

Exploring the themes of feminism in select fiction of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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The Nigerian history is one of the oldest and English literature bears in it numerous representations from Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. While many writers focus on representing the past, Adichie takes up on her shoulder to represent the present and future through her vibrant novels. Her novels are female oriented, she bears in her the ability to represent the best of both world, which is a product of assimilation rather than intolerance. She calls herself a proud feminist and states that feminism should be a product of culture, her most popular saying is “culture does not make people and people make culture” and hence according to her, every culture must bear in it the quality to acknowledge and respect women. In her seminal work, *We should all be feminists* she talks about her love for feminism and clarifies numerous misjudgements as to what is feminism. She does not claim for a separate feminism as many critics of feminism, rather she claims for an umbrella term which has the ability to bear in itself every differences and similarities. She also wants men, to qualify themselves as feminist and she strongly believes that only the representation of men in feminism can further the scope of feminism. Her novels are portrayal of her ideology, in her works she creates strong women characters who are independent and self-sufficient in nature. Her characters represent the way, she wants to mould her brand of feminism and hence this research paper could focus on women characters created by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

In her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, the story is of an abusive father, from a point of view of his daughter. The girl child, Kambili is shy and scared of everything, she is very soft spoken and has difficulties expressing herself. She has a mother, whom she calls as Mama and brother whom she calls as Jaja, her father is called by her as Papa. She bears in herself a deep sense of silence and yet she has a questioning attitude which is never motivated by anyone. Kambili’s father is abusive and his punishments are severe. He is a devout Christian and he is against every practise that would remind his children of their past. He calls them heathen in nature and severely beat him if he finds them breaking any of his rule. Kambili’s mother is the easy prey for her Papa’s attitude and she has had numerous miscarriages because of her father’s severe beating. Only woman who can question and argue with Papa is Kambili’s aunty. When Kambili is allowed to stay for few days in the house of her aunty that is when she understands the true sense of freedom and independent thinking. The novel slowly progresses as a bildungsroman where Kambili grows out of her fear into a positive

person in the tutor of her aunty and inspired by her cousin Amaka. She experiences music, paintings and nature for the first time, which leads her to question the true meaning of freedom. She understands how much Amaka, a girl of similar age is different and independent thinking in nature, unlike her, she understands it is her father's torture that leads her to a sheltered life and comes out of it little by little. While the readers are shown the positive changes of Kambili, it is kept hidden that even Kambili's mama is undergoing similar changes. In future event, when Papa is dead, mama confesses to have slowly poisoned papa, in order to avenge him for her miscarriage and escape the ill fate. The story ends with Jaja going to prison and with the news that he will be released soon. Which leads Kambili and Mama to prepare for a bright future. This story is balanced with two contradictory characters of same age. The aunty and Mama are of same age group and Kambili and Amaka are of same age group. Aunty is well read and a professor in university, her rearing of children and education that she provides them is different, which tunes Amaka into a strong woman, when Kambili and Mama are left in an independent situation they yearn for the same, and each takes a decision of their own. While Kambili due to immaturity merely fantasises about an independent life, Mama gains it by solving the hurdle in her way. In Kambili's words the purple hibiscus that is a cross pollination grown by her aunty represents both freedom and power and finally she achieves it in the course of novel.

In the second book, *Half of a Yellow Sun* again two strong women characters are represented with the interpolation story of war, love and sacrifice. This novel is also a great example of female bonding. The two sisters, Olanna and Kainene are London educated women. While their education and free spirit makes them unique and strong, they take up business of their father and run it successfully. Kainene is fascinated with white men and has a white boy friend Richard, on the other hand Olanna is considered very beautiful and she takes a strong Nigerian reformist as her boy friend. Olanna and Kainene are little jealous of each other and hence avoid each other's company. The difference of opinion between them expands with the arrival of respective boyfriends and they become jealous of each other. Kainene manages the family business, while Olanna takes up social work along side her boyfriend, whom she marries. Olanna meanwhile joins teaching and becomes a professor of Sociology. Both these women are represented as best in their social and family work. Kainene is called as equal to two sons by her father. Olanna is unable to bear a child and hence adopts the child of her husband's ex - girlfriend. She in order to avenge her husband's mistake, has a sexual relationship with white man Richard. She is generally called as illogically beautiful, thus many men fall for her, she considers it her pride and walk with her head held high, she never regrets anything in her life until these sisters come face to face with war. The cruelty of war, changes the sisters and makes them close to each other. Kainene foregoes her successful business and trades her life with enemy and acts fearless to save her country. Meanwhile Olanna foregoes her teaching profession and becomes a full time social worker thus both these characters represent the strength of women power.

Her third novel, *Americanah* is a novel about racism and how an independent woman faces racism and how she overcomes it in an alien country. The character Ifemelu is a good student, who never could have afforded an education in America. Her aunty is a kept woman for a white man, though Ifemelu is young to understand this, she questions her aunty on economic independence and her future. Her aunty pacifies Ifemelu by stating she will change him soon. Ifemelu is good in her studies and is much liked by her teachers. One day, when aunty's husband dies, she flees in the fear of losing property with her son to America. Aunty is educated yet lacks a proper degree, hence she joins medical college, in order to take care of son and as a house help she calls Ifemelu. Ifemelu joins college and looks after her cousin in her free time, also helping her aunty. While her aunty struggles to become a doctor, Ifemelu finds the education system different in America. She is also

oppressed and she faces racial discrimination in her college. She becomes depressed and starts a blog to overcome her feelings, as a blog writer she is popular and she discusses numerous issues very openly thus changing lives and opinions of numerous people. She unlike others, does not change her attitude and avoids to let go her culture. But it is not easy as she is not given any job, when she is forced to take up a job because of lack of money, she works for a sports person, who sexually uses her to fulfil his desires, this makes her so sad and she decides to fight for herself. Writing her blog gives her hope, at present she has grown out of this discrimination and survived more than ten years in America. She decides to leave America and join her long time boy friend who is now married and settled in Nigeria. They decide their prospect of being together in the end of the story. She joins a magazine in the end of novel and also starts another blog about life in Lagos, while considering about her future life with her boyfriend Obinze. She is a representation of economically and financially independent woman, who chose and sculpt the life they want to lead. All the women characters of Adichie represent her principle of living and hence exploring them provides with an opportunity to understand the brand of feminism that Adichie talks about. She is one of top writers of this century and practises what she preaches. Her novels blend reality into story line thus making them unique read for understanding the 21st century feminism.

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