



GENDER ROLES AND CONFLICTS IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

¹Jyoti Bansal

¹scholar

¹Scholar

INTRODUCTION

This research project majorly focuses on the set or expected gender roles that have been set into the minds of the stereotypical society from a long period of time. The minds of the children are trained in a way that they meet their expected set of roles. A female child is ordained to be a good daughter and aspire to get married and become a good wife by abiding with all the duties that she must fulfil. A male child is expected to earn well as he is said to be the head of the family who will earn the bread. These roles, based on the gender are rooted deep inside the minds of the people. People do not conform and find it inappropriate if the mark of division is slightly blurred. The difference must be maintained in order to carry the politics of the society which is hovering over from centuries.

This project will be portraying the behavioural patterns of the characters from Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It will further examine the result of forced implications of set roles on the psyche of the people and what consequence do they face when the complex situations arises in which the reversal of roles happens. People change with the demand of environment and situations. People vary in their caste, culture, creed, desires etc so an impeccable system of pre conceived notions cannot assist people during the time of odd situations or adversities.

These roles are interconnected with the gender that is further linked with the traditional norms one has to follow. The gender roles and expectations involve the psychological behaviour, patterns of living, appearance, attitude and behaviour of people. To explain the condition the example of Nigerian Civil War can be taken. The colonialism of Nigeria was the result of the war that was dependent on the conflict between the Igbo people and

the government of Nigeria. A war destroys not only the infrastructure but the mental peace and health of the people is deteriorated resulting in heavy damage of wealth, labour and increase in religious conflicts as well. A war takes the society backwards and thus its futility is proved by authors and playwrights time to time. The main focus of introducing the Nigerian Civil War in the research project is its affect on gender. A war disturbs a person within himself so how are the expected gender roles meted out or if the set roles abide by all the norms and duties that they have to fulfil during war time or any such crisis. What are the situations in which the reversal of roles happen and if they are accepted by the society and people then?

These questions will be answered by the medium of the text *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the project will talk about different aspects in which the characters acted in the varied manner. The set roles and the contrast in the roles will be highlighted followed by the information about the Igbo people and culture. The major focus of the project will be laid onto the gender roles and the consequences of the reversed roles.

The author is a renowned writer who wrote about female rights extensively. She is a feminist whose writings were about the equality that must be enjoyed by females as well. Her childhood experiences compelled her to rebel against the society and to fight for her freedom. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* she talks about the Nigerian Civil War that completely changed the perspective of the people regarding gender. Women were always looked down in comparison to men and they were taken as meek, submissive and dossal who were denied all the rights. They faced the issue of identity as the society never gave them a stature they deserved. The title of the novel is also symbolical as it represents the flag of Biafra which has different colours depicting different meanings with a half sun that provides a ray of hope and development.

IGBO CULTURE

The characters of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* are the followers of Igbo culture. It talks about the Nigerian Civil War which constituted majorly of Igbo people. The culture is an important part of Nigeria. The language they speak is Igbo. Igbo people had an egalitarian society who believed in equality of members. They were controlled by the supreme power and believed in the Sky God, Sun God, and Thunder God. Although they believed in equality but these people were also dominated by the male mindset. Birth of a male child was considered auspicious as he was believed to be the successor of the culture. Birth, marriage and death were the major ceremonies that the people invested their emotions into. Marriages were not merely a bond between the

two but among families and villages as well. Burial was an important aspect of the culture as it was taken into consideration that death is not the end but just reliving a person from the physical body. Reincarnation of the person was associated with the birth of a new child. The culture was the one strictly adhering to rules and norms set by the highest authority. They believed in polytheism and thus they worshipped many Gods and Goddesses. Farming was considered as an important occupation in the culture. They were the people who believed in clans. Many authors discuss about their art and paintings. Igbo culture was followed widely in Northern part of Nigeria. Their conflict with the government resulted in the Civil War that continued for six years.

In *Things fall Apart* the author Chinua Achebe also mentions and talks about the vivid behaviour and patterns of the Igbo people. How land was the main asset and occupation for these people, how their language was different although the novel is written in English but it includes some words from the Igbo language as well. The characters of the religion are physically and mentally strong. They worship animals as well and celebrate occasions with great pomp and show. The slightest of mistakes or a person not abiding by the laws is severely punished like Okonkwo was punished. They believed in equal distribution of power.

GENDER

Gender is a crucial topic to discuss in the novel as the gender roles are set and people are expected to obtain those standards of the set roles else they are considered to be abnormal or unusual. Society blames them for not fulfilling the demanded pattern of behaviour that a person depending on his or her sex must do or follow. It is peculiar that how a group of people decided and allocated the roles to another people without having the consideration about others desires, goals, perception etc. The conflict of the gender roles arose during the Civil War that demanded the reversal of roles.

The difference in mindsets and actions is derived due to colonialism. Prior to colonialism people were strictly bounded by the roles they were asked to play. Pre colonialism was a period in which Nigeria followed the old way of traditions, life and their culture. the result of colonialism was colonised minds that blindly mixed with the western values and culture and the product was a hybrid. Hybridity is a concept that explains the mixing of two cultures in a way that the beliefs, values and in some cases the religious aspects are also juggled up. We all are hybrids that are produced due to colonialism and mixing of cultures. The product is neither a complete Westerner nor a complete Nigerian. Many critics argue about the definition of gender by stating that the gender

roles are associated with the biological differences and may a times the difference between the identity and the roles are created depending upon the psychological factors.

It is further proved via facts and studies that both the genders males and females react differently in the same situation. This depends on their characteristics and the way they perceive the situation. The study of Essentialism further states the set differences between the men and women. The novel thus talks about the shift from the set notions and patriarchy by giving the power and hold in the hands of females in which they extend their roles.

FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

Femininity and Masculinity have become the basic concepts that must be discussed after the term Gender. These concepts are pertinent to be known as the moral system of values, assigned duties to the people and the set roles are given dependent on these concepts. Societal pressure whether of being a strong man or to completely surrender oneself in order to be a good housewife all depends on these concepts. If they are reversed or their duties are reversed in any case then the unusual behaviour is suspected which is outcaste in the society. These roles are explained by the author in detail and how the adverse situations demand the reversal of roles.

Men are always considered as the head of the family and the women are the shadow who follows man blindly. In Biblical aspects Eve was made from the rib of Adam which again says that woman is a part of man thus less intellectual, who lacks strength or power in comparison to men. There are numerous writings that prove the same as in Oedipus Rex the kingdom needed a King after the death of Laius but no one cared if Jocasta died. The role of women is always depleted down and they are often limited to certain boundaries. The distinctions and discrimination regarding gender inequality have resulted in many unsaid wars and Feminist theories. The Feminist demands for equality stating that the difference lies in the minds not in the hormones. Many critics state that there is only one difference and that is biological. Characteristics of strength, valour and power should not only be associated with men as women are equally strong.

These differences are deeply embedded into the minds that today also women are regarded as the intellectually weak and emotional beings who lacks the decisive power. This can be linked with the ill effects of post colonialism as after the influence of western world and after they enslaved the society mentally the distinction occurred.

IDENTITY

Identity is of utmost value without which a person is regarded as nonexistent. An identity of a person is a crucial aspect of his or her life. A conflicted identity or identity issues can have ill effects on the mental health of the people. Identity decides roles and responsibilities that one has to follow and fulfil in the society. An identity is not only the name or gender but the perception of a person that is formed by the experiences and learning. Identity is based on the external forces of society, culture, environment, education and economical force as well. These forces act in a way that a formation of Identity takes place.

Identities can always be constructed as they are affected by the factors of caste, creed, religion and language. A society always helps construct or destroy an identity. The mannerism and language are also interrelated with identity. Identity has much to relate with language structure. A person's identity is known by the language he or she speaks. Identity issues appeared post colonialism as the people were controlled physically and mentally. Hybrids were produced that is the mixing of two cultures that resulted in chaos and conflicted identities.

Identity is not only related to the gender but it has notions of ideas and perceptions one hold. Identity is often related with the term identity politics that states the corruption that prevails in this genre. Often the high positions in reputed areas are offered to the males rather than a deserving female. The author too faced such discriminations during her childhood where she was looked down because of being a girl. There are many more examples in which the ingrained idea of gender roles results in the diminished morality and lack of enthusiasm in the capable females as the opportunity is only given to the other gender despite of their incapability.

CONCLUSION

The pivotal point or aim of the project was to understand the set gender roles and how an adverse situation demands the reversal of roles. It presented how the stereotypical and male chauvinistic society demands the set roles to be achieved. Colonialism has affected the minds and thus has an everlasting impact on gender roles as well. Women are suppressed and often objectified. The reversal of gender roles happened in *Half of a Yellow Sun* which proves that there are no set notions. For example in *Emma* by Jane Austen the character of

Emma plays the role of alpha male. She fulfils the responsibilities of a male and decides to live her life on her own conditions. The society victimise female and often take her as the oppressive being.

This should be taken into consideration that all human beings are different in nature, adaptation and behavioural pattern. They perceive things in a divergent manner. If one person conforms the set roles it is not mandatory for the other person to fulfil the expectations in the same manner. It is natural to be different or to have difference in perception, thinking and values. So it can be concluded that there exist no set gender roles. Males and females can adhere to the responsibilities they wish to complete and can forego the things they do not want to do. The societal pressure can only increase the stress and the chains and clutches of the society cannot set or define roles. The focus must be laid on the peculiar aspects of individuality as it is directly proportionate to ones identity.

WORKS CITED

Adichie, C. 2006. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Fourth Estate: London.

Achebe, C. 2010. 'Igbo Women in the Nigerian-Biafran War 1967–1970: An Interplay of Control'. *Journal of Black Studies*.

Osedebamen, Joy. "An Investigation of the Stability of Gender Roles and Expectations before and during the Nigerian Civil War in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*." All Institutions. CICERO Center for International Climate and Environmental Research - Oslo, 12 May 2017.