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WCC, Stella tie up for Maya Angelou tribute

When two of the city's oldest women's colleges come together in tribute of a *Phenomenal Woman* – you know there's something special brewing

by Sonali Shenoy

Chennai: Nobody can remember the last time Women's Christian College and Stella Maris collaborated on a project. So it's quite possible, this is a first. And it was all the more exciting when we heard that the theatrical production they have been working on for two months now is in tribute to the life of a *Phenomenal Woman*, (that's a clue) who was recently all over the news after her passing. We're talking about feminist poet Maya Angelou. And to do it – they're weaving in everything from a ballroom dance to a cooking lesson at the performance set to be staged this afternoon.

"Actually the ballroom dance is the cooking lesson," Annie Kuriachan, the English professor at WCC surprises us. And though we won't reveal the 'how' of it, lest it spoil the magic, here is the why. Kuriachan elaborates, "Not many know that Angelou was also a dancer and wrote a few cookbooks!" Co-director from Stella Maris, V Padma or Mangai as she is known in the Tamil theatre community adds, "There's a lot of Maya

Angelou's story with extracts from her works through the production, but beyond that we've also tried to strike a resonance between Maya Angelou and any woman."

As for how the 16 student-actors from both colleges got around to working together, it turns out it started with a couple of ideas swapped by the professors at a doctoral committee meeting recently. And given that both professors were from the respective English Departments of their colleges, it seemed only natural they looked for a theme that is literature-relevant today. "So we sent out heavy-duty research teams of students to collate together all the possible material they could find," recalls Kuriachan. So watch out for all the favourites, some of them even set to song – like *Still I Rise* and *Daughters*. "We even have a small rap section," reveals Mangai with a laugh. So free yourself up this afternoon for this rather unconventional tribute that has plenty curious. Picturing an 86-year-old Angelou smiling down from her balcony seat heaven, one has to wonder...what would she say?

Remembering Maya Angelou: A Tribute will be staged at Women's Christian College Auditorium today, at 3 pm.

