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Social And Economic Class In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novel Americanah

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Abstract

In the late nineteenth century, African American social reformers started to compare the struggles against caste oppression and racial injustice in the United States. Most of these reformers failed to take into account what was lost when intricate details of hierarchy, position, and identity were first translated into the words "race" and "caste" and then back again. While analysing such double translation restrictions, this paper contends that racial and caste parallels had been extensively used in opposition to white supremacy, caste oppression, and other types of injustice. Although Americanah is a novel about a group of characters, it also includes a thorough examination and critique of racism in America, England, and Nigeria, as well as Adichie's astute observations scattered throughout. Ifemelu disagrees that she is a black person in Nigeria. There is still a racial hierarchy in Nigerian society.

Keywords: Politics, race, caste, black identity, American culture, and immigration.

Introduction

Literature is generally seen as the product of the most talented individuals in a particular language and community. The study of literature begins with the study of language as a channel of communication that links many people to the entire world, as viewed through the discoveries. This is significant because language affects both the material and spiritual worlds.

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According to the presumption or argument made by academics without literary backgrounds who believe that literature is only a medium for presenting stories, literature has a civilising value that offers a view into the shared experience of all people. People can become better citizens through using literature to alter their mind set and attitude on life.

The creative work has essentially evolved into a crucial aspect of cultural globalisation, particularly for Africa, whose literature has long been disparaged and criticised by western critics who contend that it lacks the ideological universalism that they assert is a distinctive feature of western works, to the exclusion of other races' works. Similar to how African literary works evolved from pre-literate cultures to become what they were in the Middle Ages, Western literary works arose out of pre-literate western nations.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's third book *Americanah*, focuses mostly on racial issues and African immigrants. The novel *Americanah* depicts the tale of two immigrant Nigerians who fall in love but lose touch as time and distance pass between them. The struggle to survive in this book is set against a backdrop of identity crises, racial discrimination, and politics of skin, hair, and colour. *Americanah* has made an effort to create a revolutionary act from a Nigerian standpoint. In this narrative, the protagonist is trying to figure out who she is amid a tangle of intimate, difficult, and delicate relationships that include her in numerous contemporary cultural events. Adichie analyses these issues using migration as a frame. She is aware of how a person's life is affected by how their ethnicity and gender interact. The narrative highlights the impact of their immigrant status on them based on caste and race, while examining the varied experiences of African immigrants to analyse the state of economic and cultural reality in African and American culture.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie won National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award for the novel *Americanah* in 2013. The novel *Americanah*, describes about Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman, her experience moving to the United States to attend college. The book *Americanah* by Adichie offers a comprehensive examination of the complex interactions between blacks and whites. She broadens her viewpoints by illustrating how black people interact with one another around the globe. The main character of *Americanah*, Ifemelu, is a powerful individual whose race has affected and influenced her life opportunities and objectives. She becomes a well-known blogger who engages in a number of romantic relationships that diminish her personality and sense of self.

This book describes Ifemelu's life in two countries, which is connected by her relationship with Obinze, a friend from high school. Ifemelu disagrees that she is a black person in Nigeria. In Nigerian culture, there is still a hierarchy of races, with light-skinned or persons of different races being seen as more attractive than those who use skin-lightening products. On the other hand, Ifemelu and Obinze learn that racism is a far bigger aspect of life in America and England, respectively. When Ifemelu is forced to acclimate to America's complex racial politics, she learns about race and starts to identify as a black woman.

Obinze was humiliated for scraping his knee since he is a "knee-grow" (*Americanah* – 237), and Adichie recounts several instances of racist events. Ifemelu creates a blog about race, which Adichie intersperses blog posts throughout narrative. Adichie is able to be most publicly critical of racism in America with these posts: Ifemelu is able to express numerous microaggressions, incidents, and assumptions that many white people would not see or comprehend, and she does so in a direct and funny

manner. Many of these topics deal with the differences in experiences between African-Americans and ‘American-Africans,’ or Africans who come to live in America for the first time and encounter racial discrimination

Although Ifemelu’s blog has become more well-known, she has decided to stop publishing blog. She is confused if this was the best option she could have made. As the train leaves Princeton and makes its way to Trenton, a lot more black folks get on. In New York, she saw that some subway stations had thin white people and others had “fat” black people. Ifemelu considers how she has ceased using the word “fat” since arriving to America. When Ifemelu was recently accused of being overweight by a customer at the grocery store, she glanced in the mirror and realised she was overweight. Adichie is clear about colourism in her narrative and is aware of how it exists in both a Nigerian and an American context. The main characters spend so much time in America and England, despite the fact that the book is primarily a love story, that race and colourism are frequently brought to their attention as the reader moves through the book.

Ifemelu had difficulty in first few years in the United States, while she suffers from loss of identity as a consequence of societal construct and both rejects and accentuates race paradoxically. In one of her passionate blogs, she says,

“Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t ‘black’ in your country? You’re in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes”.(Americanah – 308)

Adichie allows seeing racism as biases of people regarding skin colour and hair texture of the protagonist but she does not resort to the fight of typical girl between the dark skinned Ifemelu and the light skinned Ginika. On the other side, Adichie illustrate that intimate friendships may exist across colour spectrum. Adichie explains that race does not always play out when and how one expects to, as the dark-skinned friend accidentally started to date a popular boy, despite what the other characters expected and wanted. And he treats her well.

Adichie also explains method of skin bleaching between few Nigerian women. The narrator writes of Ifemelu’s boss

“It was simple to notice that she had not been born with her light complexion, its shine was too waxy and her knuckles were dark, as though those folds of flesh had stubbornly resisted her bleaching cream,”.

Ifemelu writes a blog post titled in her American setting: “Why Dark-Skinned Black Women both American and Non-American Love Barack Obama.”(Americanah – 356). Ifemelu describes how light skin is preferred over dark complexion in many cultures, but especially in America. The main argument of the blog is that Obama is loved by dark-skinned black women because he is a dark-skinned black man. The blog’s major point is that dark-skinned black women adore Obama because he is a dark-skinned black guy who adores a dark-skinned black woman. She expresses, “He knows what the world does not know: that dark black women totally rock.”(Americanah – 369) And she tacks on a last sentence in the

typical humour writing of Ifemelu which expresses, “Oh, and dark black women are also for cleaning up Washington and getting out of Iraq and whatnot.”(Americanah – 370)

The novel *Americanah* works as a story to teach readers about the immigrant experience in America and current race challenges whether they are black or white, American or non-American, The main character uses Ifemelu’s blog, which has been deftly woven into the main narrative structure, as a platform to communicate her experiences with blackness and race in the United States, leading to self-discovery and a remaking of her identity. Several statements found not only online but also in the news and newspapers show that race is still a topic that should be discussed today, despite the protagonist’s claim that it is common practise to avoid talking about race and claim that the idea belongs to the past.

According to Adichie’s work, people with dark skin are thought to experience race similarly in the United States. In essence, it is problematic to impose one identity on another; this is not a good practise. Ifemelu searches for a black identity because she feels unwelcome or ignored by normal Americans because she is an Igbo from Nigeria. Black success is an uncommon occurrence in the West, but it is ordinary in Nigeria.

Nigeria is the second-largest and most populated country in Africa. One out of every five Africans is a Nigerian. Nigeria, on the other hand, is divided along ethnic and religious lines. Nigeria is the second-largest country on the continent and has a large population. Nigerians make up one in five Africans. Additionally, Nigeria has both ethnic and religious cultural differences.

“...but racism is about power of a group and in America it’s the white folks who have the power. How? Well, white folks don’t get treated like shit in upper class African-American communities and white folks don’t get denied bank loans and mortgages precisely because they are white and black juries don’t give white criminals worse sentences than black criminals for the same crime and black police officers don’t stop white folk for driving while white and black companies don’t choose not to hire somebody because their name sounds white and black teachers don’t tell white kids that they are not smart enough to be doctors...”(Americanah -327)

Ifemelu struggles to find an identity, an identity that undergoes a long process of transformation as a result of the changes she faces. When she resides in Nigeria, her life is quite normal. She has a boyfriend and a family, and she attends school. Because everyone is black like her, she is untouched by racism. When she goes to America, she realizes how whites act as surrogates for black people due to their skin colour.

The reader may distinguish the two-way moulding of black women’s identities and adaptation of American society through the novel’s exploration. The protagonist of the story will experience numerous instances of bias based on the reader’s own cultural background, gender, ethnicity or racial group, and socioeconomic class. Black women are suffering greatly as a result of this widespread prejudice since they are being demoted to the lowest levels of society.

The novel of Adichie *Americanah* provides a unique viewpoint on what it means to be black in America, and so adds to a better understanding of race and class in the United States. In literature

produced by or about Africans in the West, the goal is to represent black characters in a realistic manner so that readers may empathise with them. *Americanah* has a lot of social commentary about race and how people of colour are portrayed today. Adichie's goal is to convey black immigrant women experience in United States and remove double colonisation of black women. Adichie's ideas and observations on race notion are reflected in the work.

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