

RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER

MAY 2021

Welcome to the MAY 2021 issue of RTC LIBRARY E-NEWSLETTER

In this issue: Recommended Reads: Alchemist, Chimamanda Adichie's Short Essays.

Recommended Reads from the RTC community

Alchemist by Paulo Coelho

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"The Alchemist" is an allegorical novel first published in 1988 and is written by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. It was originally written in Portuguese and in 2012, it was translated into 67 languages for which it has won the Guinness World Record. It is recognized as one of the most bestselling books in history by having 65 million copies sold worldwide. The novel incorporates the themes of discovering one's destiny and purpose in life. It was said that Coelho wrote The Alchemist in two weeks. He states that he was able to write at this pace because the story was "already y written in [his] soul."

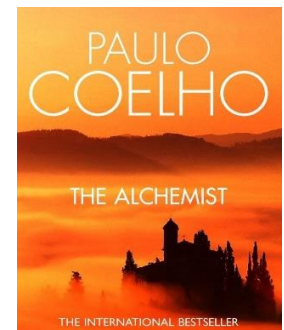
The Alchemist shares the story of the young Andalusian shepherd boy named Santiago, who dreams only about buried treasure in Egypt and starts his difficult journey to find it. Considering the whole clarity and symbolic abundance of a fable, the novel is both a quest for buried treasure and spiritual pursuit, where a hero gets the better of misfortunes by the guidance of disguised teachers who escort him.

The novel starts with Santiago, who was referred to as "the boy" throughout the novel, sleeps in a deserted church with his flock of sheep near a sycamore tree in the sacristy. That time, he saw a repeated dream of a child telling him that he will find a hidden treasure if he travels to the Egyptian pyramids. He reached the village of Tarifia and requested a Gypsy woman to interpret his dreams. The Gypsy woman tells him that the dream is a vision. Santiago meets an old man called Melchizedek, who is the king of Salem and he talks to him about fate and destiny, which he termed as Personal Legend and gives him two stones to Santiago: Urim and Thummim, which can interpret omens during his search of treasure.

Later, Santiago upon reaching Africa lost his money and worked for a crystal merchant. Within eleven months, he learnt Arabic and got enough money to come back home. On a desert caravan, Santiago encounters a fascinating Englishman whose interest in wisdom and persistent quest to discover the mystery of alchemy motivate Santiago to follow his dream of searching for treasures. As the Englishman keeps on searching for the 200-year-old alchemist in the desert oasis, Santiago meets a young girl called Fatima, with whom he fell in love with. Fatima tells him to continue his search for Personal Legend. He comes to meet an alchemist, encounters warring tribesmen, risk his life by promising to turn himself into the wind, and is robbed, beaten, and nearly killed just as he is about to uncover his treasure.

The ending of the novel is surprising, where the boy learns that his treasure is not at the pyramids, but back at the abandoned church where he begins the journey. While going through the journey taken by Santiago, it teaches readers to listen to our heart and pursue our destiny or dreams in life with undying hope, faith and spirit. The book says “When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.” The story is well written as a narrative that there are disparate turning points in the story. As a reader, I was involved to follow Santiago’s steps of walking the way even if it gives no hints of where you are heading which ultimately will result in unprecedented surprises at the end. It is like being in the journey and mimics life, where every moment is potentially a turning point.

Moreover, The Alchemist is a thrilling novel that discharges optimism in readers; it tells that everything is possible as long as you want it to happen as said in the novel: “When you really want something, the whole universe always conspires in your favor.” It talks about overcoming fear by facing obstacles in life. I feel that one must have the contemplative feeling to relish the book. Besides, the story holds various layers and depths which are difficult to get a full grasp of the book in the first read. The Alchemist is an association of philosophy and knowledge which makes the whole book an inspiring read.



Thank you
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Book Review on Chimamanda Adichie's Short Essays: DEAR IJEWELE OR A FEMINIST MANIFESTO WITH FIFTEEN SUGGESTIONS and WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

Introduction:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian feminist writer wrote the following short essays. "Dear Ijeawele or a feminist manifesto with fifteen suggestions" is a letter with fifteen suggestions regarding how her friend Ijeawele should raise her daughter Chizalum as a feminist. From sexuality, work-place discrimination, internalized misogyny and many more- her fifteen suggestions succinctly describe the issues and prescribe the solutions. "We should all be feminists" is an essay that breaks down the discourse on feminism; starting from clarifying the term and its connotations, stating the gender issues faced by both men and women, narrating experiences and incidences and finally, prescribing the solution, which is in essence: *we should all be feminists*. As a black feminist; she deconstructs certain ideologies that predominate African/Nigerian culture and penetrate gender inequality. Her audience is not just limited to Black females; she communicates the role of men and shares the experience of men and white females as well. One can argue she has a relatively wide audience. The following summaries will illustrate her purpose, which is to deconstruct harmful and predominant notions of gender roles, expectations and norms.

Summaries:

This short essay starts with an introduction to feminism and how it is viewed. Her friend, *Okoloma* calls her a feminist and introduces her to the word as something with a negative connotation. The discourse regarding the word 'feminist' is so skewed with many expectations. With all the comments from those around her, she wanted to be a "*Happy African feminist who does not hate men and who likes to wear lip-gloss and high heels for herself and not for men*". Most of the time, people expect feminism to fit into a certain box with clear lines of what it is and isn't. Like any other concept in the world, feminism cannot be defined within a sentence as these commentators expected.

She then mentions some personal experiences, which in my opinion demonstrate why feminism is vital and indispensable. She talks about her experience in trying for class monitor, which was given to a boy. At a parking lot, her male friend was thanked for the tip she gave. She was harassed at a hotel, not acknowledged at a restaurant or not allowed into a club simply by virtue of being a woman. She even narrates experiences of other women. A woman at a managerial position was judged for expressing "anger" and lacking a "woman's touch to her job" and another

woman had to wear a wedding ring at work to be taken seriously. All this argues that we all absolutely have to be feminists.

Feminism is still needed in today's world because of things such as the existence of the Lilly Ledbetter law, the expectation of a woman to be married and alter their successes to please the fragile egos of men, the toxic masculinity that associates masculinity with money, the biased gender roles in both the private and public spheres, the internalization of these issues, the reproduction of them to the younger generation and many more factors. Although the discussion of gender is one that makes people uncomfortable, in Nigeria and even Bhutan alike, it is time to have the discussion while simultaneously learning and unlearning norms that address the problems that exist within the gender discourse.

In the second essay the author writes a letter to her friend who asks her how to raise her daughter a feminist. The letter comprises of fifteen suggestions, which will be summarized in the following paragraph.

First, she should be a full person and not let gender roles assigned to an individual in the public and private spheres define her. Second, both parents have equal responsibility in parenting, and neither deserves extra applause for performing their role. Third, gender role differentiation should be unlearned. Differentiating between pink, blue, dolls and helicopters should be rejected from the beginning. Fourth, beware of "*feminism Lite*" which is a form of conditional feminism that still propagates the notion that men are superior to women. Fifth, encourage and even bribe children to read books. Sixth, question elements of language that perpetuates prejudices. Seventh, marriage should not be seen as an achievement of women. Eighth, it is not necessary to be liked. Rather, it is more important to be honest. Ninth, Chizalum should be raised with an identity, proud to be a Nigerian Igbo woman. Tenth, Chizalum should be encouraged to play sport and prefer whichever fashion she prefers: feminine or not. She should be surrounded by male and female idols to teach her that gender roles and expectations are not static. Eleventh, culture is bound to change and therefore culture and biology alike should be questioned when required. Twelfth, she should be spoken to about sexuality and taught that it is not shameful. Thirteenth; she should be familiarized with love and romance. She should be taught that the gender roles regarding romance such as proposing should be challenged. Fourteenth, she should know that just because women are oppressed or considered inferior, they are not more moral than men. Fifteenth and lastly, she should be taught that nothing is universal and nothing can be universalized. Relativism is the only universal aspect of the world.

Relation with concepts of sexual politics and gender:

The two essays encompass many concepts and arguments. However the following were chosen for this review based on their relevance to my classes and relatable characteristics. The six topics will be elaborated on and will cover many other ideas and issues that are relevant under each umbrella concept.

The first topic is on how the internalized norms that uphold patriarchy are perpetuated from childhood itself. The essay mentions how somebody says to a baby girl “May you find a good husband”, girls are gifted dolls and cooking sets and boys are given guns and helicopters and how clothing section in stores has separated colors for infants that practically look the same. When such concepts are infiltrated on a child itself, the child will most likely grow upholding the same harmful norms and values (Signorielli, 1990).

Secondly, as the child grows up they will be exposed to and will learn from the gender differentiation between their parents. From the phenomenon of changing the last name after marriage, it is evident that the institution further enforces patriarchy (Smart, 2013). The author discusses how marriage is seen as an achievement for women, parenting as a sole responsibility of the mother and cooking as a woman’s job. This is true for Bhutanese society as well and hampers women’s role in the public sphere and work environments as well (Seden, 2016)

Thirdly, as children enter teenage, there are aspects of gender differentiation reinforced. Adichie states that female sexuality is not discussed or simply associated to shame. She states that girls quit sports when their body changes, hide their menstruation and involve in romance with a sense of inferiority. Stearns and Glennie (2006) state that while most boys drop out of school for disciplinarian issues, girls drop out due to the social pressure and problems regarding sexual health.

The fourth concept is hegemonic masculinity, which is the ways in which men legitimize their dominance in society and justify the subordination of women and other male populations (Donaldson, 1993). Adichie states that men have to propose and pay in order not to feel ‘emasculated’. Patriarchy is a system that even subjects men to toxic and unreasonable expectations of masculinity (Ford, 2019).

Fifth, Adichie explores how women are subjected to misogynistic treatments in the public sphere as well. At work, she is judged for being too successful and in areas such as the aforementioned restaurant, club and hotel- she also faces discrimination. Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) found that misogynistic work environments are common than workplaces that express hostility towards

men. They found that such misogynistic workplaces lead to overall negative effects for all employees.

The final umbrella concept this review will evaluate is how the term feminism is seen with such negative baggage. Adichie claims that it is frowned upon, not talked about openly and even seen as intimidating or threatening. It is time to redefine feminism. Internalized misogyny and general patriarchy, along with Feminism lite has painted feminism in a negative light (Ging and Siapera, 2019). However, Dixon (2014) claims that with Internet feminism and *hashtag* feminism, the concept is being redefined in a positive light where the virtual internet space has allowed for more clear discussions and clarification of inaccurate preexisting notions on feminism.

Critical Analysis and Reflection:

My reaction to the essays and concepts has been reflected in the above paragraphs, my sentiments embedded within the discussions and reflected in the choice of concepts I have chosen to reflect on.

Nevertheless, to further elaborate on my personal analysis, the essays made me question the status quo in Bhutan and where the gender discourse in my own environment stood. In comparison to the examples Adichie stated, Bhutan is at a rather similar stage. However, this came with a hint of optimism. If the issues are similar, her recommended solution's applicability could be tested and practiced in the Bhutanese context. Adichie eloquently and elaborately discuss the key themes of patriarchy, gender differentiation and misogyny. Nevertheless, it would have been more relatable if she included the experience of women from other cultures as well. As a woman, I could relate to most of the highlighted issues. However, as an Asian woman I yearned to be more represented in her literature. Further, her lack of inclusion of any LGBT related issues also were a shortcoming. Considering that her essays were so elaborate and included many arguments, the element of LGBT inclusion in gender discourse would have really completed her work fully. Nevertheless, her narration through her strong opinions and relatable experiences paint vivid takeaways and convince the audience as to why feminism is imperative even in the world today.

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Thank you
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Wanted! Book reviews from Faculty, Staff, and Students

If you have read a good book and would like to contribute a review to the Library Newsletter, we would love to receive one from you. Tell us a little about the book and why you liked it in 250-500 words. If interested, send your review to gyanupradhan@rtc.bt or come by the library and see the library staff.

Thanks!!

YOU MUST TELL YOURSELF, "NO MATTER HOW HARD IT IS, OR HOW HARD IT GETS, I AM GOING TO MAKE IT..."-Les Brown.

