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INNER STRENGTH OF WOMAN IN MAYA ANGELOU'S *PHENOMENAL WOMAN*

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Inner Strength of Woman in Maya Angelou's *Phenomenal Women*

Maya Angelou, Marguerite Annie Johnson born on April 4, 1928, was an American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* tells of her life up to the age of 17 and brought her international recognition and acclaim.

Angelou was an African-American and because of her nationality she experienced discrimination and was aware of the way the society looked at people like her. But Angelou was very proud of herself and wanted the world to see it. She was not afraid of speaking in public. She used to do so to help others who were the victims of discrimination. She was also fighting for the women; she wanted women to have the same rights as men. In her poem *Phenomenal Woman* Angelou advocates that as a self-confident woman, she wants to show the world what makes her beautiful and she expresses it in a various way.

The poem starts in a conversational fashion where a flock of women, intrigued by poet's popularity amidst male suitors, want to know from her the secret of her success. Despite her strong refusal to fit into beauty paradigm, the poet gets maximum male attention. By her own admission, she is neither cute, nor she has a bottlenecked figure. Her physical incongruity makes the questioning women more curious and they have a strong feeling that the poet conceals the secret of her success.

The poet proudly asserts that she is very happy with whatever she has and definitely is not going to take a plunge to beautify herself. Her real appearance, the reach of her arms, the span of her hips, and the curl of her lips makes her such a phenomenal woman. She intends to highlight that there is no falsity about her appearance. She appears the way she exists. Such an honesty of her appearance exudes tremendous confidence which makes men to go.

Every time she enters the room, she becomes the cynosure of the present contingent of men. Helpless men used to stoop flock after her just the way bees swarm around their hive. The hive of honey bees is an interesting metaphor. As bees find shelter in a hive, helpless men seek refuge in the not-so-glamorous body of the poet.

Maya Angelou now takes initiative to decode the mystery further for the bewildering women. She is confident and that shows in the spark of her eyes. She has a proud smile which exudes optimism. Her swinging waist and joyous feet show that she is in firm control over the situation. This firmness, this confidence makes her a phenomenal woman who refuses to mould herself according to a male's desire. The repeated proud assertion of being a phenomenal woman is a celebration of womanhood.

She remains a mystery to her male admirers. This ordinary looking woman sparks a desire in them and they fail to pin down the reason. Maya Angelou tries to reveal the mystery but the myopic men fail to see it.

Actually, male doctrine believes in specificity. They cannot stand the idea of totality. When Maya Angelou's entire appearance wins them over, they leave no stone unturned to fix a point. Male hegemony demands stability, a hierarchy of things which Maya Angelou's body savagely defies. Her arch of the back, her glorious smile, rhyming motion of her breasts remains a jigsaw and single-minded men will never find the final piece of this jigsaw.

The poet again reasserts her phenomenal existence. She says that she never does anything outrageous to draw attention. She does not need to talk aloud or to jump here and there to get attention. She wins attention just to be what she is. The click of her heel, bend of her hair, her caring palm make her self-sufficient. She is complete since she is a woman and she needs not to gloss up herself to soar above. This audacity of thought, this proud claim and this supreme confidence make her a phenomenal woman.

The tone of the poem is that of a strong, confident woman who doesn't bother what people think about her. A Phenomenal woman can be with any shape or size, creed, religion, age, community. The colour of her skin does not matter but she must be true to herself with self-respect and determination towards facing all the difficulties in the society with positivity. Though our society considers a woman as a Second sex and submissive too, but as a woman there is something to be considered as beauty or charming. These words are used to describe women but still it should not end with physique. Inner beauty is powerful which can conquer the world. In this patriarchal society every woman is a phenomenal woman.

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