CHAPTER - 4

CONTEMPORARY IGBO WRITINGS
CHAPTER IV

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The initial success of Igbo novels has lead to regular attempts in novel writing. Some of the important contemporary writers are Chimamanda Nagozi Adichie, Nnedi Okorafor and Chris Abani. The contemporary writings have re-asserted the popularity of fourth world writings as accepted genre.

1. Chimamanda Nagozi Adichie

Chimamanda Nagozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist. Her first novel - *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2003. It was listed for the Booker prize. Her second book, *Half of Yellow Sun* won the Orange Prize for fiction. The *Thing around Your Neck* was published recently in 2009 and was short-listed for the 2009 Johan Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial Prize and the 2010 Commonwealth Writers Prize. She has also written a collection of short stories.

i. *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie writes about contemporary Nigeria. She also explores the post-colonial burden. Personal lives are set against the larger canvas of social and political
forces. Nigeria was colonized by Britain in 1945, but when they left, they “gifted” their legacy. This legacy forms an important component of the novel *Purple Hibiscus*. This legacy which wrecks havoc in the lives of his family members is represented by the autocratic figure of the head of the family - Eugene, who follows everything British including their high-handedness and cruelty.

The main character of the novel is Kambili. The story is set in Enuga, which is a beautiful city situated in the valleys of the Milliken Hills in eastern Nigeria. The story is about a people trying to come to terms with their post-colonial heritage and trying to pick up the remnants of a shattered culture. They are not able to establish a good and efficient system of governance and corruption is rampant.

It is interesting to note that the novel is written from the point of view of a teenager - Kambili who is a shy girl of fifteen and also from the point of view of her brother Jaja who is seventeen years old. Kambili sets the scene for the novel as she starts sharing.

I lay in bed after Mama left and let my mind rake through the past, through the years when Jaja and Mama and I spoke more with our spirits than with our lips. Until Nsukka. Nsukka started it all; Aunty Ifeoma’s little garden next to the verandah of her flat in Nsukka began to lift the silence. Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving
The children's father is rich and influential. He shows more concern and love to outsiders than at home. People at home are taken for granted and used, musical and abused at will. He is a religious fanatic and punishes his wife and children very severely for what he perceives as sinful. He has two faces - one public and the other private. Publicly he is the champion of human rights and publishes a newspaper challenging the military junta. Privately he is a sadist who beats his wife relentlessly and without any reason. Even his children are victims of his religious obsessions. The children have to face all this plus the story and stress of teenage years - emotional trauma, peer relations and petty rivalry.

An important part of the novel is when Kambili and Jaja visit their father's sister, their Aunty Ifeoma in the university town of Nsukka. Her household is exactly the opposite of her brothers. It is an Oasis and what a contrast! It is a Catholic household, but not rigid and orthodox like their father, but liberal. The family members can express their views and talk freely. In this atmosphere Kambili and Jaja also learn to express their opinions freely. Their aunt is a very sensible and outspoken woman. With her, the trauma the children have suffered under their father starts healing.
There is a beautiful purple hibiscus that blooms in Ifeoma's garden. It is vibrant, alive and precious - open and blooming - a symbol of everything that the protagonist's father would crush. During her stay, Kambili falls in love with a young priest, Father Amadi. After their visit to their aunt's place, far-reaching changes in the Achike family take place.

In the end, Beatrice is unable to bear Eugene's violence and she poisons him. Jaja sacrifices, takes the blame on himself and goes to jail. Aunt Ifeoma is unfairly dismissed from her job and moves to America with her family. The novel spans a period of three years.

The end shows some signs of optimism. Kambili has become a confident young girl of eighteen. Her brother is about to be released from prison. His experience there makes him stronger and mature. Their mother, who had deteriorated psychologically, shows small signs of improvement. Thus a better life seems to be beckoning them.

The narrative technique of Purple Hibiscus is that of first person and the narrator is a teenage girl. "In a soft, searing voice, Adichie examines the complexities of family, faith and country through the haunted but hopeful eyes of a young girl on the cusp of womanhood. Lush, cadenced and often disconcerting, this is an accomplished first effort" (dadooda.com). She finds her own voice and gets over her stammering. The story is told in flashback. It starts mid-way when the family is undergoing serious disintegration. Then through flashback she narrates what caused the problem and then continues into the further development of events. She ends the story in present time.
It is interesting to note that the first three parts of the novel are written in the past tense, while the last part which recounts present time, is written in simple present tense. The shy, reserved, submissive nature of the narrator is reflected through the narration. We can observe the teenage mind gathering by the novel. Adichie very skilfully portrays the storms and stresses within a teenage mind.

The skill with which she handles the inexperienced teenage narrator shows her intelligence and sensitivity. It is also done with great tenderness. She is also able to approach social, religious and political concerns of Eastern Nigeria with great sincerity and honesty. Her protagonist is timid but a very sharp observer. There is enough room and scope left for the reader to interpret issues of corruption in government and public offices, political oppression, poverty etc. The notions of freedom and religion are exposed through the perception of a fifteen year old girl. One can also follow her sexual awakening and also political awakening. Kambili is a successful and endearing creation. An adult narrator would sound all “too knowing”.

The home of Kambili is a microcosm of the chaotic, larger world of Nigeria. The parallels are evident. Just as Nigeria was under the stern rule of the British, Kambili family is under the strict, unjust domination of the father - Papa Eugene. Domination, in fact, is one of the major themes of the novel. His whip likes control and contradictory religious beliefs have a negative effect on the family. They are also forced to hide things and keep secrets among themselves.
Autocracy and dictatorship affect different people in different ways. The post-colonial disintegration of indigenous culture of Nigeria is also seen. This is due to those who become victims of foreign cultures. Papa Eugene is a clone of the autocrat and rigid Englishmen who came as colonists. He completely accepts Western culture under which he submerges his native culture. He further forces his views on his family. This is how Kambili describes him - "He hardly spoke Igbo. He did not like us to speak in public. Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product" (dadooda.com). Eugene ignores his mother tongue and wants to impose the English language on everyone at home. Just as the British were spreading the English language in Nigeria, Eugene applies the same strategy - but among his near and dear ones. It is a miming at the microcosm level what is happening within the Macrocosm.

Eugene also suffers from other post-colonial syndromes - he has multiple personalities. He claims to be a very religious man, but respects his wife's father more because he has conformed to the Christian faith and he does not respect his own father because he is a non conformist. Kambili observes: "It was so different from the way Papa had treated my maternal grandfather. He determinedly spoke English and he knew Latin and he had insisted that we call him Grandfather, in English. Papa still talked about him often, his eyes proud" (dadooda.com). Eugene allows Kambili and Jaja to meet their fraternal grandfather only at times and that also for only fifteen minutes. He tries to portray himself as a perfect man by speaking in English and being religious and suggesting that his example should be emulated. By his attitude he brings chaos and confusion in his house.
This insistence is why Jaja does not want to go to mass. This is also the reason for Kambili's immaturity and Beatrice's numbness. Papa Eugene's autocratic ways makes fear lurk in every nook and corner of the house. He does not hesitate to kick his daughter, who had to be admitted to hospital and was too frightened to tell the doctor that her father beat her up. Thus Kambili shares, "Even the hot pain in my side had become lukewarm. I told the doctor it was as bad as before and I screamed when he tried to feel my side. I did not want to leave the hospital. I did not want to go home" (dadooda.com). Even his wife has undergone traumatic experiences.

Chapter thirteen describes one such incident. Mama Beatrice goes to aunt Ifeoma's house and tells her that she has to go to hospital. She looks at Jaja and Kambili and says, "You know the small table where we keep the family Bible; your father broke it on my belly. My blood finished on the floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it. I was six weeks gone" (dadooda.com). The family is extremely shocked after listening to this. Eugene calls in the evening and aunt Ifeoma picked up the phone and angrily told him that Beatrice would not be going home (to such a monster). But when Beatrice comes to know, she quickly calls Eugene and informs Aunt Ifeoma that, "We are leaving tomorrow. The children and I. Eugene is coming himself to pick us up" (dadooda.com). Beatrice is very frightened of the consequences of not returning to Eugene, so she ignores Aunt Ifeoma's attempt to save her from the torture of Eugene's constant torture. By beating Kambili and Beatrice, Eugene feels superior and powerful and feels that through it he gets the respect he deserves.
Another theme of the novel is secrecy. Because of domination and terrorizing there is a constant atmosphere of fear which prevails. This muffles openness and thus secrets are kept which cause mental destruction. For example, Aunt Ifeoma convinced Eugene to send Jaja and Kambili to stay with her, Amaka, Chima and Obiora. Papa Eugene gives both Jaja and Kambili a schedule to follow when they are there. When Aunt Ifeoma comes to know this she scoffs and laughs at the idea and says, “Eugene gave you a schedule to follow when you’re here? I will keep them for you until you leave” (dadooda.com). She considers it ridiculous to follow a routine when children are on holiday. Kambili and Jaja feel guilty for not following the schedule their father wants them to. But this is kept a secret and Eugene is not told.

Eugene too has his secrets. Eugene’s father had exposed him to pagan rituals. Eugene does not want his children to know this because they might think he is weak and going against his beliefs. Papa Eugene is a typical post-colonial phenomenon. He is obsessed with power and control and wants to remain the sole dictator in his family. His way of receiving respect and maintain dominance is through violence.

Violence leads to either rebellion and fight back or silent acquiescence. Another related theme of the novel is silence. The weak are silenced. Kambili leads a very fearful and traumatic life because she is repressed and silenced by her father. The whole family keeps silent except when they open their mouths to try to please “the lord and master” of the house. They all try to repress their feelings and emotions.
Eugene himself forces his wife and children not to reveal his secrets to the world because his public face was of a philanthropist. The longing for Eugene’s approval compels the family to speak only to praise him or else remain silent. When Kambili visits her aunt’s house the first thing she says is to make her father proud. She tries to gratify her father when she says, “I sucked my tongue to unfreeze it, tasting the gritty dust. Because Papa Nnukwu is a pagan. Papa would be proud that I had said that” (dooda.com). The unfreezing of the tongue indicates how less she speaks. In contrast Amak can speak freely because her mother has raised her in that way. While Kambili and her family can only communicate with each other through their eyes and body language

Religion and politics are also important themes of the novel. Politics and power are always related to corruption. The police officers openly take bribes. The book critiques contemporary Nigeria and its rampant corruption: “Huge cheques we have written to judges, policemen and prison guards and anonymous donations to disabled veterans from the civil war” (kwenu.com/Chimamanda Adichie) Though the main focus of the novel is not the political regime, its power and influence can be seen in more subtle ways in Kambili’s father and the assassination of Ado Colaer.

Though violence and oppression are one of the major themes of the novel, love and hope also form important thematic threads. The flower purple Hibiscus symbolizes hope for the future and the garden in which the flower grows at Aunt Ifeoma’s house symbolizes freedom. Though they are not
financially well off, they are rich in the wealth of love, togetherness and self-awareness.

The English that Kambili speaks is peppered with Igbo words and Nigenanisms. This draws the reader into getting a feel of Nigeria. The readers come to know about Nigerian life and idiom – their customs and traditions. The Geographical space that the novel covers ranges from scenic hillsides of Enugu and Nsukka to the unpaved, dusty, rural roads of Abba and Aokpe. The reader gets glimpses of contemporary Nigerian life in the rural and urban sectors.

Adichie is an Igbo and is thus familiar with the language and culture. The novel uses many Igbo expressions and idioms. Her style of writing is elegant, full of grace and appears effortless. Her art of characterization is skilful. She deftly creates and develops complex characters. The contradictions within a character are well brought out, as in Eugene who on the one hand is a generous, compassionate citizen to the outer world while on the other is a relentless tyrant at home. His motives are also analysed.

The novel is a powerful and moving evocation of formative years of a young girl - the complication of relationships and the confusion and ambiguity rife in a politically oppressed country. The cruel life in her family is juxtaposed with the goodness, happiness and love present in aunt Ifeoma's family. In her own family, violence, becomes self-destructive. His violent behaviour tears his family to bits and eventually leads to his death at the hands of his own wife and the son implicates himself for the crime. This is the final, shocking twist of the novel.
Modern Nigeria is also a country divided from within after the colonizers leave. They form a so-called democracy which is nothing but a miming of the British oppression and the leaders are all corrupt and out to make money. These puppet political regimes were supported by the colonizers. Politics had the added complication of tribal affiliation and the influence of the language and religion brought by the superior whites to civilize the black natives. The novel shows with great insight a country trying to balance the pressures of individual, religious and tribal values while learning to be democratic. There is also satire on a nation fallen into self doubt and pity where - "The educated ones leave. the ones with the potential to the right the wrongs” (kwenu.com/Chimamanda Adichie). The Igbo life style is also critiqued: "Why many Igbo people built huge houses in their hometowns, where they spent only a week or two in December yet were content to live in cramped quarters in the city” (kwenu.com/Chimamanda Adichie).

The title of the novel is also very carefully chosen. A hibiscus flower is generally red in colour. But the novel is called *Purple Hibiscus*. This is symbolic and the purple colour represents abnormality and unending hope. It is an engrossing and moving story of a dysfunctional family, which ends in tragedy but there are also glimpses of the hope of a better life ahead. Overall, it is a fascinating book.

Adichie renders this coming-of-age story beautifully. Every character has dimension; every description resonates like cello music.... [Her] strong, lyrical voice earns her a place on the
shelf squarely next to Gabriel García Márquez and Alex Haley and Chinua Achebe. (halfofayellowsun.com)

ii. *Half of Yellow Sun*

Adichie’s other noteworthy work is *Half of Yellow Sun*. It centres around the Nigerian-Biafra war:

*Half of a Yellow Sun* entirely absorbs the reader . . . [and] leaves you reeling at the horrors people can inflict on one another. Set during the internecine Nigeria-Biafra conflict, it is a bootless, toothless cry against the wickedness of what one character describes as ‘the custodians of fate.’ The stark maturity of its vision is so startling that the great African novelist Chinua Achebe refused to believe the book could have been written by someone so young . . . From the very first page you understand just what he means. Adichie resolutely refuses to show off. She writes in a stately, almost grandiloquent manner—the mode of eons-old epics about civilizations battered by war—and relies on the potency of her story rather than flashy phrase-making to sustain the interest of her reader . . . . Adichie dramatizes the savage diurnal grind as her characters struggle to survive Biafra in the face of bombing raids, starvation and the constant threat of being overrun by Nigerian ‘vandals.’ Atrocity is ever-present, included not for shock value but simply because such horrors happened . . . Masterfully understated . . . the book takes on an urgent, visceral power . . . [Over] the course of the book
Adichie explains her aim in writing the novel, “I wanted to write about love and war, because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra, because I lost both my grandfathers in the Biafra-Nigerian war, because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present.....” (Walder 130).

The story is about love and war and the period is between 1967 and 1970. The incidents affect the lives of four characters - ranging from high-ranking political figures, a professor, a British citizen and a houseboy. The first clash occurs in the dispute as to what government would rule after the British leave Nigeria. The controversy leads to Nigerian - Biafra war. The personal lives of the four characters are shattered by the war.

The British left Nigeria amid in a state of disorder. It was a collection of diverse regional fragments, held loosely together. All groups were vying against each other to gain political advancement and control. This also led to Nigerians massacring their own Northern Igbo people. These people were those who dominated most of the country’s civil services. The Igbo’s retaliated because they were victimized. They formed their own independent state of Biafra.

The Nigerians then tried to get it back. Biafra was a bone of contention because it is rich in oil reserves and has great economic potential. This led to a devastating consequence - a three year civil war. In 1970, the war ended when Biafra was forced to surrender. They were in a pitiable condition. They
were victims of human brutality and the brutality of nature. They suffered severe famine and more than a million people died of starvation.

Adichie’s novel is based on the lives of these Igbo people during the time of the war. The book begins in the early 1960’s which was a time of peace - “The Republic of Biafra was a secessionist state in south-eastern Nigeria. Biafra was inhabited mostly by the Igbo people and existed from 30 May 1967, to 15 January 1970” (halfofayellowsun.com). It is in this background that the main characters are introduced. First, we follow Ugwu who is fifteen years old and leaves his village for Nsukka. He works as a houseboy for Odenigbo. He is an intellectual and a mathematician. He meets his scholarly friends and they have intellectual discussion and heated arguments about the state of affairs in Nigeria.

Though Ugwu comes from a poor family, he is intelligent and keen listener and while serving them, learns a lot. He stands out among the other characters for his enthusiasm, loyalty and intellectual curiosity. In the beginning of the novel he is an ignorant teenager from a poor village. By the end of the book he becomes a valued member of the family writing a book about the history of his country.

The second character to join the household is a girl called Olanna. She is an attractive young woman who has a university degree and speaks excellent English. She belongs to a wealthy English family. Her family cannot understand her relationship with Odenigbo. They want her to marry a normal young man - Madu, who is a major in the Biafran army.
Olanna is attracted to Odenigbo as he is confident, different, has strong opinions and is a little weird. She comes to Nsukka to live with her “revolutionary lover”. Olanna’s narrative brings the human cost of war. She is a witness to the cruel massacre of her relative’s home-town. Her fall from privilege to poverty is also tragic. She goes through trauma and depression but there is also the emergence of a new spirit.

Olanna also has a twin sister, Kaianne. Here steps in another character, Richard Churchill. He is a handsome English-man in love with Kaianne. Churchill moves to Nigeria as he loves African things and has the sensitivity of a writer. He is an aspiring writer. He is studying African art and has been employed to write articles about the war for the outside world. But his role is that of a mere bystander and as a character he appears weak and does not leave an impression.

The events leading to the outbreak of the war are seen through these three perspectives. The war starts. There is bombardment on Biafra land and many people are killed or displaced. There is large scale destruction, but the Biafrans fight valiantly. Refuge camps are set up in classrooms. Volunteers run around distributing food and hope. Olanna’s contribution is in imparting education to starving children, specially making them aware about Biafra. She shows them Odenigbo’s flag and explains their symbols. She explains that the Red colour stands for mourning for them. The Green colour represents the prosperity Biafra aspires to achieve and *Half of Yellow Sun* indicates the splendid future of Biafra.
Initially the Biafarns fight with Great Spirit and hope. They follow the inspiration of their optimistic song: "If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise" (instablogs.com). But with war, tragedy and failure their voices become muted. Despair and destruction take a toll. The people cry and beat themselves. Grown men are described as sucking their thumbs in despair. Mothers scream in mourning, leaders and masters like Odenigbo become undignified and angry in frustration. Those involved in social work (like Olanna) are wounded to the core and feel numb. Love, friendship and relationships are tested. The reality of the destructive of war shatters all. The world around just watch callously.

The narrative moves backwards and forwards in time. The point of view shifts from Ugwu, to Olanna and Odenigbo and. It alternates between these three characters. There is a sensitive, intermingling of the politics of the day and the touching, humane story of three human beings affected by fear, famine and violence. It is interesting to note their different response to the situation. Each of the three characters is different and comes from a different background. The way they think, act, respond and react are different. This makes the narrative very believable, human and also personal. The reader can sympathize with their plight.

Other themes and ideas that Adichie deals with are identity, nationhood, racism, fear, sexism, colonialism, power games, betrayal, personal relationships etc. These themes are handled through several minor characters. It is thus a character-driven novel and the presence of these characters enables the author to handle complex themes with great skill.
The hopes and fears of the Igbo people are reflected in the ordinary passions and desires of Ugwu and Olanna. With the political conditions becoming more serious, the idealism of the Biafrans is shattered by the reality of war. But individuals like Ugwu and Olanna survive as they live more for their family and friends than for ideals. Their spirit, loyalty and friends hope are a tribute to those who had lived through the crisis that had taken place between 1967 and 1970.

Richard attempts to write about his experiences, but is not able to. At the close of the book Ugwu becomes a writer and gives an eyewitness account of the war. Adichie justifies her choice in the following words within the book — “Wanted to make a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa” (halfofayellowsun.com).

The technique of a book within a book is also used. Extracts from Ugwu’s book appear throughout *Half of Yellow Sun*. Nigeria, in the beginning of independence in 1960 is said to be “a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp.” The title of Ugwu’s book is *The World was Silent When We Died*. It expresses the abandonment felt by the Biafrans during the war, which was also felt by former colonial powers and fellow African Nations. Adichie feels both are to blame — the Nigerian Northerners and Biafran Southerners. As Olanna remarks, “[The British] may have collected the firewood, but we lit the match” (damaris.org). This admission of responsibility is refreshing. It would only have articulated by a Nigerian voice. Adichie shows politics flawed from all sides. The imitation of colonial politics and seduction of intellectualism are juxtaposed with the permanent values of loyalty, respect and tolerance.
Richard, the Englishman is first shown as inexperienced and clueless. But he is also arrogant. He dreams of speaking for a country that he has just arrived into. He changes for the better. Initially, he would become defensive when anybody pointed out his arrogance. From this, he matures and develops into a good listener who develops fair judgement. He is aware of the humanity of those whom he meets regardless of race or colour of skin. He does not like Susan’s racism, though he himself is not entirely devoid of it. Later in the novel, he pities two journalists (whom he takes round) for their pre-conceived notions about Africa and Africans. He accepts the fact that certain stories are not for him to tell. He falls in love with an Igbo girl. Near the end, he falls into sorrowful but impotent racism against a military officer, who he fears is a rival for his Igbo lover.

Ugwu’s story enables Adichie to comment on class and the great importance of focusing on every individual as a human being. Ugwu is uneducated, but intelligent. When he comes to work for Odenigbo, he encourages him to read and also enrolls him at a school. This allows Ugwu to do something important towards the end.

The personal drama of characters revolves around family estrangement, affairs, illegitimate children, class and racial problems and so on. Adichie handles all the small dramas very skilfully and prevents them from deteriorating into melodrama, sentimentality or exaggeration. War appears mundane because of the even-handed treatment. Horror crops up from unexpected quarters. For example, after the ethnic cleansing against the Biafrans, Olanna is returning in a train crowded by refuges, who are running away. There she is haunted by
the decapitated head of a woman’s child, which the woman keeps in a Calabash. The language used by Adichie here is simple, direct, yet hitting and shocking in its simplicity.

Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl’s head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed.

The woman closed the calabash. “Do you know,” she said, “it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair.”

(tumblr.com)

For those caught up in the war, there is an intense longing for the normal. Kainene against military orders goes into enemy territory to continue her black market business. She provides food for refuge camps. This is mainly a quest for order. Adichie writes about how war rips apart lives. Death becomes arbitrary vicious and brutal. Richard also realizes this when an airport official is murdered by Nigerian soldiers as they discover that he is an Igbo.

Much of Ugwu’s story deals with forceful recruitment into the army. This is because he had gone through the experience of being snatched by Biafran soldiers and forced into fighting the civil war. Ugwu’s account of his experiences at the training camp is heart rending as well as ironic because the Biafran army lacks weapons training and discipline. They cannot stand up against the better equipped Nigerian army Ugwu wants to place in context what is happening in his country. He is also obsessed with a paperback copy
of Fredrick Douglass's autobiography. There are various cruel acts that haunt him, specially the one in which young soldiers terrorize a barmaid.

The centre is formed by Olanna and Odenigbo's relationship who have to struggle and work at overcoming usual marriage problems. There is the larger struggle between Biafra and Nigeria. The spark of hope in their reconciliation during their journey from their home to refugee camps provides a light of hope that Biafra and Nigeria will overcome their regional difference and peace will prevail in both war-ravaged nations.

Even though Half of Yellow Sun is related from a Biafran point of view, Adichie makes a sincere effort to humanize all sides of the conflict. We learn that there are three ethnic groups - in Nigeria - the Yoruba, the Igbo and the Hausa in North. After a series of massacres in the North, the Igbo decided to have their own state. So Biafra is created. But it is short lived as Nigeria puts in all its strength to end it. So, war broke out Adichie makes all these complex political issues easy to understand by also inserting a personal colour by showing the psychological impact of war.

It is a moving novel because it is not a mere war novel. It is a novel about relationships - between parents and children and men and women. It also shows how people learn to adapt and adjust and cope with life. It is also a perfect example of the saying "the personal is political".

The novel talks about a particular war but shows the universal consequences of war-how it fosters distrust and makes monsters of people, how people have to live with uncertainty and fear every day. But despite all this the novel is
also uplifting. It shows the worth and courage of man to fight odds. It is a story of survival and above all, the story of ordinary lives which need to be told as much as the globally story. It shows how even if events go beyond our control, even beyond the limits of reasoning, still hope remains alive. Revolutionary aspirations may crash, but those who survive cherish the finer aspects of life. Eventually, it is loving and endurance and not a call to arms which give the characters what they need to survive.

Adichie herself had felt the impact of the war as both her grandfather’s deed during the civil war. One of her five siblings was born “in the thick of war”. He faced near death as a baby, when he was given some palm wine by her father’s friend. This is introduced as an infant’s experience in the book. Another reason for her choice of writing about the war is that she considers its impact central to the way her country is today. There is great diversity in Nigeria. But there is a lot of poverty there. There are several ethnic groups who speak hundreds of different languages; the title refers to one of the components of the flag of Biafara - a son that is mid-way through rising.

After the war, Nigeria stayed restlessly together. After independence, its oil wealth was exploited by multinationals, officials in military and civilian governments and other expatriate and Nigerian elites. Many people see it as a natural outcome of Britain’s divide and rule policy. Adichie is of the opinion that Nigeria was not given the tools to handle itself after independence. Nigeria was set up to fail. The only thing we Nigerians should take responsibility for the extent of failure.
By writing this novel, Adichie tries to explore the belief of some people that their experiences of migration and persecution in Nigeria have made the Igbo the "Jews of Africa". *Half of Yellow Sun* describes the Holocaust carefully and in a subtle manner. There is a balanced historical comparison in the novel. The book provides a true picture of the war. She has played with history and altered minor details, like; she has shortened the distance between towns and has created a station, where there isn't one. About her own book Adichie says, "If fiction is indeed the soul of history, then I was equally committed to the fiction and the history, equally true to the spirit of the time as well as to my artistic vision of it" (guardian.co.uk).

*Half of Yellow Sun* is a wonderful mixture of the emotional and factual. Her fiction also has the power that Adichie sees in Achebe's work:

> Achebe’s war fiction then, humane and pragmatic as it is, becomes a paean to the possibilities that the Biafra held. The stories have an emotional power that accumulates in an unobtrusive way and stuns the reader at the end; there are sentences in them that will always move me to tears.

(_guardian.co.uk_)

### iii. *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Adichie's third book is a collection of twelve short stories titled *The Thing around Your Neck*. It was published in April 2009. The stories are set in Nigeria, America or Cape Town. Though the stories are not linked, a common thread runs through them. Some themes are religious fanaticism,
religious and cultural clash between Christians and Nigerians, interaction between traditional religion and Christianity and married life. *The Thing around Your Neck* is rich with references to history, culture and literature. The twelve short stories are:

1. Cell One
2. Imitation
3. A Private Experience
4. Ghosts
5. On Monday of Last Week
6. Jumping Monkey Hill
7. The Thing Around Your Neck
8. The American Embassy
9. The Shivering
10. The Arrangers of Marriage
11. Tomorrow Is Too Far
12. The Headstrong Historian

The first story *Cell One* deals with corruption and police brutality. Though this is a common topic for Nigerian literature, Adichie deals with the theme in a fresh way. The setting of the story is a University campus. There are some bad elements - young men who are engaged in criminal activity. They belong to gangs who steal, fight and kill. "... eighteen-year-olds who had mastered the swagger of American rap videos were undergoing secret and strange initiations that sometimes left one or two of them dead on Odim Hill" (npr.org). The
narrator is a girl. The story begins like this - “The first time our house was robbed; it was our neighbour Osita who climbed in through the dining room window and stole…” (articles.cnn.com). The description is trite, crisp and racy and catches the reader’s attention. The use of the active voice also sets a racy pitch. The story is about how the narrator’s teenage brother, Nnamabia is arrested by the police after a gang has run riot, shooting students and finally escaping in a professor’s car. It is not really clarified whether he is really guilty or not. Still, he is imprisoned without a charge and left to the mercy of corrupt policemen.

Her brother is kept in cell one. It is a place where several people have lost their lives. It is a place where criminals are treated roughly. There is head bashing and vicious kicking. The gory details do not shock the reader because of the skills of narration, where details are revealed slowly by building up suspense.

Suspense is built up very skillfully throughout the story. Nnamabia’s parents and his sister arrived one day to meet him in the prison. They hoped he would be released because orders for his release had come from higher authorities. But they found that the theory had vanished.

Many insignificant details leave a lasting impression on the reader. In the story Nnamabia emerges as a sober and mature teenager. Obviously he matures as a result of what he witnesses in the cell. He also forces the police, at a great rise to himself, to treat and old man in the cell with dignity. He fought for another man.
The contradictions pushed into each individual life are also caught in this story. It enhances our awareness that most individuals are loving at one moment and cruel at times. For example, the narrator of the story knows that her brother Nnambia steals and sells. Yet she loves and admires him. She also knows one of his brother’s friends also steals, but secretly she admires his style. However, there are moments of frustration especially for her brother: “His tone (Nnamabia) was histrionic. I wanted to ask him to shut up...because he did not understand how lucky he was that the policemen allowed him to come out and enjoy our food” (tribune.com.ng).

*Private Experience* is a story about one of the tremendous problems faced in a post-colonial world resulting from clash of cultures. It is about religious intolerance existing between the Igbo Christians and the Hausa Muslims in North Nigeria. The setting is a place called Kano in North Nigeria.

Riots broke out when the Hausa Muslims went against Igbo Christians. During the riots, two women take refuge in a small shack. One is an Igbo medical student, the other, a Hausa market trader. They interact with each other briefly and it affirms the power of humanity to resist tribal warfare. Adichie has the skill of evoking a scene graphically. Thus, the riot-torn street outside the shack is described in the following way – “smell like the kind of sky-coloured smoke that wafts around during Christmas when people throw goat carcasses into fires to burn the hair off the skin” (nairaland.com).

Adichie has also written stories about immigration to the U. S. She highlights adjustments required when one arrives in the world’s most advanced and powerful country. In the story a bored housewife (an Igbo) Nkem, has been
sent to a smart American suburb by her husband (a businessman). She cannot speak English correctly and feels embarrassed and powerless there. She finds out that her husband has a mistress in Nigeria. This makes her angry, but she gathers courage and asserts herself by taking control of the situation, silences and forces obedience from her husband.

Ghosts is another interesting story. It is the only story with a male protagonist. The main character James Nwoye is modeled after her own father James Nwoye Adichie who was a professor of mathematics. The protagonist of Ghosts is the first professor of statistics in Nigeria. The story is set after the Biafra war and is about the lives of two university lecturers. The story may seem an extension of Half of Yellow Sun, because there are certain parallels especially in the violation of lecturers’ bungalows and the death of Christopher Okigbo during the Biafra war. The story is an intermingling of fact and fiction. In reality, Chris Okigbo died while fighting the Biafra war. Okeoma in Half of Yellow Sun is based on the character of Chris. There is more than one ghost in Ghosts. This indicates the depth of the story.

The lives of Nigerian immigrants in America are shown with great realism in the two stories On Monday Last Week and The Shivering. Adichie shows how the immigrants have to struggle for their living whether it is obtaining a working permit or a green card. She also portrays the cultural shock they have to suffer.

Jumping Monkey Hill is a more complex and different story. The story is about the African writers workshop held outside Cape Town at a resort. The workshop is sponsored by the British Council and chaired by Edward
Campbell, an old Africa hand with an accent. The Blacks are seven out of the eight participants. Like most such workshops, the writers are expected to spend part of the time writing and then read their work aloud. After this, usually follows a critical review by the participants. Again like most workshops, each character has a personal agenda, from fawning attention to aggressive isolation. Adichie spices up the narration with excerpts from the story written by the narrator and which is presented in the group.

The story *The Thing Around Your Neck* further explores “the American dream” and the experience of those who go there in pursuit of a better life and success. The female protagonist of the story is a Nigerian woman who is attracted towards American after reading about its progress and opportunities it offers. Her name is Akunna, which is also significant because it signifies opportunities and success. Her family is also convinced about it and expects her to be very successful and send them presents from there: “In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don’t buy a gun like those Americans” (www.all-story.com).

Akunna goes to America and stays with her uncle. Soon she is a victim of racial discrimination. The blacks are not given the same rights as the whites. For example, they are not allowed to use the same hairdresser. Her uncle also tells her that, “The trick was to understand America, to know that America was give-and-take You gave up a lot but you gained a lot too” (immigrantconnect.org). Though her uncle is a black man, he has accepted this inequality. This inequality has become a stark reality and is deeply rooted and accepted universally. When her uncle starts to abuse Akunna, she is strong
enough not to take it and leave her uncle's house to venture out in an alien land alone.

The exploitation of immigrants is obvious in the way in which they have to work for a lesser salary than the whites, for the same work. Akunna takes up the job of a waitress and gets lesser salary than the others. In fact, she is made to work more hours for less money. But she is very hardworking because she studies along with doing her job.

However, Akunna finds it extremely difficult to adjust to American society. She observes that Americans have very little idea about Africa and its culture. She comments:

Some people thought you were from Jamaica because they thought that every black person with an accent was Jamaican.

Or some who guessed that you were African asked if you knew so and so from Kenya or so and so from Zimbabwe because they thought Africa was a country where everyone knew everyone else. (immigrantconnect.org)

So when she meets a man who is actually aware of her background and roots, she is very impressed and falls in love with him. But there are other things, attitudes and values which are very different for him. Akunna is very loyal to her parents. She regularly sends them money, even though she does not earn enough. So, the fact that her boyfriend does not care much for his parents puzzles and confuses her. Both have very different ideas about money also.
The turning point in the story comes when she receives a letter from her mother informing her about the sad demise of her father. She then takes the decision to leave her boyfriend and return home. She also realizes that she cannot achieve success in America and goes back home, to her roots. The story critiques the American dream and bursts the bubble that America is a land of opportunities, wealth and comfort. The story is unfolded through second person narrative and yet involves closely with the protagonists experiences.

A significant detail is that we never get to know the name of Akunna's boyfriend. He thus appears as a mere symbol of the American attitude towards life. The title The Thing around Your Neck symbolizes homesickness and loneliness which one has to face being away from home.

The story The American Embassy has a new technique of unfolding the story. A woman loses her son as he is shot by soldiers because of her husband's anti-government article. She wants political asylum in the U.S and so is waiting in a line at the U.S embassy for an interview. While waiting in the line the story of her marriage, her son and the event leading to her son's death are unfolded through reminiscence. But by remembering the past, the woman gains a new insight. She starts feeling that she would be using her son's death to her advantage and does not want this. In the end, she simply turns around and walks out.

Arrangers of Marriages shows how marriage can be exploited for personal gain - getting a green card. Chinaza has had arranged marriage of convenience and she does not feel any joy in it. She is married to Udenwa, who wants to
be called ‘Dave’ as he behaves that in order to progress one has to be like Americans. Chinaza refuses to call him by that name and refers to him as “my new husband”.

This indicates the gulf between them. In her eagerness to leave America, she complains to an African-American who has taken on a Swahili name. She is shocked when she hears that, this girl - Nia had physical intimacy with her husband. Chinaza had come to Nia after discovering that her husband had married a white lady in order to get a green card. In the story *Arrangers of Marriages* there are two arranged marriages - involving one man – one to get a green card and the other to get a Nigerian wife. It focuses on exploitation for achieving personal gains even in a close relationship like marriage.

The story *Tomorrow is Too Far* is about gender discrimination. Adchie’s protagonist reminds us of Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. The story centres around sibling rivalry caused by a patriarchal society. The girl hates her brother Nsono because he is spoilt by the entire family and gets all the care and attention of their mother. The girl also sensitively observes that her mother is happier putting her brother to bed than putting her daughter to bed. Thus she is jealous of her brother. Even when the children go to Nigeria to visit their grandmother, it is the same story. She treats the boy like a prince, cooks his favourite dishes, while she instructs the girl to learn how to take care of a man. The girl feels ignored and resentful.

Just like *Nervous Conditions* the boy dies a death; the sister accidentally causes and then blames the grandmother. Like Tambu, at first, she is not sorry for the death of her brother because now she gets all the attention of her family.
But the mother is not the same again and she does not meet her grandmother again. She only goes there after eighteen years, in her funeral. Adichie critiques the patriarchal society and looks at both the negative and positive aspects of Nigerian and American values.

*The Headstrong Historian* is a story which has been greatly influenced by Achebe. Adichie takes her characters straight from Achebe’s writing but gives them a new historical perspective. When we read the names Okonkwo and Obierika, we are reminded of Umuofia. *The Headstrong Historian* also deals with themes like the white man’s burden to civilize the natives through English language and conversion to Christianity. However, Adichie brings in a feminine viewpoint. The protagonist of the story is a very useful from the white men. She sends her son to school to learn English because she is aware of the power the English language. But her son changes beyond expectation.

In the story, Adichie shows two cultures in contact and contest and two cultures at loggerheads seething with suspicion. As far as the portrayal of Nigerian history is concerned, nothing is new. We also have our headstrong historian rewriting the history of her people which has been misrepresented by the Europeans.

Some of the questions Achebe raises at the end of *Things Fall Apart* are answered by Adichie in her story. She shows, in the story, what daughters can do to extent the legacy of their fathers. The daughter of the story takes it upon her shoulders to reconstruct her people’s history.

As she has been educated in a mission school, she is familiar with Christianity. But she rebels against it as she is able to see the contradictions
latent within it. So, even though her father is against it, she reconnects with her grandmother who has always known that the daughter will pay a special role in the spiritual future of the family. This is how Adichie takes the popular Umuofia story to greater heights.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo always wishes for a son who would take care of the family's legacy. He also observes that his youngest daughter has the wisdom he wants to see in a man. He feels proud of her but not satisfied because a girl could not assume that role. Adichie’s story deals with an Onicha that needs its culture preserved and story related correctly. The girl Afamefuna is the “headstrong historian” who searches every village for clues of peoples past, even travelling to museums in history to follow traces of that history, which is almost erased by the colonists. Afamefuna writes a book entitled *Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed, History of Southern Nigeria*.

Adichie’s style of writing bears a unique stamp. While reading her stories one feels close to the story-teller as if she were relating those stories over tea. Her tone is engaging, consistent and often lyrical. Most of the time, she has a refreshing, positive outlook. There are certain recurrent motifs. For example, people moving through doors, windows or open-spaces:

She smiles a slight, distracted smile ... and turns to climb out of the window. (africanwriter.com)

He is walking away. And you are weeping, standing alone under the avocado tree. (africanwriter.com)
I rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside, and let me pass. (africanwriter.com)

Father Patrick was walking up and down, flicking water on the people... (africanwriter.com)

It was Grace who, feeling an odd rootlessness in the later years of her life ... would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna. (africanwriter.com)

She is a master story-teller and her characters portrayal is full of insight and sensitivity, tracing their aspirations, success, failures or disappointments. Many of the characters seem restless, trapped between what they have left behind and what they had imagined or expected - the dichotomy between expectation and reality.

In such cases dreams and aspirations are not fulfilled. They come to a point where the realization dawns upon them that they are on futile journeys. This realization appears as a strangling feeling - something around the neck. But that does not mean something around the feet. They are mobile. They are in search of love happiness and for this are ready to leave Nigeria for America and even America for Nigeria.

Besides moving, the characters are passionately engaged in thinking, talking, silence, ponderous thoughts, words and even ponderous silences. In Cell One, when the narrator’s brother chooses to remain silent about his experiences in the jail, she is left with no choice but to imagine him -“Raising his voice,
calling the policeman a stupid idiot, a spineless coward, a sadist, a bastard…” (africanwrter.com). In the story *Jumping Monkey Hill*, Edward, an old white man who loves Africa is a fervent talker. He talks to a group of African writers whom he expects would listen to him questionably. In the *American Embassy*, the chief talker is “[a] nondescript face with a dark complexion unusually smooth for a man.” (afncanwrter.com). “Ugonna’s mother” the heroine of the story is mainly silent, enmeshed in a revere born of the trauma of losing her four-year-old child to the bullets fired by assassins. But in front of the American interviewer, she chooses to be silent.

Overall, Adichie’s stories are powerful and well crafted. It’s an interesting collection even though it cannot be compared to *Purple Hibiscus* or *Half of Yellow Sun*.

2. **Nnedi Okorafor**

Nnedi Okrafor is a Nigerian writer who has chosen the genre of fantasy for her writings. Her stories reflect her West African heritage as well as her American life. She has three books to her credit - *Zarah the Windseeker*, *The Shadow Speaker* and *Who Fears Death*. *The Shadow Speaker* was the winner of the Carl, Brandon Parallax Award. *Zara the Windseeker* bagged the Wole Soyinka prize for literature in Africa, while *Who Fears Death* was nominated for the 2010 Nebula Award.

It is interesting to note that Nnedi wanted to become an entomologist when she was young. But she ended up becoming a writer. However she maintained
her interest in and fascinated for insects and nature and this is reflected in her novels which have striking flora and fauna. Her characters have superhuman strength - they can fly, read minds etc. She was inspired by writers like Octavia Butler, Stephen King, Ben Okri, Tove Jamsson, Hayao Miyazaki and Ngugi Wa Thiongo.

\textbf{i. The Shadow Speaker}

\textit{The Shadow Speaker} is a young adult novel. Nnedi Okorafor says this about \textit{The Shadow Speaker} – "Spontaneous forests, polygamy, strange insects, Nigerian 419 scammers, really really fast cars, a different kind of Sahara Desert, male beauty contests, the apocalypse, life, death, sword fights, fat chiefs, assassins, this novel is kind of nuts" (nnedi.com). The novel is set in the year 2070. It uses first person narrative. It employs science fiction as well as fantasy. The story is set in a futuristic, magical universe with planets beyond the earth. The main voice of the story is a 14-15 year old Muslim girl called Ejn Ugabe. She does not live in a futuristic America or Britain but in Nigeria. She is Black and speaks many languages. It’s the visualization of a world of peace. Ejji lives in a world post - “Peace Bomb”.

Nuclear war leads to the release of these bombs. The main aim of these bombs is to spread peace by causing mutations in the human population. These bombs release magic into the world. This new world of magic is occupied with desert magicians, screaming storms, talking camels etc.

Ejii is a “shadow speaker” she can communicate with shadows, read thoughts and feelings of people who come in contact with her. She is the daughter of
a former dictator. She also witnesses his death at the hands of Sarauniya Jaa who brought peace through violent means, to his region. A few years later, Ejii finds out that Jaa wants to groom her as his successor. But Ejii’s mother feels that she is too young for such a responsibility. The shadows tell Ejii that she should follow Jaa in order to prevent a war between the earth and planet Ginen. So she sets out with her speaking camel called Onion, in order to prevent the war.

Ejii and her friends used to communicate with each other with the help of a technological device called the “Elegba”. Ejii travels by camel and at times, puts on the burqa. Okorafor creates a complex and detailed world projecting a dream and fantastic world for Africa in the future. Ejii is a mixture of the past and the future. Her father was a fundamentalist and plays significant role in the way she behaves and acts as a woman. He believed that women have a very important and limited role to play. While he ruled the village, Ejii was happy within her prescribed roles. But Jaa (a strong woman warrior) gets him killed and liberates the people from his tyranny.

With the shadow of her father removed, Ejii feels the need to stand on her own feet. Her search for Jaa is also a quest which leads to her recognition of her limitations and upbringing and she has to choose which roles she will play. Ejii shares a love-hate relationship with Jaa.

Though Ejii is a Black Muslim, this is not a race novel. The readers find contrary portrayals of Islam. Ejii’s father is described as so terrible that he has to be publically executed in the name of justice. This brings change into the
two towns even before Ejii’s story begins. Ejii describes the change which seems to be “Islamification” of the town:

He returned a month later a changed man. He rode into town on bejewelled camel, wearing a golden caftan and turban and an equally golden smile. [...] When Kwamfa was Jaa’s town, everyone learned how to shoot a gun, ride a camel, take apart and rebuild a computer. Girls and women with meta-abilities were allowed to hone their skills and learn from elders. My father put an end to all of this. (nnedi.com)

Further, at another place, the protagonist shares:

Women and girls are too beautiful to dirty their hands with such things’, he told the people with a soft chuckle. The men would agree and the women and girls would feel flattered and demurely smile. My father also thought women and girls too beautiful to be seen, so he brought back and enforced the requirement of wearing a burka or veil at all times. And he cut off several food and housing programs, which left many people very poor. (nnedi.com)

The author herself is not a Muslim, nor does she specify that these changes are due to Ejii’s father’s “Muslimness”. The author only draws a parallel between Islam and the conservative dress not native to the region. When Ejii visits Agadez, which is an old Muslim city full of people, from Arab to African, she drapes a veil over her head to be seen as one with the many
women wearing veils and burkas. Ejii’s dress varies. Sometimes she wears a full-body veil. Sometimes she throws it off to show the dress underneath.

Jaa serves as a kind of mentor to Ejii. It is associated with the other changes brought by her father - the subordination of women. Throughout the novel, Ejii struggles to overcome the submissive behaviour learnt from her father. When her mother tells Ejii that she should not walk behind her male friends, she makes a conscious effort not to step behind when walking with males.

Okorafor has a unique style. She can incorporate fantastical creatures and talents into the story as well as the everyday-ness of Islam into Ejii’s life. Ejii is described as praying – “That night as Ejii closed the door to her room, took off her shoes, spread her cover on the floor, knelt down, and prayed, she felt wonderfully close to Allah” (patheos.com). She is also described as not praying – “Outside, the Morning Prayer blared through the streets and Ejii felt a pang of guilt. The last few days had been so hectic that she hadn’t kept up with her prayers” (patheos.com). Though Ejii makes references to “Allah” in the novel, “Allah” is not portrayed as an Islamic God but a force that transcends description. Some aspects of Ejii’s Islam may not be acceptable to Muslim readers. For instance, the first time in the novel Ejii prays – “Ejii knelt on the ground, pressed her head to the sand, and said a prayer to all the gods and goddesses she could think of” (patheos.com).

The readers would wonder who these Gods and Goddesses are. It is not answered in the novel. The portrayal of Islam itself seems a part fantasy. Islam of 2070 seems to have no prohibitions on alcohol. For example, in the following passage – “What would you like to drink? Her mother asked Mazi
Godwin. Beer would be fine, he said And give my student here [Ejii] a glass of palm wine to calm her down" (patheos.com). Overall, it is a fascinating, engaging and creative novel. She develops a complex and detailed world of a futuristic Africa:

The Shadow Speaker is wonderful, highly original stuff, episode after amazing episode, full of colour, life and death. The people and the places in the Shadow Speaker all feel so real. Nnedi also deals head-on with the fact that power and pain are closely linked, as are magic and blood. I think this book is marvellous. (nnedi.com/shadow).

ii. Who Fears Death

Who Fears Death is another book based on fantasy. “Okorafor is a master storyteller who combines recent history, fantasy, tradition, advanced technology and culture into something wonderful and new that should not be missed” (nnedi.com/who fears death) The setting is post-apocalyptic and magical Africa. An Okeke woman is raped by a Nuru man. The woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl, whom she names Onyesonwu. The Okeke are pastoralists and craftspeople. The Nuru are urbanites who have access to slightly more technology.

Okeke’s effort at rebellion has triggered a wave of genocides. Onyesonwu’s mother is the survivor of one such assault. She escapes towards the East and after several years of displacement and wandering in the desert settles in an Okeke village. Onyesonwu has mixed features. She has a freckled face. She
has sand coloured skin and hair. This makes her an outsider from both the Nuru and Okeke people.

Onyesonwu has a male friend called Mwita (who later becomes her husband). Both are Ewu. The children born of Nuru and Okeke are called Ewu. The assumption is that they are generally children born because of rape. It is believed that they all look the same and are always violent. These markers are carried with Onyesonwu and these prejudices shape her reaction and anger against the world. She is always on the path to rebellion. Okeke also wants to be trained as a sorcerer and wants the local sorcerer to teach her and shows him her emerging power. Both Onyesonwu and Mwita train as sorceress.

She is told by her master that she will die by stoning. He explains that this is predicted by a Nuru philosophy. This triggers Onyesonwu’s pursuit. For her search she takes along her three female friends - Binta, Luyu and Dtti with whom she underwent the ritual clitoridectomy. The other people she takes with her are Mwita and Ninta. She kills the sorcerer who had turned slavery into genocide. But Mwita is killed in the process. Binta is also killed later. All the men are wiped out and all the women left pregnant.

The novel is rather complicated and the plot cannot be explained in simple terms. This completely is its beauty and it has to be felt. The intricacies can only be experienced. At the centre of the novel lies Onyesonwu’s quest. But it is much more than a quest story.

Her magical powers are an important element in the novel. She can change shape and take the form of any animal she sees. She can travel between the
worlds of the living and the dead. The novel would have been easier to understand if it were only about Onyesonwu’s coming of age as an Ewu girl in an Okeke town.

Okorafor explores and expresses Onyesonwu’s slow struggle to accept herself and find a place in her community. This leads her to defying her parents to participate in a controversial ancient Okeke ritual, the Eleventh Rite, which involves eleven-year-old girls losing a portion of their clitoris to a knife wielded by one of the town’s circle of wise old women. This scene is horrifying but very skilfully rendered.

The narration adopts the style of an African folktale. The prose style is simple yet potent and dramatic. *Who Fears Death* is written in an almost classic “first person introspective-retrospective” style. Onyesonwu narrates her mother’s rape and even her own murder of the men of the sorcerer’s village. Her narrative is focused on power relations between her friends and her father. The novel is significant because it shows women at the centre. It portrays a strong woman at the centre of a fantasy novel. Fantasy and science fiction have consistently been the domain of the white male. Okorafor’s work is a refreshing departure from the norm.

Okorafor’s parents were Nigerian immigrants. Hence she went to Nigeria often. Her beautiful, detailed description of the desert shows her close knowledge of the African landscape. The story of rape and genocide begins and ends the novel. But it is not clear whether *Who Fears Death* is a science fiction or quest narrative of saving the world from genocide or whether it was intended to be a story of a girl’s bonding, friendship and courtship problems. It is a
blend of all and the themes are handled with maturity and subtlety. Magic and the supernatural are handled with great skill and make it convincing.

Peter Beagle, bestselling and award-winning author of *The Last Unicorn*, *The Innkeeper's Song* and many more fantasy books says, “Who Fears Death is one of the most striking, chilling, truly fascinating, and all-around remarkable novels I've read in a very long time” (nnedi.com/who fears death).

3. **Chris Abani**

   i. **Graceland**

Chris Abani is a Nigerian writer. His first novel was political thriller. It was about a field Nigerian group. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government believed that the book was a blueprint for an actual coup and the eighteen year old Abani was arrested and sent to prison. He was released after six months. In 2005 his book *Graceland* was published.

*Graceland* is a story of contemporary Africa. The novel is about a teenage boy Elvis Oke who lives in Lagos - a city known for its violence. When his mother dies, he moves to one of the Ghettos - a slum called Maroko, with his father. His father wastes his time at a wine shop. So Elvis has to fend for himself. He does this by impersonating Elvis for tourists. He remains a young, restless man, without any anchors in life. A self-proclaimed activist called King of the Beggars comes into his life as a guide. He, however strays under the influence of a friend called Redemption and helps in illegal trafficking -
the cocaine business. But when he tries to involve him deeper, he finally eases himself out and tries to re-organize his life.

Graceland moves back and forth between Elvi’s earlier life in Afikpo (and Igbo village, far away from Lagos) and Lagos. The evocation of the village is superb, with its folklore based on ancient rituals.

Violence is an important part of the novel. Elvis’s fate in Lagos as well as Afikpo is rent with violence. Abani makes some strong political comments in the novel, especially on the “thieves” and the World Bank people. It also criticizes the Nigerian people:

A country often becomes what its inhabitants dream for it. Much the same way that a novel shapes a writer, the people’s perspective shapes the nation, so the country becomes the thing people want to see. Every time we complain that we don’t want to be ruled by military dictatorship, but every time there is a coup, we come out in the streets and dance and celebrate the replacement of one despot with another. How long can we continue to pretend we are not responsible for this? (curledup.com/gracelan)

Elvis eventually finds his place in the world but after going through tremendous turmoil and violence. Violence comes from anywhere. For example—“An unknown man ran toward the oncoming soldiers wielding an old Igbo sword called an akparaja. Short, wide, and double-edged, it cleaved heads off with ease, littering the floor like a pineapple harvest” (curledup.com/gracelan).
Abani has great narrative skill. The story in itself is absorbing. There is a subtle intermingling of scenes graphically described from Elvis's early life with the villagers and the male elders present engaged in the traditional eagle ceremony. But with traditions fast fading away, they have to make do with a pre-killed chick.

After some years Elvis and his alcoholic father leave the village for Lagos. It brings alive the novel. Oke is about to escape Nigeria as the author had done. Adichie illuminates the complexities of human experience through works inspired by events in her native Nigeria, while Abani brings his characters within the larger social and political forces in contemporary Nigeria.

Quincy Troupe, author of Transcircularity, Miles: The Autobiography and Miles and Me writes:

Graceland is a painful look at an urban culture seemingly always on the verge of complete societal breakdown. Chris Abani's riveting novel is a superbly written, structurally fascinating work and I found myself captivated by the hilarity of some of the scenes, often as I found myself on the verge of tears. It is a stunning debut by an immensely talented writer. (chrisabani.com/Graceland)

Wendy Belcher, Author of Honey from the Lion: an African Journey says:

This is a new kind of book. We will look back on its publication as a watershed moment in the history of postcolonial literature. It is, as the best of such novels are.
hybrid, monstrous, exilic, an indictment of the global terrorism of capital, yet it is also something we have not seen before. In Elvis we meet an African man who suffers incandescently, who watches others suffer more, yet emerges not as another tragic masculinity, but as that rarest of creatures, a hero. This is Chris Abani's gift, to transmute the harrowing into the transcendent. Believe it: Elvis is redemption.

(books.google.co.in/GraceLand)
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