

# A Study on Challenging Gender-Based Issues Before Women's Education in Ama Ata Aidoo's the Girl Who Can

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## Abstract:

Challenging gender-based issues appear as barriers to women education in Ama Ata Aidoo's short story The Girl Who Can. Aidoo's writings advocates for women empowerment through education and women empowerment is the center of interest of Aidoo. The study follows a textual analysis. The Girl Who Can promotes the ideals of feminist movement in Africa by presenting issues which adhere to nuances in gender roles and social structure. The study unfolds the hidden stories behind women's backwardness and powerlessness. Aidoo promotes gender equality and women's empowerment through education. The Girl Who Can plays a significant role in empowering women through education. It shows gender-based stereotypes which make invulnerable barriers in front of women education. The study presents African women's brave and persistent struggle to overcome the inhibitions and gender-based stereotypes created by the male dominated society to subject them to a narrow world. The Girl Who Can portrays a female tripartite household in which general conflict is shown through the conversation and interaction among the grand-mother Nana, her daughter Kaya and her grand-daughter Adjoa. Aidoo has portrait Adjoa as a representative fighting women character, who last of all wins over all challenges she faced in course of her educational journey. The study undergoes a close reading of the text. The article aims to investigate the challenging gender-based issues in the short story The Girl Who Can.

**Keywords:** Barrier, Challenging, Women Empowerment, Feminist Movement, Stereotype

## Introduction:

Gender-based issues are the common events in a patriarchal society. Gender-based issues are the barriers to women empowerment through women's education. Women empowerment is a subject of debate and struggle for centuries in a patriarchal setting of the society where the traditional beliefs and cultural expectations fixup women's roles at home and in broader society. Gender-based issues are problematic in almost each and every country. Social and cultural totem and taboos contribute much for demotion and degradation of women's education. Traditional beliefs and religious bindings in the communities appear as key barriers to women's progress. The denial of education prevents women from gaining economic freedom intellectual upliftment and self-reliance. In this respect feminism has been playing significant roles in giving equal right to the women for a balanced society. Women writers, all over the world have been playing a meaningful role in exposing the gender-based challenging issues and advocating for women's empowerment.

Globally recognized women writer Ama Ata Aidoo is a Ghanaian feminist who has consistently challenge traditional gender roles in her works. She is the voice of the subdued and oppressed women. The Girl Who Can is her wonderful short story which serves as a compelling critique of the societal restrictions imposed upon women. The Girl Who Can presents gender-based challenge issues, particularly in relation to women education. It is a story of struggle of a young girl named Adjoa who is found to take challenge in navigating the expectations assigned to her by her family and society. Adjoa is portrayed by Aidoo as the embodiment of clash between traditional gender norms and the aspirations of African women. Aidoo has exposed gender-based issues that appear as a challenge for women's access to education. In the life of Adjoa, societal norms, family dynamics and the transformative power of education play a significant role in being fallen in troubles to have education. This study explores gender-based issues that harms women's education in Ghanaian society. It emphasizes the importance of challenging traditional gender issues to provide equal opportunities for women in the field of education. Education is the basic need of human life and it is considered as a fundamental right. The study aims to examine the challenging gender-based issues which made barriers to Adjoa's educational journey. This paper highlights gender inequalities in education in African society, particularly in Ghanaian society.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

This study aims:

1. To explore gender-based challenging issues which hinder women's education in The Girl Who Can.
2. To expose Adjoa's challenging steps to overcome gender-based barriers for her education.
3. To show family support for Adjoa's education.

### **Methodology:**

This is a qualitative research work which employs a textual analysis focusing on a critical reading of The Girl Who Can. The study follows a feminist literary perspective which is applied to anatomize the ways in which Aidoo shows the setback of patriarchal norms and advocates for gender equality. The study is based on secondary data collected from different academic articles, journals, books. Critical and analytical methods have been used to examine the data and explore the objectives.

### **Findings and Discussion:**

The short story The Girl Who Can presence its protagonist Adjoa as a victim to gender-based discrimination. In one hand Adjoa faces problems pertaining to traditional beliefs, rituals, social totem and taboos and on the other hand she confronts with family culture, family rules and directions of the elders in growing up as a fit and fine human being with manifestation of all her good qualities she is born with. Adjoa's grandmother Nana talks about her thin legs and argues that her thin legs are not fit for reproduction. A deep-rooted cultural belief is that a women's life meaningless if she is unable to bear child. It is believed that the primary purpose of a women's life is to become a wife and mother. This social belief and value system degrades and diminishes the value of education for women as their meaning of life is determined by their reproductive capabilities. The meaning of the women's life is not compassed by intellectual quality and effective potential. Such kind of beliefs and traditional attitudes of the society demotivate family's from giving emphasis on education for their girl child. It is nothing but glorification of gender in inequality in educational access to women. In African society cultural perception of women continue to limit their educational pursuits. In Ghanaian society particular gender and education for

women do not go parallel. It is a matter of remorse that some rural communities of the Ghanaian society withdraw their girl child from school to arrange marriage or domestic purpose. Adjoa's life reflects the gender-based challenging issues the women in the Ghanaian society face every day. Adjoa's family skepticize about of the value of her education.

### **Gender-based challenging issues which hinder women education:**

It is not right that all the members of a family and all the community people discourage women education. Adjoa's mother is one of the supporters of women education. Adjoa's mother encourages her and boost up her energy and enthusiasm for having education. Adjoa's mother in case of Adjoa's education goes against societal expectations placed on girls. Outlook to women education in any society or community changed time to time. Adjoa's mother and grandmother represents gradual shift in attitudes towards women education. Attitudes of Adjoa's mother is different from her grandmother's attitude toward women education. It is a fight between tradition and modernity. African women writers utilize literature to challenge patriarchal family structures. The family structures in a patriarchal society restricts women empowerment. Adjoa's grandmother does not support Adjoa's schooling. It is a ray of hope that Adjoa's mother inwardly gives full support but because of the red eye of the society she shows outwardly partial support which gives green signal for a growing recognition the value of education. The story in *The Girl Who Can* exposes that a single family has different perspectives on an attitude to women's role for a girl's future. Gender-based issues such as societal norms and gender stereotypes make the women face challenges in accessing education. Adoo showcases how traditional African communities impose rigid restrictions and traditional rules on women. African traditional society gives more priority to marriage, motherhood and family obligations.

### **Adjoa's Challenging steps to Overcome barriers to her education:**

In African societies women education is ignored. The women of African societies are kept far away from the opportunities of education. Adjoa faces gender-based problems in family and in society simultaneously. Education for women is given no importance rather their domestic duties and obligations are given much importance. Family and society both stand against academic or professional success of the women community. UNESCO's report on women education is remorseful and shocking. UNESCO reports that over one hundred and thirty Millions of girl all over the world remain out of school education for only because of gender-based barriers in maximum communities and societies, especially in rural communities and societies the elders in the family's focus on education for boys but girls remain deprived of proper education. It is believed in the societies that investment in a son's education is more profitable because the boy member of a family will become the primary earner. This is very derogatory for women that the girl children are pulled out of school to support household chores and to make worthy for marriage. Adjoa is found facing such stereotypes. Adjoa took a drastic step against her grandmother's expectations in taking challenge for showing her running abilities. Her challenge finally became fruitful. Eventually despite being deemed unfit because of her thin legs wins scholarship in sports. Adjoa proves that a girl's worth should not be determined by age old traditions and societal expectations rather by her own physical capabilities and intellectual abilities. Adjoa's strong will and determinations help her winning awards in sports and achievement in education. Adjoa's grandmother Nana treats Adjoa as a girl child not as a human being. But Adjoa despite being scolded by her grandma fights for gender equality. Adjoa's struggle against societal stereotypes at every walk of life was very challenging and epoch making in the then African

society. The transformative power of education is proved in Adjoa's life. Transformative power of education brings a paradigm shift in women's life it gives women economic independence, social empowerment and voice in decision making. Adjoa's struggle for her education proves that if a woman is educated, she gains better access to job opportunities and makes woman financially self-sufficient. Education makes women stronger and strengthen their ability to challenge oppressive and cohesive tradition. Proper education for women advocates for equal rights to men and women. Education is the only tool which strengthen confidence and widens knowledge the periphery of their knowledge. Confidence and sound knowledge enable them to participate in social and political activities. Achievement of Adjoa's scholarship represents a break throw to gender-based issues. Adjoa proves that education for women makes women free form the limitations and restrictions imposed on women by the elders. Aidoo's struggle for education comply with the ideas of feminist scholars. The feminists considers that education is a tool of liberation. Adjoa's fight against societal traditions seems to be the same fight Malala Yousafjy fought. Noble peace prize winner Pakistani female education activist Malala Yousafjy advocates for women education going against societal gender-based barriers. Malala believes that education is the most powerful weapon for social change.

#### **Family Support for Adjoa's Education:**

Adjoa fought many challenges in being educated. It is well known that many young girls fall prey to the pressure from their elders for their education. Women's individual expectations from the society and the family in case of their education is grinded into powder under hammering of the societal expectations. The Girl Who Can presents a three-generation household wherein various perspectives on gender roles face cross connection. Adjoa's grandmother represents traditional beliefs and stereotypes. Her grandmother Nana gives emphasis on marriage and motherhood while education for women does bear no meaning to her. Adjoa's mother Kaya represents transition which survives in between tradition and modernity. She is in transition. She can not openly challenged Nana's traditional belief not she can give full freedom to Adjoa to shift tradition to modernity. Adjoa represents paradigm shift from tradition to modernity. Adjoa is emblem of change. Adjoa faces challenging barriers of outdated beliefs and proves through her life that education is the most valuable thing of life. Adjoa's mother Kaya had to face pressures of the elders in family and societal gender-based issues. But Kaya did not surrender to the setback of the traditional beliefs. Kaya before the red eye of the elders of her family took initiatives in giving proper education to her daughter Adjoa. It is very interesting to note that Adjoa's mother Kaya represents the progressive shift which is very urgent for women empowerment through education. Adjoa's mother Kaya's role in empowering her daughter through education is very significant. She is the only member of Adjoa's family who had full support inwardly and partial support outwardly. Adjoa's family did not fully support for Adjoa's education though she expected that from her family. If Adjoa's mother Kaya did not support Adjoa in case of her education Adjoa could not go against her grandmother's traditional beliefs. It is very clear that Adjoa had to bow down her head towards gender-based issues and challenges. She could not stand in the society. Her mother Kaya's role in making Adjoa a successful human being is significant and inspires next generation mothers.

#### **Conclusion:**

Ama Ata Aidoo is a world's famous feminist who advocated for women empowerment through education. Her short story The Girl Who Can is an investigation of the gender-based issues and challenges which

harm women education. Through the portrayal of the protagonist Adjoa Aidoo presence a compelling argument for women's empowerment through education. The Girl Who Can is an impressive critique of the gender-based issues and challenges. The findings of the study generate an awareness about the hindrance of gender-based barriers to women education the gender-based issues and challenges Adjoa faced in course of her life are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs of the communities and societies of today's world. Adjoa is the representative of millions of girls who are deprived of education all over the world. Adjoa is a fictional character who is very often found on the soil of reality in the time of Android set mobile. Adjoa's problem is not the problem of Ghanaian women but the women of the world. To give solution to the problems relating to women education positive steps from the side of the government of each country should be taken and support of the NGOs and intellectual society must be given. General awareness and government policies can work hand in hand to promote gender equality removing gender-based issues and challenges. Community awareness programmes can play a significant role in challenging gender stereotypes. Aidoo's short story The Girl Who Can is still relevant in contemporary society for ensuring equal educational opportunities for all irrespective of caste, creed, religion and gender-based issues and challenges. The study promotes value of education for upliftment of global society as a whole and for the good of the women community of the world as a part. The study also emphasizes on equal importance of men and women in the society equal participation of men and women in education is to be established all over the world. Ama Ata Aidoo's The Girl Who Can fights for women empowerment through proper education.

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