

**SCRUTINIZING THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI
ADICHE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN***

A.Amala Nithya Roselin¹

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg.No. 19211284012031), Research Department of English,
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Palayamkottai – 627002,
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti - 627012, Tirunelveli,
Tamil Nadu, India

Dr.S.Veeralakshmi²

²Assistant Professor, Research Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),
Palayamkottai – 627002, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,
Abishekapatti - 627012, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie owns a substantial efficacy in handling female characters. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a befitting sample which showcases Adichie's brilliant exploration of women in the Nigerian society. Olanna and Kainene are the prime character in the novel, whom Adichie use as medium to record the contribution of women during the period of Biafra War or Nigerian Civil War. One and all women in the novel crops from different social and cultural background and travels in disparate paths. This paper attempt to study how women are portrayed in Adichie's novel, with their own flaws and power. It also highlights the point where the contrasting female characters intersect.

Keywords: Adichie, women, Biafran War, Nigerian

I. INTRODUCTION

*Land of the rising sun, we love and cherish, Beloved homeland of our great
heroes; We must defend our lives or we shall perish. We shall protect our
hearts from all our foes; But if the price is death for all we hold dear,
Then let us die without a shred of fear... (Adichie, 277)*

Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* makes clear the position of women in the Nigerian society. She puts forth the point that the society treats its women alike irrespective of their financial status and education. Moreover, a woman getting education is like she is performing the role of opposite gender. She is never expected and encouraged to be educated. The men in the society believe that education is not needed for someone who is going spend the entire life in kitchen. An educated woman is considered as the odd one, who does not intend to obey men in the family and does not live with dedication to her husband. Janice Spleth in "The Biafran War and the Evolution of Domestic Space in *Half of a Yellow Sun*" opines, "Girls focused on designing the interior of a house, situating people and animal within a closed area, in a static position that was peaceful as opposed to boys (130).

This condition prevails all over the Nigerian society even after the independence. As it is mentioned in the previous chapters, African male writers always escape from portraying the realities of actual world of women. Women in the Nigerian society undergo double marginalization as they are controlled outside and inside the house. In *Things Fall Apart*, the

condition of women is vividly portrayed. For every misfortune in the family, women are blamed. It also presents how a man treats women in the family.

Not only the writings of Chinua Achebe, but many male writers of Africa fail to express about this topic. It is actually like skipping a page of a history. During the postcolonial era, when writing becomes the tool for every colonized country to express their discomfort and pain, women writers also emerge in reasonable numbers.

The male writers write about the injustice done to them by the colonizers, while the female writers use this chance as an opportunity to express their self, they speak about the postcolonial themes allotting some space to speak about the position of women during that time. Powerful writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nadime Gordimar, Mariamma Ba, and many other female writers emerge from Africa. Their writings are original only intended to express their self without any exaggeration.

The women writers in Africa comes forward to contribute their writings to literature, not to expose their talent or to be the competitor of male writers, but to make the history not to forget about the struggles faced by the African women for generation. *Half of a Yellow* may seem like a political or historical novel, but actually underneath its politics and history, there lays the true voice of women. Also, Adichie's work stands out of the usual frame of war novels, which Spleth says about *Half of a Yellow Sun* as:

The author thus refuses the familiar heroic war narrative...replacing the traditional battlefield as her centre of interest with the domestic of family life, which, if rarely the site of key military engagements, proves highly effective in illustrating the changing fortunes of a people at war (129)

II. RESEARCH ELABORATION

Adichie is not an extreme feminist who tries to put down men and demands rights for them. She, often in her interviews and speeches mention that she reads Chinua Achebe from her childhood and is admired by his writings. She also mentions that her inspiration for writing comes from Chinua Achebe. But, his writing, as it is mentioned above at times biased with women unfriendly incidents. Adichie holds Achebe as her inspiration but the aim of their writings is completely different. It is also an example that Adichie is not an extreme feminist. Though she voice out for the status of women she admires the writings of Achebe who in his writings convey patriarchal ideas. Adichie admires Achebe's writings but not his patriarchal views.

Adichie tries her best in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to portray all sorts of female attitudes. She is not selective in female themes which may leads to bias. She aims to portray the very reality of women, as it the war based story, she desires to highlight about the contribution done by women during the Biafran War. At times, women too are unaware about how tradition deforms their ability. Even education is considered to be a taboo for women. As they believe that education spoils a women from performing her familial duties. Adichie, in order to stress this idea, portrays an incident with Mama, who stands as the representation of an ignorant Nigerian woman, crippled by taboos. Though education helps not all time to lead life, at many times it helps us be safe from the ignorant beliefs and injustices in the society.

Mama, a character who is drowned in the tradition, does not accept a woman who is educated and modern. She literally fights to prevent Olanna approaching her son, Odenigbo. She acts as an authentic woman who sightlessly follows the superstitious tradition. She

believes in the idea that a woman who is educated does not obey men, she acts superior to him, she does not perform her familial duties properly and finally jack of all she cannot be chaste.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* women become the victim of women. Mama makes Amala to assault Odenigbo sexually, in order to save his son from Olanna. Amala being ignorant does not have the courage to resist Mama and acts according to the order of Mama. Mama becomes satisfied when she knows that Amala is pregnant. At least Olanna prevents Amala's child from the superstitious society by adopting the child. Amala is muted by the tradition that makes her to lose her identity forever.

Other than culture, another thing that constrains liberation of women is women's dependence on men. Olanna desires to win the complete love of Odenigbo at any cost. She refuses to accept the rich proposals suggested by her parents. Though she does not like be a bait for her father's business deals, she loves Odenigbo whole heartedly that makes her to deny the marriage proposals.

For everything Olanna depends on Odenigbo. She expects Odenigbo to love her, as much as she does. The result of her intense love for him is nothing but the constant betrayal. He does not care about the infidelity done to Olanna. Olanna leaves behind luxurious lifestyle, her parents and Kainene for Odenigbo. She is ready to adapt to any lifestyle that the only condition is the presence of Odenigbo. Dodgson-Katiyo in "Fragile Negotiations': Olanna's Melancholia in *Half of a Yellow Sun*" mentions,

...he (Ugwu) believes she should be in a glass case. Glass, of course, is fragile and, throughout the novel, Olanna's strength is revealed but also her fragility when that strength fails her. Her vision of life, like Adichie's, is largely a dark one and her grief and the depression that is referred to as 'Dark Swoops' (117)

The first betrayal by Odenigbo, that is, his relationship Amala, is the first blow for Olanna's intense love. Odenigbo tries to justify his side by saying that he is dozed. Again she decides to live with him, but with the traces of his betrayal in her mind. As a revenge she justifies her sexual relationship with Richard, Kainene's English boyfriend. Richard, from his first encounter with Olanna, admires her beauty.

III. FINDINGS

These incidents show that Olanna is not matured in the beginning. Her prime weakness is her blind love for Odenigbo. In the name of love, she loses her entire identity. Olanna keenly understands the quality of Odenigbo's love for her only after the death of Mama. Odenigbo gives much importance to his mother and it is evident when he justifies her mother for throwing Olanna out of the house.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, characters like Mama (mother of Odenigbo) and Mrs Ozobia (mother of Olanna), perform their roles according to the tradition that kills the identity of womanhood. Characters like these also exist in the society that Adichie wants to record to make the society aware about these things.

Characters like Anulika (Ugwu's sister), Arize (cousin of Olanna) and Amala (servant of Mama), are completely ignorant and never tries to find their identity. They are easily influenced by the society and its customs. They blindly follow the rules and regulations without questioning structure. When they encounter characters like Kainene and Olanna, they

react without any discontent. Therefore it is clear that they accept their position given by the society.

Adichie succeeds in her attempt writing a women-centred novel employing war as a backdrop. The work spans the horror of Nigerian Civil War or Biafran War, also, piercing the untold dimensions left in the history. Even though Adichie explore the trauma of her central characters, she never fails to cover the ample information about the political instability in the post independence Nigeria.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007. Print.

Awelewa, Abayomi. "Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Leeds African Studies Bulletin*, Issue 78, 2016, pp. 105-117.

Azuike, MA. "Women's Struggle and Independence in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*." *African Research Review*, Vol 3, 2009: pp. 79-91.

Afzal, Thahiya. "Warring Identities: Metaphor of War in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Man in India*, 96(11), pp. 4729-4736.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012. Print.

Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. Print.

Spleth, Janice. "Biafran War and the Evolution of Domestic Space in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. Ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu. London: James Currey, 2017. 149-61.

Zulfiqar, Sadia. *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender*. United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2016. Print.