

# Exploring Racial Hierarchy in Nigerian Women's Writings with Special Reference to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novel *Americanah*

SANTOSH DHURPAT GAWALI

*Ph. D. Research Scholar, S L L & C S, S R T M University Campus, Nanded.*

*Abstract-* The present research paper intended to highlight the very dehumanising notion of racial discrimination. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author, implies to explore her personal experiences of racism in America where she studied as a research scholar throughout her notable novels like *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. The novel *Americanah* deals with the racial conflict of the non- American black people in America. Adichie has depicted an iconic love story of Ifemelu who is the protagonist of the novel and Obinze, her lover. Ifemelu left Nigeria and went to America to pursue her education but she suffers a lot because of her race was Nigerian black one. In America, she would go to Trinton city to braid her hair, but there she wondered by there was no place where she could braid her hair. At every place, she came across many difficulties recognizing the racial prejudices of the native American white people towards the non- American black one. After facing this bitter experience is of racism, she wrote a lifestyle blog titled, "Recenteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks by a Non-American Black". In the train, she meets a dread- locked white man who told her that race was totally overhyped those days. Black people needed to get over themselves, it was all about class then, the haves and haves not. The protagonist of the novel Ifemelu posted on her blog entitled, " Not all Dread Locked White American Guys are Down." Adichie highlighted the uncultured ethos of the Native American White People's perspective of social dogma towards the non- American black people. In fact, the dehumanizing 'Race' factor is considered as dangerous as 'Caste' system in India. A racial hierarchy is based on the social stratification in which some racial groups are considered as superior or inferior to other racial groups. In America, racism is one of the powerful dehumanizing factors in the path humanism. Black people are considered as inferior to the whites in United States. As a result of this, the protagonist of this novel Ifemelu has become the victim of the so-called racial bias in America. She faces various difficulties as being a black Nigerian woman. Thus, racial hierarchy has been explored throughout the narrative of this novel in order to highlight the hidden reality of the darkness of human world.

*Keywords:* Gender, Race, Patriarchy, Religion and Love

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel entitled *Americanah* deals with her bitter experiences and views on gender and sexuality. She has pointed out that she was so much angry because she thought that gender plays the role of grave injustice at the present-day scenario regarding woman's subjugation in the patriarchal human condition. her name has been shortlisted in "The New York Times, Ten Best Books of 2013" for this novel *Americanah*. Adichie's present novel *Americanah* explores Ifemelu's hardships and bitter experiences of gender discrimination and racism in America. Ifemelu left Nigeria to pursue her education in America before that she fell in love with a Nigerian boy Obinze, a son of Professor. He tried to go to America to meet her beloved Ifemelu but he could not do so because he was denied for a visa to go to America after 9/11 attack. Ifemelu gradually gained success as a writer in the United States where she was also known for her blog about racism in America. *Americanah* is a novel that gives harsh realities of the present time regarding gender, race and identity. Kate Millet emphasized in her book entitled *Sexual Politics* which is a radical feminist text that in the roots of women's oppression are fixed in the form of patriarchal gender biased social system. She opines that biological sex is natural and gender is culturally constructed while femineity is culturally defined based on society's understanding of gender. She expresses her views on gender which is based on the construction of human psyche. She bluntly refused the gender discrimination by stating that just biological is natural creation and gender is not naturally constructed but it is culturally constructed by the people. Similarly, a portrait of Ifemelu in this novel stands for her denial of gender discrimination. Once she wrote in her blog the only human race that matters and nothing else despite of this which can be a dominant thing that govern whole human race. Ifemelu used to go to braid her

hair but at the braiding centre she was neglected there as a non- American black woman. When Ifemelu was 10 years old, her mother would take her to the church for prayer but she never believed on God and other supernatural power. Whenever you would see the testimonies of the people who were prayed in the church, she uttered that such things are impossible to happen after praying to God. She was a nihilist one two she grown up in a Christian family. The tone of her ideology is something against the traditional beliefs and the so-called cultured society.

Americanah is considered as a postcolonial novel that deals with the themes of identity, race, and immigration which is depicted through the life of the protagonist Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who migrated to the United States. The novel highlights race and racism in America through the perspective of a non-American, observing cultural integration, the effect of colonialism, and the struggle for self-identity for both African and African-American people. The narrative is related with the themes of identity and belonging, and the eternal love between Ifemelu and Obinze explores how cultural identity is conveyed in relationships and through the involvement of migration and return.

This novel examines the migrant experience in America through the perspective of a non-Black person of colour who is now supposed as "Black" in a new racial hierarchal system. Ifemelu's saga sheds light on the difference between as a Nigerian and as an African-American, a difference that even marks how she is supposed by other Black people in America. Ifemelu's fight to direct her identity is signified by her hair. She firstly wants to adapt to American standards by soothing her hair, but eventually holds her natural hair as a form of self-acceptance and resistance. Ifemelu's blog posts show a sardonic yet moving observation on race, immigration, and identity, especially the "racial hierarchy" in the United States, and it explores that how race is a social concept rather than a biological one. This novel is viewed as a postcolonial text that examines the lasting effects of colonialism on the psyche of the colonised and how it creates issues of identity. The search for identity and crisis of identity is a major theme stanching from this colonial impact. Racism has become one of the dangerous factors for human upliftment. Adichie has explored that 'race' is a very humiliated notion throughout the

character of Ifemelu in this novel. Adichie writes in Americanah, "Race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves. Its all about now class now, the haves and the haves not. ....The only race that matters is the human race." (Americanah 4)

The narrative explores the pressures to adapt the leading cultures, which often resulted into the suppression of one's own identity. It also scrutinizes how this occurs in both the United States and Nigeria. Adichie satirizes on the absurdities and injustices of the societies she depicts, creating a tinged and appealing narrative despite its thoughtful themes. Further, Adichie has depicted the love story between Ifemelu and Obinze which gives an outline for sightseeing how cultural identity is conveyed in romantic relationships and how it is influenced by migration. The novel talks about the complex judgement to return home and the challenges of re-joining with one's cultural roots after being away for a long time. Some characters stand for a "nomadic sensibility," moving from place to place or changing their way of life in search of satisfaction in the life, a common characteristic in refugee experiences.

## II. CONCLUSION

At the end of the novel, she has proved that though she is a woman she can achieve the greatest success in her life. The protagonist Ifemelu is a stubborn, outspoken black girl. She has gone through the bitter hardships which she experienced in America and she overcame the brutal gender racial dehumanizing hurdles to form harmony and liberty in the universe. Eventually she came back to her own country Nigeria to live there happily.

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