

## ABSTRACT

### **“The Autobiographies of Maya Angelou: Critical Perspectives on Crime and Deviance”**

The present study aims to explore and examine the aspects of ‘crime’ and ‘deviance’ that are found evident in the textual representations in the autobiographies of the African American writer and poet, Maya Angelou. Her narratives provide a deeper insight into the world of crime from her own perspective, revealing the networks and operations of crime in the underworld that persists like a silent killer through its various categories thereby not only permeating human relationships but also threatening the moral fabric of the larger society. Angelou’s first hand experiences of the underworld as well as her own brush with the world of crime and deviance had certainly left an impact on her sense of self through these tense and crucial years when she found herself compelled to learn a few lessons of life in the hardest of ways.

As noted in the chapters of the thesis, some of the pressing concerns of social inequalities are highlighted through the problems of racial stereotyping, racial segregation, gender biases, poverty, sexual exploitation, unequal opportunities, unaddressed rights and legal injustice as well. The autobiographies contain multiple references to the matrices of race, gender, class and power relations while also lending detailed insights into the ways in which the ‘black psyche’ is shaped and sensitized by their everyday experiences, realities, struggles, choices, decisions etc., together with the complex process of coming into terms with their ‘sense of self’ in a racially oppressive society. Therefore, through an exploration of crime and deviance in the autobiographical texts, the study attempts to examine and establish the ways in which these are informed by the inter-connected multiple intersections of particularly ‘race’, ‘class’ and ‘gender’ which invariably inform ‘black experiences’ thereby also lending a detailed insight into the functioning of oppressive systems and structures through which the powerful justify their modes of oppression as well as their dominant position. While taking into account the social systems, structures, practices and social experiences, the study also highlights the contexts of post-World War II and the period of Civil Rights Movement in order to provide a situated understanding of the American society with its discourses of ‘crime’ and ‘deviance’.

Angelou represents the inequalities of race, gender and class in such a way that facilitates the reader to see through the influence and function of socio-economic systems on social consciousness and long-term social injustice on crime and deviance. The lack of fair and equal opportunities for black Americans is presented as a continuum of the historical injustice, disadvantaging, deprivation, exploitation, harassment and hatred that ultimately tends to result in the stunted progress of the African American people.

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