



Global South Feminisms and Digital Storytelling: Re-imagining Empowerment in Contemporary Women's Writing

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Abstract- This paper examines how contemporary women writers from the Global South use digital storytelling as a feminist practice to rethink empowerment beyond dominant Western frameworks. Drawing on postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, and digital feminist theory, it argues that digital platforms can serve as counter-hegemonic spaces where marginalized women express agency, resistance, and collective memory. Through close readings of writers such as Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the paper shows that empowerment in Global South feminist writing is best understood as relational, contextual, and ongoing rather than universal or purely individual.

Keywords- Global South feminisms; digital storytelling; postcolonial feminism; intersectionality; women's writing; empowerment

I. Introduction

Feminist literary criticism has long challenged the universal claims of Western liberal feminism, especially its tendency to treat women's experiences as though they were identical across very different histories and cultures. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential critique in *Under Western Eyes* shows how Western feminist discourse often represents the "Third World woman" as a single, fixed, and oppressed figure, thereby reproducing colonial hierarchies within feminist knowledge itself. In contrast, Global South feminisms emphasize historical context, material conditions, and the overlapping forces of colonialism, nationalism, caste, race, class, and religion.

At the same time, digital platforms have changed the way feminist voices are created and shared. Blogs, online essays, social media posts, and digitally mediated literary forms allow women writers to reach audiences directly, bypassing many traditional publishing gatekeepers. These spaces open up new narrative possibilities, but they also remain shaped by unequal access, surveillance, and global power structures.

This paper brings together Global South feminisms and digital storytelling to argue that contemporary women's writing increasingly uses digital forms to challenge Western ideas of empowerment. While scholars have explored Global South feminisms and digital activism separately, less attention has been given to the way literary women writers use digital circulation as part of feminist narrative practice. This study addresses



that gap by treating digital storytelling as both a literary and political strategy that reshapes ideas of voice, agency, and empowerment.

II. Literature Review

Early feminist criticism made gender an important category of analysis, but much of it still relied on universal assumptions that failed to account for differences in culture, history, and geopolitics among women. Mohanty's intervention exposed how Western feminist texts often cast Third World women as passive victims, which reinforced imperial ways of seeing and speaking about them. Scholars such as Uma Narayan and Inderpal Grewal later argued for feminist approaches grounded in local realities and material conditions rather than abstract ideas of liberation.

Global South feminisms emerged in response to these limitations, stressing plurality, resistance, and intersectionality. Feminist theorists have shown that women's lives in postcolonial societies are shaped by overlapping forms of domination, including caste hierarchies, racialization, economic insecurity, and state violence. Literary critics have since used these ideas to read women's writing as a space of feminist resistance and subject formation.

At the same time, scholarship on digital feminism has expanded significantly. Hester Baer, for example, highlights how digital spaces can create feminist visibility and networked solidarity, while also warning against overly optimistic views that ignore structural inequality. Much of this work, however, still focuses on the Global North and pays less attention to digital participation in the Global South. In literary studies, digital storytelling is often treated as secondary to print literature rather than as a central narrative mode. This paper intervenes in that gap by positioning digital storytelling as central to contemporary Global South feminist literary practice.

III. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three connected frameworks: postcolonial feminism, intersectionality, and digital feminist theory.

Postcolonial feminist theory offers useful tools for examining representation and voice. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, *Can the subaltern speak?*, draws attention to the violence involved in representing marginalized subjects within dominant systems of knowledge. Her point is not that subaltern subjects are silent, but that their speech is often mediated, distorted, or erased by powerful structures. This study therefore does not assume that digital platforms automatically enable subaltern expression; instead, it treats digital storytelling as a contested space where feminist voice emerges through negotiation rather than transparency.



Intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, further informs the analysis by showing how gender intersects with race, caste, class, and other axes of identity. For women writers from the Global South, narrative voice is shaped by these overlapping structures of power. Digital storytelling allows layered identities to appear in ways that resist simplified feminist categories.

Digital feminist theory frames online spaces as politically ambivalent rather than purely liberating. Digital platforms can support feminist resistance, but they can also reproduce existing inequalities. This framework makes it possible to examine digital storytelling as a site of both possibility and constraint.

IV. Methodology

The study follows a qualitative, interpretive approach based on close textual analysis and theoretically informed reading. The primary texts include literary works and digitally circulated narratives by contemporary women writers from the Global South, particularly Meena Kandasamy and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

The texts were selected on the basis of three criteria: their connection to Global South feminist discourse, their attention to gendered oppression, and their circulation across digital platforms. Rather than treating these digital texts as social data, the paper reads them as literary and political artifacts, focusing on narrative voice, language, metaphor, and circulation.

This method values depth over breadth and acknowledges its limitation in focusing mainly on Anglophone texts. That limitation is deliberate, since the purpose is to examine transnational feminist circulation rather than make broad empirical claims.

V. Analysis

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* presents autobiographical testimony as a form of resistance. Written in the first person, the narrative refuses the passive image often attached to stories of domestic violence. Instead, the narrator uses anger, irony, and intense language to challenge patriarchal control. The repeated return to abusive speech shows how domination works through performance and turns language itself into a site of feminist critique.

Kandasamy's work can also be understood through Spivak's distinction between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*. Spivak warns that access to subaltern voice is never simple because speech is always shaped by dominant discourse. Kandasamy's narrative does not claim unmediated truth; instead, it reveals its own constructedness through fragmentation, irony, and stylistic excess. This self-awareness fits Spivak's argument that political speech must recognize its own limits.



What makes Kandasamy especially relevant to digital storytelling is not only the novel itself but also its circulation through essays, interviews, and social media. These digital forms extend her testimony into public space, where personal experience becomes collective feminist speech. In this way, digital storytelling allows the narrative to move beyond the book and into broader political conversation.

A common criticism is that digital circulation can turn feminist suffering into consumable trauma. From this view, online visibility may encourage voyeurism rather than political action. Yet this criticism does not fully account for the force of Kandasamy's voice, which does not simply seek sympathy but directly confronts the reader. Her writing does not beautify pain; it turns testimony into refusal.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* offers another, related model of digital feminist storytelling. Starting as a TED Talk and later spreading widely online, the text shows how Global South feminist ideas can enter global public discourse. Adichie uses an accessible style that blends personal narrative with social critique, making African feminist concerns understandable to a wide audience.

Her digital storytelling also engages Spivak's concerns about voice and representation. Although Adichie has a strong transnational presence, she does not speak as if she represents all African women. Instead, she grounds her claims in personal and local experience, which helps avoid the universalizing tendency that Spivak criticizes. Digital circulation enlarges her audience without erasing the specificity of her voice.

The online spread of Adichie's talk also gives it pedagogical value. It helps feminist ideas move beyond academic settings and into everyday digital life. In this sense, empowerment appears through recognition, discussion, and repeated exposure to feminist language. Her use of humor, clarity, and directness helps the text travel across cultural boundaries while preserving its feminist force.

Critics may argue that Adichie's visibility makes African feminism more acceptable to Western liberal audiences and weakens its radical edge. That concern is important, but it does not fully capture the strategic choices involved in global circulation. Adichie does not abandon cultural specificity; she adapts form to reach wider audiences. Digital storytelling here works as compromise without surrender.

Across both texts, empowerment is not presented as individual success or personal freedom in the neoliberal sense. Instead, it appears as a relational and ongoing process rooted in memory, storytelling, and collective consciousness. Kandasamy's confrontational style and Adichie's pedagogical style both resist a depoliticized version of feminism.

Spivak's caution about empowerment is especially relevant here. Visibility and voice alone do not guarantee liberation, because they can be absorbed into dominant systems.



The texts in this paper reflect that tension by presenting empowerment as partial, unstable, and unfinished. Digital storytelling becomes an ethical practice that speaks carefully and remains aware of its limits.

Crenshaw's intersectionality further clarifies this point by showing that empowerment is shaped by gender, caste, race, and postcolonial power together. Digital storytelling gives space to these overlapping identities without forcing them into a single explanation. The result is a vision of resistance that values struggle more than closure.

VI. Conclusion

This paper argues that digital storytelling is central to rethinking empowerment in Global South feminist writing. By linking literary narrative with digital circulation, contemporary women writers challenge universalist feminist frameworks and present more local, intersectional forms of resistance. The study suggests that feminist literary criticism should treat digital forms not as secondary channels, but as important sites of feminist knowledge production.

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