as dangerous for their existence. But nothing holds these strong women back from their journey of self-exploration. The aim of this study is to expose the revolutionary self and life of these Afro-American woman activists in the historical background of the U.S. implicit racism. And to put into light the Afro-American woman activists who were/are not much discussed because of their interrogative approach and transgressing actions against white supremacy. These Afro-American women activists stand as a symbol of resistance to strive and be triumphant in making their space in society. The life narratives selected for the study are *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), *Angela Davis: An autobiography* (1974), the autobiography series of Maya Angelou: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Singin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), *Mom and Me and Mom* (2013).

The thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the conceptions of resistance. The variant dimensions of 'representation' has been discussed. The second chapter Life Narratives: "Reflecting and Reviewing Lives" centers on the way in which life of the author gets explored through life narratives like autobiography. The third chapter "Devising Self out of Resistance: From Subsistence to Selfhood" explores the development of black women self as they explore different vistas of struggle and subjugation. It deals with the different aspects of self. The development of self in a person has analyzed in the light of theories of psychology- Gender Schema Theory, Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura- Self-efficacy. It focuses on the way the concept of self and self-exploration is getting revealed and realized through the genre of autobiography. Self as a by- product of intersections of race, class and gender is scrutinized in this chapter. The fourth chapter "Redefining

Realness: A Re-presentation of Racist Consciousness” studies race as a decisive factor in forming a person’s psyche and thus its effect on the selfhood. Critical Race Theory (CRT) Erik. H. Erikson’s psychological theory of identity and the role of familial or other personal relationships as a strong backbone for subverting commonplace notions and actions on the basis of race is being depicted. The chapter moves through theories of representation. It focuses on representation of gender and racial representation. The Afro-American women activists had to resist all the societal and cultural forces which tried to subjugate them in the name of race and gender, and finally conjured up to ‘represent’ the value of self in struggling against adverse life situations.

The fifth chapter entitled “Beyond Performativity: Space and Performance Bridge the Conceptual Divide” details how the transgressed gender roles make these activists’ life at risk and the negative image society and media cast upon them. The conception of binary oppositions in connection with gender roles always put forward a boundary for one’s actions in a social structure which extends its foundation in compartmentalization. Society put forth a normative structure of gender role by means of repeated compliance to social/cultural norms on gender performance and thus ‘naturalizing’ them. In contrast to the commonplace predetermined gender dynamics, these activist women found it functional to subvert the gender boundaries in ‘performing’ their identity.

The concluding chapter explains the unique success of these Afro-American activists in their search of self. It voices forth the unstated aspiration of woman and shares in common a note of braveness and perseverance to assert their self and thus establish their valor even in unpropitious situations. It depicts the metamorphosis of a Afro-American woman self to activist self which results in changing status quo as well

as gaining individual identity among the other Black women. How the Black women activism has been overlooked by most historians though their activism begins simply from refusal to adjust to the systems of race and patriarchy prevalent in the U.S. then, forms the core of this chapter.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“One ever feels his two-ness an American, a Negro; two soul, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder” (Moyo 194-195).

Afro-Americans remain to be the racial minority group in United States. Many foreign-born Blacks, biracial individuals also come under the term African American. While analyzing the history of black resistance against the atrocities of white supremacy, it can be seen that 1526 was the year in which the very first group of African people arrived as slaves in America. They came as slaves of the San Miguel de Guadalupe colony. With them began the African American resistance in distinct forms as and when their obstacles transformed from slavery to lynching, discrimination, segregation, inequality in the contexts of gender and racial profiling, mass incarceration, police brutality etc. The modes of resistance during slavery were also different. Some chose to fight, and the others chose to flee. The fighting group developed into protestors, and they conducted slave revolts. But the other group of blacks fled to free-states, countries, and some committed suicide as they felt suicide was better than slavery. The African American struggle for justice has long history.

It was by the middle of 1600s, the status of Africans in the U.S. changed into slaves. Legal slave trades were there until 1808. By that time, the Africans brought to America was more than 500,000 in number. They were assigned with many types of physical labours like work in cotton or tobacco plantations, all sorts of domestic service in the households of their masters. Apart from that, indentured service was in prevalence. That is, some individuals were hired out or rented to do some other work

and the masters of the slaves got payment for the work. Atlantic slave trade again added 3.5 million enslaved African Americans. It was President Abraham Lincoln who signed the Emancipation Proclamation during the American Civil War in 1863. The proclamation made free the slaves who seceded from the Union. African Americans felt elevated of their status in the nation, and they began establishing civic associations, educational institutions, and communities for themselves. They began to construct their own space. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, public demonstrations and self-defending organizations became widespread. Amidst these, the emergence of Jim Crow Laws in 1890s was a severe blow for the Blacks. It made the Blacks further segregated as it divided social space for Whites and Blacks separately. The African Americans followed these Laws compliantly. Legalized racial oppressive actions were increasing on daily basis. Small acts of abolitions and protests began to sprout. As a counter action to these racial discriminations and oppressions, the Civil Rights Movement came into prevalence from 1954 which lasted till 1968. Lyndon B. Johnson agreed on the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was beneficial in banning segregations in public accommodations, labour unions, employment, and other facilities. Blacks were given inclusiveness in politics through The Voting Right Act of 1965. Further fights for equality of opportunity in social, economic, and political realms took place through the active efforts of the Black Power Movements which spanned from 1966 to 1975. Through these struggles and protests blacks won liberty apparently. Remnants of slavery and subjugations continue to exist. Their staunch resistance lowered the pace of their work down and as a result they were termed weak and docile, inhuman, and arrogant. In 20th century, demonstrations for civil rights and non-violent ways of protest were in vogue.

Despite the progress in their social stature, African Americans still undergo challenges by systemic racism in various arenas like criminal justice, education, health care, social positions etc. To retort against all these challenges, forms of Black resistance play a significant role even nowadays. One of the new waves of Civil Rights Movement is the Black Lives Matter Movement. Until the Blacks equally enjoy the lives in U.S., as the Whites do, and until the Black and White skin colours stop changing the mindset of the people, the resistance will be going on. It is noteworthy that most of the basic economy of U.S. was built by exploiting Black labour and the role of Blacks in U.S. But how do Blacks become marginalized? and why the protests of the Blacks to make a respectable living in U.S. is still in vogue? are questions that began a long way back from the days of slavery and are still going on. Policing the Black Americans has strong undercurrents that relate to racial and gendered stereotypes in U.S. social structure. The Blacks have been viciously treated under the U.S. police force for petty charges. Racial biases underscore all these White actions. Black policing has a futuristic impact. The Blacks under police custody suffer physical as well as mental tortures in name of race, in case of women, in name of gender. Apart from that the degraded imprecise images of these Black people are being disseminated through mainstream media, even as mouthpiece of government officials. These manipulated stories on the crimes committed by Blacks are so believable as they are made believable for the public as they emanate from state authorities' sources. The futuristic impact is that once come out of police custody, these Blacks seem abandoned by family and other close circles; they themselves must hide from the public because of their subdued images propagated. They must undergo 'drapetomania'. Drapetomania is termed as a mental infirmity hypothesized by an American physician Samuel A Cartwright in 1851. *Oxford: A Dictionary of*

Psychology defines it as an uncontrollable mental urge of the Blacks to flee from their White masters or from any White systems of ascendancy. In short, it represents an individual's strong yearning to come out of slavery and the impulse for autonomy. As an alternative for drapetomaniac strategies, the self-empowered Black women activists took a standpoint to be rebels against any modes of white dominant actions. They thwarted the base of scientific racism through their subversive actions which turns out to be strong disciplines of resistance.

Oxford Dictionary defines the term 'resistance' as a refusal to comply with or to accept something, or the ability not to be affected by something adversely. Thus, 'resistance' indicates a two-fold phenomenon. One is intrinsic and the other is extrinsic. In its intrinsic way it keeps a shield to be mentally and emotionally unaffected by external opposing forces. In its extrinsic way, it refuses to go in pact with external forces which are not in line with their own ideologies and individual freedom. The word resistance comes in its full swing as it is used in the context of segregation or desegregation. Resistance was the mighty weapon in the hands of the Black agency. To acknowledge the underlying power in Black people and to assert Blackness as a socially as well as politically capable factor, resistance played a significant role. Black resistance elaborated as a movement of Black people against all subjugating forces emanated from White dominating authority.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, resistance and oppression are in a dialectical relationship. That means, resistance is always formed against oppression or oppressive forces simultaneously and that resistance is structured by oppression itself. Resistance can further lead to oppression (248). Resistance can be political, social, and cultural in response to the type of oppression. And in cases of multifaceted

oppression, intersectional resistance takes place. There is collective resistance in response to the oppression which emanates primarily from an individual agency.

Resistance and protest of Black against the White supremacy take its root from the American social history. United States has constructed much of their wealth by utilizing the labour of African American. These Afro-Americans were enslaved under the whites and a majority of the enslaved tried to cope up with the hardships they underwent, and a rare part of the group strived to undermine the system of oppression and slavery even through subtle ways. And such a small group kept handing over the baton to the coming generations. Thus, the subtle ways of response against the oppressive power grew into resistance and protests.

The blatant manifestations of the White supremacy can be seen there in South Africans as well as among the Blacks in United States during the second half of twentieth century. An action will have a reaction: These supremacist attitudes and actions were often challenged by Blacks through protests. They stood strongly against legalized racial segregation and discriminations.

The African National Congress (ANC) was making campaigns of civil disobedience against unjust laws of U.S government. ANC conducted boycotts, non-cooperation with White agendas of removing Black to new places. There was a law which insisted Black man to carry pass for travelling. As the Black protested the Pass Laws, it resulted in the massacre of 69 protestors of Sharpeville in 1960 (Savage 181). The resistance of blacks was getting lashed in these ways. The U.S. government oppressed all the protests and resistant actions and organizations. ANC was banned. As the unarmed protest did not find fruit, the resistance moved a level higher, as ANC leaders entered an armed epoch in collaborating with the Communist Party in South Africa. Non-violence became a part of Civil Rights activity only after World War II

with a Philip Randolph march on Washington movement which belongs to 1941-1945 and the founding and first sit-ins of the CORE (Committee on Racial Equality) (Kersten 14). A conservative mood aroused in U.S. by 1952 because of which the Black leaders became resistant to endorse protests and resistant actions. This was the outcome of their fear of backlash that had the power to hinder the progress of the reform tactic which was gradually getting realized on legal levels. These were hints supporting decisions from the country on the constitutional rights of Afro-Americans.

The focus on non-violent modes of resistance came into prevalence after the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955- 56. But later in 1960 –1961, the trust in passive resistance lost its hope and, through Martin Luther King direct actions commenced. Then the ANC accepted armed struggle in opposition to non-violent ways of resistance. Though Gandhian influence of non-violence was there in Africans, mass opposition of civil obedience and boycotts acted as modes of resistance. It created impacts and resulted in social polarization. Thus, non-violent campaigns and social protests became modes of resistance through which the Black status was uplifted.

The term ‘resistance’ is attributed with two distinct meanings in this thesis. One is ‘resistance’ by the Blacks as a mode of protest against racist segregations; and the other, non-lenient attitude against White authoritative perspectives. And the life narratives themselves work as resistance against the peripheral and hidden portrayals of Black lives in the U.S. Autobiography tries to bring an exposure to the shadowed lives of the activists. The Black, the Black women in particular, used the mode of personal narrative to unfold the pent-up frustrated attitudes of them and degrading approaches of Whites at the initial stage of slavery. The common practice is that the manifestation through words like culture and cultural, or other literary expressions are self-formed by the grand narratives by subsiding the life narratives of the ones with

subjugated existence in society. Such 'othered' voices may become very vague in their prevalence and act as counter narratives to the grand narratives of dominant sections of society. But later, life narratives came to be exploration of America's political and social positions in certain matters of racism and prejudices. As ages passed, Black women became more empowered-, self-empowered, and they began to explicate their self-efficacy in life-writing. Thus, the Black women life- narratives became powerful enough to enrich the concept of strong selfhood in other Blacks. Autobiography as a resistance gives the authors the power to recognize one's self in comparison with the 'others' and thus resulted in an understanding of the plurality of human identity. Thus, autobiography acts as a resistance, and it leads to representation – a detailed portrayal or exposure of the 'othering' faced by the marginalized. It will certainly result in centering the 'other' in that community which will result in a transformation from resistance to representation.

The silent endurance of Black subjugation, in course of time, paved way for non-violent resistance, then violent resistance and autobiography acted as a shift from resistance, of these Black people on the margins of social existence, to representation. The voice of the Blacks was not being heard or represented through White narratives. African American people's decades of sufferings and exploitations found expression in Black writings, especially in autobiographies. The real picture of the U.S. society was portrayed clearly through the life narratives of these activist women. The U.S. legal system and society were apparently promising liberty and equality for Blacks, even the basic rights were denied for them. As a genre, African American life-narratives emerged in eighteenth century and it gets continuum in the nineteenth century with the introduction of slave- narrative. The core subject matter of African American autobiography was the problems of racial exploitation and ethnic hatred.

And through these sensitizing accounts, African American autobiographies took its esteemed position among the mainstream literature of U.S.

Instead of exaggerated or nullified portrayals of racial segregations in literature, autobiography presents a factual and un-mediated expression of the writer. Thus, by refusing the mainstream White portrayal of Black experiences through a second or third person narrative, the genuine direct factual voices of Blacks in autobiography act as a significant tool of resistance towards the goal of social and political representations.

The individualistic Black life narratives together perpetrate the purpose of exposing the collective suffering of Black people under discriminations. Thus, it ended up as a corrective tool in cultural politics and in deconstructing the social hegemonies of power as the basics of skin colours. Thus, Black life narratives acted as a verbal tool from subjugated existence of Black masses to representation.

The term 'representation' can be mainly defined in two distinct ways. *Oxford Dictionary of Language* defines it as an action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone and the state of being so represented. And the other variant layers of meaning are that of a portrayal and description of something or someone in a specific way (Representation, N.1 Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary). The thesis takes the two layers of semantic connections in distinct ways. The Afro-American activists excelled in their act of standing and fighting for the cause of Black community. They devoted their whole life for the uplift of the Black masses especially Black women who were under double subjugations: One, in the matter of race and, the other in the name of gender.

The second layer of meaning of the word 'representation' suggests presentational power of Black people as second to the Whites. As deprived of power

and knowledge in a White society, Blacks were passive in existence. They are people who are marginalized only because of the pigmentation of skin and that added some more darkness to their life. This categorized presentation was resisted strongly in its root level by the Black community itself. They resisted representing the 'assigned', 'predetermined' ways of depicting themselves.

In its initial sense, Afro-Americans represent or stand as a symbol of strong survivors who directly or boldly faced all the challenges of White authority even at the hands of judicial system. But in its second sense, the Afro-American activists question the hierarchical structure which constructed by the cultural/social hegemony by placing Afro-Americans at the bottom of the social hierarchy only based on their race and skin colour. Afro-Americans are totally resisting such a sort of representation which makes black voices and stories much more misrepresented or devalued.

Representation is in that sense, a re-presentation of the original Afro-Americans' austere hardships and sufferings in a rather light or softened manner in the mainstream literature and media. As Stuart Hall's Perception Theory propagates, dominant reading intermingling the dominant value and beliefs in U.S. culture and from the perspective of the major sectional interest ie., White-preferred understandings of the world perception happen (Hall 128). Some meanings are in a closure, some are misrepresented as the dominant class has the power to steer the meaning-making process. The autobiographies of Black people especially, Black women activists were really a blow on the dominant group's power on meaning-making process. The direct expressions of Black lives flowed through the direct voices of Black activists without hindered by distortions or restrictions. White people's account of Black lives and such restricted expressions or observations displaced more wide, deep, and genuine expressions of Blacks themselves. Here comes the shift of

encoding by the ruling hegemonies to encoding by the ones who seek to establish new hegemonies. Thus, by overthrowing existing power relations, the Black voices succeeded in creating spaces opposed to the ruling hegemony. Thus 'autobiography' acted a notable constituent in the process of Black resistance to be represented, not neglected.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Afro-American literature began to grow Afro-centric by portraying and thus asserting Black identities and elaborating African culture and legacy. Thus writing, especially, self-narratives became a form of expressing the true status of Black in society. The top surge was there in the Black women narratives. They used autobiography or self-narratives as a means of resistance towards the White quasi-realistic portrayal of Black lives. Black women writers wanted to assert their self through their writings and simultaneously they wished to smash the stereotypical images of them molded by the society around them; to be shattered and thus they can acquire their own individual identity. The Black women came to the forefront by wiping out the added as well as filtered descriptions on Black through second person, third person narratives. And writers like Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Lucille Clifton, etc. began expressing their experiences through their own writings. Those accounts are portrayals of acute, deep racist attitudes and marginalization they used to endure on a day-to-day basis. Their writings showed the peak points of subjugations they had to endure both in matter of race and gender.

Then Black women writings, especially autobiographical narratives can be seen as mode of resistance to the racialized and gendered renderings of their images by the society and culture. These life-narratives interrogate the racial as well as gender hegemony as practiced by the former group in White/Black, men/women binaries.

Unveiling the arenas of these Black women experiences attempts a deconstruction of the cliched portrayal of Black women identities and thus a reconstruction of the identities can be seen possible. One cannot find equality but has to struggle for equality and should strive to represent himself/herself. Thus, the Black women community with a rather bold, stubborn, and asserting self, succeeded in representing their self after a long period of struggle. *Assata: an Autobiography, Angela Davis: An Autobiography* and Maya Angelou's autobiographical narratives are unhinged overflow of Black woman experiences which call for our attention against injustice prevailed in U.S. society during 1960's and 70's.

By the 13th Amendment in the U.S constitution, slavery is abolished on 18th December 1865. Even though slavery was abolished by law, the strong and active remnants of it were there. The Black women were the utmost receptors of the impacts. Racial segregation as socially enforced separation of Afro-Americans from Whites was still in prevalence. To enforce racial segregation, Jim Crow Laws played a significant role until 1965. The Blacks had to suffer racial segregation even at public facilities and transportation. There were very pathetic facilities for the Blacks in comparison with the Whites. Certain places and times the Afro-American even denied facilities and spaces. Denying spaces in a land which was equally owned by all human beings alike, is pitiable. As a set of laws, Jim Crow Laws created political, social, economic, and educational disadvantages for Blacks. Even though there were campaign and protest to break Jim Crow Laws, it continued its institutionalized racist agenda by giving second class citizenship for Blacks (Alexander 101). Influences of Jim Crow Laws were there in each realm of life namely daily life matters, jury trials, court cases, marriages, functions, etc. Social domains of White were continuing to separate Black lives. Jim Crow Laws applied to every Afro-Americans, but they had

a special and often devastating impact on Black women. Under Jim Crow segregation, Black women were more vulnerable to violence, harassment and exploitation. They were more likely to be subjected to sexual violence and abuse by White employers and other authority figures, with little or no legal protection or recourse available to them. Jim Crow schools were often poor and inadequate, providing Black children (including girls) with poor educational outcomes. Black girls were discriminated against on the grounds of race and gender, which limited their access to high-quality education and advancement opportunities. Jim Crow Laws deprived Black women of fundamental civil rights and freedoms, including voting, public access, and the right to move freely. This systematic exclusion and segregation further marginalized Black women and weakened their ability to play a full role in society. Black women experienced multiple forms of discrimination based on racial identity, gender identity, and, often, class identity. These intersecting systems of discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion exacerbated Jim Crow segregation, and Black women faced unique challenges and obstacles to achieving social, economic and political equality. Such segregated public spaces evoked the activists like Assata to come to the forefront of society and to protest White supremacy to protest their status.

The preconceptions and stereotyped images of Afro-Americans have its origin in the history from the period of slavery. Most of the stereotypes have emerged from U.S. residing Afro-Americans and are linked to racism. In the nineteenth century, minstrel shows portrayed Black people as foolish and dim-witted. Minstrel shows can be considered as a perfect White portrayal of Black stereotypes. Minstrel shows which were originated in nineteenth century, featured White performers portraying Black characters by wearing black faces. Often the characters depict negative shades of character. To represent Black characters, White actors wore black face and black

costume. Through comic, silly, buffoonish skits and themes, these minstrel shows affirmed racist stereotypes. The portrayal of Black as hypersexual and using derogatory terms to address Black people like 'sambo' were there in prevalence. One of the significant stereotypes of Black especially Black women was the mammy stereotype. It was certainly a U.S. historical stereotype in which Black women work for White family and taking care of children of that family. By putting Black women in the domestic stereotypic roles, segregation affected them in more severe ways. This mammy stereotype was meant to create an image of Black women being happy and satisfied in the domestic roles without becoming assertive and engaging in earning jobs.

Late in the twentieth century and even now in the twenty first century, the world could find the stereotype of Black people as terrorists, drug traffickers, hobos, savages, and even criminals. These stereotypes paved the way for social categorizations or collective grouping which resulted in nullifying individual identities. Individuals were/are always connected as an exemplar of a Black collective group.

The utmost gradation of stereotype of Afro-American can be seen in expectations about criminality. This can be observed in the perception of Blacks as criminals by the legal system and thus assuming them as criminals by the public, legal and judicial system. Investigating into this set of stereotypes will be realized in physical traits, characteristics, their way of speaking language, etc. Resistance begins at its utmost degree right from this matter. The term 'Blacks' that used to represent Afro-Americans itself is a perfect product of stereotyping. There are/were light skinned Afro-Americans. The Afro-Americans were strong against in representation of their 'Black' images along with the collective traits of them. They were against

these stereotypic associations. Even in language there are a set of terms and adjectives that relate to Black stereotypes. As Devine and Elliot says in their article: Athletic, criminals, lazy, uneducated, loud, inferior, unintellectual, aggressive, sexually aggressive etc. are but stereotypes of adjectives and counter-stereotypic adjectives are intellectual, kind, educated, wealthy, motivational etc. (Devine 1147). What complicates the concept of race is its automaticity and social judgments. Automaticity is strongly linked to prejudiced perceptions of physical external traits of an individual and resulted social class categorization.

When gender is interconnected to this Afro-American stereotyping, Black women are still pervasively stereotypes as being aggressive, illogical, bad tempered, loud, and bitter. When these women are classified into these stereotypes the true reason behind their aggressiveness, the original subject matter behind their reactions became automatically shaded. These are not their personal, emotional reactions. Instead, these are reactions against stereotypical approach to them. In fact, what are stereotyped is the attitude towards the Blacks, the gaze, judgements, systems of derogatory labeling originate from White-centered perspectives. And that stereotyping needs reconstruction too. Though the slavery system was abolished decades ago, the discriminations and subjugations in name of stereotyping is still there in U.S. The historical stereotypes of Sambo, Mandingo, Jezebel, 'Black Brute', 'black buck', etc. have been replaced with contemporary stereotypes of 'welfare queens', 'angry Black woman' and 'Black bitch' stereotypes. Black women activists are often portrayed as angry, aggressive and confrontational, quick to speak out against injustice and oppression. The purpose of this stereotype is to vilify Black women activists by making their righteous anger seem irrational and baseless, thereby undermining their legitimate grievances and demands for social justice. The Jezebel

trope, based on racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women as hypersexual and reckless, characterizes Black female activists as sexually aggressive and morally corrupt individuals who use their sexuality to manipulate and control others.

This stereotype undermines the credibility and integrity of Black women activists by portraying them as morally questionable and untrustworthy. The angry Black woman stereotyping made Black women feel the necessity to repress their emotional expressions in spaces other than their own spaces and such repressed emotions ended up in accumulation of such pent-up feelings that can come out relentlessly in such contexts. Thus, they are labeled as aggressive and angry. What they want is to avoid judgment on them and to shatter the preconception on their emotional outbursts. But psychologically, the accumulated feelings will end up in further outbursts. These portrayals emerge strictly from a white point of view. By making these images, Black women's individuality is getting erased and thus making Black women silenced and invisible in the society. This is aptly reflected in Sojourner Truth's rhetorical work "Ain't I a woman?" (4)

Literature itself was a space of male dominance at once as it gave space and validity for men's experiences. Women's voices were made invisible in a scenario of man enjoying the 'subject' position where woman expected to be the objects. The less space in literature and the lack of sufficient predecessors or 'maternal precursors' demanded a hectic work from a woman writer to be reputable (Gilbert 65). Origin of women autobiography can be traced back to women who need to express herself and to expose her psyche to the public world. Woman is always considered to be the insignificant part of the dichotomous gender structure. Woman desired to write her invisible self to bring it out to light. Among the woman stories of self, the initial ones are expressions of some nuns, stories of suffocation of domestic woman. Among them

some autobiographies remained only in manuscripts and a few of them brought forth for publication. Self-narratives elaborating on women's quandary in strong political and social movements caught attention. Women autobiographies are prime accounts of women's confidential thoughts and aspirations which were not come to light neither through acts nor through words in the then existing social structure. The social and cultural codes propose barriers for the woman to transgress the gender boundaries to express herself.

The social and cultural traditions that made woman to act within some boundaries and how women followed or otherwise protested such coded acts are also exposed through the assortment of women autobiographies. It reveals an unyielding grasp of social realities. And thus, a reconstructive version of history is revealed through woman's perspective. Women autobiographies are historical records on the inequalities in education based on gender, the growing unrest among the working classes, and the divisive social class structure.

Considering gender, women are a class who met with contemporary prejudice and is seen as an oddity. Seeking equality for women was an important issue for feminist movements, but the emergence of "womanism" brought a totally different perspective of seeking equality. Womanism focused not on seeking feminine gender equality rather in multifaceted and interconnected aspect of class, race, and gender. And it reflects in systems of oppressions in connection with physical capability and sexual orientation (Bryson 2003:230). Women Autobiographies provide fresh insights into the diversity of women lives, and reveal their beliefs, opinions, and aspirations. It provides a valuable body of evidence for those studying childhood, class, education and the creation of gender spaces and identities. African American women autobiographers can be considered as examples of black women using their personal

narratives to construct a space in the social structure. Exposing all dark aspects of life they had to undergo, the Black women demonstrate a perfect example for being sturdy enough to subvert the boundaries of gender and racial disparities.

Black woman autobiographies always function as a source of verbal power or dominance over the white verbal artifacts. They act as an unswerving account of their struggle for getting a fair space in society. Black women-hardships and their determination to get out of the boundaries of race, class, and gender, and to establish their identity was strictly problematic. Though they are eager to express their voice, the power structures wanted to make them silent and invisible. Their 'self' was fragmented among the clutches of race, class, and gender. And from this fragmented self, emerged a need to express themselves through a new, more genuine genre, autobiography. Black women writings, especially life-narratives are subversive in nature as it transgresses the predetermined conceptions of dichotomous as well as authoritative class, race, and gender conceptions. Black women used this form of communication to let their voice out to the whole world and to voice forth the stories of the oppressed black.

Detailing or scrutinizing Black women autobiographies is unique in unveiling the life experiences of the Black woman who are placed outside the white- male-heterosexual-middleclass paradigm. Black women's suppressed voices and a call for subverting the race boundaries found better expression in their life narratives. Though there were issues regarding the politics of publications and in the politics of reception, these life-narratives exposed a different epoch in the history of American literature. Through their life and life-narratives, the Afro-American woman writers Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou expose and show the true colours of prejudiced and disempowered attitudes of the white people towards them. These

autobiographies serve to be social and historical documents showing literally enslaved status of black and inhuman approaches of the white people and the judicial system towards them.

The autobiographical narratives of Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou have been selected for the study as they are largely overlooked in existing academic discussions and research discourses. Taking a historical and truly realistic approach, the life stories of the people of colours will surely result in marginalization of those works. Once these realistic descriptions are mixed with fictional paraphernalia and softened the hardships of Blacks, then those writings might have been accepted. Maya Angelou's autobiographical series presents the Black realities in a much more softened way. That's why these works are noted while comparing them to the life narrations of Assata Shakur and Angela Davis. These autobiographies enlarge the need for and importance of selfhood.

These life narratives distinctly sketch the social cultural and spatial backgrounds which caused the molding of these Black selves. Literally these are stories outlining the emergence of a strong self. Historically, these are social/political documents exposing their struggles for freedom. As literary output, these life narratives had to strive to create their space in white dominated literary circles, dominated by both American writing and American reading. Being out- products of emotional/ personal experiences and not as a well thought-out literary out-product, these Afro-American autobiographies act as subversive documents to resist oppression.

Autobiography is not just writing the past but applying a rational structure to one's life history. Compared to other genres of literature, traces of fictional elements are at the minimum in autobiographies. Though diary, memoir, journal etc. are forms

of self-expression, they all deal with self from diverse perspectives and none of them comprises a whole and permanent account of a life. It deals with the insecurity, alienation that haunted the black women not trying to valorize their life but reveals through the activism -individual and group- through which they managed to subvert the predetermined boundaries of racial and gender roles. These Black women autobiographies help to reawaken a sort of political sense against the agendas of capitalist social structure. The commonplace consideration about Black women autobiographies as belonging to homelier tradition has cleared out through the publication of Angela Davis' and Assata Shakur's autobiographies. They have nothing to talk about domestic life. Instead, those are accounts of their political, rebellious life and activism. Autobiographies of Afro-American woman writers Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou have been studied in this thesis as they call for enough attention and acclaim because of the activists' self-assertion and activism.

Marguerite Anne Johnson renamed as Maya Angelou- famous writer, civil rights activist, educator, historian, and actress- was the first Afro-American and the second poet to recite her own poetry *On the Pulse of Morning* at Presidential Inauguration of Bill Clinton in 1993. In 2006, she got the Mother Theresa award for her service to humanity. She has many honors to her credit. Among them, the notable one is her contribution to Afro American autobiography through her autobiographical series. The seven autobiographies to her credit are: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). *Gather Together in My Name* (1974). *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976). *The Heart of a Woman* (1981). *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986). *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), *Mom and Me and Mom* (2013). Her life narratives graph the advancement of a self slowly getting relieved from the clutches of racist and gendered

obstructions. The early autobiographies *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). *Gather Together in My Name*, depicts a black woman's marginalized existence. Later, as she grows up imbibing the strategies of self-assertion, her personal accounts become that of an assertive voice and thus powerful. The objectives in investigating through these autobiographies are to scrutinize the dichotomous oppression she suffered as a Black woman activist, to understand the mode of resistance Black woman took as a tool against white male-centered structure, and to analyze the distinct strategies of representation of black pride and power in an absolutely White social setting.

Maya Angelou was born on April 4th, 1928. As separated from her parents, she grew up with her brother Bailey and grandmother Anderson in rural Stamps, Arkansas. She attended schools in California and Arkansas and learned dance and drama. This led to her career as an actress. Being strong enough to cross the boundaries of gender, she became San Francisco's first female streetcar conductor. Because of her activist fervour, she married a South African freedom fighter Vusumzi Make. She spent her later years in Egypt with her husband and son. Her career as a journalist began in Cairo. Her marital relation span only three years and she got separated in 1962. Her career as a journalist continued with *Arab Observer* as an editor, *Gandhian Times*, *African Review*. She became Assistant Administrator of the School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana. She felt strong love and lineage towards her motherland Africa. From her childhood she had witnessed the inferior existence the Blacks had to go through. It generated an urge within her to fight against all sorts of discriminations that a Black woman had to undergo in name of gender and skin colour. Later she joined the Civil Rights Movement. Her voyages and trips in Africa proved to be her search for roots and her contribution in fighting against

oppression of Africans was crucial. She was such an active fighter against discrimination, and she participated in many public protests, street plays intended to defeat white power structure.

Maya Angelou's literary career began by writing poems. But she won wide acclaim through her life narratives. Her first autobiographical work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) chronicles her life till the age of sixteen along with socio-political happenings of 1930s. Her childhood experiences with brother Bailey and brave grandmother were enough to make her self strong and brave. But as she had undergone a rape at the age of eight, it affected her sense of self in an adverse way. She chose to be silent for five years even without uttering a word. She regains self-pride at the end of the narrative *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Gather Together in My Name (1974) is the second work in Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies. It covers Angelou's teenage life, and it unfolds how her self is being developed into a comparatively strong womanhood. Her struggle to care for her son Guy as she is single parent is detailed well. The third volume of her life narrative *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) illustrates Angelou's passionate career ventures and how she manages to integrate her passions with her life course. Before her international tour of *Porgy and Bess*, she began a career in dance. *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), Angelou's fourth autobiography, draws a graph of her development mostly towards an arena of creativity and a matured self. *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986) explores her journey through motherhood. *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) begins with her decision to move to United States and ends with some tragic incidents like the assassination of civil rights leaders Malcolm X. Martin Luther King Jr. Angelou's activist fervour, conceptions on identity formation and subversive attitudes are getting unfolded in this narrative.

Mom and Me and Mom (2013), a book released just before her eighty fifth birthday and relates the role of her emotional fervours, especially with her mom, in making her strong enough to tackle the dilemmas of life. Through these life narratives, Maya Angelou exhibits her life as a representative of the struggles of African Americans in opposing the overpowering forces which curbed their right to have a free dignified existence. Through Angelou's expository writing on her life experiences, the American society's claim of being a nation of null inequality proves to be pointless: Instead of overt and legalized marginalization of Blacks prevailed before the Civil Rights Movement, what prevails there in the present scenario is a form of covert marginalization. Legally the Blacks are equal to the whites, but pragmatically they are not. Angela Yvonne Davis was a vibrant activist in Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Her autobiography entitled *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* published in 1974, contextualizes Angela's unique attitudes towards gender dynamics and racial oppressions in the U.S. This life narrative acts as a testimony in exposing the role of the U.S. mainstream media in generating and propagating contorted images of black woman activists and their struggles for equality. Angela Davis was born on January 26, 1944, in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. She was a victim to racial oppressions and segregations even from her childhood. She became an active member in the Black Liberation Movement in her college days itself and joined the Communist party at the age of 24. She had to undergo trials and imprisonment at the age of 26 for working to save Soledad Brothers. She was falsely accused of killing the presiding judge related to a shootout at the Marin County Courthouse. She was attributed the charges of murder and conspiracy. She managed to come out of all the alleged charges against her and became a strong activist dedicating her whole life to black freedom.

Angela's autobiography is unique in the sense that it doesn't portray a journey of a black woman from birth to death. So distinctively, it begins with her hiding underground to escape from the police. Davis and Helen are in want of the police as they are charged with the murder of the presiding judge. As the narrative begins, they want to go out by making over their appearance. The second and third section of her autobiography deal with her younger days and entitled as "Rocks" and "Water". Beyond a personal narrative, this autobiography stands as a social document of the humiliations and hardships an African American woman as well as a woman activist had to undergo in the U.S. social/cultural milieu.

Assata Shakur, one of FBI's most wanted Black woman activist in the U.S. perspectives was a prolific Black revolutionary living in political asylum in Cuba. *Assata: An Autobiography* made her life known to the public unless she might have remained only in the 'terrorist' / 'criminal' list of mainstream media propagandas. Her life narration is not at all in a soothing way as it unfolds the brutal treatments, she had undergone under the U.S. judicial and prison system. But these scenes of humiliations make the readers empowered to stand against any forms of segregation and adverse approaches towards Black community. She was very observant of social and cultural aspects of discrimination even from her early days of childhood, thus developed an activist fervour deep within. Her social movement transgressing the white boundaries of gender and racial performance earned her negative images like robber, criminal, and murderer. This autobiography acted to re-define her identity in the public which otherwise be distorted permanently by the U.S. mainstream media and government as well. The focus of this life-narrative is the State-generated atrociousness against the Black people and activists meant to make them silenced so that the authorities can exercise their power in a placid way.

The relevance of the study is in the intertwined linkage between racial/gendered aspects of identities with dominant authoritarian structures in society. Racism and capitalism are still strongly associated resulting in perpetual degraded existence of African Americans in the contemporary society. In judicial systems, labour markets, educational opportunities, economic status etc. the Blacks cannot reach up to the levels of the Whites. Taking into consideration job opportunities, very trivial number of Blacks occupies positions in highly paid jobs compared to whites. In some places, the same job is paid differently for the blacks and the whites. The Blacks have to pay higher insurance premium and higher rents for houses. To position a group of people, lower to the other, the most counted way is to generate an inferior self- perception within the psyche of the targeted group. What the Whites have done is simply the same. They made Afro-Americans assimilate the notion that their dark skin was something degraded, their emotional as well as physical aspects are very weak, and they are capable only to do menial works which mostly involve fewer intellectual engagements. The collective consciousness of Black people, along with the White imposed images on their identities, made them maintain a distance from mainstream culture of the U.S. and such an existence on the fringes perpetuates racism in a rather hidden mode all pervasively.

The autobiographical narratives of Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou can be accounted as mouthpieces of Black women as they unfurl the process of subjugated black woman proves becoming assertive individuals. This study scrutinizes the expansion of self in Black women only by means of these women's protesting and assertive attitudes. Thus, this study essentially counts to be a persuasive note for the Black woman to be out of the shackles of race and gender through subversive practices even though it affects their self-images. The activist lives studied

in this thesis pose an epitome of inspiration for the Blacks in the U.S. to stand against prejudiced attitudes and approaches towards them. The obdurate attitudes of the activists Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou made them move from a life of protest to a life of representation. In such a way, this study chronicles the evolution of a strong self by trouncing any forces against it. It also exemplifies the socio-political as well as psychological situations which urge people to remonstrate against the system and how it will become rewarding even if at the acme.

As covert forms of segregations and oppressive forces are in vogue against racial and gendered existence of man, Afro-American woman activists and their life narratives are still becoming core subjects of studies. Assata Shakur and Angela Davis are the activists who studied less compared to Maya Angelou. *Assata: An Autobiography* and *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* remain less discussed as it depicts stark realities of Black status in the U.S. setting of the Black degraded existence. This brief account of research work studies these Black woman activists from varied perspectives and shows the marginalized existence of the Black in the U.S.

Maya Angelou: The Iconic Self, a work by Mary Jane Lupton, illustrates Anjelou's exclusive activist life and literary outputs. A study on Black woman autobiographies in general, Joanne M. Braxton's *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* envisaging the Black life unfolded through literary tradition in particular persuade the Black masses. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins attempts to explore the ideals of black woman philosophies of Bell Hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. Study on identity formation as a woman's progress towards motherhood is studied by Uriah Stonewell in her thesis

“The Subjects of Motherhood and Marriage in the Autobiography of Maya Angelou”. It also discusses the efforts and spaces a woman needs to give for childbearing. “Breaking Out of the Cage the Autobiographical Writings of Maya Angelou” is an essay enlisting the protests Angelou took to fight against racism in the U.S. Her journey freed herself from the cages of subjugation and her free bird existence is envisaged in this study.

The lives of Black woman activists-Angela Davis, Ida. B. Wells and Assata Shakur have been analyzed in Joy James’ book *Imprisoned Intellectual America's Political Prisoners Write on Life Liberation and Rebellion*. The idea that how a revolutionary existence creates pros and cons in developing a self is better discussed in this work. The black woman’s experiences in prison are also elaborated. Their resistance against the U.S. judiciary, illegal FBI programs like COINTELPO and state movements to terrorize their images are unfolded. Margo V. Perkins’ book *Autobiography as Activism* studies the woman activists Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown and Angela Davis in the light of their autobiographies: Angela Davis’ *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974), Assata Shakur’s *Assata Shakur: An Autobiography* (1987), and Elaine Brown’s *A Taste of Power: a Black Women’s Story* (1992). “Framing the Panther- Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency” is an article penned by Joy James analyses the role of gender politics in Black Power Movements. How her leadership for black cause is molded and how her fugitive existence can be taken as a protest towards white powers is discussed in this article. *Assata Taught Me* is the most recent book by Donna Murch published in 2022. It exemplifies the power of black power movements against racist attitudes of the U.S. The state violence intended to oppress the black insurgence and how Assata stood to be a pillar of power against all such oppressive forces are illustrated in every detail in this book.

Interviews and videos of these activists and the reviews on them are more authentic as they append more exactitude to the autobiographical voice of them. *Assata: Conversations with Youth in Havana at the World Youth Festival* (1998) was a video in which Assata's life is unfolded through her voice. Readers get a political map of U.S.' racist activities prevailed then. The newspaper articles and recorded accounts of trials in the words of jurors as well as other common observers give mostly contrast visualization of the same scene. The text published in 1974, *Perversions of Justice: The Prosecution and Acquittal of the Panther 21* written by Peter L. Zimroth presented a biased observation of the trials of black women activists in a white-centered perspective. *The Making of a Revolutionary: Angela Davis* by J.A.Parker helped to analyze the mistreatment of the Black under the American Judicial system as detailed in the selected autobiographies.

Works on Black American woman autobiographies, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition* and *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* authored by Joanne. M. Braxton, elaborates on the tradition's link in the construction of the genre autobiography. An analysis of autobiography as a genre shows in its personal and historical dimensions.

The thesis is framed into six chapters. The introductory chapter details the life narratives as a distinct and diversified genre of literature to represent the black lives under subjugation and how it acts in the mode of resistance to represent their race and gender. It elucidates the concept of representation as used in the title of the thesis "Resistance to Representation". The term 'representation' is used in two different senses in elaborating the aspects of race, class and gender. In one sense, representation means the state of being so represented as some attributes are induced into a person. The three Black American activists Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou

were totally against this attribution of predetermined racial/gender characteristics on a person irrespective of their unique individual qualities. They are not ready to be in the boundaries of race and gender ascribed on them by the predetermined social constructions. Instead, they subvert all these race, class and gender boundaries in their journey of self-exploration. In its second sense, the term 'representation' is colored with political aspects, that is, the process of making one's ideologies 'valid and accepted' in public policy making process. Second chapter depicts an evolution of autobiography as a separate genre, and how womanish (gender) and black (racial) tinges alter the structure and content of the genre autobiography.

The third chapter entitled "Devising Self out of Resistance: From Subsistence to Selfhood" elucidates two distinct features of black woman autobiographical selfhood: being a "selfhood-in-relation", using textual examples from autobiographies of African American women activists. This chapter also make an analysis of the political nature and impact of Afro-American autobiographical self in general public. The black selfhood-in-relation conception makes a strong disparity with the "solo hero" centered plots in mainstream black as well as white male American autobiographies. The discussed autobiographies are Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), Maya Angelou's six autobiographies: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Singin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), *Mom and Me and Mom* (2013) and Angela Davis's *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974). Though the struggle for getting out of a predetermined way of being passive to racial and gender oppressions ended up in attributing these Black women a 'terrorist' colour, they finally succeeded to come out of the aura with their unwavering power of determination.

The manner in which the conceptions of self and self-exploration are revealed through the genre of autobiography, is detailed in the first section. Self as the upshot of the intersection of race, class and gender is portrayed. In the selected autobiographies, there is a sort of transgression of gender role binaries and racial categorization, and it results in subverting the construction of the gendered notions of the self. Foucault's formations on the construction of self with regard to the connection between three essentially connected forces: power, truth and subjectivity form the framework of this chapter.

The fourth chapter titled as "Redefining Realness: A Re-presentation of Racist Consciousness" revolves round the dynamics of race-class divisions inside racial groups and gender class practices. Re-presentation suggests a further presentation of the cliched racist consciousness as it is unfolding through these activists' life course. The notion of structural intersectionality inside black communities is analyzed through the life-narratives of the three black woman activists. The term 'representation' extends its meaning to two different dimensions while elaborating the aspects of race, class and gender. To an extent it is the state of being represented in a specific way as some attributes are induced into a person which covertly designed by the hegemonic powers in the society. Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou challenge the attributes imposed on an individual in the name of race. They are not ready to be in the boundaries of race and gender ascribed on them by the predetermined social constructions. Instead, they subvert all these races, class and gender boundaries in their journey of self-exploration. In its second sense, the term 'representation' is colored with political aspects, that is, the method of making one's ideologies widely accepted in public policy making process.

The fifth chapter is entitled “Beyond Performativity: Space and ‘Performance Bridge the Conceptual Divide’”. This chapter depicts gender as a factor in devising resistance. The three activists live in a male centered White supremacist social structure and that background made them take powerful methods of resistance to assert their identity. Opposition between Black feminism and Black Nationalism forms a major part of this chapter as there exists intersectionality inside the Black power-movement itself. Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and gender performance functions as basis of analyzing gender dynamics in the black women autobiographies. The portrayal of surviving Black masculine harassment and gender discrimination inside the prison system of 1970’s American society counts in detailing the role of American legal system in molding violent activists. The conception of binary oppositions in connection with gender roles always put forward a boundary for one’s actions in a social structure which extends its foundation in compartmentalization. Society put forth a normative structure of gender role by means of repeated compliance to social/cultural norms on gender performance and thus ‘naturalizing’ them.

Struggles of Black women under the conceptual structure of White supremacy and that of Black Feminism have been scrutinized. Gender as a factor in demanding resistance as the three activists live in a male centered White supremacist social structure. The concluding chapter explores the evolution of the Black woman activists as strong human beings instead of remaining a passive, enduring class in White supremacist society.

Chapter 2

Life Narratives: Reflecting and Reviewing Lives

Every piece of art, substantially literature, is a prolix effect of the creator's subjective experiences being dissected through an objective lens. What makes autobiography peculiar from other literary genres is its mode, and the scope of representation it proffers for an individual's life. More than being a verbal artefact, autobiography presents a testimony of a person's life to the public which can be persuasive, expository, or challenging. To construct a good autobiographical narrative, a scrutiny into the life and experiences of the person is of great significance and it is the crux of the genre. Autobiographies can never be compartmentalized into a particular section. It is an interdisciplinary realm where culture, religion, caste, gender, and class intertwine while making a life unveiled. As an outcome, the approach towards autobiographies should also be from distinct spheres- literary, criticism, sociology, psychoanalysis, history, and women studies.

An autobiography is a person's own account of life. Although many people lack the ability to write about themselves, they believe that their life should be chronicled. This is the reason why a lot of autobiographies are co-written by someone other than the subject or are told to the writer by the subject. Most autobiographies are written in the first person, regardless of whether the subject is the person who really writes the words of his/her story. Because of this, autobiographies typically go beyond merely recounting life events. Autobiographies carry the warmth and depth of personal/emotional experiences to the fullest. This warmth and truthfulness are the factors which are lacking in other pieces of literature.

There are distinct subgenres of autobiography. A memoir is an autobiographical work written in a more subjective manner. But in a memoir, the autobiographer goes into the nuances of a particular piece of their life rather than focusing on the life as a whole. Which part of the life is to be portrayed in the memoir is the choice of the author based on the relevance and significance of the writing context. Traditional autobiographies recount life from the beginning towards the present status mostly in a chronological order, even though it can be a random account. Fictional autobiographies principally lack authenticity as they contain fictitious elements in them. The authors use fictional characters to voice forth their own experiences and thereby impart an illusory feel even those are real life narratives. Spiritual autobiographies on the other hand centers on the author's transformation from a deserted and mostly sinful mind towards an awakening to faithful or religious life. In the course of the journey, the autobiographical self undergoes many sorts of tribulations, struggles, skepticism, ill faith, unrighteousness and repentance. Another subgenre of autobiography is confessions. Confessional autobiographers are with an intend to expose their rather concealed part of their life to the readers. They want to reveal their mind plagued with confidential thoughts/actions which will certainly free up their mind and thus reach up to a self- consolation.

Autobiographies of psychological illness is a recently emerged genre in which the author recounts his/her traumatic experiences along with mental health difficulties. The autobiographical journey reveals a metamorphic conversion of the persona to a healed mindset to survive the mental trials further. Personal essays present one or two aspects of the writer's life rather than covering up the whole span of life. Being an intimate form of writing, it always lines up with the author's emotions, thoughts, and self-realizations etc. The focus in this genre is on tone and style rather than on the plot.

The genre full autobiography defies fictional representation of incidents, and thereupon designating itself into subsets is not at all feasible. Each being an account of unique experiences, autobiography is a genre of diversity which can never be compartmentalized into clear-cut constituents. As a genre, autobiography expands its area into life-histories, diaries, journals, letters etc. The rhetorical stance the autobiographer takes has the credence to influence the readers and thus creates a radical effect. As Roy Pascal, a twentieth century English academician says: "autobiography is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, but diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time" (Pascal 3). A diary can present a series of life-moments, but autobiography covers a broad whole area of life. While placing self at the centre, autobiography focuses more on self than any other genre does as it revolves round incongruous incidents and experiences.

The broad categorization on the type of autobiography results in four various levels: thematic autobiography, intellectual autobiography, historical autobiography, fictionalized autobiography and religious autobiography. And the recent trends in autobiographies show a drastic shift in the method of storytelling focusing upon diverse voices as well as distinct experiences. As a part of this new trend, hybrid autobiographies, environmental and sustainability narratives, audio memoirs, autobiographies voice forth multifaceted identities exploring intersectionality of identity etc. come into vogue.

The term 'autobiography' was a coinage of one of eighteenth-century English poets, Robert Southey, and got published in a literary and political periodical named *Quarterly Review* as he describes the work of a poet from Portugal, in the year 1809. (Anderson 1, 7; Berryman 71). The first verbal artifact of autobiographical tone was presumptively written by Rev. W.P. Scargill and got published in 1834 (qtd in Olney

Autobiography 5). The initial stage in the development of autobiography was marked by *apologia*, works intended for extenuation and self-praise, not for revealing the life experiences as a whole (Ames 129). *Apologia* gave way to self-critical literary forms with Jean Jacques Rousseau's autobiographical book *Confessions*. The style in which the matters unfold in this book was an imitation of Saint Augustine's (354–430) autobiographical work *Confessions* which comprised thirteen books written in Latin. The advancement of autobiography as a separate genre is vested upon Saint Augustine as his *Confessions* was the first autobiography ever written in the West.

Rather than being extensive excerpts of life proceedings, autobiography began to encompass affective domain of human experiences only by the advancement of Romantic age. From then, autobiographical expressions started probing into and portraying more intimate and emotional aspects of self. By the end of nineteenth century, exposing personal and motional faces in public became acceptable in society. What makes the genre of autobiography more phenomenal is its adherence to truth and veracity differing from fictional elements. Being a forthright expression of the subject's authentic experiences, the repercussion of autobiography on the readers is inexhaustible. While tracing the unique impulses of autobiographical writings in *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, James Olney states that “an Autobiography projects a single radical energy originating in the subject center, an aggressive, creative expression of the self, a defense of individual integrity in the face of an otherwise multiple, confusing, swarming, and inimical universe” (15).

While examining autobiographical tradition, women's autobiography represents a disparate and distinct tradition. It is clearly noted that women autobiographies represent and portray the human life more from an affective domain as giving more verbal expression to emotional and effectual aspects of incidents and

events as well. That is, the narratives of the lives and hardships of women are detailed well in life-histories by women compared to men. The dynamics of gender can be seen exposed more effusively in women's life narratives. Men are also affected by the dynamics of gender. But the adverse effect of gender attributions is mostly diverted towards women. In short, men are least affected by the effects of gender dynamics.

Critics opine that autobiographies written by men in general depict a sort of shadowy representation of woman. But women autobiographies unveil the dark sides of woman experiences which rather rendered invisible or presented in a pleasant way in male narratives. Nancy Chodorow, an American psychologist, in her 1978 work *The Reproduction of Mothering* states that "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does. That is, in psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated than men and have more flexible ego boundaries." (44). This illustrates that women's accounts of life experiences encompass the detailing of not only of her own self but also of the dynamics of other selves in relation to hers. Women narrations of self will always be censorious of her actions, thoughts and thus of the self. As gender disparities exist even in the superficial layer of culture, and woman being the affected class, dynamics of gender clearly spread throughout woman's autobiography.

The etymology of the word 'autobiography' can be elaborated as a combination of two Greek words 'autos' and 'bios'. 'Autos' means self and 'bios' means life. When a person directly writes about his/her own life experiences and personal history, it becomes more valid and genuine. The practice of writing about self has been prevalent in different cultures throughout history, though in varied forms: - life narratives, memoirs, personal essays, poetical expressions etc. The term 'autobiography' exposes a type of literary genre in which the life story of the author is

getting focused. And as a literary genre, it gained wide prominence in Western literature during the period of Renaissance.

Though autobiography was the genre pondered over by educated and scholarly people in the beginning, it became common and accessed by individuals from different strata of society from eighteenth century. Thus, autobiographies became literature of genuine accounts of life stories. The most important core of autobiography is that it can act as a record for the future generations to refer to a person's life and experiences. While considering English literature, it has a range of prolific works on self and thus has a rich autobiographical tradition.

From 12th to 17th century, English literature, especially autobiographical writing was religious in its core. From the medieval period to Renaissance period, the spiritual experiences of saints were the focus. Authors focused on religious confessions, advice, or moral forms of self-narratives. The life accounts were often compared or paralleled with biblical figures and presented as a neotype of them. Spiritual autobiography is a genre evolved during seventeenth century which abounded in Protestant writings in England. These autobiographies had a specific structure in which a sinned youth turned into a sacred person after some religious realizations. Thus, repentance, self-realization and conversion experience were the core. The most notable and discussed among the spiritual autobiographies are the ones written by Saint Augustine and Margery Kempe.

Confessions was the notable one from Western literature. *Confessions* was a work that belongs to the fourth century A.D. authored by Saint Augustine. *Confessions* is viewed as a precursor to the exact genre autobiography. Though *Revelations of Divine Love* written by Julian of Norwich was published prior to *Confessions* among the spiritual autobiographies, it remained less discussed. Though

being the first book known to have authored by a woman between fourteenth to fifteenth century, it was less considered in literary circles. Women were denied access to the vehicular language of the period- Latin, from higher positions in society, roles of knowledge etc. The book was less distributed and mentioned, the readership remained meagre. So, *Revelations of Divine Love* gained less momentum. As the genre went on evolving, many autobiographies became famous.

Autobiography centered on self and self-reflections began to emerge during the Renaissance period. *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* from sixteenth century *The Confessions* authored by Jean-Jacques Rousseau from eighteenth century were gaining momentum in that genre. In contrast to spiritual content, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* dealt mainly with the adventurous life of an Italian goldsmith and sculptor Cellini. The courtly life was the main theme in Baldassare Castiglione's autobiography *The Book of the Courtier*. Self-narrative in diary forms became prominent after Samuel Pepys's work *Pepys Diary* (1660-1669). These works are not refined in their form as per the genre autobiography, they were paving a refined ground for autobiographical tradition.

The life narratives selected for the study are *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), *Angela Davis: An autobiography* (1974), the autobiography series of Maya Angelou: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Singin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), *Mom and Me and Mom* (2013). These autobiographies expose the evolution of the Black woman activists as strong beings instead of remaining a passive, enduring class in White supremacist society. This chapter further depicts a scrutiny into the history of Black woman autobiography and how womanish (gender) and black (racial) tinges change the structure and content of

the genre autobiography. It depicts the metamorphosis of a Afro-American woman self to activist self which results in changing status quo as well as gaining individual identity among the other Black women. How the Black women activism has been overlooked by most historians though their activism begins simply from refusal to adjust to the systems of race and patriarchy prevalent in U.S. then, forms the core of this chapter.

Autobiography as the term suggests a great space for the subject to elaborate on one's conceptions, life experiences, trials and tribulations endured to acquire a position of self-satisfaction in a specific social structure. In the case of Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou, their activism played a relevant role in making them self-equipped to fight against the social stigmas. Apart from what they did while their active status in life, their autobiographies play an even more relevant role in inspiring the masses and the process is still in vogue. Their activism inspired the masses in fighting for their own space in the society in early twentieth century. But their self-narratives are still inspiring the masses to stand against any modes of oppression in name of race, class, and gender. Thus, activism through self-narratives can be describes as a mode of resistance that made the radical Black women enable to free themselves through a pouring out their suppressed feelings and urge the Black women readers to move from their private domains to public space of resistance. Basically, these Black women activists used pen as their weapon of protest and urge the Black women masses to do the same in sake of their survival.

The phenomenon of Black consciousness is not limited to America. Instead, the issue is one that the entire modern world is aware of and has firsthand experience with. Things are not the same as they were in the past, when Black people had no place in the political sphere or in other domains such as the economy, even though

White people's dominance is still evident in some areas. Put another way, throughout the era of enlightenment, what was once referred to as Black primitivism has evolved. It is modernism that has changed and revolutionized the racist beliefs about Black people. While racial inequality and segregation still exist today, they are not as prevalent as they were in the past. These autobiographies can be seen as a sort of extension of their activism against the racial segregation and gendered oppression they endured and continue to exist in the U.S political context. Thus, they create a linkage between personal and political in elaborating their life experiences through life narratives. It acts as a sort of unconventional history against the dominant modes of knowledge emanated from the perspectives of the cream levels of social hierarchy. These women's struggle in the revolution and how it is distinct from the experiences of men in revolution are the main aspects to be focused. And thus, a feminine perspective of the revolutionary movements has been portrayed in these life narratives. The Black Power Movement has been discussed in a lot of books and life narratives. But the various convolutions of the same can be seen as it is discussed from a feminine perspective. Their life accounts dismantle the commonplace expectations about race, gender, and class. These autobiographies clearly show how their identities are constructed in pace and mode with their strong association in the Black Power battles.

In *Assata: an Autobiography*, the fugitive life of Assata Shakur and her prison experiences. The conventional autobiographical form is deconstructed in her work as she recounts her adverse life experiences not wearing the mask of a gentle and truthful person simply to validate her story. She is so stubborn to question the erratic social climate in U.S. in dealing with Black masses, especially women masses. Her life and survival demonstrate a gradual development of her social, political consciousness, through her fugitive status, prisoner existence, exiled outlook etc. In opposition with

the common portrayal of good and accepted actions and modes of life in autobiographical writings, Assata's autobiography clearly depicts the actions of theft, arrest, attribution of unnecessary charges by the police, racial profiling, murder attempts and so on. While explaining about her early life, she mentions the poverty and racism her family had to undergo and how these experiences played a major role in forming her vision on the world.

Moreover, *Assata: An Autobiography* acts as an excellent instance for showing how media coverage and racial bias have created a tilted image in the public which was totally against what is termed 'right' in a society. Such moral as well as legal 'wrong' image has propagated by the media in a full intention to create a hatred in the public against such black emerging figures in the society. The criminal charges attributed on her shows the injustices of court in the society. And regarding this criminal status, Assata boldly put forward the conception that in a racist society, no justice can be expected, or no justice can be given. The injustice and brutal treatment of the judicial system made her succumb before the court and her autobiography remains as a space for her to expose her ideas and ideals. Assata's autobiography can be viewed in the light of Margo Perkins's conception of autobiography, specifically political autobiography.

These expectations that have come to govern activists writing their life stories are manifold. These expectations, which collectively shape a genre of writing I will call political autobiography (after Davis's coining of the term), are implicitly revealed in the work of other activists as well as critics of resistance literature. They include the following: (1) that the autobiographer will emphasize the story of the struggle over her own personal ordeals; (2) that she will use her own story both to document a history of the struggle and to further its political agenda; (3) that she will provide a voice

for the voiceless; (4) that she will honor strategic silences in order to protect the integrity of the struggle as well as the welfare of other activists; (5) that she will expose oppressive conditions and the repressive tactics of the state; and (6) that she will use the autobiography as a form of political intervention, to educate as broad an audience as possible to the situation and issues at stake (Perkins 7).

As Perkins remarks, the purpose of a political autobiography is to make a social awareness or political correctness in the public through the unfolding of personal struggles of the activists. Such autobiographies also act as a historical document recording the less heard voice which otherwise be vanished amidst the voice of power and authority. In line with that, the black narrative of Assata brings forth the repressive strategies of the U.S. state in oppressing the black in general and succeed in making the voice heard among the minority oppressed groups. It acts as a type of political activism as well as dismantling of commonplace discourses which portray black only with negative attributes. The autobiography gives a clear- cut description of what Shakur experienced in opposition with what the propaganda had widely conveyed. She had to fight not only with the justice system but also with the public judgment about her. In the foreword to Assata Shakur's autobiography Lenox Hinds writes, "As is now clear, a carefully orchestrated intelligence and counterintelligence campaign was conducted by the FBI in cooperation with state and local law enforcement agencies designed to criminalize, defame, harass, and intimidate Assata beginning at least in 1971" (viii). This clearly shows the negative attitude and opposing actions taken by the authorities against liberal movements and activists in general. Two distinct perspectives on the same issue being represented in the narrative: Shakur's unfolding of the brutal experiences in the context of U.S. police force and justice system, and the U.S. perspective on such an activist propagated through their official

reports. The cruel and inhuman approach of the police and the corruption prevailed there can be seen in the opening of Shakur's life narrative:

There were lights and sirens. Zayd was dead. My mind knew that Zayd was . The air was like cold glass. Huge bubbles rose and burst. Each one felt like an explosion in my chest. My mouth tasted like blood and dirt. The car spun around me and then something like sleep overtook me. In the background i could hear what sounded like gunfire. But i was fading and dreaming. Suddenly, the door flew open and i felt myself being dragged out onto the pavement. Pushed and punched, a foot upside my head, a kick in the stomach. Police were everywhere. One had a gun to my head (Shakur, *Autobiography* 3).

This account is the perfect beginning of an autobiography of a black woman activist to set the scene of dominant system and background prevailed in the social scenario which got exposed in a decent mode by the propaganda of dominant class. The New Jersey Turnpike incident is marked and portrayed from the U.S. perspective in all the media and official records. All, alike, pictured the Black criminality and injustice. But Shakur's personal accounts evidently describe each and every brutal act of the police and judicial system and how she struggled in overcoming all those differing forces. While her narrative presents a strong black woman striving to refute the social injustice in name of race and gender, it naturally refutes the media-formed public image of her as a lawless, criminal Black activist without humanity. The long days of her imprisonment hindered her from communicating with the public and even with her Black fellow revolutionaries. So that her justifications to public accusations couldn't find any space or voice. The Black revolutionaries' being portrayed as criminals should be viewed in the sense that these Black revolutionaries are victims of

an injustice social system. The law enforcement was the core of brutalization of Black activist actions. Through the unjust attribution of murder, kidnapping and robbery on Shakur, what the system wants to convey is the unruly and violent actions of Black revolutionary.

They call us murderers, but we did not murder over two hundred fifty unarmed Black men, women, and children, or wound thousands of others in the riots they provoked during the sixties...They call us murderers, but we were not responsible for the twenty-eight brother inmates and nine hostages murdered at attica. They call us murderers, but we did not murder and wound over thirty unarmed Black students at Jackson State—or Southern State, either (Shakur, *Autobiography* 50).

Shakur put forward the politicized and hooked up charges against her and deconstructs them through intense description of her own experiences. The sense of helplessness she endured throughout her activist endeavours defines the judicial system and law enforcement itself as the systems which dispense racism. As Shakur found that none of her lawyers' pleas were accepted by the court, she concluded the futility in playing with the rules of the judicial system. Her voice of protest has been portrayed in media in a different tone. As New York Times reports:

Mrs. Chesimard, who had been banished from the court frequently for shouting insults during earlier proceedings, was banished again yesterday morning. Then, on her attorney's promise that she would be quiet during Mr. White's testimony, Judge Lee Gagliardi let her return. But as Mr. White related how the bank robbery had taken place, Mrs. Chesimard began shouting: How much did they pay you? I never robbed a bank with you. You lie. She kept shouting as marshals escorted her out (Prial 5).

Shakur specifies the approach of the jury members and the court in handling such cases. All of them were tainted by racism and thus no justice could be bestowed from them. The judicial system acted just as a replica of the dominant racist social structure of U.S. Shakur's realizations are summed up in her statements:

Many of us have misconceptions about Black history in amerika. What we are taught in the public school system is usually inaccurate, distorted, and packed full of outright lies. Among the most common lies are that Lincoln freed the slaves, that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves, and that the history of Black people in amerika has consisted of slow but steady progress, that things have gotten better, bit by bit. Belief in these myths can cause us to make serious mistakes in analyzing our current situation and in planning future action (Shakur 176).

The long battle of freedom and justice which comprises her two years' solitary confinement could find no light in Assata's life, and she could observe the racial and gendered treatments on matters rather than righteousness and justice. Her final comment in the narrative makes evident the vain endeavour in finding a fair chance to defend herself "In the long run, the people are our only appeal. The only ones who can free us are ourselves" (Shakur 252).

Shakur ends her life narrative with the line of thought that no one can provide us freedom, but we must make ourselves free. In her opinion, rather than court, people are her only appeals. Shakur wants her life story to be propagated through her autobiographical voice among the public and thus they can go through the reality as opposed to the ones chronicled in the U.S. social arena.

Angela Davis's autobiography also refutes the boundaries of a personal life narrative as it calls people to action through her account of activist life against the

social, political and racial discrimination and injustice in the U.S. society. The framework of a political autobiography gives a space for the author to express and influence attitudes, opinion, and political stance etc. Thus, personal becomes political here: Her personal views, visions, experiences influence the political principles and perspectives, and her political stances shape her personal standpoints. *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* excels in inspiring the Black women and activists through her unfolding account of revolutionary life. Her account of childhood and college days get less focus amidst her detailed description of extending political activism and imprisonment. The false accusation attributed on her by the court in 1970 poised to earn wide acclaim.

As Davis's autobiography is not written in chronological order, it doesn't come under the form of a personal autobiography. Through her activism unfolded in the life narrative, she challenges the readers to stand against any injustice in the social arena and seek liberty via the prevailing political system. Even after fifty more years of its publication, Angela Davis's life narrative continues to be a part of many scholarly discussions and articles. Her struggles against oppression and injustice against the Black masses attained a universal realm as she became a communist. Davis's life narrative portrays the years from her childhood in Alabama towards her release from murder charges and kidnapping in California. Davis's narrative moves through the emergence and end of the Civil Rights Movement in U.S. and universal harmony with freedom movements in Africa and Asia. The narrative begins with Davis's arrest by the FBI and her relocation from prison to prison. Her activist fervour exposed through her participation in the Civil Rights Movement and her continuous struggles succeeded in creating a strong political self. And what focused more on this recount is the political and social aspects of Davis's life rather than her private life

comprising intimate relationships. In the introduction to the autobiography, Davis herself has made the point clear that what she wants to convey through her life narrative is not an individualized history but a story of political significance, and thus aims at a social connectedness of this life recount. Through the detailed description of the discriminations and subjugations she has endured as a Black woman, Davis wants to align herself with the Black women mass in the same stream and thus she intends to convey her “overwhelming sense of belonging to a community of humans—... of struggle against poverty and racism” (Davis 23).

Angela Davis celebrates and feel proud of her Blackness and the cultural roots even amidst her struggles to get rid of the negative connotations associated with that race. She fought against the discrimination and prejudices linked with racism, but she was never in a stance to get out of it. The autobiography depicts her rational connectedness to her ancestors which reinforced as an outcome of the oppressive forces of racism. She values her each visit to her home country, and she depicts the reality of poverty-stricken conditions of black people in southern villages and the underfunded schools with no sufficient learning facilities that Blacks had to attend. All these shaped her life goals, from her childhood itself, as working for a social cause- to uplift the life status of black people. It was possible only through an active protest the predetermined rules and roles assigned to black people by the White authorities. Thus, she opts the life of an activist and attained success in that position.

Davis's struggles, including her imprisonment in her late 20s, her dedication to the Communist party and the prejudice she faced from the U.S. government as a result, and her experiences as a Black woman in predominantly male-dominated activist spaces—where she eventually came out as a lesbian—had a significant influence on her work as a revolutionist and the issues she devoted her time and energy to.

Although race remained a primary emphasis of her work, it was never only about fighting for racial justice; rather, her work more broadly attended to the intersections of numerous marginalized identities, including class and gender. In addition, she advocated for various social causes as demonstrating, jail reform, the release of political prisoners.

Angela Davis gives detailed accounts of growing up in the Jim Crow era in Birmingham, Alabama. She highlights the significance of family and community in forming her identity and values by sharing tales of her family's tenacity in the face of racial segregation and violence. As educators and activists, themselves, Davis considers the impact of her parents and their emphasis on education as a means for emancipation. She talks on how her education has affected her political awareness, especially the way that Marxist theory, feminism, and Black liberation movements have influenced her. Davis muses on the way that education may upend oppressive structures and empower underprivileged groups.

Angela Davis's autobiography portrays race as the core principle in the organization of U.S. social system and its aftermath on the Black people. Her account of long trials and imprisonment exposes the U.S. judicial system or criminal laws which were formed as anti-black ideologies. It can be seen as a mixture of racism, heteronormative patriarchy, and white supremacy. Her life narrative details the prison system and punishments in U.S. which adversely affected the black mass as it was specifically meant for them. These existed a reality that black people were imprisoned for the most minor matters. Penal punishment evolved into a daily routine. This occurrence was getting widespread. Davis scrutinised why the prisoners, especially those of African American descent, were in prison and what had compelled them to enter prison. It ended up in the learning about the nature of racism and class prejudice

and realized that, despite the particulars of each case, the majority of them were incarcerated due to their race—Black, Brown, and impoverished. Angela Davis was forced by these circumstances to be involved with the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. The pathetic condition of black prisoners has been described in different parts of *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*: “Around the middle of February, I picked up the Los Angeles Times and noticed on the front page a large photograph of three very striking black men. Their faces were serene and strong, but their arms to their sides and chains locked their legs” (250).

A powerful campaign emerged for the justice and safety of the inmates at Soledad jail. Various Committees were instituted. Their main motivation was the black prisoners, who endured unspeakable crimes at the hands of police and jail officials. They were not permitted to defend themselves verbally. That was the case with John Clutchette, and George Jackson. They had been attributed with the charge of murdering the jail guard, and there was proof of it. The fact was that George and John were "militants" and they had discussed liberation theory and practice with their compatriots. The jail administration intended to hold them figuratively accountable for the unplanned uprising carried out by the prisoners. There was a strong protest against it among the black masses. Angela Davis was successful in combining the sufferers, prisoners, protesters, and activists. She arranged rallies, protest strikes etc. She conducted awareness campaigns. They put up a strong rally. Following the event, Angela Davis gave another statement about the brothers at the University of La Jolla. The group members were also excited to form the La Jolla Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. Members of the Defense Committee were therefore doing increasingly powerful work. The strength of the larger defensive campaign was reflected in the growing number of Committee members each week. This further demonstrates how

close Angela Davis was to becoming well-known to the general public. She started to come often and gave public lectures to educate the populace. Angela stated unequivocally that she would discuss the Soledad Brothers issue in any speech she gave and that any honoraria she would earn would be donated to the Soledad.

In October 1970, Davis was detained in New York on suspicion of conspiracy, murder, and kidnapping. This led to a global "Free Angela Protest." Davis was arrested in New York and spent sixteen months in prison before her trial started in California. According to the California warrant for Angela Davis's arrest, she was involved in murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. Angela Davis was the 309th person and the third woman to be listed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List on August 18, 1970. Angela Davis became entangled in the web of allegations, but she was not the perpetrator because, as a liberal humanitarian, she is so admirable that it is hard to imagine that a person of her caliber could ever commit murder, not even in her wildest dreams. Her life narrative is one of unfathomable obstacles encountered along the way. Her battle was no match for her inner strength, and she overcame it to continue her academic career unfazed by the challenges. Her accomplishments in this area are shockingly impressive. Perhaps she has realized that a woman's fate is replete with obstacles and hardships.

Her struggle doesn't stay straightforward throughout her life. The foundation of the entire American social structure is racism, which she had to deal with every day of her life. She was animated as she explains because of this sense of independence. Angela Davis stated in her life narrative: - nothing in the world made me angrier than inaction, than silence. The refusal or inability to do something, say something when a thing needed doing or saying, was unbearable (94). This underlies the formation of her as an Afro-American activist. In the 1960s, she became a nationally recognized

radical and activist. Later on, she rose to the position of U.S. Communist Party leader. Despite never having been an official member of the Black Panther Party, she developed a class relationship with them through her participation in the civil rights movement. In the broad backdrop of activism, Angela Davis's life narrative presents an intersectional approach of race, gender and class by pausing herself as a black woman figure in U.S. social structure.

As autobiography plays a major role in elaborating the characteristic nature of contemporary culture and society through firsthand recounts, it remains as a reference point to history. Maya Angelou's life narratives as they cover different stages of her personal life, depicts the stages of realities in the social, cultural and political aspects of the U.S. backdrop. The archetypal pattern of autobiography is subverted in Maya Angelou's life narratives. Being authoress, poet, playwright, editor, songwriter, singer, teacher, dancer in her disposition itself echoes the extent of her talent and accomplishments. Through the movement of her narratives from her childhood in Arkansan to her activist endeavours, Maya Angelou's transformation can be evidently seen. Her childhood backdrop of racism and poverty made her strong self to be developed into a revolutionary self. Most part of her life narrative focus on her development being an African American child in the United States- the hardest road she had to move through. Her real name was Marguerite. Her early struggles had more to do with her family's issues. She was also facing the same severe forms of prejudice against her race that all Black people in the South faced. Black and White people were segregated at the period by Jim Crow Laws, a social and legal framework known as segregation. In many parts of the country, black people did not receive fair or equal treatment. Racism was particularly pervasive in the South. This was the region where lynchings occurred much too frequently and where slavery had its roots.

Marguerite experienced discrimination for the first time at the Movie theatre. The ticket seller was a Caucasian girl. The child would not touch the dime that Marguerite handed her for her ticket. Rather, she inserted the dime into the change box using a card. She then declined to issue tickets to Bailey or Marguerite. Not even a word would she say to them. She just waved her hand toward the theater's door. For the first time, Marguerite realized that her skin tone was the reason behind her mistreatment. All her experiences in relation to discrimination find their space in her life narratives. Being one of the first African American women who openly describe her personal life, Angelou was hailed as a new chronicler with the release of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She is well regarded for her role as an advocate for women and Black people. One way to describe Angelou's writing is as autobiographical fiction. However, she has purposefully tried to broaden, alter, and critique the autobiography genre in order to subvert the conventional autobiographical framework.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings breaks a lot of the prevalent autobiographical norms. The work is centered on a black woman's evolution and enrichment, uses first-person narrative, and is organized chronologically. The work does, however, also include elements of the fiction genre, such as dialogue and rich, sensory descriptions. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* has also been interpreted by readers as a bildungsroman, which tells the tale of a young black girl's development. The narrative of the book centers on Angelou's quest for identity as well as her battles with racism, sexual assault, and self-acceptance. Strong African- American women play a major role in the narrative: Mrs. Flowers, who is well- educated and proud, "momma," Angelou's devout grandmother, and her resourceful and vivacious mother.

These figures played a major role in forming her into a person of strong will. As Angelou moves about a lot, she experiences rootlessness and metamorphosis.

Gather Together in My Name (1974), the second book, opens in the late 1940s; following the conclusion of World War II and its detrimental impact on the lives of Black people. It ends a few years later, following Angelou's victory in her own struggle with narcotics, prostitution as well as addiction. Angelou's bad qualities are accentuated in this volume by her visit to Stamps, where she and Momma (Annie) Henderson faced their divergent racial perspectives. These viewpoints turned out to be incompatible.

Gather Together addresses motherhood in great detail. As a youngster, Angelou was naturally unsophisticated and without job training and advanced education of any kind when she became a mother. Throughout much of *Gather Together In My Name*, Angelou chronicles her various jobs as she struggled to support her son and make ends meet in a difficult economic climate. She worked as a Creole chef, dancer, dishwasher, and barmaid, and often these jobs were intertwined with her feelings toward men who sought to exploit her innocence. Angelou's admission of being a prostitute, hiding stolen goods, and nearly losing her son is difficult to accept. On the bright side, though, she was learning how to dance professionally in front of live audiences. Her early nightclub performances with R. L. Poole demonstrated her talent as a dancer, and in 1952, she reportedly received a scholarship to study with Pearl Primus, a Trinidadian-born choreographer whose 1943 work "Mighty Fruit" was world-renowned. As Angelou's singing and dancing became increasingly sought after, she became increasingly emotional about the conflict between her career and her desire to be a good mother. This conflict, which is all too common among mothers with careers, becomes the central theme of her third book.

Her subsequent book, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), chronicles a difficult period in Maya's growth. Her dancing career flourished, but the pain and loneliness that came from being separated from her son also persisted. She was also permanently split off from Momma Henderson, whose passing is poignantly remembered in *Singin' and Swingin* Maya, who is currently Mrs. Tosh Angelos, went through a brief, painful marriage and divorce. Once more on her own, she committed to the nearly two-year-long 1954–1955 Porgy and Bess European and African tour. At the age of twenty-eight, she had a young son that she left with her mother, Vivian, reliving her own early years, when she and Bailey were sent to momma.

The book that most clearly demonstrates Angelou's maturity is *The Heart of a Woman* (1981). Now her son was a teenager, she became more assured in her parenting, despite a near-accident involving a street gang during a Chicago performance. Nevertheless, she had made a self-promise to forgo extensive tours and discovered fulfillment in her New York/Brooklyn surroundings as an actress, writer, and political organizer. The fifth book, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), was not released until 1986, two decades after Angelou's return to the United States, but it covers her African travels from 1962 to 1965 in further detail. Guy's car accident left Angelou stunned and dejected, so she moved to Ghana's capital, Accra, in West Africa. Guy's miraculous recovery allowed him to start his journey toward independence from his mother as well as enroll at the University of Ghana. Early in the 1960s, Angelou lived in Accra. She later left to tour Berlin and Venice with a theatrical group.

The sixth and final book in author Maya Angelou's autobiographical series is *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002). The narrative moves between 1965 and 1968, picks

up where Angelou's earlier work *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* left off—that is, with her journey back to the United States from Accra, Ghana, where she had spent the previous four years living. The book's onset is marked by a major happening: the murders of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Angelou explains how she handled these occurrences and the profound changes in the nation and in her own life.

Maya Angelou's narratives can be classified into African American literary tradition of political protest penned after the years of Civil Rights Movements. The different aspects of racism and Angelou's approach to racist attitudes, her resistant tactics against all types of discrimination in the culture form the central theme of her life narratives. It shows Angelou's transformation from "helpless rage and indignation to forms of subtle resistance, and finally to outright and active protest" (Smith 8). The autobiographical writings of Maya Angelou are convincing illustrations of defiance against racism and oppression. In her autobiographical writings, including *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and later memoir volumes, Maya Angelou documents her encounters with racism and discrimination, as well as her perseverance in the face of hardship. The investigation of identity and the fight for self-acceptance in a culture that frequently aims to marginalize and dehumanize Black people are two major themes in Angelou's stories. Angelou's writings offer insightful perspectives into the structural injustices that African Americans encounter, ranging from her upbringing in the segregated South to her experiences as a young woman navigating the complexities of racial relations in America.

The most unique Afro-American literary endeavor is the Afro-American autobiographical declaration. Thousands of narratives among the precursors of the autobiography, were written by African Americans in the eighteenth century, to protest the injustices of slavery and to hasten their own emancipation. Up to the

present day, the autobiographical statement continues to be the classic form of literature that best captures the inmost aspirations and struggles of the African American people. It traces the growth of the people even under the influence of slavery and capitalism in the United States today. When analyzing the social and political environment that gave rise to the Afro-American identity, it is crucial to remember that, at its core, slavery offered very little in the way of the 'formal freedoms' that were bestowed upon Afro-Americans. Rather, slavery and its aftermath symbolized a system of planned and persistent violence—both psychological and otherwise, against a target population. While slavery enslaved the individual, imperialism seized Afro-American labour just as brutally and severely restricted their ability to participate in social and political life within the nation. This was done under the false pretence that the individual was granted complete freedom.

Thus, Afro-Americans' entire social evolution has been shaped by their fight to free themselves from the debilitating social and psychological consequences of the prevailing culture and ideology. This struggle was largely evident in Afro-American writers' writing, especially in autobiographies. The way that the Afro-American self develops can be understood through these autobiographical accounts because literature looks at how ideology—that is, ideas, values, and feelings—functions within the social system. The dehumanization and infringement suffered by African American women continued to be mainly unnoticed and infrequently brought up in public. A small number of the thousands of autobiographies that were released in the early years were about her, and her condition remained a closely kept secret. This discrepancy persisted long into the modern era, creating a scenario where discussing the autobiographical statement in Afro-American literature was possible without having to address the Afro-American woman as black and female, as a person and a presence,

as independent and accountable. The Afro-American women's literary endeavors came into light in the latter half of the 20th century. Now, these life narratives remain omnipresent in the Afro-American autobiographical statement.

Afro-American women activists' autobiographies have greatly influenced society in many of ways. The experiences and hardships faced by Black women in America are powerfully brought to light by these autobiographies, especially in the context of activism and social justice movements. These women challenge readers to face hard realities and structural injustices by bringing racism, sexism, discrimination, and inequality to light via their personal tales. Autobiographies written by these Afro-American women activists challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about race, gender, and activism. They offer nuanced portrayals of Black women as multifaceted individuals with agency, leadership, and intellectual prowess, countering negative stereotypes that have been perpetuated in mainstream media and society. With their first-person narratives of historical occurrences, social movements, and activist tactics, these memoirs are excellent teaching tools. For students, instructors, and scholars interested in learning about the real-world experiences of Black women activists, these books are must-read because they provide light on the complexity of American history and the problems that oppressed populations endure. Through igniting crucial discussions, uniting communities, and influencing public opinion and legislation, the autobiographies of Afro-American women activists have contributed to the acceleration of social change. Through their personal stories, these women question the existing misconceptions, promote justice and equality, and encourage group action in the direction of creating a society that is more inclusive and fairer. Overall, these Black American women activists' autobiographies have a profound influence that goes well beyond the pages they write, they influence public opinion, promote compassion

and understanding, and support continuous initiatives for emancipation and social change.

The current effort aims to investigate the nature, application, and significance of autobiography in the lives of Afro-American writers. The Black women activists decentred these features on the writing canvas by presenting the real situations of black people's life and revealing the truths that underlie political and social standards. Autobiography is the result of an internal drive, a presentation that compels the author to transcribe precisely what resonates with his innermost feelings. Reading autobiographies becomes significant for a variety of reasons. Its significance extends to readers of all subjects and is not limited to the confines of literary prose. The Afro-American autobiographies selected for this study have a compelling argument for survival. The selected autobiographies reflect the stark realities the U.S. social background presented for Black people. More than that the metamorphosis of personalities or the blending of activist fervours can be witnessed as the narrative progresses. All the life narratives can be tied together with a common school of thoughts and feelings- racism, sufferings of Black community, prolonged struggle with White supremacy, activism find its fruit in empowered women selves.

Chapter 3

Devising Self out of Resistance: From Subsistence to Selfhood

Self is an unbound factor which contributes to an individual's essential being and distinguishes one from other individuals. Self is strictly a contentious term in the contemporary theoretical scenario. Many philosophers are still in debate regarding the existence of self or the concept of self as an illusion. Though many thinkers stress the illusory nature of the conception of self, philosophers like Daniel and Dennet point out the sense of self in every individual which is intertwined with the identity of an individual (Frank S 4). Self can never be swathed in a unitary construction as it encompasses different realms in its formation. Literature, being an expression of self, deals with myriad forms of self: partial and inclusive. All literary works centered on self/selves in their rendering and manifestation in the course of elaboration of the plot. Memoirs, confessions, autobiographical narratives and testimonies are the epitomes in delineating self in its authentic as well as its most exemplary form. A comprehensive and elaborate extension of self can be found in the genre of autobiography as it encompasses a man's life as a whole rather than portraying disintegrated segments of life. Moreover, life unfolds directly from the one who goes through it in an autobiography. Life is a complex phenomenon which can never be compartmentalized in terms of the experiences we undergo and the conceptions/knowledge we internalize. Similarly, it is not viable to categorize 'self' as it keeps on developing or getting amended by the experiences it goes through. Here is the significance of autobiography; it illustrates the expressions of self in varied forms: 'Varied' in the sense that each autobiography, being an expression of a unique self, differs in its exploration and expressions of peculiar self.

Self is a multifaceted aspect. Rom Harre states that self “appears in personal narratives in at least three psychologically diverse contexts: perception, reflection, and social interaction” (Harre 59). The author perceives his/her experiences while retrieving and elaborating them as they are getting structured in a self-narrative. It is a process of imbibing as well as gauging the self which is followed by reflection. The act of sharing one's own experiences, developmental thoughts, and pragmatic knowledge through the mode of life-writing contributes to social interaction. Thus, self-narratives act as the best literary expressions of self.

Even centuries ago, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists have grappled with the conception of ‘self’ as the most complex but basic human problem. All the imperfections afflicting human consciousness, way of life, understanding human’s role in social, cultural arena can be unfolded perfectly by analyzing the self of an individual. The self can never be a permanent reality. But in its stage of transformation, it tries to accommodate novel findings or realization to act against any forces of suppression. Self is in a constant process of recreation. The initiation of self-consciousness is one of the milestones in the cultural evolution that Homo sapiens had undergone before millions of years. When analyzing the evolutionary past of human beings, ‘self’ is the element which has undergone complex and minute transformations to contribute human identity as well as intelligence.

The practice of self-writing can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato; *Seventh Letter of Plato (Epistle)*. Plato detailed a significant period of his life in this book. In the initial stages of formation, autobiographies focused more on the life/ ‘bio’ of the authors. But later they twisted or extended the focus to ‘self’/’auto’. The augmentation at which self can be put up through autobiography was the main concern of critics in those years. The term autobiography itself is

inadequate to encompass diverse dimensions of self. Michel Beaujour put out of place the term 'autobiography' in general. He suggests other terms like 'autographie', 'autoscription', 'autospecularisation' and 'autoportrait' (Abbot 421). These terms are congruous with autobiography as it is the history of one's life manifested in words by oneself. The orientation of it may vary when it is viewed from different angles: theoretical, cultural, structural, and ideological. The essence, method or the structure of an autobiography depend on the edifice of the self; there may be dimensions of culture, gender, history, race, ethnicity and social factors affecting 'self' unique to each individual. The contemporary theoretical epoch that includes post-structuralism and deconstruction, nullifies the existence of the subject in a text. Here arises the finely pertinent questioning of the nature of 'the self'. In any dimension, autobiography can be termed as the alleged documentation of self-formation or self-development of a chiefly located 'self'. Thus, it becomes an interdisciplinary concern that comprises philosophical, psychological, ethnic, and gendered development of a person in the formation of an absolute individual. The expressions of realities in autobiographies can never be evasive. More than being an authentic account of experiences, they represent a unique self. Self is composed of different aspects of the same individual-pragmatic, emotional, intellectual etc. The notion of self has elaborated effusively by theoreticians:

On the one hand the reader expenses the Autobiographical text as an occasion of discovery of seeing in the text the heretofore unexpressed or unrecognized depth of the readers' self....What the reader finds displayed is that vulnerability which makes it possible to celebrate the finitude of his or her shelving. The reader discovers the possibility of selfhood through interpretation (Gunn 19).

In the process of writing an autobiography, there emerges relativism between the narrator and the one who had once gone through the experiences. A sort of reflection, rememory and moral judgment occur where one can demarcate between right or wrong. And also, the autobiographer relates with other characters surrounded him/her. It leads the narrator to explore the self as an experience or recipient of actions, where the self is seen as an objective static entity (Quigley 152). Thus, the current self or the now-person is the amalgamation of the assimilated knowledge through the experiences and incidents of the past.

Self identifies itself in two ways during its developmental stage: the first predisposes the person into dissociative identity and the other propels him or her towards unity, wholeness (Louis 122). The wholeness aspect can be realised only if the dissociated self gets an identity or acceptance within the social scenario. Thus, private self gets acceptance in the public. A particular individual's assimilation into the social or cultural standards or norms and his/ her conformity to them determines whether he/she possesses a split self or integrated self.

Being an evolving phenomenon in everyone, self is under conversion in each juncture of one's life. It alters or outdoes in accordance with experiences an individual comes up against, both social and personal. In line with the Social Cognitive Learning Theory of Albert Bandura which originated in 1986, social environment and cognitive factors together contribute to a person's development and behaviour (Bandura 247). This learning theory is relevant in explaining the process of self-formation as self is being developed through cognition. And self alters only in line with learning ie. when the new schemas are being assimilated into the mind of individual self changes accordingly.

Observational learning happens in every individual as he/she sets a model for things to be done. In Assata Shakur's and Angela Davis's case, African American human activist Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, the most famous Afro American spokesperson cum Civil Rights activist and such political leaders played a great role in influencing them to lead an activist life protesting against all sorts of subjugation towards Black community.

Reciprocal Determinism focuses on the role of the environment in how an individual imbibes things and conceptions. Social interaction between the individual and other individuals helps in developing and assimilating existing schematic structure. While considering these activists, they spent most of their bright/youthful years enduring segregation and harassment by white people. The environment in which they brought up was totally based on white supremacist agenda. And it helped determine their 'self' into a compact whole capable of protesting against and standing for the cause of the black needs, rights, and goals at any cost. This vibe sprouted within the inner self as an outcome of reciprocal determinism and helped determine their own identity as activists.

Self-efficacy is the third important constituent in Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura 191). When a person believes that he/she can perform a particular role/action, then confidence emerges to put all the thoughts into pragmatic. These black women were successful in their efforts of protest as they got enough support from the black fellow beings to fight against white. So, this self- efficacy enables social learning and thus fixing the 'activist self' among the revolutionary Black activists.

In its applicational level, Social Cognitive Theory of Albert Bandura stresses on the impact of repeatedly displayed images of the target group in the media on the

viewers/readers; representation in line with race, gender etc. and how it affects the attitude and behavioral changes in the viewers. This can be analyzed in detail while examining the attitude of the U.S. folk towards the activists. The Black women activists were being represented in U.S. media as terrorists. And the accused legal charges and allegations attributed to them through social propagandas, pamphlets and other modes of media created a 'murderer, robber' image of these Civil Activists.

In the process of constructing an autobiography, the author recounts his or her past experiences in the form of words/writing and feels a sort of liberation as she/he unites even the suppressed contents of the unconscious mind. And thus, an otherwise covert self is getting exposed. The autobiographer goes in the past to recreate it in the present narrative and thus autobiography acts as a platform to interpret, recreate and reinterpret one's self.

When we examine autobiographical writings, different renditions of established facts can be seen. In "History and Ideology in Autobiographical Literature of the First World War", Evelyn Cobley states that Self-narration is as old as humanist tradition and gets its primacy in legitimizing the authenticity of the author in narrating lived experience (37). On one level, autobiography is the elaboration of an evolving self. On the other hand, it's a kind of negotiation on a socio-cultural and even political level. An autobiography -different from all other life narratives- sketches the growth of a person in all levels- intellectual, conceptual, emotional, empirical etc. Thus, the process of framing of a self, as the person develops a self-willed identity, can be exemplified.

The upsurge of autobiography itself as a literary genre can be traced back in the pivot of self rather than in the extrinsic nature and superficial life of human beings. By elaborating on self and to reach into selfhood, an autobiographer undergoes an

artistic reconstruction of self where oneself gains a clearer perspective of one's own life. Instead of being a mere recapitulation of past experiences in life, autobiography is a quest for self through personal history and reaching up to solipsism. Thus, self becomes the pivotal factor of autobiography.

The process of constructing an autobiography itself aids in framing and outlining the whole experiences - individual and collective- and specifies selfhood. This reviewing of past experiences leads to self-actualization of their current status whether it is racial or gendered. Self-actualization is a psychological term which elaborates the basic initiative in every person to accomplish potentialities inherent in them. The process specifies their positions and posture in the public or society. Thus, it leads to an urge for self-assertion through questioning the then existing scenario which binds them into a restricted framework as well as curbs the expansion of self. As a consequence, one adopts resistance as a mode of self - assertion.

Self-narratives of men and women are different in their effective qualities. Generally, women autobiographies are labeled to be such narratives that extend more to subjective tones and emotional color. Serious and elaborate notes on emotions, expressions, cognitions and mental states of individuals are apparent in these accounts. Different from generalized conceptions on women narratives, the selected autobiographies of black women activists are unique as they contain less or null emotional expressions in explaining their life. There is a widespread belief that females and males experience null emotional expressions in explaining their life. All these autobiographies are distinct socializations regarding expression of internal states. The autobiographies under consideration totally refute the notion as the narrators are strong activists who can be considered as an epitome of socializations as well as social reformations. In devising self, memories of past experiences form a

strong basis and it's actually a form of continuity of self: limitless self, desire, transgression and quest for the self. If we own a place where our freedom and even our identity is challenged, we normally crave for space where we can assert our identity. During the quest to assert self, individuals have to transgress certain fixed notions or socio-cultural barriers. Maya Angelou, Assata Shakur and Angela Davis are the black women activists who were born and brought up in a white supremacist background which created a sort of challenged self in them. Being Black women, their identities are taunted and struggled in the white societies. Though slavery had been abolished by law in 1865 in U.S., these Black women, being Civil Rights Activists, experienced forms of slavery. They were accused of murder charges, imprisoned for mistakes not made by them, brutally treated in prisons, denied justice at court etc. To blow the trumpet of freedom, they were in need to destroy the walls of socio-cultural stigmas. Those stigmas are being transgressed in a way that society labels them iniquitous; it is hard to change social mindset until the core substances which formulated it traditionally could be deleted. It is clearly the clichés that pause troubles against liberation of black woman self.

As a political tool for actualizing racial and gender liberation, these activists created autobiographical self as separated from their personal or emotional realm or perspectives. They consider the reading public and want to create a sort of revolutionary impact in the readers, especially in black women readers, to develop a strong self instead of following the clichéd subjugated existence. Through their autobiographies these African American women activists could transform the personal history into art as well as political manifesto. Thus, they devise their 'selves' out of resistance. Resistance in its one sense is in the form of activism and self-narrative itself is a form of the resistance as it exposes the subjugations and

suppression that the black women endured in the white society which otherwise might not be brought into limelight ever.

Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), Maya Angelou's six autobiographies: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Singin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), *Mom and Me and Mom* (2013) and Angela Davis's *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974) raise questions about boundaries of individualism, identity, space and individual responsibility. They center primarily in the exhilaration of the limitless possibilities of the self. Their narratives have the texture of activism itself. Life-narrative itself is considered or evolved as a way of navigating lives. A sort of indissolubility of the inner and the outer self can be clearly traced in their writings. Complexities of a black woman's self-surviving in a white male-dominated scenario are realistically explored in the life narratives. The activist perspective from which the narratives have been written provides them with a sort of subversive revision even if they are rooted in western culture.

Exploration of these autobiographies helps to develop a new consciousness in which black vulnerable intricacies of self are analyzed. These works feature Black feminist autobiographical selfhood precisely. Black selfhood in these autobiographies stands in strict opposition to the hero-centered subjects which are commonplace in other autobiographies. As the narratives move through the trials and tribulations the Black American activists undergo, an overall collective realm is formed within and outside the individuals. It can be linked to a collective consciousness realm. Most of the experiences they faced are a sort of transcript of the ones in each Black American reader's life. Self in Black American autobiographies is an end product of the author's

consideration of the reading public and thus the 'self' becomes 'political' in nature. That is the main reason underlying the fact that some books, especially autobiographical narratives, by Black authors were strictly banned in American schools and libraries. Books like Richard Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* (1945), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) etc. are among the strictly banned books in U.S. because of their anti-American tone, Pan-Africanism, and philosophy on Black pride and Black Nationalism. Black open writings were always frowned at and not promoted by mass media in the U.S. So, it is really noteworthy that such Black autobiographies took the high ground in creating an awareness in Black mass about their subjugated existence as well as persuading them to act against the powers of white supremacy.

Afro-American autobiographers firmly believed in the power of autobiographies to bring a change in the socio-economic position of them in the American society. The role of white hegemony, overpowering black masters and the way these women tried to obtain individual freedom through non-cooperation and protest are apparent in all their autobiographical narratives.

All Afro-American women cannot be judged alike or based on similar variables because each of them possesses unique experiences and living conditions. Likewise, a Black American woman cannot be judged by the same factors as the other groups of people as they face double discrimination being a woman and a Black in a male dominated White society. Any act of subversion may label them as immoral and unfeminine. As most of the Black activists state purity of mind and body is unattainable to virtuous Black women as the white men's licentious habits forced Black women into that level of subjugation. In her controversial book, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography* (1986), Jelinek focuses on the difference between men's and

women's autobiographies in their subject matter, style of writing and gender images they portray. These disparities count to be the major factors in putting aside black women's personal narratives not to be counted as a part of mainstream literature.

Maya Angelou has stated in her narrative *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you” (74). Thus, Black women's personal narratives count to be an unleashing of the hitherto life of silence and sufferings of Black women in the white society. These Black activists tried to blur the social and political boundaries that separate the private life of Black women and their public lives. It can be viewed as a Black female politicization of domestic ideology. They achieved freedom as access to the social institutions beyond motherhood, family, and home etc. Black autobiography, especially Black woman autobiography encompasses all the aspects of black women experiences with authenticity. Black women were in a dilemma in placing herself in the society and in finding a standpoint to have their existence. The ethnic and racial factors force her into an existence in which she can't resist and cannot make her identity or self-definition. For an independent existence, the inseparable thing is this self- definition. And by defining oneself, one can reach to the true self. The image of each individual in a society is formed of different social and personal roles and these roles are always archetypes connected with distinct factors like gender class, caste, race, ethnicity etc. All these play significant roles in authenticating a person's self. There is a wide disparity between such social and personal roles that individuals intended to play in a social milieu and the ones they are expected or dictated to play in a social or cultural milieu. The self-narratives of Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur clearly depict their own struggles to weave various as well as complex strands of their personal, social, political and artistic life into a united whole.

Thus, through the process of resistance, they moved to a status in which they grew into representing the perfect image of a self-accepted Black womanhood. They and their struggles represent not only their individual life but also the hardships (mental and physical) endured by all black women collectively. They represent the black activist women folk who took their initial steps in resisting the authoritative powers over them and redirected and reconstructed the history of Black women itself. This framing of 'self' acts as a model for Black American women.

Exploration of self can be possible only when one is able to dismantle the private and the public realm, extending private thoughts and ideas to public realms and reaching to generalizations. These women activists could extend their private experiences to the public generalizations to which most of the Black women could relate themselves. These women activists' narratives are epitome of self-empowerment texts in which they portray themselves as empowered persons.

Theories of autobiography raise mainly two issues- the self and the truth. The very heart of African American autobiography theory is that the claim of 'I' usually stands for 'we'. But the 'I' in the autobiographies are a level higher than the typical 'we' as the subject of these autobiographies are women activists other than being passive black women. Autobiography by African American women make the black female selfhood as collective which can otherwise be called 'selfhood-in-relation' (Reddy 179).

With their courage, strong activist fervor, absolute political consciousness, and unwavering strength to fight against powers which dominate them, efforts in which they tried to free themselves from the white/black male masters to break free from slavery prove that they were never passive receivers of subjugation. Their intelligence,

hardships and determination resulted in reaching to the forefront of society rather than being passive subjects of oppression.

The autobiographical self here is placed in a wider historical context of the black women community rather than in a closed, congested personal arena. Still, the narrowed details of the personal or political self are not at all neglected in elaborating the development of self. The autobiographical voices elaborate the truly sensitive account of personal or political experiences. But the same episodes were portrayed differently through the language and the depiction of men and media as voices of the ruling/authoritative community. The public delineation of these activists by the media resulted in labeling them as desperado.

In elaborating 'selfhood in relation', these characters can be said to be molded by the strong women figures around them as well as motivated by the subjugated-passive black women folks who helped in cultivating the need of resistance in them. Though they live in America, they don't let the racist and sexist agenda of American society thwart the spontaneity of their outlook on life. They possess no sense of their racist, gender identity which in the other way might have curbed the flow of forming their strong, stubborn self.

Strong women bonding between or among the characters contribute to the power of the women activists. Their moms used to be very stubborn in acting against power structures. According to Archetypal theory, a child's mind bears primordial images of Father and *Magna Mater* ("Great mother") which will automatically reflect on the child's father or mother (Goldenberg 52). Here, in these self-narratives, the activist Black women had strong mothers whom they considered as tier role models in becoming rebels against White authoritative powers. Those mothers never succumb to tolerance and patience which were considered to be trademarks of black women.

While considering the title of Assata Shakur's self-narrative, *Assata : An Autobiography*, the first constituent in the word 'autobiography' means 'self'. Being an exploration of self, sometimes it creates a textual self which may be totally different from the coloring the society and culture ascribed to that specific person's identity. Through converting personal experiences to textual representations, autobiographical narrative attains a sort of revolutionary nature in case of the activists through which they can refute the socially established facade on their terrorist nature and can make their standpoint clear.

In the first chapter, Shakur denies the fixity of the terms race prejudice, race pride, race solidarity and 'race consciousness' etc. She instead focuses on individual action and individuality in determining a person's identity. She takes the stance of an assimilationist in such a way that no racial aspects affect her mental or pragmatic concerns. She preferred to be considered as an activist without getting assigned with a gendered/ racial label 'black women' activist cum writer.

She seems to celebrate her ethnic identity rather than considering it as the one to be afflicted to reach up to the status of the white identity. The role of ethnicity in forming her 'self' is depicted as she unfolds different characters in her community who helped moulding herself. The concept self-in-relation/ the role of female bonding has been illustrated clearly as she reveals the role of strong Black women in her life (B. Collins 470).

A relational understanding of self is there in Angela Davis's autobiography. Her family, fellow comrades and all those who stood against racism played a major role in framing her 'self'. She considers Afro-American society as her own family and thus addressed the ones from that community in kinship terms 'brother' and 'sister'.

She says they all are tied together not of blood or skin color but of the discrimination and prejudice they face.

Davis attributed ancestors' role in framing a social framework for being subjective to political and social prejudices. The ancestors, like her grandmother, were real slaves. So, Davis insists on the practice of remembering the racial aspects as they play a major role in getting deep understanding of the present time and can act as a basis of suggestive measures for making improvement in their way of living in future.

In the preface to her autobiography, Davis states:

The forces that had made my life what it is are the very same forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people,” and later. “The one extraordinary event of my life had nothing to do with me as an individual-with a little twist of history, another sister or brother could have easily become the political prisoner (Davis xv).

Self is the formation of nature and nurture. Both these have played a significant role in forming Davis's self. Davis's mom was an activist from her college days. Her life of political action persuaded Davis's to develop an urge towards a life of protest for attaining a world of equality for the Black mass. Davis's mother, her attorney and close friend Mrs. Margaret Burnham and her political mother Mrs. Charlene Mitchell have played notable roles in the formation of her self. Davis describes Margaret Burnham as her 'legal' mother as she adds to Davis's nurturing in a so-called maternal sense with adequate advice and support during her trials.

When the power structure tried to beat her power of resistance by attributing wrong charges on her and she was put in prison, her 'self' was getting firm and strong by the masses demonstrating outside her prisons. It is evident from her narrative that her strong self is mended and molded mainly by strong women rather than men.

"Claudia Jones articulated a form of Black Marxist feminism that was influential for later generations of women activists and laid a critical foundation in addressing both race and class in Communist movements." (Boyce 2007). Her 'self' is firmly influenced by the books she read while she was in prison; mainly about strong communist women leaders- her friends, political ancestors.

Angela Davis Came into wide fame during her imprisonment and her trial on conspiracy charges in 1970-1972. She became an internationally known great leader of the Black community because of her success in devising her self out of resistance. Her deep study and interest in philosophy prompted her to research what people had to say about formidable things in society. Thus, she started to get involved in issues, especially discriminatory issues in society as a part of which her interest in Karl Marx sprouted and flourished.

Her weaving of the conceptions of self and activist mode was greatly influenced by astonishingly worst conditions of the Black in the U.S. and by the utterly bad state of prison system. She took the duty to bring to light the whole worse and unjustified conditions and practices in the system of imprisonment in the U.S as her life mission. In her opinion, prison, prison-industrial complex is a form of masked racism. She devised a strong self as a practical solution to the problems of racism, gender inequality, feminism, education etc. The most unjustified system prevalent in the U.S. was that people were sent to prison, simply because they were Black, brown and poor. Being a revolutionary, Davis felt that it is the duty of revolutionaries to fight against systems of oppression. Thus, she joined the Soledad Brother Defense Committee. To protect people from the atrocities of jail prisoners, guards, jail authorities and police, the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee played a major role.

Being strong and keeping a strong self is sometimes interpreted as 'felony'. In a social scenario, which demands a group of people to be silent only because of their class and colour difference, their strong and stubborn steps are considered unlawful. Prisoners during the 1990s were not allowed to utter even a word against the authority. John, George, Fleeta actively participated in Soledad endeavors and at the same time, they were militants. As they prompted their fellow beings to be alert about their own liberation and space in society, they were charged with the killing of a jail guard. Actually, they were not at all responsible for the death of the jail guard and the only evidence against George, John and Fleeta was that they were militants. Angela Davis was expanding her acquaintance with the masses especially Black women and thus contributed a major part of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee.

The defense campaign was getting stronger and broader. She had a strong sense of sacrifice for the people of the Black community. Her primary concern was to cure the Black masses out of the subjugated plight. She tried her level best to convince the masses about their subjection and persuaded them to stand against all sorts of barriers and oppression.

In shaping one's self, childhood experiences play a significant role. Many adverse experiences Angela Davis went through in her childhood, taught her the importance of keeping her Black identity aloof to and against the 'ideal' White identity which claimed to be ideal by the authoritarian white people. When she was a little girl, her family moved into an all-white neighborhood. She was really astonished by the racial antipathy fermenting in that place as the people there considered Angela and her family as unwelcome guests. Differences in racial attitudes and social classes were encountered by Angela Davis in spheres and stages of her life: School, society,

stores, church etc. The California Board of Regions charged her speeches in defense of Soledad Brothers and on the same charge, she got dismissed from the University.

She was pointlessly targeted by the police simply because of her leniency with Soledad Brothers, Jonathan Jackson, brother of Soledad, carried a gun which was registered in Angela's name for self-protection. A warrant was issued for the arrest in August 1917. Davis hid in a friend's house. She was placed on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted list. FBI agents found her on October 13th, 1970 (Williams 12-14). Angela Davis's strong self-created that much impact in the public as a worldwide 'Free Angela Protest' was conducted when she was arrested in New York in 1920 on charges of conspiracy, murder and kidnapping. She was in prison for a total of sixteen months. Pursuing the self and living in line with the dictates of one's own self is that much questionable in the white society. This was clearly evident as she became the third woman and 309th individual to appear on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives' List.

Though the external agencies and factors tried to distract her advancements of protests through accusations, Angela Davis did not allow her inner strength to get weakened. She obstinately moved with her educational advancements and finally came to be successful in realizing her academic achievements. And the educational background marked as a steppingstone as well as basic ground to the activist advancement against class/caste/gender discriminations. The systems-social, educational, political- were prejudiced against women, especially Black women. Education was a instrumental in strengthening her self. In the socially as well as politically hostile atmosphere, great books, good personalities and her studies helped her enlighten herself rather than getting passive.

Black women face social prejudices like racial stereotypes, discrimination, and microaggressions in daily life, affecting their interactions, access to resources, and opportunities. They also encounter educational biases, including limited access to quality education, biased disciplinary practices, and stereotypes that undermine their academic abilities and potential for advancement. Black women encounter educational discrimination through unequal access to quality education, biased disciplinary practices, and limited academic opportunities. They also face systemic barriers like underfunded schools and stereotypes.

Angela was very active in forming organizations against the then-existing prison system in the U.S. The solid reason for that lies in her encounter with social injustice, victimization of helpless people, racial prejudice, blind judicial law against the Black, racism etc. All the hardships she endured helped positively in her personal and political evolution into a person of strong identity. Angela conducted deep and comprehensive studies on the prison system and as a result she took abolition of the prison system as her lifetime endeavor. For the realization of that goal, she became an action-oriented founder of a national organization named 'Critical Resistance'. The main intention of the organization was to put an end to the prison system through deep and minutest research in the prison system. Angela argued that the existing judicial/prison system is another form of slavery. The U.S. prison well abounds in African American population disproportionately.

To assert one's self, we should be able to question and fight against the forces that act in opposition to its progress. The brutal treatment towards Black people, the frustration they endured for decades, constant thought on racial subjugation etc. acted against the development of self in Black people. But Angela urged them to come out from this circle of fear by shattering all the boundaries of gender and races. She

asserted her 'self' that also brought a sense of awareness among the masses about the relevance of asserting their 'self' by subverting the shackles of injustice prevailed there in the name of justice in the U.S.

She persuaded Black folk through her writing, lectures and her serious discussion with legal experts persuaded the public in line with protest against White forces of subjugation:

Already she had firm opinion against the very system of imprisonment. She remarks 'Jails are thoughtless places. Thoughtless in the sense that no thinking is done by their administrations: no problem solving or rational evaluation of any situation slightly different from the norm. The void created by this absence of thought is filled by rules and the fear of establishing a precedent (Angela, *Autobiography* 290).

Angela Davis had first-hand experience in the disparities of the prison/judicial system. The U.S. prison population at that time was a replica of racial enmity prevailed in the U.S. As the Black folk were not in protest, the prison administration was in safe zone indeed. Her fellow activists John Clutchel, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo was also in the same battlefield against white supremacist agendas on a parallel ground. Angela fought for Black women's rights and for Black men's privileges. In Davis's trial in California, the prosecution elaborated as the primary motive for her crimes as her uncontrolled passion for Jonathan Jackson. But her personal grief over Jonathan Jackson's death was not at all explained in detail in her autobiography.

Judicial manipulation continues to harass Black people which necessitated strengthening the people's movements like the National United Committee (NUCFAC) which was created to free Angela Davis from false charges. Later, this committee aided a lot in defending the judicial system in favor of Black folk.

Sometimes the black had to hide their appearance to save themselves from the white brutal attacks. Their fugitive periods in life to escape from the U.S. local and state troopers have been portrayed in the autobiographies. Angela Davis elaborates on such a condition in her autobiography:

But tonight the way seemed strange, full of the unknown perils of being a fugitive. And there was no getting around it - my life was now that of a fugitive, and fugitives are caressed every hour by paranoia. Every strange person I saw might be an agent in disguise, with bloodhounds waiting in the shrubbery for their master's command. Living as a fugitive means resisting hysteria, distinguishing between the creations of a frightened imagination and the real signs that the enemy is near. I had to learn how to elude him, outsmart him. It would be difficult, but not impossible (Davis 5).

Asserting 'self' was impossible as all the external/background forces like government machinery, judicial system, prison hierarchy, press etc. were acting in direction with tyrannizing Black self. Rather than legal necessities, most of the arrests and imprisonment of the Black by the White were actions motivated by ill-will only be in name of their ethnicity. Scapegoating of innocent Black people and victimizing them under well-planned systemic strategy and violence were there.

Inside the prison, the partialities/racial disparities are high as they even handcuffed the Black with their arms behind them, while the White women were kept with free hand. San Quentin, the conductor of the prison, was very poor. Reports were released about brutal tortures, hard beatings of the authorities over Black prison women. Angela was put in jail for many months only as result of the court administrator's fabrication of circumstantial evidence. Angela Davis, such a notable and worthy revolutionary, was arrested. And more than two hundred local committees

and sixty-seven committees in foreign countries worked for Angela's liberation from prison in February 1971. This showed the power of a single woman who has a determined 'self'. As a result of social protests, she was released from County jail in 1972. Through a long, microscopic procedure, the court granted her bail. They unnecessarily attributed political color to the case and her imprisonment. Any person of self-will will always be feared by the authority/ruling class.

This is because of the same reason; Angela was warned against attending large gatherings and conducting public speaking. Davis's autobiographical self seems to be impersonal and public. Rather than being too emotional and personal in its impacts, it is a political autobiography advancing political struggle.

As it is primarily a political autobiography, the main focus of Angela Davis is to reveal their life in connection with public activities rather than exploring the personal life. But the role these public sphere 'performances' execute in forming 'self' is portrayed well in those autobiographies. The important thing to be noted is that all the activists happened to go through conflicting family or other personal relationships as they lead a risky life deviating from common women. In this context, the term 'common' connotes the black women who passively endured all the subjugations resulting from the white supremacist agenda of actions and ideologies.

Maya Angelou's autobiography unfolds an exploration of self. As in a pattern of Bildungsroman, she exposes her formative years of life from her early childhood to womanhood. The series of autobiographical narratives show her psychological, moral, academic development as it constitutes the formation of a rounded personality. The narrative seems to be a quest for self-discovery which was possible only through burning under the cauldron of hardships. Hardships in the name of race and gender make her a strong person with an influential self. Though social forces alienated her

and questioned her identity she succeeded in maintaining an inner self unchanging in all controversial situations of her life. Adverse situations began so early in her life, at the age of three, during her life in Stamps, Arkansas. The discrepancy between the social role and the domestic existence of the black women formed a battlefield for Angelou and she triumphs in developing a selfhood by enduring all the negative effects of black existence. Her strong-will forms the basis of all these vehement actions. Nothing but her relentless spirit makes her self-assertion pragmatic in the social realm. In her autobiography *The Heart of a Woman*, Angelou talks about the black existence in the U.S.

We, the most hated, must take hate into our hands and by the miracle of love, turn loathing into love. WE, the most feared and apprehensive, must take fear and by love, change it into hope. We, who die daily in large and small ways, must take the demon death and turn it into Life...We had to pray without ceasing and work without tiring. We had to know evil will not forever stay on the throne (Angelou, *The Heart of a Woman* 56)

Maya Angelou's autobiographical series portray an unconventional role of women in all aspects. Rather than following the fixity of roles, Angelou acted vibrantly in different situations of conflict. There were certain social roles usually attached to Black women like 'Mammy'. Most of the Black women dare not to perform beyond the commonplace roles. But Angelou never succumbed to the fixed roles of identity, and was revolutionary in gaining the freedom she denied with, in the journey of developing her self. For example, rather than considering the male dominion high and suppressing own desires and wishes in fear of subverting boundaries of action for women, Angelou stood against them and asserted her wants and wishes etc.

While facing racial obstacles, Angelou proves to be vigorous and stable in her attitude. Her adverse life experiences contribute only to her inner growth and self-development. Angelou's journeys, especially her visit to Africa, provided her with enough experiences and realizations to augment her self.

In the process of devising an individual's self, self-worth can be achieved well through one's position and profession in society. In her autobiography, Angelou can be seen in the process of driving herself through different and distinct professions, each of which provides her with sufficient experiences to build a perverse nature. Having portrayed as one of the examples of colored women rising above the boundaries of color and class to achieve respectable position in the White society, Angelou had to go through various professions: streetcar conductorette, shift waitress in a day and night restaurant, actor, singer, writer, harlot in Melrose record shop, dancer etc.

Her profession as a streetcar conductorette provided her with a platform enough to get in touch with all classes of people in society and to fix a control over all sorts of people's influence. She was so determined to earn her living by any means and thus achieved economic freedom which formed the very basis of self-assertion to some extent. She didn't even get the support of Negro organizations in fixing her economic problem. Her strong survival against all detrimental situations of her life contributed both by White and Black male class. After many trials and tribulations, she was able to be "hired as the first Negro on the San Francisco street cars" (Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* 269). With her life she showed the world that even in adverse personal and social environment, in her case White society, she is being a Black American can be a formidable character. From her job at the age of seventeen as Creole cook, she took the help of old pappu Ford to learn that her socializing skills

and untiring capacity to work even from five o'clock in the morning made her successful in the particular field.

Her relationship with R. L. Poole who trained her in acrobatics, jazz, tap dancing was really a twist in her identity. Angelou herself marked these steps in her life as a step towards liberation; the steps trespassed the boundaries of gendered conceptions of self.

“I had tried many things and failed,” she says (Angelou, *Gather Together in My Name* 137). This trial and failure provided her with a ground rich enough to sprout like a new, bright flower. She even stooped to the flesh profession- harlotry during one stage of her life. Her efficient perception of reality made her capable enough to encounter all the hard situations of her life. She kept her self aloof from better experiences of the past so as to keep her self away from getting distorted by experimental reality.

The first decent Black-White relation in Angelou's life that she had with Louise Cox, the part owner of the Melrose record shop in Fillmore, gave her a sort of confidence. Unlike the other White masters, Cox treated her with dignity and courtesy.

The broken marriage with Tosh was mainly due to emotional and patriarchal problems. Later, her job as a dancer at the Garden of Allah advertising was a great challenge to her because she was the first Black woman dancer in that area. She converted challenges in a positive way as she attained an identity of glamour and it inspired her to compare herself with glamorous Black women in history. Even the White strippers there felt a sort of antipathy and envy towards her.

Her straightforward manners and artistic talents as a dancer helped her to gain an opportunity at the Purple Onion. The Purple Onion was a basement cabaret. Her days there helped her to develop a relentless self, devoid of colour and gender

attributes. This life at Purple Onion plays a major role in transforming her identity: In the first stage of developing self, she accepted the identity of a Cuban family ‘‘Rita the Cuban Bombshell’’. The title ‘Bombshell’ itself suggests her vibrant and revolutionary nature. The Purple Onion was responsible for transforming her identity into Maya Angelou, which was later stylized into Maya Angelou. The new identity itself provided her with ample opportunities on radio and on television. Her public talks and dancing became that much popular as the Maya Angelou Fan Club was formed. As her fame increased, her self-esteem also doubled. But the real

turning point in Angelou’s life was her association with *Porgy and Bess*. It opened up a door to the world itself. Her yearning for travelling to be in the group of African American people, got realized through it.

I wanted to travel, to try to speak other languages, to see the cities I had read about all my life, but most important, I wanted to be with a large, friendly group of Black people who sang so gloriously and lived with such passion. (*Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry like Christmas* 143-4).

Creativity has a major role in enriching a person’s identity. Maya Angelou’s initial endeavour in creativity was through John Killen who introduced her to Harlem Writers’ Guild. She began sketching song lyrics, short stories, plays etc. Her play became a great success. Her initial step to subvert the social boundaries set up by classism and racism through revolutionary steps began as she happened to hear the speech of Martin Luther King Jr. To help him out by raising funds she presented a play entitled ‘‘Cabaret for Freedom’’. The problems, both mental and physical, affected by Black people in the white society were presented through a Broadway play ‘‘The Blacks’’. Suffering the debasement of White people, black emerged to be very sharp and alert in everything.

Going through various life experiences, different forms of self will evolve and those transformational self will be strong and capable enough to deal with any tribulations of life further. Her strong participation in the Cultural Association for Women African Heritage (CAWAH) made her an adamant activist. She organized a tenacious protest march to the UN's building.

She opened a new door in devising self. She was the first black woman working as an editor of a magazine. Angelou enriched the self through educating herself in every bit of her experience. She considered each of her life experiences, even if it's good or bad, that too with ample cheer, and dealt them with a sense of authenticity. Her life shows that apart from mental stubbornness, learning plays an impartial role in shaping the self. Her interaction with educated people, artistic or creative class, was influential in forming her self. More than that, her strong determination to fight against the discriminatory powers in U.S., helped her to device her self out of resistance.

Resistance is a step through which she managed to shape her self. She joined a group of radicals and participated strongly in demonstrations and marches. She was active in all revolutionary acts against the operation. She, as an activist, shows interminable participation in political activities. She was so committed to the Black American struggle and joined the Organization for Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Critics like Sandra O'Neale have stated that Angelou has the opinion that independent existence resulting from marriage, entertainment can never be capable enough to mould a good self. She believed in an independent existence far away from all bondages to express herself through writing. Through writing, she seemed to achieve a sort of sublimation. Maya Angelou wants society to accept her as a black woman. So, she spread her thoughts and ideals through her speeches and writing. She

wanted to preach the importance of self - worth in black women and to nourish them a need for self-reliance.

Her distinct and various professional experiences helped her to deal with diversities of life experiences and to stand against any adverse life situations. Her optimistic nature and close relationship with people like Julia Mayfield, Dolly Mcpheren, James Baledwil and Kojo helped her to overcome life hardships. Her autobiographies, which depicted a sort of development of self as writing, were the means through which she integrated her self.

The act of writing an autobiography was therapeutic to Angelou and she could portray all the bitter experiences of her life in her life narratives and the process of writing itself aided in forming a strong self. The process of writing life narratives itself helped her reconstruct her self. Her life strongly stands as an ideal example for the 'archetypal' self of an African American woman who had to suffer racial and gendered subjugations for years. Her transition was from a person with a fragmented self to one with an integrated strong self. Through her autobiography series of eight works, Angelou was unraveling the traditions of racism and sexism in the Afro-American collective history.

Prison manifestos and autobiographical narratives of Assata Shakur unfolded the development of a strong self which acted as an enlightening force in the Black consciousness. It resulted in generating a protest against dichotomous inevitability in terms of race, gender and class. Angelou's activism and autobiographical narrative is calm and persuasive in its tone and in revelations. Her autobiography is vibrant in its actions and presentations.

In the case of Shakur, the state-sanctioned violence against Black people in America and the false identities the state imposed on them as imprisoned leaders, laid

bedrock in developing a strong self in her. Thus, she came out to be a Black woman activist with an unbeaten self. Her life narrative can be considered as a foundation of resistance-strategies acceptable for Black women against the White superpowers as well as radical prison activism.

Shakur was a strong member in Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army. Her struggles for Black as a Civil Rights activist from 1971 to 1979 and public talks made her a notable figure in America. Her autobiography can be considered as an epitome of reconstituting Black female identity within the new scenario of Black Power Movements, the Black Liberation Army. Assata Shakur was pulled over by the New Jersey State Police, shot two times and after that charged with murdering a police officer. She was convicted and served six years in the Marin County correctional facility for women in New York. After escaping from there, she took refuge in Cuba. New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman placed a \$1,000,000 on Assata's head. Assata used her life as a Black woman political prisoner to inspire a notion of liberation of Black woman selfhood from all the shackles of White supremacist society and Black male exploitation. Thus, Assata's approach to prison-industrial pattern and political imprisonment serve to recenter the role of them in Black Power Movement.

Her account of Black woman activism refashions the history while reflecting Black freedom struggles. It also depicts a feminizing view of Black history. All these accounts are a way of overcoming age-old racism in the U.S.

She was granted political refugee status in Cuba. She was taught from early childhood to survive and fight against segregation in the racist the U.S. society. As an activist she joined many groups like the Black Panther Party and struggles involved with political agencies.

Chapter one of her autobiography begins with how she was arrested by the cops and handcuffed to a bed in the hospital. She was fatally wounded in the New Jersey Turnpike shootout. In such a critical situation, the cops beat Shakur repeatedly and tortured her.

Black nurses in the hospital provided her with books which helped her to know about social happenings around. The society and actions of people simply focused on shattering the bond between Black and White women who were strongly fighting against sexism and racism in society.

The judge and other authorities accused Shakur of all the charges, even the charge of the New Jersey turnpike incident. Shakur's mom and sister visited the prison, and her mom said that she was proud of her being an activist prisoner. She was shot in the hand, chest and leg. Her hand was disabled and even doctors couldn't predict the use of it. Her lungs were all damaged.

In chapter two, the effects of segregation Shakur experienced when she was residing in White people's street are exposed through this autobiography. White people even denied the Black's rights to own their land. The torturing by the White with guns was unbearable for the Black people. Shakur's grandmother taught her self-worth and to be proud of being what she is, a Black woman. Chapter three clearly details how Shakur's grandparent brought her up to be a stubborn Black woman by making her understand the importance of not letting others walk over her and she was taught not to let White people make her feel subjugated.

For a Black woman living in the 18th century, segregation was an inevitable part of life but Shakur's mom and later Shakur herself acted against the rules. In order to be recognized as 'individuals' in a white-centred culture, the grandmother learned Spanish and spoke Gibberish so that she could enter into 'White-only' places. With

such clever tricks, she could subvert the white supremacist agenda which always tried to tyrannize Black people.

Black teachers treated Shakur better than White teachers. White teachers were very cruel and indifferent to her. Such bad behavior and ill treatment from White folk even from her childhood created an aversion in her mind toward Whites. So, she had never felt an inclination to be one like the White. But she was so proud being a Black woman and stuck on to her self-worth.

In the formation of self, many important incidents, even the ones from her childhood, played a major role. She has witnessed the shooting of Martin Luther King JR. Her revolutionary mind and protesting behavior are the signs of personal as well as political conflicts she had to go through. Her parents were in constant conflict at home, which had even forced her to run away from home. In her journey of life, Shakur had gone through all horrid nuances of social representations: she had gone through the life of a thief, and she had forced to be a sexual focus of a man named David.

Whatever circumstances she had undergone, all of them resulted in molding a self that stood aloof from detrimental forces. Instead, she fixed the focus of her inner self in worthy matters. She thought and acted in a way that the existing system of oppression should be changed only through the sufferer's effort. Chapter five details the ugliness of treatment Shakur had to undergo in jail in New York. She even had to take part in an invasive search of her vaginal and anal cavities. She was put in that part of the jail reserved for crazy or mad people.

Media play a role in creating false identity which even curbs the development of 'self'. In the case of these Black women, the mainstream media which were the objects of white society, portrayed a totally unethical, distorted image of them. So, society considered them as outcasts. When the whole world stands against one, it is a

challenge for one to survive and to develop a strong self. But these women were obstinate in fighting against the opposite forces and came to be successful in molding strong self.

The judicial system of the U.S. was so biased and indifferent toward the Black Rights. They did not give a chance to hear Shakur's lawyers' arguments saying that they were unfairly targeted. They were repeatedly removed from the courtroom. When the public tried to protest against the injustice of the judicial system which segregated Black, they were also attacked by the U.S. marshals. Shakur and her friend Kamau Sadiki were moved to a country where they were allowed to hear trials on speakerphones. They couldn't even utter a word explaining their standpoint. Shakur failed a trial for shooting a cop on the Turnpike. Though the jurors admitted not to be racist in their judgments, they all were racist as they failed to give fair trial for Shakur. Shakur says ironically that all the jurors have read the book *Target Black* which discussed Shakur's role in the Black Liberation Army and denounces her for involving with sensational groundless accusations and outright lies.

When Shakur was impregnated at the prison, the white prison doctors were not even ready to give her proper medication. Instead, they compelled her to have an abortion. Her request for a Black doctor to take care of her was also harshly denied. She had denied even proper food and care though she was pregnant, while placed in Middlesex County Jail. Protests were gathered out to allow Shakur to choose her doctor during delivery. She gave birth to a baby girl, Khalilah Camille Shakur. Immediately after breastfeeding she was sent to prison again.

In shaping self, education plays a major role. Shakur's education in Brandeis University, her Professor Herbert Marcuse's teachings on Marx's theory of Dialectical Materialism etc. were great in influencing Assata to develop an activist mind.

Brandeis was a platform where Assata got familiarized with other like-minded Black women like Angela Davis which fueled the fire of protest in her. They together initiated many demonstrations against racism.

Shakur's political consciousness was kindled by the students in African college. She began to develop a thorough understanding of Colonialism and thus began to question the U.S. actions abroad. She decided to quit her job with low wages. Instead started to do some work by herself. And for that she decided to continue her education.

Shakur was put on trial for a bank robbery in 1971. It was actually the FBI's hooked up story to frame her. So that they can catch her as she had escaped from jail. Shakur's opening statement summed up the U.S. government as targeting Black and Puerto-Rican communities and the ones they considered 'militant' resulting in creating a 'White-hating, cop-hating, gun-toting maniac' image for Shakur in the society. Through her strong steps of protest and accretion, she justified the need or role of the Black Liberation Army in fighting for justice and freedom of the community. During the trial three witnesses who earlier claimed to have seen Assata shooting the officer, revealed that they had been paid by FBI and other local authorities to lie regarding this. The supposed victim James Freeman himself faked his injuries. Thus, she was acquitted. At college, she entered into Malcolm X's organization of Afro-American unity and in many anti-racist protests. She realized the need for systemic change. But she strongly believed that self-determination was necessary to bring about any change in this racist system.

Expressing their years of struggles through personal narratives resulted in self-realization through self-affirmation. The Black women activists grew up amidst a repressive system without being depressed by it. Through their life narratives, they

convey a message of survival and affirmation of self even the detrimental factors which adversely affected them. The process of writing self-narratives forms to be a way towards self-realization which fuels their survival and redefinition of self. In a process to subvert the restrictions and imposed subjugated roles on identities, they survived the subjugated existence, to possess a strong self of assertion. Through the abyss of emotional oppression and social subjugation, these activists emerged as individuals of strong self. According to Maya Angelou, life writing is an 'art for the sake of the soul'. She says, while writing an autobiography, one is reconstructing his/her own experiences as she/he relies on them.

These activists were born in a world that denied them the very blossoming of their own existence. Instead of resenting maltreatments and injustices towards the Black women, they were strengthening their own 'self' through the painful past. They considered their racial identity as a source of strength. More than stressing on their racial identity, they focus on the sense of themselves as an individual i.e., individual self.

Chapter 4

Redefining Realness: A Re- Presentation of Racist Consciousness

“We have people coming into the country or trying to come in — and we’re stopping a lot of them — but we’re taking people out of the country. You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are. These aren’t people. These are animals.” (Graham 22)

These are the words of the reputed twenty first century American leader Donald Trump recorded in White House Records. He opined this in his talk, in 2018 Round Table Conference, on specifying the immigration of people of Mexican race. ‘Race’ is said to have no importance or significance in this advanced world in defining a person or in forming an identity. The above statement elaborates the view of much educated, cultured and sophisticated man who presided over United States government from 2017-2021. This clearly exposes how the notion of race still remains as a hindrance in man’s progress. Though there is a wide misconception prevalent that the modern world is mostly free from the clutches of racism and even the expression of racism is not at all acceptable in the current social scenario, it is being carried out in diverse forms. It is embedded in tradition, culture, and institutions and more than in one’s unconscious mind. And it apparently affects in forming one’s self or rather in forming one’s identity.

This chapter focuses on an extended conception of self/identity: social identity. In a historically marginalized group of people, group identity formation has a significant role in determining personal attitude and traits. It is not personal identity but social identity which makes man a social being. Social identity helps link a person to his/her community and inherent culture. Each individual tries to relate oneself with

the social chain for augmenting a sense of personal integration. This personal integration aids in forming an identity which is mainly social. Here comes the question of differentiation as a stumbling stone in the process of identification.

Differentiation can be defined as a sense of self and its continuity influenced from his/her sense of membership in collective groups. When one tries to connect his/her personal self with the social background and the other collective members in the society, a social identity of that person begins to arise. Thus, a person's sense of self is strictly influenced by the 'set' social and cultural prerequisites which society thinks these individuals ought to possess and stick to, for having a smooth, easy-going existence in that social scenario. Society and culture are instilled in the people around as they are always influenced by the way these people are formed.

Attitudes towards racism have changed in unpretentious ways. But the age-old stereotypes and mental images, as an out-product of collective consciousness of that specific race, remain unchanged. Collective consciousness as a term is being applied not to the Black people in this context. Rather, Attitudes towards racism have changed in unpretentious ways. But the age-old stereotypes and mental images, as an out-product of collective consciousness of that specific race, remain unchanged. Human beings should learn to respect the value of self rather than finding lines of discrimination among themselves in terms of race. In this enlightened age, racism exists in transmuted ways. For instance, differentiate between groups in terms of certain fixed values, and watching the progressive actions and movements of selected races through a lens distinct from the common standards and thus their modes of actions made to be 'discriminated' again. The most important implied form of racist attitude is the attack on racial movements by claiming that they are already given an equal status with others. The illustration of this can be seen in the former American

President Trump's ban on any racial sensitivity training like that of Critical Race theory in the U.S.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) evolved as a response to the variant aftermaths of Civil Rights Movement and can be acted as a framework to confront racial attitudes and prejudiced approaches towards the Black in the United States. It came into vogue in the 1970s through the ideas of Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw and Richard Delgado. CRT points out that how racism is an integral part of American systems and institutions. CRT charges the responsibility of racism to legal structures and policies more than that of individual prejudices. And it strictly opposes the notion that by stopping the talk on racism will be a way to get out of racism. Critical Race Theory challenges three myths. The first one is that whether colorblind policies will ever lead to as elimination of racism. According to them, to get cursed from color-bound discriminations in society and culture, or in order to get out of racism, one must consider race/color as a factor in itself. As an instance, if a society wants to treat a marginalized one as equally as the other sections in society, the society must take account of the race of that particular group.

To proffer a group position equal to the other strata of people in society, it should be treated differently from the current subjugated status. Critical Race Theory stresses the role of societal systems in continuing racism. And CRT is totally against the idea that the extremists are the perpetrators of racism. Critical Race Theory is focusing on all dimensions of discriminations, and it stresses on the need of focusing on all forms of oppressions- gender, sexism, class, castes, and homophobia etc. in fighting against racism. CRT also rejects colorblindness as a constituent in getting out of racism. Being a socially constructed phenomenon, race can never be left unconsidered as colorblind representation.

Racial profiling had played a major role in racializing the 'racialised'. CRT favored affirmative actions and is totally against race-oriented loyal systems and law enforcement. Society should shift its perspective in handling people irrespective of their racial identity. Racial identity development is a process only based on our change in perspective. Primarily, people must learn to navigate their own identities, and thus expand their understanding on their own capabilities and potentials.

Social and collective consciousness is being formed. But this consciousness automatically develops an 'other' group with which they compare its actions, ideologies etc. In due course, one group becomes dominant over the other, making the other in a suppressed and subordinate stature.

As a person grows up, a sense of individuality is being developed within that person gradually. This sense of individuality and self is an organized whole which consists of distinct experiences of sexuality, conflict, aggressive situations, racial separations, conflicting gender roles that a person undergoes throughout one's life.

While analyzing the life narratives of the activists Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, and Maya Angelou through the lens of racism, it is evident that they had to face separation even from their early childhood. The separation was due to their existence in a 'hostile' backdrop, an African in an American societal setting. They had to endure multiple levels of oppression being Black women in American Social milieu. These activists tried to redefine the real aspects related to their gendered and colored existence. What makes these activists noteworthy is their ability to redefine and interpret the pastness of the colored Americans, Black Americans, especially Black American woman. African Americans are naturally preoccupied with the sufferings of subjugation, racial problems, inhumanity of slavery etc. In short, White supremacy assaults the Black's self in distinct ways. So, being in a crisis of identity,

they have to struggle with contradictory identities: the Black as well as the White. The activists were in a move of resistance to act against White supremacist agenda. The colored person is usually represented as a member of unique culture. It creates a sort of 'foreign body' feeling in a domestic backdrop.

It curbs a person's self-effusive quality. The Black activists were never ready to represent a class or group. Instead, they want to have a 'free' existence devoid of any racial or ethnic tinge. That conveys their resistance to represent 'cliched Black', 'socially constructed' group. They never wanted to escape from the realities of their identity. But what constitutes the 'reality' must be independent from any biased surveillance. Identities are formed in the due course of life, and they have no connection with socially constructed notions of race or ethnicity. They wanted to explore the world around them, and for that they subverted the narrow boundaries formed of race.

They resist to 'represent' the race they belong to- not because of inferior tenets attributed with it, but because they wanted a 'free' existence beyond the ethnic boundaries. The Africans in America had to face identity crisis as they were sometimes even denied being accepted as human beings. They always intended to move away from the clichés of White norms, but few could pragmatize it by fearing the power of authority or by thinking about the futility of it. But these Black woman activists hail the actions against the 'power group', and through the life narratives, they placed Black women in a new distinctive Black space different from the clichéd 'historical' domain overpowered by White.

Black people consider their blackness as worthy legacy. They took pride in the socially 'neglected' but rich complex culture of theirs: the Black culture. They spoke in favour of it, not as a separate culture to be uplifted but as a common culture to be

accounted for in general. For instance, Maya Angelou elaborates on the contribution of the Black culture and tradition in America in her television series *Blacks Blues Blacks!* Being aired on an education channel, this series was strong enough to persuade the Black masses. As Du Bois suggests in *The Souls of Black Folk*, African Americans possess a sort of 'double consciousness' - "they look themselves through a black eye which makes them proud of their ancestry, but the second consciousness prompt them for always looking at one's self through the eyes of others...that is through the lens of Whites" (2). This double consciousness made them more thoughtful about their existence, and there were invisible clutches of systemic racism which made the Blacks more segregated. The lack of freedom in all spheres always maintained a master-slave shade of relationship in the post- slavery era. Jim Crow laws were making the racist disparities legalized. The Blacks were separated from the whites in every field: schools, hospitals, restaurants, public places, washrooms etc. The Blacks were not able to share such specific spaces with the whites, and the subversion of which were treated with severe physical punishments. These laws were in aid of the whites to keep the inequality between the Blacks and the whites permanently. Civil rights Movements of 1960s, under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, enabled the abolition of Jim Crow Laws through the Civil rights Acts of 1964.

Apart from their activism, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou took the open-free expression of their thoughts and experiences through autobiographies as they were verbal steps of resistance against the tribulations that African American psyche continues to endure. Even though the system of slavery had been abolished during twentieth century, the forces of oppression continued there under imperialist powers. The Black denied substantive involvement in the forefront of the society, politics, culture etc. African American activists denied their passive

hyphenated self and lifted the self-assertiveness even in the atmosphere in which they are haunted along by authoritative powers. The process of writing itself made them vivacious.

The Black women and their sufferings and subjugations were under veil till the latter part of the twentieth century. The autobiographical outputs of these women through writing made them free from the shadows of hidden suppressed existence. In the case of Black women, public representations of 'self' will be totally different from the personal perceptions and enacting. So, autobiography gives a proper channel for a person under racial subjugation, to elaborate on subjective perceptions of self which is beyond being 'racial'. Rather than clinging up to 'racial' type of an individual which is totally a social construction, autobiography always lays out a space for the individual to explore the free self.

Redefine 'realness' comes as a concept while these autobiographical narratives try to redefine what is commonly portrayed of black women, mainly the activist women. The 'realness' of black women experiences that elaborated though fictional black women characters is mostly refined and mostly removed from reality. And also, such black woman figures are overly portrayed as subjugated ones before their white master-like heroes. The intentional formation of white authoritative figures and, in the opposite pole, the suppressed black women, always go beyond the real representation of black woman experiences. The fictional characters lack depth and genuinity of the autobiographical persona. In fictional presentation of life stories, emphasis might be added; real-life characters might be altered etc. Fictional presentation of autobiographical accounts is certainly a product of rethinking and re-living the memories and analyzing them from a more mature perspective. That is, as the self in an autobiography is getting developed through experiences and

understandings, there's no space for prejudiced accounts. As there is no relevance for an external agency to elaborate the self, fictional or biased dealings of the person is strictly out of point.

In Erik. H. Erikson's psychological theory of identity, the fifth stage is so crucial in a person's identity formation. Children in the age group of twelve to eighteen seek for an identity by looking at the world and circumstances around. The individual craves to fix him/her in a society and to be fixed within it. While re-interrogating the existing sense of self, any negative experience faced from around may create role confusion in them and would feel uncomfortable. If they succeed in this stage, they will have a strong sense of fidelity (Erikson 161). While considering of the activists Angela Davis, Maya Angelou and Assata Shakur, it can be observed that they all had undergone role confusions in their identity formation as their experiences were adverse being a black woman in a white supremacist society.

Forming a coherent sense of self is decisive in developing identity. While analyzing key aspect of identity formation in these African American activists, it could be found that their effort to mold a sense of self as an individual separated from the racial identity was always obstructed by imposed racial attributes. And such a dilemma which always impeded black women's progress toward a free existence.

The psyche of these black American activists must have been developed in a very unhealthy background for the Blacks in America. According to Erikson's second stage of development, the children develop a sense of independence during their years up to three. Success in this stage will lead to autonomy and failure: shame and doubt. And success will lead to the enhancing ability to survive in the world: self-esteem will be developed. As Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou were nurtured by

their strong mother figures, they could develop such a strong sense of self-esteem to face the obstacles in their ways towards self-development and progress.

Assata states in her autobiography, “No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them” (196). The white systemic racism is clear in this sentence itself. In education, health care, justice system and employment etc. the blacks had to be the victims of systemic racism. These Black woman activists are exposed to lots and lots of racial discriminations. They were strong enough to fight against the racial prejudices. They succeeded in asserting their racial pride as they uplift the race as an ideal image to exist in the world.

Maya Angelou’s life narratives begin with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Her childhood name was Marguerite. Being a small child, Marguerite was mostly affected by the trauma inflicted upon her by the White society in case of physical aesthetics and appearance. As the White society considered white skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair as ideal signs of beauty, most of the Blacks had to undergo a negative self-image traumatized by the lack of the so called ‘ideal’ beauty concept of the society. It is evident when little Maya Angelou (as Marguerite) tells in *I Know the Caged Bird Sings*, “I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody’s dream of what was right with the world” (Angelou 1). Being a little girl, she was caught up by the ‘white beauty’ concept. Even from early childhood, Maya was subjected to such hierarchies where white was always at the zenith. These experiences made her think about the need for an identity solely rooted in values not in race, and also made her able to cast off her ‘racial self’ from her sense of self. Generations of slavery, subjugations and ‘white is superior’ notions she herself had to undergo, have a great deal in these protests against the white superiority and the Black normalcy.

Maya Angelou, being a lonely girl, was sent away with her brother to Arkansas. Being a child of separated parents, she felt a sort of loneliness there. Her 'Blackness' made this loneliness double. Through the negligence and exploitation by the white society, little Maya grown to be an individual who was proud of her Blackness and became a successful artist in the society. She considered Black as real and White as not:

She says white folks couldn't be people because their feet were too small, their skin too white and see-through, and they didn't walk on the balls of their feet the way people did, they walked on their heels like horses. People were those who lived on my side of town. I didn't like them all, or, in fact, any of them very much, but they were people. These others, the strange pale creatures that lived in their alien unlife, weren't considered folks. They were whitefolks. (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* 26)

The Black were made Blacks and realized by the all-pervasive pressures of the white which in an invisible way controlled the Black behaviors, way of life and even the thought patterns. For instance, Maya Angelou exposes the way in which the Blacks battled with the established codes and names, being a member of racial group. The 'powwhite trash episode' explains the same (Angelou 28).

Even the White trash girls taunted Maya's grandma as she didn't succumb to the degrading level to retaliate or to speak against them in the same way. To be unlike the impudent white girls, grandma (momma) remained in silence. Silence was her weapon to maintain respectability even in the racist scenario. But silence was only in the case of debatable discussions. In case of action, they were strong enough to Break the boundaries of subjugation and passive forbearance.

The Blacks never advocate silent endurance or passive subjugation. Instead, they highlight the need of resistance to current context and time. They, like Angelou's momma, were proud to be the Blacks and maintained that dignity always. Her momma and other Black women around her, showed her the power of Black Americans to resist the White power which curbed them of the space in society and culture. There were initial victories as they stood strong and stubborn against the White prejudices. Maya Angelou didn't feel convenient in being slavish to white masters. She couldn't suffocate her fellow beings serve as slavish before white masters and Black men waiting for their masters with smiles, whipping posts curbing of White lips when Blacks could be seen in public places like bus, restaurants etc.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou put forward an example for the white degradation of the Black as she details Mr. Edward Don Leavy's speech. Edward was the White inspector of her school. He makes the remark that the aspirations of the coloured students to a higher social space would only prove futile. "The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gaugins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises" (Angelou 179). Maya retorts to this statement by saying "It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my colour with no chance of defense" (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 180). Though felt agitated against the racial prejudices prevalent there in the U.S., Angelou came in terms with her Black identity and became proud of its worth by the end of her graduation day ceremony. She terms Black race as "the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 184). The transition occurred in the status of Black Americans as consequences of expanded economic opportunities,

geographical explorations and their access to organizations and areas which widened the horizons of their experiences, and thus their views on the self as well as the world.

Racial hatred or racial prejudices in the U.S. had the power to tyrannize the Blacks mentally and to keep them away from the mainstream strata of society in every realm. The Americans were easy-going with South Americans, Cubans etc. but they were not ready to count the African Americans as their fellow beings. From the period of slavery, the Blacks were being utilized by the whites in different realms and in fact, they were the ones who provide the base for American nations. 'Black American', the term that commonly used to refer to an African American itself is questionable. Why wouldn't it be 'African white' instead of 'Black American'? These clichéd terms, names etc., are also the creations of white people as they enjoy the hegemony. Using skin pigmentation to refer to a set of people itself is humiliating.

Maya's mind saw a ray of hope as against racial prejudices when she got a chance to mingle with Canadians. In *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting Merry Like Christmas*, she exposes their ways through which she learned to look at the whites freely, only because of the unprejudiced approach of Canadians Whites towards her Black self. Her short span of life in junkyard (U.K.) made her realize how well different races- Negroes, Americans and Mexicans can mingle smoothly without any racial impurities. It makes apparent that, more than the race, attitudes make a difference. There are different knowledge streams which detail in depth the conception of race. Even though there are some ancient theories which state that race has a biological/genetic origin, theories rooted in science stick on the point that race has no link with hereditary factors. It is the sole creation of society, culture and climatic changes in specific geographical spaces make differences in skin color. There are light colored people in 'the blacks' and there are dark skinned people in the whites. The

American conception on race is related to skin color in its major part. Much comparative research on race classification dismantles the relevance of skin colour in differentiating between races. One cannot juxtapose human beings on the basis of skin pigmentation. How physical, behavioural and cultural patterns can be linked to skin color? Some notable philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant remarked on the negative associations with the colour black. Kant mentions in his *Physical Geography*:

“Humanity have achieved its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians already have lesser talent. The Negroes stand far lower, and the peoples of America are lowest” (5). They have elaborated about Africans as they lack in personal agency, and they are not fully humane. Personal agency can be defined as “the sense that I am the one who is causing and generating an action” (Gallagher 15).

In that sense, how can Africans be acquired with a personal agency as they could never be the generators of their action: their actions and even the way of life was determined by white systems in the U.S. scenario. The social hierarchy in the U.S. itself was a creation of white apparently. It places Americans at the top and the Blacks or African Americans at the lower levels providing the former a supremacy over the latter. Social Cognitive theory propagated by Canadian American psychologist Albert Bandura points out four constituents of personal agency. They are intentionality, forethought, self- reactivity, and self-reflectiveness. Intentionality refers to the ability of a person to take his/her actions which will lead to an expected goal (Gallagher 15). In a white society, a Black’s intentionality is mostly affected by white influences. For instance, the intentionality of Assata Shakur was accused of six times various crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping, attempted murder, and murder itself etc.

These six criminal charges were out of point as she was found not guilty at the end of her trials. This was strictly contrary to the concept of intentionality. Shakur's actions and activism were intended to free the Black masses and her 'self-reactiveness' against the opposing white forces that curbed their freedom, gave her a 'criminal' status etc. Blacks could neither decide their actions nor anticipate the outcomes of their actions. Aftermaths of the actions of Black people were being decided by the whites and mostly the aftermaths were contrary to the expected ones too. So, Kant's opinion has relevance in that sense. As the Blacks were devoid of personal agency in a white society, they were connoted with weakness. Race is something which should be elaborated separated from fixed as well as broad characteristics associated with it from ancient times. Arthur Gobineau, in his theory on race, states that race is not a biological theory but a 'spiritual' mind matrix. People think in a racial way, and these ways of thinking can help analyze and understand the issues related to mankind, civilization, and nations (Blue 139).

On scientific basis, skin colors and temperaments have no role in racial categorizations (McCoskey 34). As modern theories propagate, race is a fluid social construction. No race has supremacy over the other and no race is inferior or superior to the other. Maya Angelou always kept pride in being a Black. In her life narrative, *All God's Children Need Dancing Shoes*, she reveals the secret positive influence that Africa, her homeland always had on her. When she reached Ghana, Africa, she became more alert of her identity. She exalts the Black origin of her as she says, "lived under laws constructed by blacks, and if [they] violated those laws held responsible by blacks ... [they] could not lay any social unhappiness or personal failure at the door of colour prejudice" (78).

Maya Angelou was strong enough to convey her hatred towards the White in distinct ways, though it was not easy for a Black to mock the Whites directly. She explains her role as a white queen in the play “The Blacks” through which she could imitate and mock the haughty attitude of white women. Another distinct way of asserting the Black identity was through her music. Her music composition showed how the Blacks were smart and stubborn in their attitudes as well as in their actions. Her song “Still I rise” begins with her affirmative utterance:

You may write me down in history
With uour bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise (1-4).

The selected women autobiographies explore the strong Black women identities not as racial inferiorities but as assertions of racial attributes. There are Blacks, some Black communities themselves who collide with the white masters in many things. They were ready to give up everything. In the U.S. background, race had been used as a factor in determining public attitudes, law enforcing patterns, public policies, and affirmative action.

While analyzing the Blacks and their activism which always made concomitant to terroristic movements by the authoritative whites in the U.S., one has to set forth clear cut distinctions between liberal and conservative sentiments. Liberal attitudes define the ones who should be free to pursue their own interests and happiness in such a way that these would do no harm to others. Law enforcement and intervention can be allowed if something happens beyond that. Assigning the duty of maximizing individual freedom on the judicial system or government thus takes no action towards individual happiness. Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou

are extremely liberals as they focus only in themselves to find their way of freedom and happiness. And the ones who attributed 'terrorist' fervors on these activists thus oppressed them had strictly belonged to conservative group.

Racial profiling as a strong element in separating and degrading the African Americans could be seen in each and every realm of American society and life: judicial systems, law enforcement modes, locating people in political, authoritative or official positions, in schools as well as university admissions, immigration policies etc. Assata Shakur and Angela Davis were the victims of state troopers' brutal treatment and racial profiling. Strong black political activists were rendered with a criminal, terrorist, prisoner, mental patient images. As opposed to the Black Disability study propagates, these Black woman autobiographical narratives asserts that white subjugate actions, and violence can never make the Blacks succumb to white authorities (Bell). The liberals succumb to affirmative actions in defining their self completely out of racial prejudices and racial profiling. Meanwhile, conservatists stuck to racial profiling as it hindered the progress of individual freedom.

Racial and ethnic profiling had a significant role in 'blackening the black'. That is, making the Blacks under shades where 'light' implies free and good. The stock liberal arguments were mainly against such stereotypical assumptions prevailed. In those times, people of colour were more susceptible to commit crime. Racial profiling was totally against the liberal assumptions that each individual is certainly not a member of an ethnic or racial group. Each and every individual of colour and his/her mindset and actions were stigmatized by society's suspicion emerged from social profiling. Black minorities are more likely to commit crimes than White majorities.

The conservatives emphasize on the strong connection between race and criminal behavior. The liberals, on the other hand, give prime importance on individual freedom as well as emphasis on the agency of individual. Political as well as civil rights of each individual should never be intruded on by the agency of government. In crux, personal freedom should never be curbed by any external sources unless it does some harm to others.

Another aspect to be focused on while elaborating the degraded status or images of Blacks in those days was the negative coloring society gave to affirmative actions. Standardized laws, patterns of life, education system etc. were skewed in favor of white people. When the Blacks failed to survive in that disparity- driven background, they took up the weapons of affirmative action. They were totally against subjugation: instead of demanding or requesting for racial privileges, these women activists demanded for affirming their self beyond the arena of racial boundaries. They were never ready to consider racial minority status as a positive element to relaxation. The Black women activists should be considered as the corner stone in judging persons instead the racial affiliations.

According to the Afro-American women activists, race cannot be considered as criteria in constituting one's identity. Group racial identifications sticking on to the prominence of race should strictly be prohibited. Affirmative actions are encouraged as they help to mould an assertive identity.

The avenues of opportunities in social and political regimes - educational, employment, politics etc.- were somewhat restricted in the label of racial identity to the Blacks. Racial identity plays a major role in forming a person's self-esteem as well as self-understanding. Historical experience of the Blacks in America plays a major factor in forming 'self'. And it definitely relates to one's age and life experiences.

These self-esteem and self-understanding influence on forming racial identity in a person and it is a process involving many stages. Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou had diverse and worse life experiences related to their racial origin. But the way in which they were guided by strong figures around them- mom, teachers, the organization they belonged to like Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army etc.- helped them develop a positive self-image, an internal locus of resistance and a sense of assertion. How one thinks about himself/herself plays an important role in a person's performance as an individual in society.

During childhood, everyone is bombarded by messages that will lead one to structure self-concept throughout the development stage. These black woman activists had to undergo very degrading experiences which may lead them to form a strong sense of inferiority related to race/ethnic strata they belong to. Psychologists state that the cognitive ability of one to reflect on who he/she is in its peak when one is in adolescence. And this self-concept decides what one becomes, what all interests/endeavours one pursues, what one believes in and is subjected to do etc. The aspects of one's identity which are salient to him /her and aspects of a person's identity in others determine forming one's sense of self. By elaborating racial identity, it is not constituted by one's race but rather how one thinks about one's race.

By the second half of twentieth century, Afro-American women began to strongly protest against discriminations, and thus to assert their identity. Identity mattered but whether it is racial or not, was not of their concern. They re- presented racist consciousness. They demanded and fought for increased wages and good working conditions in industries. The first and foremost thing they did was getting themselves educated so that they were not denied in every field of work. These black woman activists were stubborn in creating a sort of intellectual and emotional

awareness of outside world and how it would be affecting one's perceptions and inner self. Their eventual goal was to survive from the hostile racial conditions of society, and at the same time to convert the society into a more hospitable arena for them to explore. The word 'survive' suggests the subversion of all the restricted shackles of racial prejudices and gendered powerlessness. Resistance and survival are an integral part of existence for a Black American in that social milieu.

The protest and resistance of these Black women becomes a re- presentation of racist consciousness. It can be elaborated that the survival tactics of the previous generations of Black American were totally altered by these activists. They, in fact, wanted to redefine the realness of racial manifestation. Maya Angelou in *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* writes, "The old habit of withdrawing into righteous indignation or lashing out furiously against insults were not applicable" (85).

They redefined racist consciousness mostly through a collective consciousness that the white power structures couldn't fight against. The methods of the Blacks, especially Black women against the white domination, were strictly protests rather than subjugation and endurance. Maya Angelou writes about the expectations maintain by white people about the Blacks in her autobiographical narrative *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*. "We were expected by others and by ourselves to lighten the burden by smiling, to defeat possible new assaults by laughter" (8). They all are expected to be passive sufferers. But these Black activists like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou became unique in their subversion of clichéd lines of subjugation and strongly protested and questioned the authorities. Audre Lorde has opined that living in the most powerful country on earth, the United State of America, the African American women have a certain power, and they should be able to use it

for the services that they believe in, particularly for the sisterhood of coloured woman (Georgoudaki 48).

The African American women were proud of their womanliness and blackness. Instead of considering these factors as hindrances for their eruption in society, they could take control over any gendered/racial forces. In her last autobiographical narrative Maya Angelou says:

I thought of human beings, as far back as I had read, of our deeds and didoes. According to some scientists, we were born to forever crawl in swamps, but for some not yet explained reason, we decided to stand erect, and despite gravity's pull and push, to remain standing (*A Song Flung up to Heaven* 211).

The conception on family is distinct in the perspectives of black people and white people. Activists in general, especially black woman activists, portray family as an institution which sets boundaries for the woman 'performance'. Most of the successful activists have a broken family and ones who spend a considerable part of their life for their family can't usually stand for the assertion of individual identity. But, these black woman activists like Assata gained most of their power through the inner strength and external sources of support from their own family. The strong mother figures and grandmother figures taught them the mode of resistance that only through which one can survive in a white supremacist society as opposed to passive subjugation in all methods of operation. Traditions of motherhood and sisterhood were that much strong to build a base of assertive power, and to provide feelings of protection with in which they were enriched among black woman themselves.

Racial obstacles have predominance over the gendered factors in influencing black woman compared to others. Women needed to go through double

discriminations compared to white or any other woman. The black woman withered mostly by racial factors rather than gendered ones.

Black women gained the strength of resistance and protests from their grandmothers, mothers and sisters etc. Foster mothering and mother–daughter relationship played a significant part in building up a strong woman figures in Afro-American culture. Those girls who brought up under the stubborn motherhood and those women who had taken up the whole responsibility of childbearing and nurturing came to be successful and stern human beings.

These autobiographies are on focus because they act as counter-narratives to the commonplace depiction of black woman, clichéd presentation of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. All these autobiographies feature the emergence of strong black woman out of submissive, subservient black girls like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou. These women's lives portray a model of counter action, either in political or in individual modes, against white supremacist agendas. They deliberately try to rebuild Afro-American women history. In childhood they underwent a sense-of displacement as they had to be double discriminated being a black woman in the binaries of man /woman and white/black. But they made attempts to redefine their self by separating it out of the subjugating background and decided to stand strong as the ones who being proud in their black identity. All these lives, the trials and tribulations they underwent show how they became victims under the supremacy of race and gender hierarchies. In each stage of their lives, they became more aware of their space in society, and that realization enabled them to mould themselves into strong activists.

There were thousands of black women who were crushed by the power of oppression and there were yet another group of black women like Sojourner Truth,

Rosa Parks etc. who stood strong to fight against powers of oppression. Fannie Lou Hamer was another black civil rights activist who confronted violence and intimidation for her efforts to register Black voters in Mississippi. She survived a brutal beating by police officers and became a leading voice in the struggle for voting rights and racial equality.

Angela Davis explains one of her experiences as a Black woman: She and her sister Fania went to a shoe store where they pretended as French and spoke French. Then they were treated as dignitaries and had given a white area to sit. Towards the end of session, they themselves reveal their identity as Black. Angela Davis went to New York for higher education due to the limited education opportunities in Birmingham. That system of education enabled her to be out of black community. But what she wanted was not an escape from the Blackness. As she got educated at Brandies University, Goethe University and Sorbonne University, she got molded by Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse. She felt an intense need to go back to the US and to actively participate in the Black Liberation Movement. She wanted to merge the line that separates the black with other people. She resisted representing the black race as she wanted to be one among 'human beings' and not separate being like 'black'. Coming back to the U.S., she became an instructor at the University of California. Later, to accomplish her dream of contributing herself to the freedom struggle, she joined a black chapter of communist party, the Che-Lunumba Collective. Then Angela Davis joined the Black Panther Party as a communist in the year 1968.

Angela Davis's racial ideologies got enriched when she made a deep acquaintance with George Jackson as they were inmates at Soledad Prison. This relationship helped her delve deep in to the basic problems of racial oppression, to the link between racism and economic oppression. George Jackson and Angela Davis

became very close intellectually and personally. Even after her release from prison, they communicated through letters. She worked for the cause of freeing him. George Jackson was a strong Black activist in Black Panther Party and thus a political prisoner in the U.S. He was falsely accused of armed robbery of a gas station in the year 1960. Later on, in his days at the prison, Jackson was again accused of killing a Correctional Officer after a fight. George Jackson founded Black Guerilla Family in 1966 to maintain dignity for Blacks in prison in order to to promote Black power against the U.S. government.

Angela happened to visit Jackson as a part of her work on his legal defense. It was notable that on the same day she lost her job at the University of California. That dismissal was on the pretext of the visit, but the real reason was her being a communist and a supporter of a Communist cause. She led a rally in Lose Angels by defending Soledad Brothers (Three persons accused of killing the guard in Soledad Prison- other than George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette). She was sought by the FBI by attributing the charges of the murder of Judge Haley and the related ones in the Marin County Courthouse happenings. Actually, Angela Davis was in Los Angeles during the murder, and she was not guilty. The incidents at the Marin County Courthouse led to Jonathan Jackson's, the brother of George Jackson and so many Black people's death.

Angela Davis was such an influential woman for the black women as her involvement for the cause of Black liberation and her active participation in Black Panther Party inspired the black masses, especially the women. This was evident when she got imprisoned; the fellow prisoner considered her a celebrity and all the prisoners, matrons and jailors were in solidarity with her and urged her to be out of the prison.

Angela Davis went on a hunger strike as a protest against her imprisonment in the section of mentally ill prisoners. Angela's public support was so much that the other prisoners also held a hunger strike until Angelou moved to the general section. As a revolutionary, Angela could inspire the black masses and could move them towards the path of protest.

Davis was the first woman who had a severe concern about the bad conditions and the poor healthcare prevailed in the prison system. More than that, she conducted study sessions on Black Liberation and Marxism for the inmates which made the black women aware of their marginalized existence. She prompted the authorities to provide enough books on black issues in the library of the prison. So that it would make the inmates the inmates get engaged with such intellectual and activist ideologies and will enable them to protest against the subjugations they were undergoing.

Angela Davis's contribution in redefining racist consciousness within the black masses especially in black women psyche is significant. When she was concerned about prison system in the U.S., she focused not only on the limited physical conditions the black inmates provided with, but also in the intellectual marginalization they encountered within the prison. That means those Black women were directed to focus on the matters propagated deliberately by the mainstream culture and media. The outcome was that those black women were unknowingly directed to feel positive about the pre-planned agendas of white people who oppressed them. Davis's attempt was mainly to create awareness among the masses regarding the state of their subjugated and valueless existence. As a part of that, she could collect inspirational books and distribute those copies to the inmates. Those books could inspire the inmates as they contain instances of resistance and revolutionary life of the black freedom fighters. *Soledad Brothers* was one of those works. The guards and

matrons in the jail were supportive of Davis's actions even though they had their own limits. She was a source of inspiration and guiding force for the inmates. They felt an intense need deep within their mind to support Davis and other Black activists in their freedom struggle.

Davis's struggles and consistent ideologies were acts of representation of racist consciousness. Within the black women inmates in the prison, she could remold the concept of passive existence to instill in them an urgency of becoming strong women. Subsequently they could also re-present the racist consciousness within them. Davis's struggle against racism and the unjust incidents linked with it was admired by the secretariat of the African National Congress, friends and lawyers, James Baldwin etc. Their voice sums up the fact that she could act beyond her racist/gender limits.

The matter of class was creating an unrelenting wedge between or among the co-activists. Davis cited an instance of it when she elaborated on how she and co-activist Ruchell Magee were treated in court in different ways. As Magee was a jail house activist and Davis an intellectual political activist, the treatment they got inside the court was different: Davis was greeted with shower of camera lights and cheers while Magee was bending in shackles nor being noticed by others.

Intersections of race and sex make the black deprived of all the privileges the blacks deserve. The Black is getting marginalized in intersectional realms; they are neglected from anti-racist as well as feminist theoretical framework. To analyze the Black woman problems, intersectional approach will only suffice.

When we consider Black issues, we consider 'Black' as a race and elaborate on the problems they face in an adverse social background. But the investigations of Black woman can never be compartmentalized. Instead, they should clearly be intersectional ones. A problem of a Black female can't necessarily be the problems of

the Black. It is pertaining only to the Black women. For instance, Assata Shakur and Angela Davis were arrested and accused of many charges. And when comparing to any Black males, their experiences were certainly unique, especially, the humiliations they had to endure in prisons. Instances like treatment of Assata Shakur during her pregnancy and delivery are revealed in the autobiographies.

Assata Shakur, Maya Angelou and Angela Davis were the activists who emerged out of their humiliated status of racism, rejection and oppression. They were fully subjected to suppressive forces around them. Society, even the judicial system, was totally against them. Instead of getting tired of the discriminating forces of racism, they were living in protest against the 'historic' errors carried out even to the present by the whites and the fellow Black people. These women tried to represent their race and to build their own dignity by fighting strongly against the racist masters.

Though racism is a significant notion in most of the Black writings, the life-narratives of these woman activists stand in separate elegance. The sole reason is its originality and clarity in the portrayal of racial discrimination epochs and the transparent portrayal of the outbursting emotions flowing from the Black narratives. It was color discrimination which made these activists deny justice from the judiciary. In the case of Assata Shakur, she still continues to be on the FBI's most wanted list of murderers. In the front of all racial discriminations, Blacks can resist or give up. But the ways these activists took were to prove through violence and resistance, their racial identity which never meant 'inferior' for them at any level.

Assata Shakur makes it clear in her autobiography that "Black revolutionaries do not drop from the moon. We are created by our conditions. Shaped by our oppression" (67).

Chapter 5

Beyond ‘Performativity’: Space and Performance Bridge the Conceptual Divide

Gender, as a social and cultural construct, plays an important part in devising woman’s resistance. Conventional or cliched conceptions illustrate scornful gestures, laughter or a bowed head etc. towards the *modus operandi* of women’s resistance. Fights, wars, physical struggles as the weapons of man against the resistant forces. These conceptions are the out-turns of traditional predetermined gender conceptions. Society attributed man the guise of a strong person either as a fighter or as hardworking breadwinners of the families. But women, culturally constructed as a passive counterpart of man, are trained to be housekeepers, caretakers of kids, child bearers etc. Even at the peak of exploitations, women are always expected to be conciliatory, submissive, and always dependent on her male counterpart. The conceptual divide between the woman images as dependent on a male counterpart rather than being self-assertive is strictly based on heterosexual model. A woman has all the powers and intelligence to assert her needs and identities in any social and cultural framework. But the fact behind envisaging dependent woman images is nothing but to suppress them and thus reassuring the binary classification and stratification of women. Destruction of the opposite forms of socially constructed masculine and feminine is the only solution to bridge the gender divide. That means, no one should find any actions or behaviors of man/woman incongruent with his/her biological sex.

“We’ll just have to get guns and be men”, this was a persuasive line in Black Panther member Elaine Brown’s song *The End of Silence* (Browne 29). More than focusing on the armed resistance, this line creates a thought on Black women’s status

in Black Power Movements as well as an intersection of gender and class. Black women, especially the activist women in the second half of the twentieth century, transgressed the boundaries of adjectives that generally transfigure women as 'healing', 'forgiving', 'passive', 'dependent' and 'feminine' etc. Instead, they showed that they were stubborn, confident, assertive, witty etc. 'She' began to laugh and roar rather than smile and groan. The African American women began to consider their choices, their likes and dislikes, their values and everything of their own as important as anything else, rather than putting them aside. As their self-perceptions changed, they could expand the arenas of cultural, social, political and educational spheres in which their power and vigor had to be manifested. The American addressing - political, economic and social -of the Black, which is summation of pathetic living conditions, enervating jobs with skimpy pay, unprotected living conditions brought them into a common platform. The common reproachful experiences of being disparaged in a White society brought them together to stand against gender and racial discrimination.

Black women were not in a stance to identify with one another up to the level of creating a collective identity as they were separated by various factors like race, ethnicity, class, religion, region etc. Their sense of oneness as women was thwarted. A significant wave of feminist activism in twentieth century resulted in a slight change in the status-quo of Black women. They began to take part in American political and public life. Women Suffrage movements and the amendments based on them encouraged women to enjoy individual citizenship rights escaping from the subjugated legal standing women had in the beginning of 20th century. To be precise, during 1900s, women had a very few rights, and these Black women didn't even have the right to control her biological reproduction, to own property in her name, to go

after a career of her choice, to hold public office etc. All these constructed a social space for a woman which is essentially domestic. In this context, arises the relevance of the Black women activists like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou. They were born and brought up stringently amid such scenario. But they managed to develop their vision and actions transgressing the strict boundaries of domestic existence. And through their life and activism they could influence and inspire the Black woman masses.

Education, the confidence to be self-assertive, scaffolding they get from other Black women are the factors which helped these Black women to assert their presence in a strictly White dominant society. Education became one of the important ideological apparatuses with which Black women got empowered. Education gave them determination to fly over all the obstacles which curbed their freedom and free expression. For instance, by the second half of the twentieth century, a section of African American could assert their identities by being successful in certain domains of work. With education these Black women continued to work in different industries for meager wages and deplorable working conditions. Black women, who were educationally enlightened, could stand and fight against the various sort of opportunities through different social struggles. They were strong in their mission to build and maintain educational institutions for their communities. They themselves had realized the need to get educated, thus aware of the impact of education on society.

Double discrimination is the main factor which kept the Black women away from attaining their goals and coming to the forefront of society. Despite the racial harassments, Black women were moved steps back because of their gender. It can be seen in the acknowledgement and fame echoed on Booker. T. Washington as he founded the Tuskegee Institution. Meanwhile Charlotte Hawkins's formation of

Palma Memorial Institution (a finishing school for colored girls), Lucy Haine's foundations of the Haines Normal Institute etc. didn't get enough acknowledgement or attention in society. It could be read through the theory of Intersectionality developed by Kimberle Crenshaw. According to Crenshaw, race, gender, caste, sex, class, sexuality, and even physical appearances intersect in forming modes of discriminations a person has to undergo in social and political realms (Crenshaw 1224). Gender interacts within race in the demarginalized status of the Black women activists. Likewise, Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou, though they stood battling for the cause of colored people, especially colored women, they had to endure gendered discriminations within their Black circle itself. Shakur illustrates it where she speaks about Black men's attitude towards Black women within the Black organizations as in Black Panther Party. Assata Shakur's autobiography elaborates the intersectional oppressions faced by activist women in The Black Power Movement in the 1970s. The experiences and decisions of women were overlooked by the male leaders. The Intersectionality theory implies that exclusion or discrimination can never be cleared working on a single problem. But the discrimination is an amalgamation of many variant factors out of which any can never be overlooked. To eradicate such problems of discrimination, each factor should be cleared from its root. In the case of Black women activists, factors related to gender weigh more than race. If the Black women had the equal rights and access as their male counterparts, the process of the Black struggle against racial discrimination would be easier.

The selected life narratives of the Black women activists Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Maya Angelou attempt to magnify their lives as cultural and social signifiers. The then-existing attitude was that Black women artists, writers, activists etc. were given baser significance as they usually put into shades. As long as they

remain in shadows, the rest of the Black women continue to be in the same lot. The presence as well as success of Black women endeavor in different realms of social and cultural proceedings will definitely have an impact on the Black woman folk. And it prompted the Black women to awake and fight for their rights and thus assert their identities.

The Black women didn't have access to mainstream culture and the reservoir of culture, namely literature. As they had no chance of expression in the so called 'mainstream' media or literature, the young Black generation was totally devoid of a role model Black woman or a Black woman's piece of literature or public propaganda. This itself emphasizes the need to elaborate their history to rely on. There were no sources or elements of motivation that Black women got access to as they were uneducated. They were strictly allotted only to domestic spheres to ponder over. It took time for them even to have a self-awareness about their subjugated existence. Black women felt a sort of separation from the other people around. They need to address the challenge of transgressing the basic lines of boundaries into the complex lines of self-assertion.

The intersections of gender, race and class can be analyzed through these autobiographies as these are mouth pieces of Black women who lived in twentieth century United States. The theory of Black Feminism was built upon such Black women experiences. Through their activism and strong ideologies, these women shatter the stereotype of Black women as 'submissive', 'subjugated' etc. As in Black Feminism, the experiences of Black women are totally different from the experiences of Black men as well as those of White women. To get empowered, a Black woman had to challenge both Black sexism and White racism as well. Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou questioned the racist and gendered approaches and through

their activism they could structure a model for other Black women to rely on and thus their activism aided in raising a consciousness in the black masses about the potential core of their individuality or identity assertion.

As Black women were denied wide access to popular culture, they were denied a space for expressing their own tales of subjugated existence. Apart from that but their tales were manipulated or misrepresented in the American popular culture as those emanated from the racial perspectives of White, or gender perspectives of males. Thus, the selected autobiographies gave birth to a liberatory prose as they are reservoirs of direct black women experiences. Their words are individual experiences but meant for collective welfare of Black women. For instance, Assata Shakur's words are from the standpoint of a Black woman who unjustifiably prosecuted attributing false charges on her during 1960s and 1970s because of her political, racial and gendered views. The relevance of these Black women activists is in the point that they wrote and acted against the powers over them in a scenario in which they were supposed to be silent, or to rephrase, where Black women were getting defined through others' voice. Shakur got arrested and had to spend many years standstill as she was imprisoned. Even if she was forced to be silent, she continued and now itself continues to inspire the ones in resistance struggle through her autobiographies and poems. Amidst the mental harassments and physical abuses, she had to face, she got inspiration by reading the books of Black women provided by Black nurses in the hospital. Shakur states "When I read the book about Black women, I felt the spirits of those sisters feeding me, making me stronger. Black women have been struggling and helping each other to survive the blows of life since the beginning of time" (16).

While analyzing the life of these Black women activists, a clear picture of schematic assimilation will be unfolded as their life was significantly influenced by

the nurturing elements. Gender Schema Theory propagated by Sandra Bem can be a better tool in evaluating the schematic developments of these activists. The Gender Schema theory tries to elaborate on gender roles-female role/male role-as product of a person's culture and society. A child began to mould his/her behavior as if adjusting to the gender norms of their surroundings and culture. Gender schema makes impact on a person's attitude, behavior and patterning on gender traits as 'male' and 'female'. Children observe the people around them and the cultural patterning of gender, and then act accordingly. Their schema dictates to them towards what they can do and what they shouldn't. Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou were born and brought up witnessing the submissive existence of Black women in front of their White masters as well as their own male counterparts. But the strong woman figures in their life rightly persuaded them to stand stubborn and to fight against all sorts of subjugations. Compared to the women outside the Black community, Black women acquired the power of protest and self-assertion from the life and acts of their sister figures, mother/grandmother figures etc. For instance, Assata's mother and grandmother were very stubborn characters unlikely the passive African American women in those ages. In Chapter 20 of her autobiography, Assata was visited at the prison, by her mom and four-year-old daughter. The daughter Kakuya seemed not at all interested or emotionally attached to her mom. Then, in Chapter 2, Shakur's grandmother comes to visit her. She tells her of her dream that Assata comes home and urges her to come out of the prison by saying that not to get used to confinements or prisons. This gives a hope and driving force for Shakur not to be continue in a status of oppression, and weeks later Shakur escapes from prison. Their cognitive schema on gender role was that they have to stand against all the oppressions in name of gender and race. From her college days Shakur was strongly involved in college organizations

and worked for the welfare of Black students. At that juncture she decided to change her name from JoAnne to an African name 'Assata'. She was not at all ready to escape from her race or gender stature which always created humiliations in her. Instead, she embraced all those and acted strongly to bridge the conceptual divide with respect to gender and race. As she joined in the Black Panther Party, the party's Afro centric as well as socialist attitudes also helped her framing a very firm ideology of her own. Her growing consciousness against adhering to preset gender norms and performing according to her will is an end result of the development of Gender Schema. As Shakur grew in a subjugated scenario, her cognitive realm developed in a way that new social information was imbibed into it.

Gender dynamics and predetermined heterosexual 'normativity' as proposed by Judith Butler are relevant in the case of these activists. These woman activists tried and gave up their relationships with a gender counterpart figure. This is simply because they were not at all ready to be in the confined structure, whether it's within a culture or deep within. Shakur marks in her autobiography about her inability to bear with a dichotomous gender pattern and she mentions about her married life that it ended their differing views of gender roles.

Angela Davis's autobiographical narrative illustrates the relevance of encouragement that she got from her parents, relatives, friends, and her Quaker educators in molding her revolutionary and 'outlaw' status. Her gender schema was developed by a group of people who instilled in her the importance of acting against oppressions and fighting for justice irrespective of adhering to gender roles. From her early childhood, she had a role model, her mother Sally Davis was a main organizer in the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) as well as she was in a group who provide support for the Scottsboro Boys. Scottsboro

boys were the ones who were in prison for decades even before clearing the charges of rape. Angela Davis, when she grew up, worked in support of political prisoners. While working as a professor in the University of California at Los Angeles, she enjoyed the status of a member in Communist party USA and joined the Panthers. She was fired from her job as a professor in 1970 for being actively involved in such organized protests. She was ready to accept that and continued her journey of protest. In due course, she became chair of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee for Black prisoner. With that, her status as 'outlaw' had been reiterated. She was imprisoned hindering her from completing her doctoral degree. Later her perseverance found result as she managed to receive an honorary doctoral degree from Karl Marx University.

Education as well as the strong upbringing were the factors which helped Angela to cross the boundaries paused by gender and race to become a powerful activist. Her brave and courageous involvement in a prisoner's attempt to escape from Martin County Hall of Justice, she was charged with conspiracy, kidnapping etc. and forced to held in the Detention Centre for Women in New York.

They could mould a community feeling among them which is specifically designed by Black women consciousness. The initial step they took to be social rather than personal was to adopt a sort of sentimental disengagement. They gave prime importance to their communal responsibilities, vision and safety of the collective consciousness rather than sticking with personal attainments. They were not emotionally attached or immersed in familial or personal bonds. Instead, their goal was the upliftment of black women mass.

Although the men in Black Power movement had to endure the same sort of repressions, the Black women activists point out certain absurd thinking among the

Black themselves which underscored the gender disparities. The experience of men and women in the resistance struggle were not similar, as there had existed the effects of gender dynamics. The racial dynamics which initiated and perverted the repressive practices towards the Black in the U.S. but more than that what affected the Black women activists like Assata Shakur and Angela Davis more is the gender dynamics which prevailed within the Black Liberation movement itself. Power should be there within an individual and it should not exist outside of individuals. (Foucault 142). If so, one can assert the identity beyond the restrictions contributed by gender dynamics. There is certainly an interconnection between personal and political. The power that one has within to assert own identity should not be searched outside. Assata Shakur clearly mentions about the gender dynamics prevailed even in the Black Panther party. Though talented woman candidates were there, the leaderships and title positions in the party were always handled by males. But such machismo can never be generalized with all male leaders in the party. Shakur's remark about her fellow activist Zayd Shakur in her autobiography is remarkable. She says, "I also respected him because he refused to become part of the macho cult that was official in the Black Panther Party. He never voted on issues or took a position just to be one of the boys" (223). The process of domination can be destructed through individual actions which dare to question the power structures. The impacts of oppression affected the psychological aspects of the people more than the external aspects.

There was rigid gender role expectations connected to the repressive values in American capitalist culture. The failure of women activists then was their uncanny state in redefining masculine and feminine notions put forward by the authoritative culture. The characteristics mostly attributed to masculinity were the same linked to activism- bravery, physical and emotional strength, aggressive nature etc. The women,

especially Black women who wanted to be an activist needed to subvert the customary feminine roles and gender boundaries. If done so, such women wouldn't live as before in their family. They were regarded as outcasts and their male counterparts will perfectly reject them for not being 'feminine' enduring every oppressive practice without questioning them. Repression was the strategy used by American authorities to assault African American women leaders. Most of them were imprisoned or incarcerated so as to hinder their successive movements against injustice. To illustrate, Angela Davis was incarcerated as a political prisoner, Assata Shakur was imprisoned and got tortured up to her decision to go in exile to Cuba. The stringent measures and atrocious treatment of the activist women by the police was clearly mentioned in *Assata: An Autobiography*. After the New Jersey Turnpike incident, Assata was wounded deadly but still the New Jersey police were not willing to allow her ambulance to move so that her life might be saved. They wanted her to be dead as she posed a threat for their overpowering agendas on Black women in general.

The factor of gender must have been revisited to make the Black power movement more emphatic. The activists were able to redefine masculinity and femininity as opposed to the predetermined gender patterns by the white supremacist structure. Traditional gender roles are attributed to each and every person in society and one who transgresses the boundaries will be overlooked. In her autobiography, Assata Shakur states that her union with her husband Lewis Chesimard dissolved just after one year. The reason she states was that the activists were unable to cope with the deviated gender roles. These women were performing according to the contexts. When the adherence to the patriarchal conceptions began, the gender categorization and devaluation of women and their actions and bodies increased. Consequently, the power with which the Black had to fight against the white authority became lessened.

Gender stratification and gendered conceptions on different realm in society affected the solidarity of Black masses. In short, even amidst such genocide, these Black women activists were able to be beyond the 'performativity' of gender roles and through their performance, they could bridge the gap between predetermined conceptions on Black women to novel conceptions on gender realities. Judith Butler's theory of Performativity exemplifies this. According to her, social reality is going on in a process of creation. And there is no fixed reality on gender roles. When people are in a mechanical process of performing the conventions of reality and clichéd actions, they make those artificial conventions unavoidable to follow and thereby natural. And Butler calls for such gender acts that result in observable changes in one's existence and in one's bodily self. To quote Butler: "One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors as well" (Performative 521).

As Judith Butler says, gender can never be interpreted as a role, but as an 'act' (Gender Trouble 139-40). When one reconstructs the social fictions of gender through one's bodily acts, its psychological inferiority also gets constructed in a new way. And for that gender acts, no essential truths or no reference points in history are there. Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou were challenging the conventional performative acts of gender and acted in line with the then existing social needs. They were highly criticized for their 'manly' nature and activist fervors as that was not acceptable for the hegemonic social conceptions on Black women in America. The conception of constructed gender identities rather than fixed identities thwarts the idea that there is no historical/predetermined gender role. Simultaneously, it thwarts the rules governing normative heterosexuality. The fixed nature of gender roles and

identities are creations of the hegemonic forces to keep the other part oppressed and stabilized. So that they will not shake the smooth flow of social and cultural hegemonies.

Racial oppression was towards the Black race itself, but gender played a significant role in further oppressing the race by weakening their core through conflicts of gender dynamics prevailed among Black male and females. Though the Communist party seemed to be progressive and advanced in making changes in Black human living and black standards, it played a prerogative role in manipulating sexual politics which adversely affected women compared to men. The party rejected birth control as it is a form of genocide which resulted in affecting women badly. They got impregnated as a result of men's conflation of women's capitulations in commitment to the revolution. The autobiographies of the founders of Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton and Brown exemplify existence for such women utilization by men in Black Power Movements. Elaine Brown in her narrative *A Taste of Power*, states an instance that a woman got compelled by a man to be in an open sexual relationship. Brown reminds the words by Earl Anthony who made her remember that "a true sister would be hay to sleep with a revolutionary Brother" (Brown 115). The party was ideologically against contraceptives and the practice of abortion. So, women had to be impregnated oftentimes and thus to produce enough offspring for the revolution. These matters drew the circle for women where they had to be shriveled, the subversion of which would be resulted in making the one stand at the end of the party.

Women were compelled or bound to give birth to the children they conceived by such tenuous relationships, at the same time men were given the liberty to deny or accept the parentage of these children. The most crucial fact was that the women who were 'victim' to these 'sexual' utilization were becoming physically weak and

intellectually backward as they didn't get time to chase their passions and to rear an activist 'self' to fight against the White powers dominating them. In such realms, the Black women had to face double exploitations: from the White masters as well as from the Black masters. The control over the Black women by Black men, specifically, the loss of the reproductive freedom of Black women affected the self-determination of Black women badly. It had a strong adverse effect on the liberation movement itself.

But the success lies in the attitude and determination with which these Black women went ahead to fight against for their freedom. Generally, motherhood is considered as a hindrance to pursue career, activism and to keep a step away from other social, political struggles. But these exceptional Black women considered motherhood beyond the traditional colours by defying conventional expectations on 'mother figures'. Her resilience to the resistance struggle multiplies after the birth of a child. Assata Shakur states that if she denies giving birth to a baby, it will be equal to giving the oppressors more power over them. While carrying her daughter Kakuya in her womb, she says that having a child is another act of resistance and the unborn child ensures that the circle of resistance is unbroken too. In her poem about the carrying baby, "Love", she writes "we are pregnant with freedom./We are a conspiracy" (Shakur 130). 'We' refers to the Black community itself. The activist women were always regarded their primary duty as fighting for freedom. For them, an individual was a part of the community as such, a newborn baby is the product to the entire community than to the individual mother and father. Because of the same notion, the Black activist women considered the practice of rearing children as a collective effect of the community, and nothing falls entirely on a mother. It resulted in keeping their activist spirit alive and getting their work never prevented by the role

of a 'child bearer'. Shakur had to get separated from her daughter Kakuya in her early days itself. Shakur's father Kamau was incarcerated, and Shakur's mother took up the duty of bringing up the daughter. When Shakur meets her daughter at her age of four, she can't even identify Shakur as her mom. Shakur feels intense sorrow in these incidents. But what is more important to her was building a world of justice and freedom to the daughter before she grows up. These activist women gave up their personal life for the collective political struggle to build up a world of freedom.

In 1960s and 1970s, these Black women activists were in their peak of protests against the racial disparities. But as they struggled and fought with the racial disparities, they could find gendered distinctions which exemplify the already existing racial subjugation. The treatment these women underwent from the part of their fellow Black beings in Black Liberation Movement were pathetic. The oppression these Black women political activists encountered were so humiliating as they became victim to racist more than those sexist oppressions. What makes them exempt is the political as well as social background in which they made their decision to be politically subversive. The social and political factors were subjugating further and further as well as threatening the upsurging minds of protest. In that scenario, these Black women activists chose to be politically active and to fight against all sorts of powers which oppress them. All power and authority like the police, lawyers, judges, journalists, and jurors were plotting against these women activists as they upsurge from white supremacist powers. It was extremely hard to survive by themselves in such a scenario.

Angela Davis's autobiography mainly focuses on her emotional aspects and happenings related to her imprisonments and trials. Assata Shakur's autobiography clearly depicts the aftermath of choosing to be subversive and trying to explore one's

place in society rather than shrinking to nulls. The bad treatment they experienced in that society sprung from the basic conceptions of society on gender roles. Though there are ‘proclamations’ that women and men are considered without any gender prejudices in society, there exists the preconceptions confined to each gender roles: women are expected to be passive, submissive, enduring, caring, emotional where heart overpowers head. Cognitive theories state that there are three elements in man’s cognition– 3Hs- Head, Heart, and Hand. The heart relates to affective domain which means emotional aspects, head is with cognitive domain which means rational/intellect/thoughts and hand with psychomotor actions. Generally, women are ascribed to be the ones in whom affective domain dominates overhead, consequently women said to be more emotional in their reactions and decision making. Head is related to thoughts/intellect and men are expected to be the ones in whom cognitive domain dominates over ‘heart’. That means, man has the power to overpower and outlaw emotions and delicate feelings as he acts according to the prompts of his intellect; more sensible than sensitive. Here comes the exceptional case of Black women. They were the victims of double forms of sexism in two diverge ways in white supremacist society. Black women were denied the protection for female stereotypes as they were very aggressive, ‘masculine’ and assertive in the perspectives of white authoritarians, and they were denied access to important realms of Black power movements as they were considered weak in their cognitive domain. What is ‘masculine’? What all things are considered feminine? All these are strictly cultural and social constructs. There is nothing beyond that. A woman can have masculine characteristics, and a man can have feminine ones too. But these subversions of gender boundaries are always scorned at. As these Black women showed masculine

predicaments, they denied the empathy of society. But they continued to be subversive, questioning and fighting for their place in society.

Contrary to the preset notions of gender ascriptions on women, these Black women activists behaved/performed in an aggressive and 'masculine' ways. The society/culture is always stands in opposition to the subversive gender roles. The perfect example is that when a woman 'performs' in any modes that is commonly attributed to man, the society tends to dehumanize that person or set her as a 'negative female stereotype'. The stance of women in performing her roles must be thoroughly analyzed: when stick on to the socially/culturally accepted stereotypical women roles, they were further alienated and neglected. In the contrary, when women try to subvert the gender boundaries, they are pictured in dehumanizing lights. They emerged to be successful in such a sense that they strive to the utmost level to erect their identity while society constantly tries to silence them.

The main tools used to oppress Black Power movements were the ones from law enforcement agencies- trials, detainments, imprisonments, and arrests. The women leaders in the forefront of Black power movements got arrested attributing wrong charges and trialed purposefully. COINTELPRO (the Counter Intelligence Program) was a planned tool targeting to entrap Black activists. Angela Davis and Assata Shakur had to undergo trials for raising their voice to assert their identity. Their voice and political activities become a threat to the White dominant society. The dominant culture perceived the emerging strong identities of these women activists as transgressive and that is why unacceptable. They were portrayed as criminals/terrorists. The police, prosecutors and the media tried to give them a terrorist aura within which any attempt to reverberate their voice in the public as criminal as well as punishable.

In fact, the crime committed by these Black women activists was that they took active part in political actions towards oppression. They have done the same things their male counterparts had done. They have taken the same journey of protest towards the overpowering and subjugating authorities. But they became further discriminated and alienated only in the name of their gender.

To illustrate gender 'performativity', the selected African American women autobiography become crucial in connection with the fact that generally the experiences of women especially Black women are negated as the mainstream media and culture portrays the male defendants' perspectives and roles. Female co-defendants were constricted into just mentions of their names in mainstream media, in scholarly articles and books. While taking the binary conception White/Black or insider/outsider, the former group's perspectives and standpoints are the focus of all the mainstream media and written documents. It gradually results in a negative portrayal of Black fighters mainly, male fighters. Women fighters shrink just a mention of their names in their defense. But once Black women are portrayed, it will certainly be the result of Black women subverting the acceptable behavior of gender. When Black women deliberately bridge the conceptual divide between 'performativity' and subversion, they are/were portrayed in negative tone and in criminal lights. The reason is that they fight against the governmental systems of society as well as disrupting the gender conceptions of the culture.

"Institutions, paradigms, and other elements of the knowledge validation procedure controlled by the elite White men constitute the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process. The purpose of this process is to represent a White male standpoint" (Collins, *Black Feminist* 222). Viewing through the lens of White masculinity standpoints, the Black is subjugated moreover; the Black women are

further subjugated. As the image built through the White supremacist standpoint, the reporting and interpretation of trials, court cases, imprisonment details etc. the Black women described with charges they even didn't think of to commit. The manners of women were just mentioned, and the details were found nowhere. Once they were portrayed, it's with the terrorist contour and utterly in negative shades.

The so called 'feminine' weakness is used to portray the Black women as not eligible to be in the political activism in general and simultaneously, 'feminine' strength these Black women activists showed to portray them as outlaws. Here lies the secret in fixing character traits specific to each gender role. By lifting the emotional and infantile nature of women, they are considered unworthy of taking part in social, political and cultural movements. By putting forth the aggressive 'manly' attributes, they were pictured as transgressing the boundaries of feminine roles.

It is apparent that the voice of the dominant culture will be echoed more compared to the original clamors of the subservient culture. It is because of the same, the original assertive, clever and autonomous roles of Black women in the revolution and their strong activism were getting overpowered with fully fabricated emotionally weak images of women. The White depiction of Black women activists was mainly focused on these weak images. More than depicting them only as supporting the Black men, Black woman activists were degraded by stating that their activism was only for their men/male counterpart. This conceptual fabrication appeared during the White judicial system's picturization of Angela Davis in the Marin County Trial. George Jackson was an activist in the Black Panther Party. The allegation against Angela was that she has actively participated in the endeavors to free Soledad Brothers and George Jackson. The prosecution built an image that Angela was taking part in all these

efforts only to save George Jackson, whom they identified only as her 'lover' not as a fellow activist.

Judith Butler's concept of heterosexual matrix can be elaborated to explain this. Everything is conceived in a heterosexual way. It is an easy way to acknowledge two activists' cooperative endeavors to simply label them as a relation on the basis of heterosexual matrix. The news labeling Angela Davis as a lover to George Jackson was streamed in all the mainstream media in USA.

These depictions were not only nullifying Black women as 'emotionally weak persons' but also destructing their intelligent, assertive moves towards their fight for echoing their voices in a racially and gendered discriminated realm. The prosecution argued that Angela couldn't discriminate between personal, political, wrong/right only because of her emotional leniency toward George Jackson. By putting forth such a point, the prosecution could be able to portray Angela as a fully emotional and irrational person. The mainstream media and the public could hear the proclamations of prosecution and the same got into the public. What Black- subjugated had in fact to reveal remain echoed only within the walls of their restricted Black fringes. Such gendered perceptions unleashed about her resulted in creating an image of Angela which poses her as danger to society as acting without logic and solely on emotions. The prosecution was sexualizing or over-sexualizing Angela's relationship with George Jackson completely neglecting their affiliation in terms of intelligence, ideologies and activism. Such attributions were certainly gendered: a woman is over-socialized as illogical on behalf of her emotional fervors once she attempts to protect fellow male activists. The same scenario may not be as such in case of a male. To the contrary, a male activist will be praised or labeled as brave and militant in his attempt to protect a fellow human woman activist. The exact notion had been taking place in

the case of Angela Davis and George Jackson. Angela, in her attempt to help Jackson to escape, termed her actions here as overwhelmed only by sexual as well as emotional desire, and therefore illogical.

All these attributions to Angela became questionable and utterly pointless when we look into Angela Davis as a person. She was really an educationist and one with a clear-cut political and ideological standpoint. She was well-educated even up to the mark of her Doctor of Philosophy. She had experiences and exposure to the world through her travels and education abroad. She was a professor in the University of California before her trial. Negating a woman's ideological/political voices by labeling them as emotionally/sexually motivated rather than emerging from a mind of intellect and clear standpoint, is an act of degrading the woman herself par with degrading her activism, with scholarly fervor. Angela Davis's reaction to the judicial system's approach towards her (only in case of gender) is expressed in her book *Women, Race and Class*'. The original voices of Black women tend to be echoed only in their own works out of which many were banned and restricted publication and distribution. That was the main reason, the voice of the minority Black women activists remained unheard. In her autobiography, Davis says about her trials, addressed to her prosecutors:

It is utterly absurd. Yet it is understandable Mr. Harris would like to take advantage of the fact that I'm a woman, for in this society woman are supposed to act only in accordance with the dictates of their emotions and passions. I might say that this is clearly a symptom of the male chauvinism which prevails in our society (2)

Another important measure White judicial system took on gender bias was labeling Black women activists as uncontrollable and therefore threat to people and society when they act aggressive, protesting. These labeling sprouts from the

subversive behavior of these women activists as they transgressed the society's limited conception of gender roles pertaining to women. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Assata Shakur as the Judiciary propagated an image of Shakur which has to be feared and dangerous to society as she acted violently against any racial and gendered actions towards her. Even before the New Jersey Turnpike case, which made Shakur notorious, the White judiciary made propaganda against her through mainstream media and pamphlets. It helped in building a strong criminal base for the people to build Shakur's terrorist image.

Many allegations were charged on Assata that she was totally labeled as a criminal and terrorist. Charges like robbery, kidnapping, murder attempts etc. were charged. Assata's photos were displayed on walls of public places as one of the bank robbers. Actually, six photos were displayed. All of them were vague pictures of the bank robbers captured in the surveillance cameras. But only one photo among those is named JoAnne Chesimard (original name of Assata Shakur); not only displays in public places, but also media advertisements, news stories all bared her named images.

Shakur's so called 'unfeminine' nature was utilized by the jury in its way to consider with negligence, the fact that she was becoming a mother during the trial. She was accused of an active member in a drug net and her pictures were constantly displayed in media, public places etc. so that the common people/public became very familiar to Shakur's face and the images of a terrorist, drug seller and bank robber etc. were instilled in public mind.

Women aligned with any activist movements were considered as danger to society by the judicial police system. The Federal Bureau of Investigation marked these women activists as terrorists. Only because of their involvement in the Black Panther Party, they were brutally treated and even murdered by attributing many

charges. For instance, Assata Shakur explains in her first part of the autobiography the ways she got caught by the police and how she was treated like an animal without any concern that she is a human being. What they had known was she is a Black woman activist working with Black Panther Party (9).

If these women activists would have remained passive and submissive, their lives were not that much threatened. But they were never ready to be continued into the four walls of a home. They were so strong that they could successfully 'perform' their roles devoid of gender/sexist and racial boundaries.

It was ambiguous that over emotional nature, weak and passive attitudes were the factors that White dominant society used to consider Black women as illogical beings incapable for entering into the forefront of society. But what makes it ambiguous is that the opposite factors like unemotional nature, strong and activist attitudes emerged from the same Black women individuals were scorned at or propagated as dangerous threat to society. Here sprouts the question regarding the positioning of a black woman in the white society. The White attitudes, standpoints etc. were certainly antagonistic for the Black. The intention of White masters was just to look down upon them as they were in a sense paused threat in implementing White authoritative modes of life in Black people.

Femininity is used as a factor to impose irrationalities, emotional fluctuations, frailty to make strong decisions in Black women. Thus, gender becomes a factor the White dominant group used to move Black woman activist from the forefront to sideways. More than that, the judicial system succeeded in labeling 'feminine' qualities as inappropriate in keeping an activist fervor. These tactics propagated by the judicial system certainly aided in the destruction of Black women. But the irony is that the same 'feminine' which used to portray Black women as ineligible to be

activists those which attributed their 'insensible' actions and that's why criminal images were used to protect or giving more consideration in case of White women.

To deal with the issues faced by Black women activists under the White regime, it's most appropriate to use womanism. Feminism, on the other hand, is an out product of White women ideologies. Womanism takes into consideration factors like class and race in the process of defining a person's identity. It is alleged that though White Feminism claims to focus largely on oppression face by women in general, it overlooks the struggles and problems confront by Black women. But the fact is that Black women's problems were unique as they comprise oppressive forces from White people and Black men. Feminism can't expose these because by itself it is an out product of the power structure which determines Black women's lot in the world.

In the case of Black woman activists, the American judicial system considered Black women as the people without having American identity simultaneously posing a threat to the nation. But the irony is in the fact that the judicial system was in the stance of protecting them. But what happened really was cornering them as their stubborn nature pause threat for the Government as they were strong enough to persuade the Black masses in their fight for freedom.

Even being in the same gender framework, White women were frowning at the assertive and activist Black women who were considered as having little regard for her gender role in the society. The mainstream intellectuals, ideologists, media and society elaborated an apparent distinction between taking the role of a revolutionary women and taking the role of a mother. The Black Panther women Assata Shakur, Afeni Shakur were treated brutally during their trials despite the fact that they were pregnant. Their children were facing threats and destructive actions during their

imprisonment. Fifty percentages of the women in the New Heaven 14 were pregnant. These women were deprived of getting proper supervision of doctors before or after the delivery. Because of this lack of proper medical assistance, there were complications and many cases of infection. Like the mothers' plight, the newborn had the same predicaments. The reason was that their babies were born as Black Panther and naturally they pose a threat to the American society. So, the plight of those infants was prescribed by the U.S. government.

Assata Shakur had to undergo the same harsh treatments during her trial as she became pregnant during her imprisonment and gave birth to her baby during that period. In spite of depriving her of proper medical care and proper nutrition, she was tortured mentally. Shakur's autobiography clearly describes the hardships she had to suffer throughout her pregnancy in prisons and during trials. How cruelly the White guards treated a woman during her pregnancy and labor is minutely portrayed in Shakur's autobiography. When she went into labor, there were armed guards around her. While she was undergoing severe labor pain, they cuffed her hands to the bed. As it didn't work, they pointed guns at her pregnant belly and warned her that they would shoot once she moved without their consent. This pathetic state is discernibly apprehensible to a woman and entirely a gendered harassment too. How can a woman be standstill during her severe labor pain? Motherhood is being celebrated from time immemorial in every culture. These harassments during and after the labor time were not at all widely mentioned anywhere other than the Black women's autobiographies. Simply because these women were barred by gender and race, the mainstream media in the US were never in a stance to reveal Black experiences under White. Most of the criminal charges on Assata were attributed and not the original ones. Whatever might be a woman should never be treated like this in her labor hours. These acts of the

guards and the prison system unravel the anti-Black attitudes and actions of the White judicial system itself. She might have given a delivery in a hospital or at least with free hands (without being cuffed) under a doctor's proper supervision. Shakur explained it in her autobiography:

I woke up about 3:30 A.M. and i could feel the baby lowering and thought I could feel the baby's head. I called the nurse. She said, without looking, that I wasn't "ready" yet. When i insisted, she looked and went running for Dr. Garrett... Later that day, September 11, they still hadn't brought me the baby. He reminded them that i was supposed to breast feed her. They told him he hadn't "written a prescription" for breast feeding (195).

Assata was denied spending time with her baby. Feeding the baby was under strict control and often forbidden.

Maya Angelou's early years of life and her traumatic period that she had to undergo because of the rape she faced at the age of eight converse the woman lot in a male-centered society. By resisting all adverse experiences and racist oppression to come out of the prejudiced circle, Maya presents the central image of a bird struggling to come out of its cage. Figuratively it can be related to a woman's psyche in the male dominated world which craves for a free existence instead of a subsistent existence within a male-dominated space. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* depicts her grandmother Annie Henderson who plays a crucial role in her life. After being abandoned by Maya's own parents, Annie Henderson whom she calls 'momma', brought her up. She is a strong woman who is financially independent and in spite of being a black woman, she is a respected personality in her locality. Angelou learns from her the survival mechanism in a racist society. There are other women also in her life who support her in her resistance against sexism and racism. Mrs. Bertha

Flower, a graceful woman inspires in Maya a love for literary book. Because of her help and guidance Maya is able to speak after sexual abuse. Her mother Vivian Baxter is another inspiring personality for her. She is different from her grandmother “Momma”. She is outgoing, exuberant city woman who lives life according to her own terms. She does not find any need to conform to the subservient country folk tradition. Angelou absorbs her personal philosophy and frequently quotes her maxims of life. Thus, the mother figure is important in women’s autobiography.

The act of writing to expose brutal and inhuman white approaches towards the blacks can be considered as an act of resistance and, thus performing beyond the expected limits of the white. The same type of writing was also suppressed. As *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a picture-like depiction of racism and sexuality, the book itself had thirty-nine bans in some libraries and schools in the U.S. Angelou did not seem affected by all these adverse forces in the society. She continued her writing to produce a wide range of realistic exposure of racist attitudes and actions in the U.S. through her life narratives. Through her campaigns as a professor and through her writings, Angelou continues to influence the black masses to subvert the lines of demarcation which limits one’s ‘performativity’ in a space.

Even though these Black women were brutally treated, and had to undergo inhuman treatments, they continued to be revolutionaries. Their fervor for political activism and the ultimate goal to help their community to get out of ‘slavery-like’ existence was inflating. The U.S. mainstream media propagated eccentric, criminalist, dangerous, terrorist images of these Black women activists. Only by destructing the predetermined conceptions on gender roles, the eccentric portrayals on activist women can be wiped out. Liberation from sexism should be realized other than existing in

words. Gender conflicts were apparently cumulating not only in the external world, but also in the internal 'Black only' world.

Even in the post-modern era, there exists a divide in the matter of gender. Though many advancements and progresses have occurred in many realms of life and world, there still exists a gender divide which elaborates the disparity between different genders in society in every fields. Inequalities exist in access to opportunities, pay, benefits, labor markets and business, career, house, public places, allocation of duties etc. Feminist theorists and activists elaborate more on their achievements in uplifting their individual status in society. But there are even more spheres they still have to be deconstructed, and thus reconstructed. For instance, in spite of the prevalence of equal pay legislation, wide disparity in the wages of male and female still exists. As this thesis focuses mainly on American social milieu, an exploration of the wage system of such a progressed nation is notable the U.S. Equal Pay Legislation is dating back to fifty years. But the fact is that American women earn 18 % less than their male counterparts. In the U.K. the gap is 17%, in Australia it's 14%. Though the wage gap based on gender is decreasing in most of the countries, it's still in prevalence.

Most of the empirical evidence shows that gender divide exists in educational, intellectual performances and strictly in framing one's self-confidence. The studies focus on the attitude of men and women towards competition show that men are far improved than women. This will naturally influence their spirit of working, active participation, intellectual and mental stance, working age and the mode and structure of their response. It is significant to note when and where such a gender gap emerges and the reason behind. It's evidently contributed by the nurturing patterns of the male-dominated social structures, education and public experiences.

Representation of women in public spheres, namely political committees, corporate boards, decision making teams etc. is notably increasing. But the fact to be noted is that this increment is only because of legal mandates. The extent to which they take part in performance is a great mismatch to be explored upon. Women are often underrepresented in formal decision-making process even though they decorate topmost positions in different fields.

The conceptual divide in gender still continues through political and educational institutions and systems, employment structures, domestic norms and values etc. There exists a clichéd practice of eulogizing woman, by ascribing the label multitasking, for her capacity to harmonize household duties and career. It is certainly a euphemistic way of gender divide which ascribes many duties and responsibilities to her. But the same woman will be pictured as subverting the gender boundaries when she stands strongly against a cause. The conceptual divide with regard to gender can only be completely bridged through deliberate accentuation of assertiveness from the part of women. The activists discussed in this study could act upon their self-will by bridging the conceptual divide.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences” (Lorde 114).

In this quote Audre Lorde speaks about the intersection of race, class and gender. Asserting herself as a person with distinct identities – black, lesbian, warrior or poet etc. she passes the message that differences can be twisted to thwart discrimination. According to her, differences themselves are not disruptive, instead the culture and society that fail to imbibe and celebrate them are disruptive in nature. While analyzing the lives of the African American activists, Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou, it can be found that instead getting degraded by the subjugations inflicted on them by the society, in name of race, cultural and gender, they strongly resisted to represent those attributed identities that restrict their development of self. They celebrated their lives by subverting those lines of demarcation and discrimination. Society failed to celebrate their individual assertions, validate their unrelenting struggle for generating personal space. Moreover, their identities were given a terrorist colour. As social psychologist Roy.

F. Baumeister defined prejudice as “a negative feeling toward an individual based solely on his or her membership in a particular group” (Baumeister, 2014). One should never be within the boundaries of personal and social biases. Even the external forces emanate from culture, tradition and society try to compartmentalize one person in a biased identity, whether it be race or gender. Personal biases act as psychological hindering points against observing the world as it is.

If an African American keeps a predisposed view of their past fixed racial identity, they won't be able to forge a creative path to the future. Likewise, if the society keeps a biased view on black in the U.S., the blacks can never be able to move and conquer the new vistas of possibilities in the divergence of the current world and to enrich their identities. It will end up in perspectivism. As a vital philosophical view, perspectivism elaborates that knowledge and understanding on something is always closely connected to the interpretive perspectives of the one who observes it (Conant). These Afro-American women activists urged the black people to think and act beyond the 'black' attributes imposed upon the African Americans by the dominant white society. This is a continuing phenomenon that began since the period of slavery and extended till the current twenty-first century. Through their activism and autobiographical voices, Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou were challenging the white systems and their modes of demeanor towards black people. Through their lives and stubborn voices, they reinvented a black identity deviant from age-old ethnic clutches and colours. These autobiographies act as true and direct documents on black sufferings and white oppressive bodies and actions. Thus, these life narratives prove to be successful in off-putting white narratives' supremacy in presenting black history only from their perspectives. When words come out of humiliated psyche and oppressed life, they would be more unassailable and persuasive. The black people are moved by the words as well as lives of these women activists.

These life narratives are unique call for protest/resistance from the women activists in words and action simultaneously. Through these verbal proclamations, the woman activists exhibited the resistance and their activism, and even by pledging their own lives. The word 'resistance' is befitting for the title of the thesis in variegated

ways. The pursuit of showing the true colours of white judicial systems and state laws in their approach towards blacks and the clear-cut delineation of unveiling the cruelty of white actions, and brutalities towards black itself is a resistance. As an author, they don't want to represent the so-called 'prolific' and 'widely accepted' writers. If so, they might have given their accounts of experiences in a rather softened and figurative approach. Instead, they want to reveal the hidden realities of black oppressed lives. In its second sense, the word 'resistance' refers to these black women writers' activism as a mode of protest. Their activist self was setting models for the black women in future by showing their subversive actions against the U.S. authoritarian systems. And thus, a sort of political consciousness is created in the black collective self which aims towards the need for black empowerment through self-assertion. Through their resistance, they are representing the black women activist collective which stood for the black's emancipation, and thus succeeded in reclaiming individual self, liberating it from racial and gendered identity.

Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou were exceptionally idiosyncratic human beings, as they resist representing the racial and gendered identities ascribed on them by the prevalent social system. They are certainly proud of and would love to be in their black identity. But they resist representing that particular race and gender, and thus curb their individuality or personal identity. The cliched categorization was the one they kept repugnance for. In short, the selected African American women activists were readily imbibing to be the representatives of black being subjects. On the contrary, they are strictly rejecting representing themselves as black objects. In that sense what happens through this black woman activists represent how the predetermined objectified black woman roles are getting reconstructed in a broadened social/ cultural/psychological space.

The politics of space-social, psychological, political, and economic- is yet to be analyzed in considering people individually. Though activism meant to resist the adverse forces that try to curb one's subsistence, the phenomenon of activism itself was male-dominated and racist during 1960's. Angela Davis herself illustrates in her autobiography, how black men were the power centers of black liberation army. They had to face the age-old interrogation regarding gender supremacy even within their personal circles. The distinctive characteristic of these activists is that they explored their inner self to create space and time in their adverse social/political arenas. It aided in nurturing pride for heritage, and thus ended up in self-discovery. The centering of black female self was a significant step towards the blow on white global supremacy. Thus, this thesis reaches up to the finding that black woman activists constructed a sense of self that resulted in de-centering the white-centered perspective on blacks. Through the specter of activism, selfhood and collective memory, the black woman narratives literally as well as pragmatically resist all sorts of representations ascribed on them. And thus, reach up to the ultimate points of self- discovery.

The study centers on dislocating race and gender from being the preset boundaries in a person's self-expressions. Though it deals with personas of twentieth century, such factors are still continuing to determine a person's identity, and also for self-expression in this twenty-first century. The world might be advanced; society might be progressed, but there exists an invisible line which demarcates human beings into binaries like 'feminine'/'masculine', 'black'/white' as normalcy. Based on the gender racial categorization an individual is ascribed upon, the class of values attributed to that person, the extent of emotional expressions, behavioral patterns, social roles etc. varies. In the matter of gender, biological determinism posits these

categorical divisions. It puts forward the notion of a natural mode of human behavior as predetermined by genetic and biological mechanisms.

Angela Davis and Assata Shakur illustrate the reasons for not idolizing the realistic narratives of activists, especially black woman activists of 1960s. The active involvement of black women in the Civil Rights Movement and their revolutionary activities in Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army etc. and the brutal, inhuman approaches they had to confront at the face of the U.S. police and judicial system are portrayed in translucent manner through the words of these activists. Assata Shakur's autobiography abounds in gory episodes which show Shakur as a helpless animal under the boots of the U.S. troopers while she was in custody at hospital and in prison. These acts make it clear that the system of slavery has been abolished only in documents but the practice of it in variant manner is still in prevalence. These women activists are selected for study as they stand to be epitomes of bravery and perseverance standing against all modes of oppression to be come out of ashes as a phoenix from all the racial and gendered tribulations they underwent in the U.S. cultural scenario. They were sticking onto the pride of their racial identity thus fought for the cause of individual as well as collective selfhood.

The implied reciprocity between racism and sexism, racism and capitalism are getting unfolded while analyzing the race/gender, black/white binaries. The study on these black women life-narratives dissects the interconnectedness of racist and gendered agendas in hindering a person's augmentation of selfhood. Compartmentalizing these activists in label of their racial origin and distorting their acts against white authoritative structures posed hindrance in their movement forward. Assata Shakur and Angela Davis had to spent most of the periods of their youth in prison and under the U.S. police control falsely accused of charges like robbery,

kidnapping, conspiracy, armed attack and murder. But what constitute these activists' turn out to be obdurate figures in the U.S. history is their unwavering strength of psyche with which they fight for their space in the white society. Assata Shakur says in her autobiography: "These people can lock us up, but they can't stop life, just like they can't stop freedom" (88). Even at the verge of her death after getting shot by the state troopers, Shakur brutally was handcuffed to hospital bed and questioned by the troopers.

While dissecting the racial and gender dynamics in the vistas of self-exploration in the lives of black activists, the standpoint of a dominant nation towards the racially labelled nation can also be elucidated in this thesis. The U.S. Prison Industrial Complex served as a symbol of racial violence, judiciary as a centre of institutionalized racial prejudice and state troopers as figures of brutal inhuman acts. The mainstream media and the government itself tried to criminalize and thus defame the Black activists. The incessant cruel treatments the Black revolutionaries subjected to at the prison and under investigation were intended to repress their spirits and strong self. In contrary to the white prospects, these Afro-American woman activists struggled and suffered all the state-inflicted violence for the freedom of Blacks.

Maya Angelou's quest for selfhood got distorted even from her childhood. Her life amidst the racist and sexist people of Arkansas developed a sense of racial self-hatred in her and female inferiority began to generate within her as an aftermath of the rape she subjected to at the age of eight. But in her later years, she was groomed to be a strong woman to fight against all the prejudices and oppressions. She felt hopeless by seeing the poor and pathetic conditions of black women working under the white masters. She says in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* "The women's feet had swollen to fill the discarded men's shoes they wore" (121). The notion 'resistance to

representation' comes to be consequential when Angelou describes dark coloured skin and its association with race in her initial autobiography. Relating white-skin with beauty is a set-standard always and everywhere by the ruling class who enjoys hegemony. They also instill in a conception of black as contrasting to beauty. In the development stage of a psyche, that means in younger ages, such conceptions get space in the intellect of a person eventually resulting in a weak self. Angelou's friends, family members and people around humiliated her in the name of her colour. Thus, a sense of weak self was developing inside her in her childhood. But it got thwarted by her brave struggles as she resisted representing any such prospects in name of race. The same Angelou celebrates her/African dark skin pigmentation in her poem *Phenomenal Woman,*"

It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.

I'm a woman
Phenomenally (22-27).

The act of recording their experiences of racial and gendered marginalization is elaborately explained in this thesis elaborately. A transgression of the predetermined and socially set boundaries of gender to explore their self and subversive actions beyond the racial demarcations are clearly a call for other black women, women in general to be interrogative and resistant against anything which curb the free existence in this universe. Even in this twenty-first century, the power movements like Black Lives Matter, takes Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou as the figures of

motivation. And they have profound brunt on the black woman activist encroachment in any realm especially in the U.S. cultural backgrounds. Black Lives Matter, as an international social movement formed in 2013 in the U.S. still in prevalence, keeps its focus in protest against any sort of racism and anti-black violence.

In every black protest, resistance was to establish safe spaces for them in society where they can be sustained with self-pride. There are still forces limiting black access to mainstream knowledge systems. The perfect instance is Donald Trump's speech against the insemination of Critical Race Theory in the U.S. educational system. Whites are scared of the aspect of teaching Black History as it gradually reveals the white masks. All black struggles with the support of the black strong self had found its success: the culmination of chattel slavery, end of Jim Crow Laws' segregation, improved representation at all levels of government, integration of educational institutions, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and realistic and genuine depiction of the Black experiences in media. Thus, the black woman protests are revered and imitable and source of reference and inspiration for all under the margins of racist and gendered spaces.

Beyond the analysis of black women's inner development in the cauldron of white exploitation, this study scrutinizes the external world that shaped the psyche of these black women activists so persistent. The select autobiographies represent the world, the people, and the system that shaped their self-hood. And it can be observed that none of these factors was supportive of them. If we take the world around the black women activists, it always denied space for them for a dignified existence. Instead, they were in a stance of subsistence enduring all kinds of backlashes. Maya Angelou and Angela Davis point out contexts in which they had to be separated from other white students at school, in the name of their black origin. Thus, they began to crave

for at least a light-skinned appearance which hides their race's blackness apparently. The people in the circle around black women activists can be divided into two categories: One group supports and always acts as a scaffolding point for them. This group can never consist of all blacks. Here comes the gender dynamics and its intervention in racial attributes. As intersectional theory states, all systems, notably that of oppression, are interconnected. In Black circle of people itself, there were black men who denied social as well as political space for Blacks. Shakur points out an instance in which leaders in Black Liberation Army circumvent the women in the party to come into the forefront of the organization. White people do not have to be mentioned as they were standing at the other end of the poll always torturing the black activist endeavors.

The system that denies social and political space for a Black subject can be intersected chiefly with the U.S. prison system, trial and justice. The inhuman treatments of blacks under the U.S. police force and court trials together connote the prevalence of slavery in a covert manner. These Black woman revolutionaries took the strategy of endurance at the initial stage and then they took resistance as their weapon of protest. Assata Shakur, having a presentiment for herself to be ever behind white bars of prison, escaped from the prison and still remains under exile. It is observed: -

Standing as a fugitive "slave" for twenty years, Shakur represents the unembraceable: The state exercises severe punitive sanctions against anyone who offers her refuge. Nevertheless, Shakur's case has received support from ideologically disparate African Americans, ranging from incarcerated revolutionaries and prison intellectuals through political icons to neoliberal black studies professors (James 113).

Assata Shakur's exile stands as a symbol for unquenchable search for freedom and protest to shrink her 'self' to be fit to the social structure constructed by white supremacy.

Angela Davis captured the attention of activists through her academic intellectualism and continues to exert her influence on black activists through her academic campaigns and articles. Her active affiliation with the Communist Party made her protest, both intellectually and pragmatically, against white-centered agendas. Her present status quo as a Professor at the University of California and her intellectual fervour continues to have her in the centre of anti-racist proclamations. She still stands for the cause of black discriminatory practices.

Maya Angelou was incredibly vigorous in her activist identity till her death in 2014. Her words and writings are still in flux to persuade the anti-racist movements. The brutal experiences she encountered in her childhood are sources with which her unconscious mind is structured. Consequently, her strive to influence the black masses through her activism and writings exposing the real pictures of white capitalist acts prove to be successful.

Racism continues to subsist as a system that compartmentalizes people in such a way that their progress, standard of living and space they occupy in society etc. are getting restricted both ideologically and pragmatically. It can aid only in reinforcing class divisions in a social structure. Moreover, it generates an 'inferior' class consciousness within the psyche of such racialized people. The people who are victims of racism in one way or other have negative instincts in their unconscious mind. This naturally led them to be in a stance of insecurity, deprived of educational as well as employment opportunities, they will suffice themselves to be in the boundaries of

restricted actions. Thus, racist attitudes and happenings will have a deep impact in a person's development of self. During the period of capitalism, racism was gripping its hold onto slavery and imperialism. But in the current scenario, in this modern and sophisticated milieu, the traces of racism can be found in a more newfangled way. The mutation of racism from its core can never be viable as it is embedded in the tradition and institutions as well as it is there in, the deep inside, the unconscious of people.

Despite the formal and judicial decree propounds equality for all people beyond racial/class/gender boundaries, there still remain the question of equal space for black in the U.S. society. The conception of integration itself is prejudiced one as integration needs classification of black as distinct group. The political ideologies of black nationalism and liberal integration remain more powerful in documents and less influential pragmatically.

This thesis is an exploration of women lives beyond gendered and domestic subsistence through selected autobiographies. Depiction of woman experiences in literature is almost cloistered by emotional, passive and subservient accounts. But the women in these selected autobiographies are stubborn in subverting the clichéd gender roles and Black subjugated roles unwilling to suppress their deeds and minds. Their lives are not mere dull domestic accounts. On the contrary, they are voicing forth the unvoiced aspirations of woman. They share in common a note of braveness and perseverance to assert their self and thus establishing their valor. Moreover, autobiographies of Black-American women have been neglected until last decades. And these three women activists seem to trace back their growing sense of self and transforming identity in the social and political struggle through the life narratives. The study on these life narratives collectively acts as document representing the race

and gender dynamics as a hindering force for strengthening self and the strong African American revolutionaries Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and Maya Angelou epitomizes the subversive life beyond such demarcations through their thriving life of resistance.

Recommendations

- Each chapter of this thesis can be extended to further thesis.
- The study mainly centers on the life narratives of three African American woman activists to elaborate upon the lives of Black women activists.
- Further studies can be done by extending the list of autobiographies of more activist women.
- Research can be done by meeting the persons and organizations in connection with these Afro-American women activists.
- A comparative study of racially marginalized people in different parts of the world can be conducted.
- To analyze the African woman activists' lives, theoretical frameworks of Black women can be used in the levels further.

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