

An Intersection of Multiple Discriminations: A Study of Select Short Stories by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Bhawna^{1*} | Dr. Deepa SP Mathur²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Hadarani Government PG College, Salumber, Rajasthan.

²Professor & HOD, Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

*Corresponding Author: bhawna.kr.parihar@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research paper examines the concept of intersectionality within the framework of Black feminism, focusing on the interconnected nature of race, gender, class, and other systems of social inequality. It will be a critical analysis of the two short stories namely "Imitation" and "The Arrangers of Marriage", within the framework of Intersectionality. The stories are taken from the collection The Things Around Your Neck by contemporary African-American woman writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The idea of intersectionality was first talked about by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar. Intersectionality provides a critical framework for understanding how different forms of discrimination operate simultaneously and shape the experiences of marginalized individuals. Black feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde have done a lot to help us understand this idea. They have challenged the mainstream feminist and anti-racist movements because they often forget about the experiences of Black women. This study looks at what these scholars have said about power, identity, oppression, resistance and social justice. It says that we cannot really understand what Black women go through by looking at racism and sexism separately. The paper explores the intellectual contributions of scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audre Lorde, examining their approaches to power, identity, oppression, resistance, and social justice. By looking at things theoretically the research shows that intersectionality helps us understand that women have many different experiences. Intersectionality expands feminist understanding because it helps us see that women's experiences cannot be understood in a simple way. We need to look at the different factors that affect their lives. Chimamanda Adichie demonstrates this idea of multiple Discrimination through her stories. The idea of intersectionality of feminism is crucial for creating a more inclusive understanding of oppression and for developing meaningful strategies, for social transformation and intersectionality of Black feminism.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Black Feminism, Multiple Discrimination, Identity, Ethic of Caring.

Introduction

The concept of the simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality and, I believe, one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black feminist thought.

—Black feminist and scholar Barbara Smith, 1983

Black feminism is a social and political struggle that recognises intersectionality. Intersectionality is the combination of effects of racism, sexism and classism simultaneously. It is a way to battle the oppression of black women. It rose in the 1970s in response to black women's marginalisation of their requirements in mainstream white feminist movements. It also arises in response to their lack of representation in leadership positions. A black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw first used

the word "intersectionality" in her very important 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. Intersectionality is a concrete concept. It describes how numerous forms of oppression are experienced by a Black woman rather than being an abstract concept. In fact, Crenshaw demonstrates the idea using the following example, which alludes to a crossroads or traffic intersection:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination ... But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. (Crenshaw, 149)

Because "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated," Crenshaw argues that feminist and antiracist theory and practice fail to "accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender." (Crenshaw, 140).

Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality," in 1989. The term acquired worldwide acceptance due to its capability to capture the simultaneous experience of the various forms of oppression that Black women go through. However, the idea was not novel. Since the era of enslavement, Black women have eloquently expressed many oppressions of race, class, and gender—referring to this idea as "interlocking oppressions," "simultaneous oppressions," "double jeopardy," "triple jeopardy" and phrases like these.

In order to contrast the multifaceted nature of Black women's experiences with the single-axis analysis that distorts them, Crenshaw focuses Black women in this study within the framework of Intersectionality. She writes that "Black women are theoretically erased" (Crenshaw, 140).

According to her, in situations of sex discrimination, the focus is on women who are privileged in terms of both race and class; in cases of racial discrimination, prejudice is typically seen in terms of Blacks who are privileged in terms of either sex or class (Crenshaw, 140). Those who are "multiply-burdened" are marginalised by this emphasis on the members of the most fortunate group. This focus on members of other previously privileged groups leads to distorted perspectives on racism and sexism because the dominant views of race and sex are actually derived from vastly more complex phenomena. She explores how this single axis framework leads to Black women's marginalisation in feminist theory and antiracist movements after looking at its doctrinal expressions. Because feminist theory and antiracist policy are based on a certain set of experiences that frequently do not adequately reflect the relationship of race and gender. Thus, black women are occasionally left out of these discourses. An already established analytical structure is not sufficient. Then it becomes very important to change the entire framework to analyse the multiple discrimination of Black women.

The phrase "Ain't I a Woman?" was given by Sojourner Truth in 1851. This phrase later used by bell hooks in her book named *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981). It challenged the sexist imagery which is actually used by male critics. They used it to justify the disenfranchisement of women. In Akron, Ohio, during a women's rights convention white men argued against women. They said that women were too weak and fragile to become a part of political activities. When Truth attempted to speak, some white women wanted her silenced. They try to silence her because they feared that her argument of slavery and racial equality would take consideration away from the movement for women's voting rights. Sojourner Truth shared her personal experiences to counter the idea that all women are weak and fragile. She showed that Black women often faced hardships that did not fit the traditional image of womanhood. Truth also pointed out the racism within the women's rights movement. She also encouraged white feminists to acknowledge and respect the experiences of Black women. In doing so, she fought against both gender inequality and racial discrimination.

bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman* focuses on presenting Black women's lives from their own perspectives rather than through the interpretations of outsiders. The work is significant because Black women have historically been represented and defined largely by others. Hooks's insightful examination of how sexual politics affects Black women's lives can therefore be understood as part of a broader Black feminist intellectual tradition. Her work contributes importantly to the body of literature produced by Black women and highlights the interconnected effects of race, gender, and class oppression.

hooks' desire to get Black women out of the shadows and into the mainstream of feminist discourse is reflected in *Ain't I a Woman*(1981). Hooks makes the persuasive case that Black women ought to be at the center of these discussions rather than being ignored and thought to be uninterested in feminist issues:

Black women have a special and unique vision. I think we have developed survival skills that will be useful to the world at large . . . we have a special view of reality that comes from being . . . in enclosures. I think we have to begin to see those views as a form of power. (Quoted by Guy-Sheftall, 84)

Hooks does not conclude that black women cannot benefit from feminism. She believes that most black women, both historically and currently, identify with and want to be a part of a feminist movement. The issue is that there isn't much of a critique of the patriarchal existing quo in the current feminist movements. To put it another way, they are made up of women who, rather than creating new social institutions, only want to walk in the shoes of the males who stand in their way. Because white American women are socialised to be racist, classist, and even sexist, feminism is consequently both racist and classist. White women should pursue more development and transformation rather than serving as surrogate males.

As Hooks ultimately proposes:

the sisterhood that is necessary for the making of feminist revolution can be achieved only when all women disengage themselves from the hostility, jealousy and competition with one another that has kept us vulnerable, weak and unable to envision new realities (Quoted by Ikerionwu, 85).

Emily Zobel Marshall writes about bell hooks that she is "a professor, poet and feminist cultural critic who sought to highlight how the dual and intertwined forces of racism and sexism have subjugated Black women throughout American history" (Marshall). bell hooks's writings inspired a generation of scholars to explore intersectional identities and the complex interrelations of gender, race, and sexuality.

Crenshaw writes that

Not only are women of colour in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when white women speak for and as women...through analysing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. Feminists thus ignore how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, moreover, how it often privileges them over and contributes to the domination of other women. Consequently, feminist theory remains white, and its potential to broaden and deepen its analysis by addressing non-privileged women remains unrealized (Crenshaw, 154).

Anna Julia Cooper emphasized the importance of addressing gender inequality combined with racial discrimination. She criticized Black leaders who claimed to speak for the entire Black community but often ignored exclusive experiences, concerns, and voices of Black women. Cooper knew that the struggle against racial oppression should also diagnose the inequalities faced by women especially within the Black community.

Cooper offered a different perspective while responding to Martin Delany's statement that wherever he was accepted, the entire Black community was also accepted. She claimed that the inclusion of Black women is equally important. Because when a Black woman gains recognition and acceptance, it embodies progress and inclusion for the entire Black community. She writes that "only the Black Woman can say, when and where I enter ... then and there the whole Negro race enters with me." (Cooper, 1892)

Crenshaw believes in major change in the theoretical approach to understand the discrimination of a Black woman:

If any real efforts are to be made to free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination, then theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Similarly, feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women. Neither Black liberationist politics nor feminist theory can ignore the intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents. (Crenshaw, 166)

Crenshaw manifests that there is no need for immediate political agreement to instigate understanding of discrimination through an intersectional approach. What actually is important is to question conventional beliefs about discrimination. There is also need of recognising that the existing frameworks are not fully sufficient to address the experiences of marginalized groups. This will help

produce a new method of thinking about inequality and encourage collective accomplishment. The goal should be to encourage larger inclusion. That will definitely lead towards the progress of marginalized people and that progress will contribute to the progress of society as a whole.

Patricia Hill Collins, a black feminist critic writes in her seminal paper named *The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought* (1989) that African-American women's preference for specific experiences and real-life circumstances ("the concrete") might come from both their African-American cultural background and their experiences as women. Because women may be socialized to focus on relationships and context. They will develop ways of thinking that emphasize personal experience, relationships, and circumstances rather than abstract principles:

In valuing the concrete, African-American women may be invoking not only an Afrocentric tradition, but a women's tradition as well. Some feminist theorists suggest that women are socialized in complex relational nexuses where contextual rules take priority over abstract principles in governing behaviour. This socialization process is thought to stimulate characteristic ways of stimulating. (Collins, 761)

In their relationships with each other, African-American women may be more likely than others to view connectedness as an important way of gaining knowledge. This may be because the tradition of sisterhood among Black women encourages them to value relationships, shared experiences, and mutual support:

In terms of Black women's relationships with one another then, African-American women may indeed find it easier than others to recognize connectedness as a primary way of knowing, simply because they are encouraged to do so by Black women's tradition of sisterhood... For Black women, new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community... also connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge-validation process (Collins, 763-64)

Patricia Hill puts that when African-American women rely on dialogue to evaluate knowledge and ideas, they may also be demonstrating a way of knowing that is commonly associated with women. Feminist scholars suggest that men and women are often socialized differently. Men tend to be encouraged to develop independence through separation, whereas women are encouraged to develop independence while maintaining connections with others. These different forms of autonomy may help explain why men and women can develop different approaches to understanding and gaining knowledge: "males and females are socialized within their families to seek different types of autonomy, the former based on separation, the latter seeking connectedness, and that this variation in types of autonomy parallels the characteristic differences between male and female ways of knowing" (Collins, 765)

Collins argues further that Black women's experiences within the family are shaped by two influences at the same time. Their family roles may be different from those of middle-class white women. However, they are still influenced by wider social and cultural expectations about what women's roles in families should be. Because of this, sharing experiences, discussing ideas, and learning through interaction have a particular importance in an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Collins suggests that Black women may experience a convergence, or coming together, of two sets of values: those found in the African-American community and those emphasized by woman-centered or feminist perspectives. It is showing that Black women's ways of knowing is being influenced by both their racial-cultural experiences and their experiences as women. (Collins, 765).

While talking about the "ethic of caring" Collins writes that "the ethic of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge-validation" (Collins, 766) for African-American women. Collins refers these three components as the "inner voice" which is women's own personal feelings, experiences, perceptions, and judgments as valuable sources of knowledge.

Collins argues that as more Black women pursue higher education and obtain advanced degrees, Black feminist scholarship continues to develop and broaden. Many African-American women scholars choose to base their research on the lived experiences of Black women, reflecting the principles of an Afrocentric feminist approach to knowledge. Rather than observing their marginalized position as a limitation, they use their unique perspective as "outsiders within" to challenge existing ideas and contribute new and creative perspectives to Black feminist thought (Collins, 771). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the writers who comes under this category.

According to Collins Black women scholars face three different groups whose standards can determine whether their knowledge is considered legitimate. First, "black feminist thought must be validated by ordinary African-American women who grow to womanhood "in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear" (Collins, 771). To gain their trust, scholars should be personally committed to the issues they study, take responsibility for the effects of their research, have some connection to the experiences they describe, and be willing to discuss their findings with members of the wider community.

Second, "Black feminist thought also must be accepted by the community of Black women scholars" (Collins, 771). However, these scholars may differ in how strongly they believe that Black women's perspectives should be developed through an Afrocentric feminist approach to knowledge.

Finally, "Black feminist thought within academia must be prepared to confront Eurocentric masculinist political and epistemological require" (Collins, 772). Therefore, Black women scholars must negotiate between the expectations of their communities, their own academic community, and the dominant academic system.

Collins writes that "the goal here is not one of integrating Black female "folk culture" into the substantiated body of academic knowledge.... rather, the process is one of rearticulating a pre-existing Black women's standpoint and re-centering the language of existing academic discourse to accommodate these knowledge claims" (Collins, 772).

Audre Lorde, a Black lesbian feminist socialist poet and writer. It is her strong argument that silence is very horrible and terrible element. It is important to find the courage to speak. Silence in the face of oppression and injustice does not necessarily provide safety. To counter the terrific silence this courage of speaking becomes an important form of resistance: "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. The speaking profits me, beyond any other effects. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 1).

Lorde writes that

My sisters in the African Diaspora, our sisters are looking to us – an insistence that their lives not be forgotten. Use your hands and your computers. None of us can do it alone. It will be done and we will do it together. It's wonderful to learn "I am not alone." The next step is difference – do not let the differences pull you apart. Use them. That is empowerment (Lorde, 1).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short stories "Imitation" and "Arrangers of Marriage" proposes a complex critique of the intersection of gender, race, diasporic displacement, marriage, class and cultural identity. Adichie validates the experiences of African women. Her stories show that the experiences of Black women in Western world cannot be understood through a single category of identity. This is depicted through the character of Nkem from the story "Imitation". Nkem's experiences are simultaneously shaped by many dimensions. It is shaped by her gender as a woman, her class position as a dependent wife, her racial and cultural identity as an African, and also through her status as a diasporic subject. As a result, her marginalization operates through multiple and overlapping structures of power.

Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is unique. It challenges the tendency to examine forms of oppression as separate and independent systems. Such as racism and sexism, both are not considered separately. Instead, intersectionality highlights that different structures of power intersect to produce unique experiences for the person who is located at their crossings. Nkem's position in "Imitation" demonstrates this intersection. She has intersection of experiences. She is not marginalized simply because she is a woman. She is also not marginalised simply because she is African; rather, her experience arises from the shared and collective paraphernalia of gender, class, race, and cultural displacement. Her identity as an African woman living in America places her within several overlying constructions of power. It affects her identity and life both within her marriage and within the larger cultural and social context. Nkem is from a poor background. She initially associates her marriage and migration to America with upward economic security and social mobility. However, her expectations gradually become complex and intricate. Eventually she got to realise that economic privilege does not necessarily guarantee social equality and emotional autonomy. Her upgraded material circumstances led her towards more increasing dependence upon her husband. Chimamanda Adichie therefore exposures

the paradox of class mobility. Though Nkem obtains access to a more comfortable and prosperous lifestyle, but she simultaneously becomes vulnerable to new forms of cultural and patriarchal control.

Nkem's marriage further demonstrates the intersection of gender and power. Her husband possesses greater economic and social authority, while Nkem occupies a comparatively dependent position. His control over her lifestyle, appearance, speech, and cultural practices indicates that the marital relationship is not simply a private emotional relationship but also a site where power is exercised. His desire to transform Nkem into an acceptable Westernized woman reflects the patriarchal expectation that women should adapt themselves to the desires and identities of men. Her body, behaviour, language, and cultural practices consequently become objects of regulation.

This aspect of the story resounds with bell hooks's feminist critique of patriarchy. Particularly bell hooks' insistence that women's oppression must be understood not separately but within broader systems of class and race. A feminist study of Nkem cannot detach sexism from racism and class inequality. Her experience as a woman is mediated by her African identity and her diasporic location. At the same time, her racial and cultural identity cannot be separated from the gendered power relations within her marriage. Adichie thus presents oppression as multidimensional rather than as a single, uniform experience of "womanhood."

Nkem, by contrast, represents an alternative relationship with cultural identity. Though she migrates to America, but she does not entirely separate herself from Africa. Her memories, emotional attachment to her homeland and cultural practices remain dominant to her sense of self. She therefore inhabits a hybrid cultural position. She is physically located in America but psychologically and culturally remains allied to Africa. Her identity develops within the space between the host culture and her homeland.

This condition corresponds to the postcolonial understanding of hybridity, particularly Homi K. Bhabha's formulation of the "Third Space." Nkem does not simply move from one fixed cultural identity to another. Rather, her identity is continuously negotiated between American cultural expectations and African heritage. Her diasporic existence creates an in-between space. In this in-between space her identity becomes unstable and fluid. Importantly, however, hybridity in Nkem's case should not be understood as a completely melodious fusion of cultures. Rather, it is produced through longing, tension, coercion, and unequal relations of power.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, therefore, Nkem's struggle cannot be reduced to the problem of an unfaithful husband. Her crisis is simultaneously personal, gendered, racialized, class-based, cultural, and diasporic. The betrayal within her marriage becomes particularly painful because it occurs within an already unequal relationship in which her husband possesses greater economic and cultural power. His infidelity consequently reinforces the larger pattern in which Nkem is positioned as an accessory to his socially respectable identity rather than as an autonomous individual.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's another short story "The Arrangers of Marriage" presents intricate characterisation of a female named Chinaza. Chinaza's life presented as a complex spot of intersecting various forms of marginalization. It is the marginalisation where gender, cultural identity, class, patriarchal authority and displacement operate simultaneously. She is an orphaned young woman. She was dependent upon her uncle and aunt before marriage. Being an orphaned girl, Chinaza inhabits a predominantly weak social position. She continually works for her uncle and aunt and has limited control over the decisions regarding her own life. Her aspirations, including her desire to pursue her examinations and education, remain largely unrecognized. Instead of being valued as an individual with independent ambitions, she is primarily perceived through the patriarchal institution of marriage.

Her uncle and aunt repeatedly remind her that they have done her a favour by arranging her marriage into what they consider a "good family." However, the notion of a "good family" is constructed according to their expectations rather than Chinaza's own desires or understanding. The reality she encounters after marriage sharply contradicts the expectations created for her. The allegedly well-off and protected life in America proves to be an illusion. Her husband's actual circumstances reveal economic struggle. This economic struggle leads to an unequal marital power structure, and emotional distance. Thus, Adichie exposes the gap between social representation and actual lived reality. Chinaza is told that marriage and migration will provide security and upward mobility. After reaching America her life becomes illusioned. Rather, she experiences displacement, dependence, and cultural alienation instead.

These conditions of Nkem and Chinaza supports the theory of intersectionality where different forms of oppression do not operate independently but intersect to recreate distinctive and unique experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Nkem and Chinaza's oppression cannot be understood simply as sexism. their positions as a woman intersects with her orphanhood, economic vulnerability, immigrant status, cultural displacement, and dependence upon patriarchal authority and being a black woman in a white society.

Conclusion

Through Nkem from "Imitation" and Chinaza from "The Arrangers of Marriage", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie questions the assumption that migration, marriage, and entry into an apparently privileged social environment automatically produce empowerment. Instead, Adichie demonstrates that when these institutions are structured by unequal relations of gender, class, culture, and power, they can reproduce rather than eliminate marginalization and discrimination. This study opens several possibilities for future intersectional research, where Adichie's female characters negotiate oppression in relation to digital culture, globalization, transnational migration, social media, economic independence and changing forms of marriage. Contemporary African women increasingly inhabit spaces that are simultaneously local, national and global. Therefore, future intersectional studies can investigate how technology and globalization reshape traditional patriarchal structures.

Thus, the futuristic value of this research lies in its ability to move from "women versus patriarchy" to a more complex understanding of how multiple identities and power structures interact. "Imitation" and "The Arrangers of Marriage" remain relevant because the forms of domination they depict are not confined to one historical moment. Their intersectional reading encourages future study to examine how African women continually reconstruct identity, agency and resistance within changing cultural, economic and global environments.

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