

Representation of Women's Voice in *We Should All Be Feminists*

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Abstract: This research paper examines the representation of women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*, focusing on how female voices are silenced, marginalized, and reclaimed through feminist discourse. Adichie redefines feminism as a universal human phenomenon rather than a Western ideology, challenging the patriarchal systems that shape women's social identities. The present research study follows feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft, Kate Millett, Margaret Fuller, and African womanist thought to examine the intersection of gender, culture, and power. With the help of Adichie's text *We Should All Be Feminists*, the research study argues that Adichie's work tries to depict the silenced voices of women based on gender discrimination. It is prevalent in our Indian society that discrimination starts from our home. At the time of a child's birth, people in our society place more emphasis on the boy child than on the girl child. Gender discrimination begins before the birth of children. This paper explores how Adichie examines the silencing of women's voices in both public and private places. It reclaims female subjectivity through storytelling, language, and personal experience. This research article critically examines the representation of women as marginalized yet resilient agents within postcolonial Nigerian society. It is a textual and thematic analysis; the research paper highlights how Adichie constructs feminism as an inclusive, humanistic project aimed at equality and dignity for all. The main objective of this research study is to explore women's voices in *We Should All Be Feminists*.

Keywords: Women, voice, marginal, feminism, patriarchal, gender discrimination

Introduction

From ancient times, the women represented in literature have long been shaped by patriarchal ideologies and societies that confine them to passive, domestic, and subordinate roles in society. Women's voices, whether in African, Western, or global narratives, have often been silenced or distorted to reflect male-centered perspectives. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a leading Nigerian novelist and feminist thinker, emerges as one of the most influential voices in contemporary gender discourse. Her essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), adapted from her TEDx talk, is both personal and political: it redefines feminism through lived experience and cultural context. The speech was delivered in 2012. Later on, the speech was published in book form in 2014. The main purpose of her essay is to strengthen the voice of women. She has tried to define feminism as a new woman in the 21st Century. She asserts that the social, political, cultural, and gender equality of women offers women in patriarchal society. She posits that 'it is essential to erase the model of patriarchal society to gain the voice of women or gender equality in the society. This research paper examines how Adichie represents women's silenced voices, explores mechanisms of their marginalization, and emphasizes the reclamation of identity and agency. It situates Adichie's work within the framework of postcolonial feminism, highlighting how her articulation of gender challenges both traditional African patriarchy and Western feminist stereotypes.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer of novels, short stories, poems, and children's books; she is also a book reviewer and literary critic. She is known as a central figure in postcolonial literature. She was born on 15th September, 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria. She completed her education at Eastern Connecticut State University and Yale University. She received prestigious awards like the Women's Prize for Fiction, MacArthur Fellowships, and many more. Adichie's essay *We Should Be Feminists* presents the silenced voices of women with different perspectives, such as social, political, cultural, communal, and creedal. She also tries to portray the socio-cultural atmosphere in Nigeria. The patriarchal society treated women as secondary in society. She also examines the silent voice of women in both public and private places. The text is analyzed through feminist perspectives to highlight the secondary status of women in society. She is restricted only to household chores, cooking, and caring for children. The discrimination based on gender begins at home; hence, it is essential to eliminate this type of negative psychology to strengthen society based on equilibrium.

Discussion

Patriarchal society has occupied a dominant place in society by giving a negligible attitude towards the girl/women. They consider women inferior to men. Women are suppressed under the stereotypical ideologies established by the patriarchal society. Women are isolated from the mainstream of society. Society is based on a patriarchal society where women generally happen to be the victims of certain complexes, such as having a sense of superiority over women, resulting in the suffering of females for being in a weaker position in the apparent men-dominated society. It is important to examine the position of women compared to men. Therefore, it is essential to examine the status of women compared to men.

The context of the present research study highlights how the writer of *We Should All Be Feminists* has used gender discrimination based on the silence and marginalization of women in society. In light of social, political, domestic, and cultural levels, we can see that people give women secondary status compared to men. It tries to draw attention towards the silence and marginalization of women in Nigeria. Adichie portrays a male-oriented society in Nigeria. Still, within the text, she highlights powerful positions of women that are unusual for the rest of the world and would help develop women's equality in society.

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Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and American Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) have started writing of women issues and problems, but struggled a lot for identifying of women writing by considering the position of women in social, political, cultural and economic rights of women. These feminist writers are considered the base for issues of women, gender discrimination, and feminism. They create an awareness about women's status, rights, duties, and responsibilities towards society. Feminism fought not only for white women's suffrage but also for equal opportunities to education and employment, and for the right to own property. In 1920, Congress passed the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. (In theory, it granted the right to women of all races, but in practice, it remained difficult for black women to vote). Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) are central to the canon; both authors laid the groundwork for radical feminism. Woolf introduced the notion of female bisexuality and a unique woman's voice and writing; Beauvoir introduced the notion of women's radical otherness or, rather, the cognitive and social process of "othering" women as the second sex in patriarchal societies by producing an authoritative definition of patriarchy. Feminism is largely concerned with issues of equality beyond suffrage, such as ending gender discrimination. These writers raised their voices to create awareness about the fundamental rights of women. In Adichie's view, becoming a feminist writer normalizes women's success and enables men to strive to accomplish more. Adichie's vision of feminism paves the way for a prosperous and all-inclusive future of society. Thus, empowering women does not take away opportunities from men.

We Should All Be Feminists is a TED Talk Speech given by Chimamanda Adichie, a popular Nigerian author. Her essay examines the silenced voice of women on various levels such as social, political, cultural, religious, private, and public places in society. The essay deals with negative stereotypes against the word 'feminism' and 'feminist'. Adichie harshly criticized the gender based approach of society that creates a negligible attitude towards women and girls. Gender based discrimination (male and female) transforms typical social and cultural stereotypes about men and women. The patriarchal society gives more emphasis on this discrimination; Adichie wants to bring a radical change in both sexes (men and women) to establish an equal approach in society. She dominantly explores that women's voices are crushed under the dominance of patriarchy. Adichie highlights the need for a social behavioral attitude to change

preconceived assumptions about women and tries to maintain the balance between both genders.

In her essay, *We Should All Be Feminists*, she has defined a negative connotation of feminism. She has made a worthy effort to define feminism for twenty-first-century women in society. She makes valid arguments about silenced women in society. Women are treated as inferior or marginal to men. Women are also alienated from the mainstream of society. The socialization of women helps maintain gender equality in society. It helps elevate the social status of women without discrimination or neglect. She focuses on the silence of women from their birth; the birth of a girl child is considered secondary or inferior to the boy child. It is believed that boys are physically and emotionally stronger than girl children. By birth, a girl child is considered inferior or secondary to the boy child.

The essay begins with a conversation between the author and her friend on feminism. The author said to her friend that whatever you read about feminism is half knowledge from Western literature. She is making an argument in favor of feminism. Okoloma said that 'you know, you are a feminist'. The word feminist was not a compliment, but Okonkwo said that 'you are a supporter of terrorism'. The word feminism was compared to the word terrorism. Adichie narrated her childhood experiences when she was learning in the school town situated in South Eastern Nigeria. At the very outset, the teacher declared the commencement of the first term exam; the student (boy/girl) who obtained the highest score in the examination would become the captain or monitor of the class. She made up her mind to become the monitor of the class by obtaining the highest marks in the examination. The teacher of the class did not offer her the position of monitor; instead, he declared that the second boy student was the class monitor because the girl could not become a monitor of the class. The teacher gives a secondary position to the girl child. The patriarchal ego of the teacher hurts; the teacher of the school did not consider the worth of a girl as a monitor of the class. The class monitor position was rejected by the class teacher only because she was a girl/female. She has not been given equal opportunities as compared to a male-dominated society. The teacher's language shows male dominance, considering the female as inferior to the male. The teacher has a negligible attitude towards Adichie's ability as class monitor. The boy is considered more eligible than girls to become a class monitor. As a male, the teacher has framed society's psyche that the girl is not eligible as a monitor, even though she possesses good qualities and knowledge. The teacher rejected monitorship based on gender. She remains silent in the face of patriarchal society's attitude. It again proves that only men become the head of institutions, family, social organizations, and political leaders, not women, even though she has the abilities to prove her worth better than men. People have strong assumptions that men can protect society because they are physically strong and more capable than women. Now society's approach has changed to look towards women or females. In the modern era, women have occupied key positions in every field like social, political, cultural, industrial, corporate, educational, and economic. The patriarchal society has to look towards women with new approaches and perspectives without discriminating against them.

Adichie has a strong fascination with her homeland, like the diaspora. She returns to her homeland, Lagos, a big city in Nigeria. She has expressed personal experiences of silencing women in *We Should Be Feminists*. She went with her friend, Louis, to a family restaurant or cafe. As a woman, she was humiliated by the behavior of the restaurant's car parking attendant. Initially, the watchman promised 'to look after your car until you get back'. Adichie was delighted by the behavior of the car parking man of the restaurant, and she offered him some money as a token of love and respect for women.

By taking the money, the man was very delighted and thanked Louis instead of Adichie. Again, here we come across the attitude of men silencing women. The man had a typical approach that women could not earn money like men, so money only belongs to men. Adichie becomes silent by seeing the behavior of the car parking man. This was an example of women-based economic discrimination developed by the people in the society. In modern society, the attitude of society has changed because women are working equally to men. Women have more abilities than men; they can tolerate a lot because they give birth to a child, and men cannot. Adichie said that fifty-two percent of the world's population is female, but most of the power positions and status are occupied by men. Women's share must be proportional to their participation. Women are now in a constructive phase that can mold traditional society and perspectives looking toward women. Gender socialization is essential to maintain the balance between men and women.

Adichie gives another instance of women's silence: in Nigeria, women cannot enter clubs and restaurants without male companions. It is a shameful assumption in Nigeria that if a woman walks alone in clubs and bars, she is considered a prostitute or sex worker. In Lagos, women are not allowed in reputable clubs and bars. The woman would have to make friends with a stranger to enter clubs and bars. She described her personal experience when she entered the restaurant with the man; the waiter greeted and bowed down before the man and ignored her. It is humiliating for her as a woman, and she feels her presence is invisible at the same moment. The waiter is a replica of patriarchal society where men are treated as superior to women. The woman is silenced at every turn in her life.

Now, a woman has started a new job occupying a central position in an organization and institution where she can find the majority of males. The woman works better and disciplines her employees about time, punctuality, and work. However, it is not accepted by the patriarchal society for women to be in a position of authority. The male members of that organization are against her working style because she is a woman. Men in the office use the same style, which people highly appreciate, but they do not accept the work done by women. It is a great tragedy for a woman who is not appreciated by the patriarchal society for her well-cultured and disciplined work.

At home, the parents resist girls from following typical ways, as girls like to make up themselves, wear bangles, and wear clothes mainly prepared for girls. Parents create discrimination in their own children; they give special treatment to boys and not to girls. They tell their girl child that she is a woman and she has to do chores, cooking,

and many more tasks assigned to females, not to males. She remains silent from childhood and obeys orders given by her parents. The parents are not worried about their boy child, but they are very worried about girls. In this way, parents snatch away their independence or freedom because she is a girl child. The biological difference between male and female is easily found in *We Should Be Feminists*. The woman keeps her silence at every moment living in the patriarchal society. Adichie's prose work, *We Should Be Feminists*, describes the silence of women living in the patriarchal society. The research paper tries to explore the silenced voices of women through the personal instance of the author explained in her prose. The patriarchal society constrains the rights of women. She raises many questions about silenced women only because of her gender. Adichie says in her essay that the problem is between men and women only because of gender discrimination; 'yes, there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better'.

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