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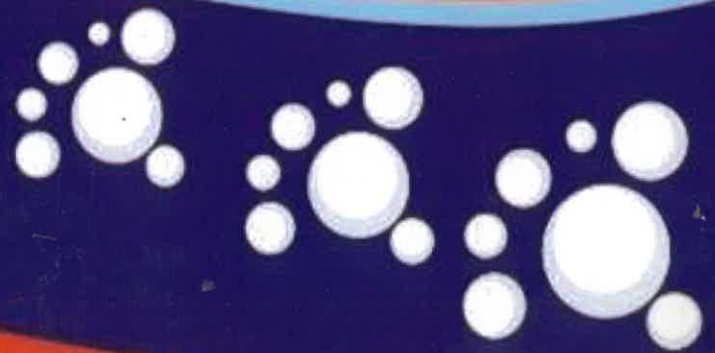
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# Humanities and Social Science Studies

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**UNRAVELLING THE JOY OF EXPLORATION IN THE NOVEL, NNEDI OKORAFOR'S  
 BINTI**

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**ABSTRACT**

The central idea of African futurism is that Africans will explore the universe with their eyes as they emerge from their cocoons. Exploration by humans, whether done consciously or unconsciously, always leads to a larger perspective and knowledge is still essential for life. Africanfuturism, in contrast to Afrofuturism, focuses more on African culture and mythology than on comparisons to or the cultural influence of Westerners. This research article studies the joy of exploration in the Africanfuturistic novel, Nnedi Okorafor *Binti*, the first novel of the *Binti Trilogy*. It dealt with the travel of Binti who was the first Himba tribe girl to study in intergalactic University on the planet Oomza. Binti's decision to leave her homeland to pursue an education demonstrates the importance of both exploration and cultural preservation. Even in a technologically advanced society, Binti's path to the university education serves as a constant reminder of the significance of education for girls. Education will enable Binti's generation and subsequent generations of her tribe to achieve significant progress. Additionally, by returning the tentacle to the Chief of Meduse, Binti forged an alliance and peace between humans and Meduse. The study primarily encompassed the area of culture, tribe, journey, and education as the point of exploration. It also discusses the generational differences between youngsters and traditional people and the difficulties encountered when interacting with the modern environment.

**Keywords:** Africanfuturism, Culture, Exploration, Journey, Tribal Life, Culture, Education Journey.

Africanfuturism can be defined as a literary movement that integrates technology, culture, mythology, and history of African people and the narrative would be from their point of view. The concept of 'Africanfuturism' was introduced by Nnedi Okorafor in her blog in 2019.

A well-known author, Nnedi Okorafor is known for writing sci-fi books for both kids and adolescents that have won international awards and have been bestsellers on the New York Times lists. She is renowned for the *Binti Series* and for her books such as *Who Fears Death*, *Zahrah the Windseeker*, *Akata Witch*, *Akata Warrior*, *Lagoon*, and *Remote Control*. Most of her writings revolve around African girls as the central characters and African landscape settings as they were given less importance by Western writers. Through the octopus analogy, Nnedi believed that Africanfuturism would lead the Himba community beyond the level of imagination without any discrimination, or oppression and portray the people of Africa as the superior race leaving behind all the suppressions and thus considering only the African people under the spotlight of the stage where there are shown as most advanced people who uses the most advanced technology and create it too. She defined all works to be 'Africanfuturist and Africanjuist' works as that makes her works stand out from the common genre of Afrofuturism and the term will make the genre stand out as the opposition which does not privilege or center the West.

Africanfuturistic novel, *Binti*, the first of the *Binti Trilogy* was published in 2015 attracted worldwide attention and won on Hugo Award in 2016, Nebula Award in 2016, and Nommo Award in 2016 for the novel which was published in 2015. The novel *Binti* dwells around the character of Binti, a modern girl with a vein filled with traditional morals and values, who belongs to the Himba tribe and seldom leaves their confined space to study in the intergalactic University on Planet Oomza. In the Ted Talk, a platform for public speaking 'Nnedi Okorafor: Sci-fi stories that imagine a future Africa', the author Nnedi Okorafor said the growth of Binti into supreme than other fellows

made this novel the core idea of Afrofuturism. Throughout her journey, Binti has always remained true to herself; despite her growth, journey, and changes inside and outside her, she has always been the same vibrant Himba tribe girl. The main characteristics of Africanfuturism such as the use of African diaspora, technology, social justice, possible future, equality, and rejection of the negative stereotypes of Africa can be seen in this novel. The novel explores various points of life as Binti travels for her education which includes tribe, culture, and education.

The term 'Tribe' can be defined as social circle primarily consisting of clusters of individuals from similar heritage who communicate a common tongue. These people share a common language, rituals and way of life and have lived in groups in a collected living for several generations. Himba are the indigenous tribal people who are living in the brutal northern barren land of Namibia, the Southwestern country of Africa. These tribal people can be identified through otjize (red paste - a combination of fat and desert clay) covering all over their skin. This community follows the tradition of men taking the headship whereas girls & women were restricted within the boundary of the house. Though the plot of *Binti* didn't take place on the soil of Namibia, the elements of culture, race, discrimination, and ethnicity were much more clearly portrayed through the character of the Himba tribal girl, Binti.

Culture can be defined as the set of unwritten laws, and rituals that will be accepted by a group of individuals (here it is a tribe) for the betterment of their life and social interactions. Himba culture is fully dependent on livestock and considers it as their pride and wealth. Usually, they isolate themselves from the urbanized lands and will lead a secluded life. They worship a single god (who were referred to by the name 'monotheist') and their ancestors. In this novel, *Binti* is portrayed as a young Himba tribal girl whose body is covered with Otjize, bushy-ended plaited hair, and wearing a thin metal ring around her ankles. Often she was seen worshipping 'Seven', her supreme God.

The main plot of *Binti* revolves around the intergalactic journey of Binti from her desert land to Oomza Uni. As Himbas are restricted to a confined space, education is not given much importance. They were educated from their experience in their day-to-day life and through people within their community. None of her parents supported the decision to study in the outer world. While referring to her mother's opinion on education at Oomza Uni, Binti remembered her mother having said, "There is a reason why our people do not go to that university. Oomza Uni wants you for its gain, Binti. You go to that school and you become its slave" (Okorafor 4). Through the statement of Binti's mother, we can be able to understand that the Himba tribe believed in the notion that exploring the world would at last lead to catastrophic failure of making them unattached to their God-gifted nature.

The tribe worships the spirit of nature in different forms, mostly the elements of earth. In this novel, it was mentioned as 'Seven' by Binti. "Then he'd say a little prayer to the Seven to keep war away and then another prayer to seal his words" (Okorafor 7). The statement by Binti, "I had not gone on my pilgrimage like a proper women" (Okorafor 46) implies that all the Himba women had to go on a pilgrimage in the desert which is considered to be their duty of life. The journey that Binti made to Oomza University is regarded as the Himba tribe's pilgrimage. She unveils herself to the other creatures in the galaxy throughout that expedition. The pilgrimage in the desert is not as simple as that, likewise, the physical and mental agony that she underwent in Thirdfish, Binti's spaceship tested her balance of leading life.

Himba tribe were restricted to a small space though they excelled in their knowledge. No one from Binti's tribe has visited the space before, even outside her community. She was the first to explore space and to get an education. She knew that she was the first to visit the space. She was viewed as a strange being when she boarded her spaceship as she was the first to do. Though she was embarrassed, and humiliated by her fellow travellers of the Khoush community, she was very determined to lead her journey leaving behind all the pessimistic thoughts.

On the journey, Binti encountered a massacre of her fellow travellers in the spaceship by the extraterrestrial being which appeared like a jellyfish. She heard about Meduse in her textbooks as a dangerous extraterrestrial being, but her curiosity and the power of her edan (a communication device that Binti unknowingly kept as good luck). She communicated with Okwu, one of Meduse and Meduse's chief through her edan which none of the humans had done before. She underwent mental and physical trauma because of the massacre but she remained strong. The communication with Meduse and her helping tendency to cure the vilest Okwa through her Otjize made her more unique and kind. She also made a deal to give back Meduse's Chief's tentacle which humans had taken away from, it and made a bridge of bonding and peace between humans and Meduse. Even Meduse's chief praised Binti by saying "I am learning something completely outside of core beliefs"(Okorafor 57). The words of the chief clearly show how much change Binti had made through her actions. The chief of the Meduse had fully changed from a creature that killed people to a friendly acquaintance.

"Straightening up, I paused and shut my eyes. Now the weight of my entire life was pressing on my shoulders" (Okorafor 1) words from Binti before her start from earth to Oozma journey. The pressure was created because she was the first to do so and more importantly, if she succeeds, she can be the forerunner for the upcoming generations to follow her path of education. "I was the first Himba in history to be bestowed with the honour of acceptance into OomzaUni."(Okorafor 17), these words by Binti, made a statement that she was the first to get an education from the most prestigious university. "I had scored so high on the planetary exams in mathematics" (Okorafor 4). Binti can't be called a girl of luck, it was her pure knowledge which helped her to attain the pride of getting an education. It was that leap that made Binti more unique from the others.

"We prefer to explore the universe by travelling inward, as opposed to outward" (Okorafor 11). It is significant to discover the inner and outer, exploring both the mind and the outer space is needed, rather than limiting to a particular boundary.

This research paper made it clear that Binti had explored the path toward culture, space, and university education. The world is much more developed and everyone has the right to education. But in some parts of the world, people were deprived of education. In this story, it was through the character of Binti, makes a statement that girls must be educated and they will not forget their culture, tradition, and age-old practice. As the world evolves, we have to run at its speed and explore the things that excite us. As long as we stay within the boundary the knowledge, experience, and excitement remain limited as the space we explore.

"Government security guards were only educated up to age ten, yet because of their jobs, they were used to age ten, yet because of their jobs they especially looked down on people like me. They were the same everywhere, no matter the tribe" (Okorafor 11). The security in the spaceship was confined to a limited place because of their choice, unlike Binti. As the father does the job, the son or daughter doesn't need to follow their path. People should not be restricted to limited space as they must explore the joy of living their life.

Leaving behind her homeland, she decides to go to study, but she takes her practice and tradition with her throughout her life. She followed practices such as worshipping their spirit 'Seven', applying Otjize to the hair used by the Himba people, bushy end at the end of plaited hair and wearing an ankle metal ring. All these make us conclude that exploration is as important as that of the culture and tradition followed by the ethnic tribe for generations and generations.

The most exciting part of the journey is the experience that they underwent. Kalpana Chawla, an Indian-American astronaut and aerospace engineer said that a person wants to enjoy the process of the journey as that is the most interesting and exciting part. The result of the study shows that the exploration will lead to the development of tribal communities that remain within the boundary. The education will empower Binti's current generation as well as the subsequent generations of her tribe to make significant progress.



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