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BUCHI EMECHETA'S WORKS AS A TALE OF MISERY



Dhaygude Kakasaheb D.

Assist. Professor, Sant Ramdas College,
Ghansavangi, Dist.jalna.

ABSTRACT:

From time immemorial women as well as the weaker sections of the society are discriminated in the male dominated patriarchal orthodox society .Male members always get the preferential treatment and this is done in the name of age old traditions. In African society,culture and the society at large play a crucial role in the marginalization and victimization of the downtrodden sections of society like the women, girl child, widows and slaves. Girls are treated as commodities which could be bought and sold. A girl child at the time of her marriage is sacrificed on the altar of bride price and her own emotions and feelings are ignored. The only criteria their parents apply is the financial condition of the would-be groom. Women and girl child get the first experience of maltreatment at their own home. The male members as well as the female members of the family become hurdle in the development of women. Though woman herself is a victim of male domination but she does not hesitate to inflict pain on another woman. The cheer and joy which is experienced at the birth of a male child in family does not find in case of female child's birth. The dogma that the male child will carry the

legacy of family leads to girl child feticide. The present paper attempts to study how women, girl child and slaves are subjected to untold miseries, their alienation and victimization in Buchi Emecheta's novels. Her works mirror the pathetic condition not only of the illiterate and exploited subaltern ones but also the educated women like the novelist herself. How women face discrimination in their homeland as well as in the land of their dreams is one of the major themes of her works.

KEY WORDS: Alienation, discrimination, gender, subaltern, victimization etc.

INTRODUCTION:

The word subaltern is derived from the works of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Subaltern means the lower or weaker class. Socially, politically and geographically these people are outside the power structure of colony and colonial homeland. The oppressed, marginalized people in the erstwhile colonies are called subalterns. Those who have limited or no accesses to the cultural imperialism are called subalterns. Among the intellectuals who laid a strong foundation for postcolonial thinking is Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak who is rightly called by Robert Young as the second member of the 'Holy Trinity' of the postcolonial critics, others being Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Having been a student of 'deconstruction', she practices postmodern critical approaches. She is eclectic in her approach and is very often described as 'a Feminist Marxist Decostructivist'. She perceives herself as "The postcolonial diasporic Indian who speaks to decolonize the mind." [Harasym, Sarah and Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak, 1990. Edward said has discussed the subaltern man as well as women, according to him eurocentric orientalism has provided the basis for the dominance of the subalterns by the colonizers.

As per the Concise Oxford Dictionary the subaltern means
An officer below the rank of captain, especially a second lieutenant.
of inferior rank. The Collins Dictionary defines the word subaltern as:
A commissioned officer below the rank of a captain in certain armies' esp. the British

Buchi Emecheta was born on 22nd July 1944 in Lagos, Nigeria. She belonged to Ibuza heritage. After immigrating to United Kingdom in 1962, she worked as a Librarian and Community teacher. She received many prestigious awards like Best Black Writer in Britain 1978. Jack Campbell award, 1979, Daughter of Mark Twain, and American Literature Award.

Emecheta has more than twenty publications to her credit; they are *In the Ditch*, *Second class citizen*, *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *The Family* and many others. Her autobiography '*Head Above Water*' was published in 1986. She wrote her own experiences and about the victimization of women and girl child in African male dominated society. Her works echo the voices of the subaltern people. The outcry of marginalized can be heard in her major works. These marginalized people are women, girl child, slaves, widows and deserted women. She always presents the experiences of the weaker and oppressed people and their sufferings in a way to evoke the sympathy of the readers.

Buchi Emecheta wrote more than a dozen novels. Her novel *In the Ditch* (1972) is a story of a Black, Immigrant Nigerian woman. The central character, Adah represents the author. It is an autobiographical novel, set in North London. She took lot of efforts to go to London. When a woman went to England for better opportunities and higher education she was coldly welcomed in her land of dreams. She finds herself in a kind of ditch of miseries from where there is no escape. It shows how racism is prevalent in London. It is a realistic picture of the precarious condition of Black Housing. It is also about the pitiable condition of a talented Black Woman writer.

Emecheta in her autobiographical novel *Second Class Citizen* talks about the struggle of a black African woman for fulfilling her dream of education. It is also about the oppression and exploitation of a girl child. Adah, a Nigerian woman moves to England to live with her husband where she experiences racial discrimination by the so-called modern society.

Emecheta says,

You must know, my dear young lady, that in Lagos you maybe a million publicity officers for the Americans; you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants: you may be living like elite, but the day you land in England, you are a second class citizen. So you can't discriminate against your own people, because we are all second class (p37)

Even in the land of the dreams the black people do not get proper housing, The whites are not ready to rent a house to blacks.

Francis says;

We are all blacks, all coloured, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these.(p29)

The blacks try to imitate the manners and speech habits of the white so that they will not be discriminated and get assimilated in the whites.

Emecheta says;

She practiced and practiced her voice in the loo, and was satisfied with the result .The landlady would definitely not mistake her for a woman from Birmingham or London (p62)

It shows how the pitiable condition of blacks who left their native lands in the hope of a better life have to face innumerable difficulties.

Franz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* says;

The blacks who travels to Europe lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours ...determined to learn diction with the expectation of breaking the barriers down. (p21)

The *Bride Price* is a story of Akunna, a young Ibo girl. After the death of her father, Akunna and her mother Ma Blackie and her brother Nna-Nndo moves from Lagos to Ibuza. Her mother Ma Blackie marries to her father's elder brother, Okonkwo, Akunna falls in love with an Osu man called Chike. But her family rejected the outcast because his uncle rejected to pay the bride price. In this novel, Emecheta concentrates on the maternal oppression of girl child. It is also about the discriminatory treatment to a girl child. Commoditization of the woman is the major concern of this novel

The *Slave Girl* is about the girl, Ogbanje Ojebeta who was sold by her own brother Okolie Ma Pallagate after the death of her parents. It is a story of misery of a once loving girl child. Her brother does not repent for his inhuman act, instead he argues that Ojebeta is a "spoilt child who was still sucking at her mother's breast when all other children of her age had long been weaned" (36). In this novel, Emecheta uses slavery as a tool to represent the position of women in male dominated society. She pays more attention to the nature of literal slavery, its economic and social contexts, and the rationalizations by its practitioners. It is also about how the merry life of a girl child was ruined by the inhuman act and the perpetrator was not an outsider. The slave owner is Ma Palagade who is also a woman. It shows how a woman becomes the hurdle in the development of another woman.

The *Family* is the story of a young black Jamaican girl, Gwendolen Brillianton who was deserted by her parents .Gwendolen was raped by her uncle. When her uncle raped her, she can't believe that this was the same man who used to bring her sweets and lemonade drinks rub oil on her grazed knee (16). Instead of sympathizing the child, her grandmother accuses her of "her backside when she moved

about ... she was a bad girl inviting trouble" (16). When Gwendolen reunites with her family in London, her father rapes her. But the young girl did not disclose the identity of the rapist. She knew that her family needed her father to "pay for their rent and bring the food money" (16) and her father also justifies rape.

Emecheta in her work the Joys of Motherhood talks about the inhuman treatment given by the society to the slaves. It is a picture of a society where a human being is commoditized. In the traditional African society when a woman is died, her female slave is forced to die with her mistress and if she denies she is killed and buried along with her dead mistress. When Agbadi's first wife, Agunwa, died, her female slave is buried along with her.

In Joys of Motherhood the novelist says;

Then her personal slave was ceremoniously called in a loud voice by the medicine man. She must be laid inside the grave first. A good slave was supposed to jump into the grave willingly. Happy to accompany her mistress; but this young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet. She kept begging for her life, much to the annoyance of many of men standing around .the woman stood far for this was a custom they found revolting .The poor slave was pushed into the shallow grave ,but she struggled out, fighting and pleading, appealing to her owner Agbadi . (p.23)

It shows the utter brutality of the society towards a slave who is sacrificed on the altar of the tradition and culture, they think that the dead one need the slave in the second life but if one apply the same criteria, the same dead person need the same husband or son in her second life too, then why did not they bury her husband or son instead of the slave along with the deceased.

CONCLUSION:

In this way the works of Buchi Emecheta describe how the subalterns are victimized and oppressed by the society. It is expected from the culture and tradition that it should provide equal opportunity to all its members irrespective of their gender, race and colour of their skin but on the contrary it sows the seeds of discrimination and injustice in society. The neglected and marginalized are treated badly and discriminated under the name of tradition and culture. The works of E mecheta shows how people are uprooted and forced to become other in the so-called modern western societies.

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