

REFLECTIONS ON CROSS-CULTURAL ASSOCIATION IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

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Abstract:

Cultures separated in time and space often exhibit reflections of a common foundation which becomes the basis of cultural ties and universal peace. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is imbued with cross-cultural commonalities which bear close association with Indian cultural ethos. The narrative reveals several cultural parallels between Indian and African traditions, culture and history. This research paper attempts to study the cross-cultural ties between Indian and African cultural heritage as revealed in the narrative of *The Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Studies, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Half of a Yellow Sun*

The post-colonial works often examine how the colonial past influences and shapes our present and have now begun to come out of the shadow of our past and are attempting to embrace our own identity.

Both India and Nigeria served as erstwhile colonies of the British Empire. India was ruled by the British for about two hundred years. During the colonial rule, the Indians maintained a servile status in their own country, a predicament which we share with other colonial nations such as Nigeria. Yet, Indians like the other colonized subjects were enamoured by the occidental other whom we sought to imitate and even worship. This is prevalent in our culture even today.

During the British rule, Nigeria underwent an experience very similar to that of the Indian predicament. In India, the British devised various tactical strategies such as the 'divide-and-rule' policy which enabled them to sustain their presence and a stronghold in India. Likewise, the strategies executed by the British colonizers similarly were molded to aggravate the existing ethnic differences. The socio-political and economic structures of the two nations also share undercurrents of similarities though not to a very pronounced extent. The narrative of the novel fills the readers with a lingering sense of nostalgia with a keen sense of similarities with Indian colonial history of oppression, dominion and resistance.

The novel begins by displaying the enchantment of the colonized to their masters which becomes a common motif in Indian scenario. Ugwu, the houseboy, comes from an extremely poor background and is employed in Odenigbo's house which is furnished with modern comforts and is replete with loads of books. Ugwu, whose rudimentary needs remain unquenched when he lived with his family is in awe of Odenigbo's opulence and splendor. He is much impressed by his acumen and status and considers regards it in the greatest of esteem. Enamoured he makes great efforts to impress Odenigbo at all costs. When he accidentally irons Odenigbo's socks he feels disturbed and makes it his mission to cook a stew so delicious, with arigbe herbs, that his master will not be able to send him back to his village. Adichie writes for Ugwu's grandmother:

She used to say that arigbe softens a man's heart. She was the second of three wives and did not have the special position that came with being the first or the last, so before she asked her husband for anything, she told Ugwu, she cooked him spicy yamporridge with arigbe. It had worked, always. Perhaps it would work with Master.

Ugwu adulates and hero-worships his master. He is extremely loyal and his soul's desire is to serve his master. The obedience he alleges to his master resembles the typical "rooster-coop" mentality of a colonized slave and spills the undercurrents of the element of consent in the hegemonic discourse. For Ugwu, this service to his master becomes the highest possible achievement of his life. He believes in serving his master with absolute faith. However, it is evident that the master's approach and treatment of his slave is questionable and an unintentional mistake like ironing the socks could threaten his employment prospects and take him back to his village which would in-turn have translated into witnessing a mockery of him, instead enjoying the comfort and support of his own people.

It is clear that voicing opinion against unjust actions never enters the mind of the slaves, at least in the initial stage. Ugwu's master, grips his mind to the extent that his thoughts seem to lack the freedom to think clearly and logically. Though, he is more a victim of his own thoughts and actions to a certain extent. The situation bears a close resemblance with the initial atmosphere in India during times of the British Raj when Indians sought to support the British in India with due allegiance. The colonial mindset emended in our behavior still seems to linger on and has changed grabs in the form of globalization.

Odenigbo is a professor of Mathematics, but it seems that he fosters a great passion is for politics. He becomes the instrument which underlines the theme of colonialism in the novel and as a force which casts its lingering spell on nearly everything.

Further, the catastrophe of the civil war which resulted in the aftermath of several lives rekindles the Indian predicament during the struggle for independence in India, which witness animosity among its citizens and led to the separation of India and Pakistan. Though Nigeria was not divided into two separate states yet the common current of bloodshed and wrath between the battling ethnic groups woefully draws on similar strains loss and despair.

Likewise, the rampant superstitions weaken the fabric of the African society and culture much like contemporary India. The ignorance and superstition prevalent in the society becomes the major cause of their servile status. The characters of the novel rbelieve in fallacies such as the view that evil spirits lead them to make mistakes or cause them to fall sick. They go to the local priests or the 'dibias' to do away with ailments, instead of approaching a doctor or look for a more logical form of treatment. They are similar in disposition to the tantriks or the occult practitioners in India.

The superstitious mindset is evident in the episode when Ugwu naïvely irons Odenigbo's socks and in the process burns them. He justifies his mistake by blaming it the evil spirits. Adichie writes:

His chest felt weighty he did not know why he had ironed the socks, why he had not simply done the safari suit. Evil spirits, that was it. The evil spirits had made him do it. They lurked everywhere, after all. Whenever he was ill with the fever, or oncehe fell from a tree, his mother would rub his body with okwuna,all the while muttering, 'We shall defeat them, they will not win.'

The episode clearly reveals that Ugwu was a deeply superstitious person much like the other members of his family. Odenigbo's mother is seen in the story by Ugwu using herbs from a dibia or a medicine man. She clearly despises western ways and believes wholeheartedly on the western medicine.

Thus, the narrative of Half of a Yellow Sun discusses themes such as colonial oppression, slavish imitation, political turmoil, social evils and cultural trauma which become the motifs of nations sharing a common colonial past. The cross-cultural ethos revealed in the novel bear a close resemblance to parallel structures in the Indian cultural context.

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