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FEMINISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*, *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*, AND *AMERICANAH*

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ABSTRACT

This brief journal is mainly about feminism in African perspective and the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's greater inclination towards the concept of feminism and gender equality. She is one of the flourishing Nigerian authors who loves to share her experiences as being a black female in the male-dominated society and is also very much proud of her nation and its culture. The present paper also discusses few of her works like *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* and tries to bring out the feministic element present in them. Her characters are not those who are fragile and passive one, instead they are more enthusiastic and daring one, who gets awakened by the bitter experiences they had to face in course of time.

Keywords: Feminism, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah*, Nigerian Civil War – Biafran War, Postcolonial novel.

Introduction

Celebrated Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has always been extremely voiced about her stand as a feminist and the need for others to be the same. She hates to be called a feminist rather she asks everyone to be one. Her writings have made her one of the most eminent faces in the literary circle. She is a multi-award winning author and has marked herself as one of Nigeria's most winning female writers. As a literary movement, feminism in African novels has a long tradition in bringing about change in society, especially on how women are treated. It tries to elucidate unfairness and humiliation of women and focuses its attention on their emancipation and awakening. Adichie portrays her female characters not as the usual depiction of women in African novels as mere sex symbols - inferior beings who should be under the control of men – but rather as an audacious and self-reliant woman.

The innovative writers of Africa have a clear mental picture of the ideal society and they have stressed on the need to combine the best in the old cultural traditions with the progressive ideas of the modern world. They have also expressed their bitterness against the corruption in the independent African states and they have protested against the dictatorial forces, which are trying to mishandle the freedom gained from the colonial powers. They have expressed their harmony with the people who are still under the domination of the

racialist regimes. They have acknowledged their motherland but not without recognizing the importance of the new knowledge of the Western world.

The subject that became a major concern to the Nigerian writers in the sixties and seventies, apart from the multiplying societal ills, was the Nigerian Civil War which took place between 1967 and 1970. The vivid side of the ugly incident, however, is that the war provided inspiration for many writers, particularly those directly involved. These writers poured out their dissatisfaction, anger and memories in considerable quantities and traits. For instance, Elechi Amadi wrote a powerful novel, *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), depicting his war-time experience. Other testimonies to the madness of the era were Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1971), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1976), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007).

Concerning feminism and writing Adichie thinks herself as a storyteller, but would not mind at all if someone were to think her as a feminist writer. She says she is exceedingly a feminist in the way she look at the world, and that world outlook must somehow be part of her work. Adichie spoke on being a feminist for TEDxEuston in December 2012, with her speech entitled, "We should all be feminists". She shared her experiences of being an African feminist, and her views on gender creation and sexuality. She believed that the problem with gender is that it shapes who we are. She argues that "feminist" isn't an offense, but rather a label that should be embraced by all.

Adichie furthermore elaborated on how to raise a feminist daughter. She says motherhood is a glorious gift, but we should not define ourselves solely by motherhood. She says that we should reject the idea of motherhood and work as mutually restricted, never apologize for working and love what we do, and loving what we do is a great gift to our child. There's a confidence and self-fulfillment that come with doing and earning by our own. She also discusses about sharing childcare equally. 'Equally' of course depends on both. It does not have to mean a literal fifty-fifty or a little by little score-keeping but we will know when the child-care work is equally shared. We'll know by our lack of resentment. Because when there is true equality, resentment does not exist. She says being a girl' is never a reason for anything. Ever."

Further Adichie remembers being told as a child to bend down properly while sweeping, like a girl. Which meant that sweeping was about being female. She talks the same about cooking as well. The knowledge of cooking does not come pre-installed in a vagina. Cooking is learned. It's just an ability that both men and women should ideally have. She instructs the parents to educate their daughters to love books and get them enough educated that they can formulate the difference between justice and injustice. Books will help her understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she wants to become. She also says that marriage can be happy or unhappy but it is not an achievement and it shouldn't be the ultimate goal of their lives.

We often teach our daughters to be likeable, to be pleasant, but we do not teach boys the same. Many girls remain unspoken when abused because they want to be good. For this Adichie says educate our daughters to reject and tackle, also teach her about difference. Make difference ordinary. Make difference normal. Teaching her never to universalize her own standards or experiences and that her standards are for her alone, and not for other people, can be a great march towards such difference.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a feminist work that challenges the probability of men to contradict the attributes of women, and this is obvious in the character of Mama (Beatrice Achike), who exposes the African concept of an ideal woman; one who remains hushed in the phase of subjugation, victimization and repression, in order to be perceived as a typically good woman. The journal seeks to deal with the issue of feminism in the works of Adichie, where the characters become her spokesperson. Experiencing the usual humiliation and sufferings, the characters are actually the persons Addictive came across her life and how they evolved from it and gain their freedom in the true sense.

Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* portrayed two types of women; the good woman (Mama) and the real woman (Auntie Ifeoma), which reflects the two different types of feminism in the work: From violence. Though, Adichie presented Mama as inactive and dutiful in beginning of the novel, she became radical towards the end to show her awakening from a bitter past. All those years she was voiceless to the sufferings she had to face in the hands of Papa.

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is about love and war, in the shadow of Biafra and the Nigeria-Biafra war. She wishes to engage with her history in order to make sense of her present, because many issues that led to the war remained unresolved in Nigeria today. Issues like identity crisis, gender issues, racism, subjugation of women and poverty are prevalent in Nigeria. The brutal bequests of colonialism make her mad, because the thought of the egos and coldness of men leading to unnecessary deaths of men, women and children enrages Adichie and she doesn't ever want to forget. The worst effected were women, who were exploited in numerous ways and by different means. Being a girl child, a daughter, a mother and wife is like a curse and certainly not easy for them. But they anyhow carry their roles with much endeavor and refinement.

The novel portrays few of such character who never gave up on such ruthless circumstances, instead faced the disgrace and sufferings with much confidence and accepted things as it came to them. They looked after themselves and their families as well, playing multiple roles like an all-rounder. It is usually believed that black women are often suppressed thrice: suppressed being a black, a women and a wife. But it was in the past, the scenario has quite changed now. As the time passes women are getting aware of the fact that if they remain dumb to the situation they will have to face till the end of their lives. So, the only means to change such norms of the patriarchal society is to get enough educated and knowledgeable that one knows the difference between right-wrong and acceptable-unacceptable for a well mannered society.

Adichie with the help of characters like Olanna and Kainene brought out the problems faced by many Nigerian women in their day to day lives. The story might be fictional one but the incidents behind it are inspired by many people whom Adichie met when she toured Africa, more particularly Nigeria. It is heartbreaking, gracefully written and, without a doubt her literary masterpiece, a classic and strongly a feministic work. Feminism in the novel is seen in the later part, where the female characters have much evolved and started protesting against the discrimination they have to face. Kainene was strong and bold from initial and always stood firm in her decisions, whether someone like or not. Olanna is somewhat silent and more like an observer, who also changed with the course of time.

In her third novel *Americanah*, Adichie explores themes like racism, diasporic issues, and identity crisis, and structural inequality, different kinds of oppression, gender roles and feminism. She fearlessly tackles weighty themes of race and identity. And ably challenging the West's ingrained perception of African life and culture. She is a writer of massive talent who just keeps better. Her breadth of vision is striking and yet she never loses sight of the deepest psychological moments of her characters.

There's a misguided idea that feminism is entirely about women's rights, which is somewhat true, but the true goal of feminism is gender equality. Goals in where both women and men are freed from the restrictive patriarchal roles society has placed upon them and stand together as equals. *Americanah*, is a perfect example of this. The central character is a young Nigerian girl named Ifemelu, who shifts to America for pursuing her higher studies. Further in the story it shows Ifemelu's journey to self-empowerment by rejecting the patriarchal roles society has tried to place upon her. Alongside it also shows the very similar struggle that men must also go through in order to remain equal to women through the character of Obinze.

In the initial itself Obinze was already introduced to the thought of the feminist women through his mother and Ifemelu. He has a blurred conception of the supremacy that women can hold and he seems reasonably contented with adapting himself to go with them. For instance, Ifemelu once mentions momentarily about how Obinze once helped her pluck in-grown hairs off her chin. By helping Ifemelu with this course of beauty, essentially for something as unusual and uncomfortable as in-grown hairs, Obinze is enthusiastically breaking down the feminine charm. Instead of considering her as this beautiful figure, he sees her as a human being. However he is not free of the roles society has placed on him.

Generally the society believes that the feminist theory is one that focuses principally on women. This is because over saturation of content from the news articles, online sources and other magazines that led to the misinformed idea those feminists are exceedingly aggressive man-haters. But the proper goal of feminism is gender equality and a "true feminist" is someone who recognizes that men, just like women, are spellbound within the patriarchal roles that society has placed on them. Patriarchal societies such as those in America and Nigeria hold men up the ideal of the home-owner, the bread winner, and the shield of the family. This does not

appear like such a burden, we have fashioned a society that punishes men if they illustrate any “feminine” conduct. We live in a society where a man who likes cooking and cleaning over fighting and smoking is seen as weak or abnormal.

Conclusion

As a whole, feminism is a core concept in all the works of Adichie and is a common theme present in her novels. She pictures her female characters as vivid and audacious and is influenced from real life people. She does not depict her female characters as fragile and submissive one, but rather as vibrant and daring one. Be it be Kambili, Olanna, Kainene or Ifemelu, no one has ever given up on any circumstances, instead brought out their best to resolve the matter. No matter whether they were passive in the initial, they evolved through different situations and brought an upheaval in themselves. Adichie positively considers herself as a “happy feminist” and believes in gender equality, where both the sexes should be given equal opportunities and should be appreciated irrespective of their gender or any such demeaning concepts.

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