

Empowerment and Identity: Examining Societal Norms through Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise* and *Barbie*

Meenakshi M Suresh

Kavya Purushothaman Assistant Professor/English Literature

Department of English

Amrita University, College of Arts & Science, Kochi, India

Email – meenusuresh522@gmail.com

Abstract: *Bibliotherapy is a type of art therapy, which uses books, poetry or any type of literary materials to promote mental health and wellbeing, it mainly emphasizes about the healing power of words. This term was coined by Samuel Crothers in 1916 in an article in 'The Atlantic Monthly'. This research delves into a bibliotherapeutic analysis of Maya Angelou's poem Still I Rise by exploring its thematic resonance in the context of societal expectation imposed on women. The study also aims to draw connection between the inspiring poem of Angelou and the famous dialogue from the movie Barbie (2023), spoken by the character Gloria which was played by actress America Ferrera. Both Angelou's poem and the famous dialogue of the movie Barbie has shared themes of resilience, empowerment and struggle against societal contradictions, which is examined in this research. This research seeks to ravel the ways in which literature; especially poetry can serve as a form of bibliotherapy and also aims to bring out a deeper understanding of how Maya Angelou's Still I Rise and the dialogue from the movie Barbie can serve as a source of empowerment and healing for women navigating societal expectations.*

Key Words: *Bibilotherapy, Societal Expectations, healing, Self-love, Resilience, Empowerment, Strength, self-discovery.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Maya Angelou is an iconic writer who is known for her empowering works. She, as an African lived through the worst oppressions and inequality of American people. So her poem *Still I Rise* is a declaration for not to allow the hatefulness of the society to determine her own success. This poem is not only about her declaration; it also empowers other women to rise up against the societal expectations. The poem inspires and encourages readers to love themselves and stand up in their phase of hardship.

The 2023 movie *Barbie* emerges as an icon of empowerment and change. The movie emphasis the need to accept a women as who they are and empowers women to challenge the societal expectations imposed on them. Towards the climax of the movie the character Gloria played by actress America Ferrera speaks about the challenges women face in the societal expectations of beauty standards, career demand, the silent struggles endured by them and the paradox embedded in the pursuit of perfection. Through this dialogue, we can witness the challenges and tension faced by women and personal aspiration that she navigates daily.

The research emphasizes bibliotherapy as a powerful medium to provide affirmation and boost confidence in women as they faces the complexities of the societal expectations.

In this paper, the concept of empowerment and self-discovery is brought out through the bibliotherapeutic lens in *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou and the dialogue from the movie *Barbie*(2023). The inspiration and empowerment evoked in women through the poem and the movie dialogue is studied here.

Overall the poem and the movie dialogue embark on a journey to understand and challenge the norms and societal expectations faced by women and to unravel our perceptions of womanhood. We, women are powerful, capable and talented ones. We have the ability to inspire and change the world. Now is the time.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

This research aims to bring out connection between the poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou and the dialogue from *Barbie* in terms of societal expectations and to explore the bibliotherapeutic effect evoked by the combined themes emphasized by the poem and the dialogue in women and embrace women with empowerment and self love.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Various issues related to societal expectations imposed on women is witnessed in the society and works related to this field as the main concern is seen. But not much study has been done in the field of the Bibliotherapeutic effect that *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou and A Barbie Movie Dialogue of 2023 provide to womens facing societal expectation.

Be Bold, But Not Too Bold by Katrina Johnson Leon, Ed.D. ,Stereotypes in Society's Expectations of Women, Bibliotherapy: The therapeutic use of books for women by Laura j. Cohen MA, RN, PhD are the three works which are related to this area.

By analysing various issues faced by women due to societal expectation. This reasearch through a comparative study tries to imply the bibliotherapeutic effect that womens facing societal expectation get from the work of Maya Angelou and the barbie movie dialogue.

4. ANALYSIS :

Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise* represents the resilience and strength of all women, transcending racial boundaries. The poem can be analyzed as a universal anthem for women as its themes brings out the collective experiences of women worldwide. The theme of resilience brings out the spirit of women to rise against and above the challenges and adversity faced by them. Angelou speaks about the universal resilience found within women, which provide them the ability to endure and emerge stronger. The verse evokes empowerment in women to take control of their narrative and fight against the societal expectations that control or define them. Angelou not only speaks for black women, she inspires women of diverse background to claim their power and strength. The theme of self – love portrayed by the poet stands as a form of resistance against prejudice and discrimination faced by women in the society. By celebrating their own identity and discovering themselves, women from various background and diversities could find strength and unity in themselves. Even though the work is written on the base of the poet's personal experience as African-American woman, the poem brings out the universal themes of resilience, empowerment and self-love which provide strength for women to face their struggles and it becomes a reflection of the collective journey of all women who face a sense of solidarity. The poem argues about the stereotypes and expectations placed on women which is applicable to women of different races and culture, developing a sense of shared resistance. While reading the work it develops a sense of empowerment, cultivates self-love and unity in women in the face of adversity. The poem brings up a bibliotherapeutic effect in women to confidently stand for their own identity. The bold language and the unapologetic confidence enrich the work with voice of empowerment and resilience. A line like "You may shoot me with your eyes" conveys her strength to withstand the adversity and inspires women to face any difficulties and challenge them. In each stanza, she simultaneously reveals her incredible self-confidence and self-love despite the oppression of society which inbuilt a source of power for women to love them despite the societal expectations. The lines "I rise.... I rise" serve as a powerful refrain, to continuously fight against the challenges and inspire women to preserve despite obstacles. Through the lines "Just like moons and like suns....Still I'll rise" she says, the society might keep her oppressed, but it is her nature to stand against all the oppressions just like the tide respond to the moon. Here, she motivates the weak souls of women to stand against all the oppressions like the tide. The powerful words used by Angelou sparkles the soul and mind of women to heal themselves and to stand out for their own identity in the society. Angelou's word conveys a message of self-love and determination, inspiring women to rise above adversity with pride and courage.

When we analyze the dialogue in the *Barbie*, Gloria the main character furiously speaks about the challenges faced by women on social expectations, beauty standards, career demands and paradoxes embedded in the pursuit of perfection. The dialogue effectively portrays the societal expectations and contradictions placed on women. She expresses the pressure faced by women in a patriarchal society. The character expresses frustration in unrealistic demands women face, emphasizes the challenges of navigating societal expectation without receiving acknowledgement or gratitude. The

dialogue expresses the double standards imposed on women. It reflects the complex and contradictory nature of women's role in the society. "I'm just so tired of watching myself and every single other women tie herself into knots so that people will like us. And if all of that is also true for a doll just representing a women, then I don't even know." This part of the dialogue is the empowering one by Gloria. The part challenges societal expectations placed on women and questions the need for conformity. It shows the exhausting struggle of women in the society. It empowers women by encouraging them to reject unrealistic ideals and embrace their true selves. The movie can be analyzed as an empowering and self-discovery one through various elements. Firstly in the movie we can witness that the protagonist journey involves overcoming obstacles promoting empowerment and self-discovery. The protagonist promotes female audience to discover their inner strength, and the movie encourages audience to embrace their unique qualities and to break societal stereotypes. Furthermore, the thematic messages, positive role models and character development convey empowering narratives and promote self-discovery. The overall impact of the movie on its audience is seen in terms of raising confidence and personal growth. The characterization in the movie makes it an iconic one.

The quoted dialogue of 2023 Barbie movie and the poem "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou represents the complex expectations and standards placed on women. By highlighting the challenging and contradictory nature of the society both the dialogue and the poem showcases the challenges faced by women in trying to meet these conflicting demands. The pressure on women to align with societal expectations of beauty, intelligence, behavior and roles and the lack of acknowledgement for women's effort, which is emphasized in Gloria's dialogue, has a deeper connection with the themes of "Still I Rise". In the poem Angelou declares her strength and resilience to the society which attempts to diminish her. The poem celebrates the unyielding spirit of women. The themes of both the dialogue and the poem explore the navigation of women in the world of conflicting expectations, where they are often judged regardless of their actions. The connection lies in their shared explorations of the struggles of women in the society. Whether it is a character who is expressing her frustration or a poet who affirms strength to rise against the societal expectations, both the pieces expresses the complexities of being a women and the need to challenge these expectations.

Maya Angelou's poem explores themes of healing, resilience, empowerment and self-love. In the context of bibliotherapy, these themes evoke a deeper impact on the readers especially on women readers. It serves as an inspiration, encouragement and a sense of resilience in women by affirming one's ability to overcome difficulties. The phrase 'Still I Rise' is seen repeated in the poem which creates a powerful mantra emphasizing the ideas of resilience. This mantra along with empowering tone of the poem can create a sense of affirmation and installs a belief in women on their own strength and capacity to rise above difficulties. The celebration of self-love in the poem encourages women readers to embrace, accept and appreciate their own identity. This contributes to self-healing which promotes self-acceptance and positivity. Overall the poem provides a bibliotherapeutic effect to readers to find inspiration, positivity and strength in the adversity they face.

The dialogue of Gloria in the 2023, Barbie movie addresses the societal expectations and contradictory standards placed on women. The acknowledgement of these challenges can provide a bibliotherapeutic effect by focusing the experiences faced by women and provides a sense of understanding and empathy. The words by Gloria provide an empowering and encourage self-reflection in women. It highlights the complexities and contradictions faced by women and the dialogue evokes a healing effect and ensures a mental and emotional wellbeing. The call for self-love emerges as a crucial element in this dialogue. We, women understand our worth, identity and encourage us to appreciate ourselves beyond societal standards.

Overall the dialogue serves as a therapeutic narrative and offers a voice to the struggles and complexities faced by women and advocates resilience and empowerment in them. It aims to break free women from the societal expectations and to offer a healing affect and encourages them to start loving their own identity and to voice out for their rights.

The poet's achievements and her struggles in the journey from a troubled childhood to becoming a literary icon symbolizes the strength women can find in themselves to overcome their obstacles and to make a significant impact in the world.

The character Gloria played by America Farrar adds depth to the character and she stands out as a powerful icon who brings out the societal expectations on all women. The character inspires women to get empowered and undergo self-acceptance.

Both Gloria and Maya Angelou are the powerful icons and symbol for women to understand their worth and break out the chains that suppress them or restrain them from their opportunity and success.

Together these pieces, instill a sense of pride, resilience and encourages women to embrace their uniqueness and ignite fire to undergo positive change and self-empowerment. As a result both these pieces provide a powerful avenue for empowerment and self-discovery. It creates a sense of empowering fire in women to break out all the adversities and to embrace their true selves.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the poem *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou sheds light in the life of women who struggle against the societal expectation and the dialogue of 2023 Barbie movie highlights the universality of themes such as resilience and empowerment. By understanding the therapeutic potential of literature this research not only enriches our knowledge about the work. It also explains about their capacity to inspire and heal individuals struggling against societal expectation. So, we can conclude that the interplay between literary expression and societal narratives offers a powerful avenue for empowerment and self-discovery.

Reference:

1. Angelou, Maya., *And Still I Rise*, Poetryfoundation.org, 1978