

# Female Hegemony in No Sweetness Here by Ama Ata Aidoo

**Dr. M. SANDRA CARMEL SOPHIA**

*Professor of English  
Koneru Lakshmaiah Deemed to be University  
Vaddeswaram, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh*

**HIMACHANDANA KOTARI**

*Lecturer in English  
Aditya Polytechnic College  
Surampalem, Andhra Pradesh*

## Abstract

Ghanaian writer and academician, Christina Ama Ata Aidoo, pivots around the conflicting stance of modern African woman in her works, Adoo throws light on exploitation of women who are considered as unacknowledged heads of household in situations when war or unemployment leaves them without husband. Women in Africa are similar in their sufferings to Indian women who should support their children all alone without looking up to anyone for any help and support from others around them. *No Sweetness Here*, collection of short stories projects the plight of Ghana in the post-independence 1960s after Africa achieved independence. The stories are rendered so intelligently with such subtlety that there is an understated nostalgia for the past. The characters are caught in a whirlpool between tradition and modernity, between the old and new, and struggle to overcome the unpleasant shocks of independence. Adoo strikes the reader the message, simultaneously allowing them to recline and realize that the readers have been into an intellectual experience as well. The convention of the story telling in traditional African society becomes true in the hands of Aidoo. Her narration is realistic with the characters brought alive through their distinct voices and speech. *No Sweetness Here* projects the traditional roles of African women and the story is narrated from the perspective of a Westernized African woman who teaches in a school in a small hamlet. The various themes in Aidoo's story include non-idealization of marriage, divorce as an alternative choice, liberated women becoming leaders in the decolonization process. The title is justified that, if there is no sweetness, there is certainly the essential salt to life, even if it comes in the form of tears, and the strength comes from endurance.

**Keywords:** Ama Ata Aidoo, African woman, exploitation, suffering, decolonization, sweetness, salt, strength, endurance.

Domiciled in 1942 in pre-independence Ghana, Ama Ata Aidoo was African Feminist who strove to create a new image of women in her works. Aidoo attempted to make people understand the need for equality in society particularly for women through her distinct narrative and stylistic features. She projects the themes of tradition and modernity. Her literary works *Anowa* (1970), *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977) and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) represent varied personalities of women especially of Africa. In these three works the protagonists represent the advancement of African women in three major aspects i.e., family, education and economic aspect

Adoo's father was a chief source of inspiration to her because he always encouraged her to participate in all activities in school. Adoo's participation in a short story competition paved the way for her to become a literary artist of high quality. The publication of the short story in 1958 boosted her morale to begin writing. Adoo studied Literature in the University of Ghana at Leg on and continued to write short stories, poems, and plays. Later she moved to Zimbabwe to master the art of writing and become a full-fledged writer. A mixture of traditional African storytelling and Western genres made Adoo become proficient in story-telling. Her short story *No*

*Sweetness Here* projects themes that mirror Adoo's own experiences. Behrent, Brown University states:

Naomi Nkealah describes the concept of African Feminism in the following words:

African Feminism strives to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman with the heterogeneous cultures of Africa. Feminisms in Africa, ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies. (133-141).

Feminism aims to advocate equal rights to women and feminists strove to make women understand this notion and helped them to find ways and means to fight for their rights. Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, and Virginia Woolf fostered varied perspectives related to feminine issues. Like the feminists, Ama Ata Aidoo, an excellent academician has fought for the rights of the women of her indigenous land. It was only during her tenure as the minister that Adoo was able to fight for women's and girls' rights and bring about useful schemes for Girls' education in Ghana. Her contribution towards literature deal with women issues from multiple perspectives. Her heroines are bold and independent which is a significant aspect to display that women have more mental strength on par with men.

In her short story titled *No Sweetness Here*, Aidoo depicts the hegemony of African women politically, economically and culturally as the major cause. The short stories address issues such as the effects of freedom struggle while also concentrating on significant moments from the daily lives of female figure as revealed in the title of the second story *For Whom Things Did Not Change*. It expresses the economic and cultural hardships faced by women. Throughout the story Aidoo makes a biting criticism of the status of women within it.

Aidoo approaches the issues of female hegemony from multiple dimensions. She claims that

[t]hree major factors have influenced the position of African women today. These were indigenous African societal patterns; the conquest of the continent by Europe; and the apparent lack of vision, or courage, in the leadership of the post-colonial period. 'Leadership' in this context does not refer to the political leadership exclusively. We speak of the entire

spectrum of the intellectual, professional, and commercial elites in positions to make vital decisions on behalf of the entire community.

In the story titled *Everything Counts*, Aidoo portrays a young educated woman who attempts to negotiate the "revolution" and status as a woman. The central character Sissie, argues with her comrades for liberation and expresses honestly the reasons for all the problems. The heroine believes that unless these issues are solved, liberation to people especially to African women is impossible. Her experiences at the university are example of the economic problems that still prevail in the ideology of the bourgeoisie. As Odamtten says of the story,

we must understand the storyteller's narrative on both levels of cognition, just as Sissie has to learn that, although she is correct about the crucial role of economics in nation building, one must also recognize the insidious nature of bourgeois oppression and its ideological claims.

Patriarchy is an important concern in Ghana where men consider themselves "superior" and hold authority over women in many aspects. Women are subordinated and not allowed to do all tasks, while men are free to do as they please and desire. In her book *Changes*, Ama Ata Aidoo portrays a female as the major character. Ama Ata Aidoo stated:

I called the book *Changes*, because I see primarily a character like Esi the protagonist as being a part of those who are trying to define, or even redefine woman as a lover, as a wife, as a mother, as a daughter, even as a granddaughter (Curry 179).

Esi holds her position and freedom and attains success though she longs for feelings of life-love and companionship. Her marriage with Oko was discontented because Esi's expectations was shattered. Oko friends are allured to the point of raping Esi and Esi decides to divorce Oko. Esi's love with a married man, Ali accepts Esi as his wife and Esi too is happy with the idea that being with Ali will make her free. But to her surprise, Esi discovers that Ali is not the right man for her and divorces him. Esi is the example of a rebel woman who breaks the traditional image of a woman affected by male chauvinism.

It was a man's world. You only survived if you knew how to live in it as a woman (Aidoo, 107).

Aidoo depicts strong females who survive despite the challenges in the society. The stories declare the truth that there is *No Sweetness Here* in Ghana after getting freedom, the only option left to women is survival which is the driving force. Udumukwu in his book *Signature of Women* affirms

Women's distinctive approach to various situations and problems posed by life and living in Africa has drawn increasing attention in recent times. The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed the growth of an enormous volume of literature written by women and for women. This literature has underscored the view that the images of women usually found in literature have been created by men without any true reference to the peculiarity of women's experiences..... (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 5)

*No Sweetness Here* is told from the perspective of a Westernized African woman who teaches in a village school. In the collection, *No Sweetness Here* Aidoo rejected the view that education emancipated women from all forms of hegemony. The exploitation of women as heads of households is not accepted by Aidoo. The stories are embodiment of revolt of women against domination of men in all its forms.

The title is apt and expresses that there is no sweetness for women in life because of the suppression they face from men and other people in the society, yet they feel that there is always salt which adds flavour to their tragic life which brings tears. The terms for the African women are symbol of women's tolerance and patience. The collection is amusing and didactic about a changing Africa and teaches universal values such as love, marriage, work, family, sacrifice, etc.

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