

## CHAPTER III

### GENDER IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BUCHI EMECHETA

'Literature' in its every sense has remained the sole re-presentation of life and everything. Both in oral and in verbal forms, literature proved its ability to mirror the reality and the society. Through it, one can easily represent, comprehend and interpret the fields of human endeavors like social problems, politics, class struggle, race, religion, gender relations etc. Among the fields of human endeavors, gender relations open ways for feminism to grow and develop. The feminists constantly rejected the gender biased society and took the help of literature to represent women as protagonists or at least as major characters. In other words, their protests, demands and criticism against the gender biased concepts were to bring in the possibilities and hopes for women to emerge and proceed on their own abilities. Hitherto feminists were seen just as a figment of male chauvinism whereas; the feminists were totally different than that of the normal women of the patriarchal world. To break through such assumptions of the men-folk, in the year of 1949, emerged the deconstructive creation of the French feminist, Simon de Beauvoir's "*The Second Sex*". In her book, she represented how decades after decades the men-folk always elevated and the women-folk kept on degrading, especially in the spheres of Literature and Myth. She made her readers apprehend the fact how on one hand men were attributed to all the good qualities and positivity, and on the other hand, women were attributed to all the secondary qualities and negativity.

In "*The Second Sex*", Simon de Beauvoir discusses the treatment of women throughout history. She took fourteen months to complete the book. She wrote it in two volumes, "Facts and Myths" and "Lived Experiences". The book is one of Beauvoir's great creations and also regarded to be the pioneering factor of second-wave feminism. In her book, Beauvoir explains how throughout histories men had been defining women not as an individual but on the basis of the relation with a man. The book also gives a presentation on how women were seen as just objects or the sources of reproductions. But, according to Beauvoir, evolution had taken place in women's condition: from their participation in production to their freedom from reproductive slavery.

She stated in the book that woman is "the privileged other" which is defined in the "way the one chooses to posit oneself" (pp. 262) She also wrote, "But the only

earthly destiny reserved to the woman equal, child-woman, soul sister, woman-sex and female animal is always man.” (pp. 264)

In the second volume of her book, she gave a comparison between the ways of upbringing of a girl and a boy. She presented how since the early age of three or four, a girl is treated differently than that of a boy. A boy at such an age is referred as a ‘little man’ while on the contrary, a girl is taught to act and behave like a ‘woman’ and thus her ‘feminine’ destiny is seemed to be imposed on her by the society. Her book gives a better understanding of gender discrimination which is practiced right from the early childhood, in a patriarchal society.

Many feminists and female critics praised the male writers like Chaucer and Shakespeare for their re-presentation of strong women characters in their writings, while others re-presented the women-folk as weak, feeble and dependent on their male companions. Some strong women writers like Kate Millet, in her book “*Sexual Politics*” (1970), attacked the male writers like Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, and Norman Miller etc. for favoring the male gender and failing to see the female gender as capable as the males. They were criticized for their inability to apprehend the capabilities of women and for supporting the male power and male-rule over the females. According to Kate Millet, the differences that lurk between the genders are “essentially cultural, rather than biological bases” and such classifications are nothing but the result of varied treatment and interpretations. (pp. 28-29) The truth was that the women writers and the women critics were beginning to emerge at a time when there were literatures and histories already created by many male writers. Women had to fight for their space and place in a field where the men had their grips rooted so strongly. Virginia Woolf’s “*A Room of One’s Own*” (1929) is a kind of essay that reflects the conditions of women of her time. The lack of ‘space’ in a woman’s life is what meant by the title of the essay. She presents how the women fail to have time and space for their selves while taking care of the household and obeying to the rules and regulations of the society applied for them. Woolf’s essay depicts all her anger and frown at the paucity of ‘room’ for women.

When on one hand Millet despised the male writers who have not given any consideration or attention to the women writers, we have an important male writer who spoke for the rights and equality of women in a long way back. John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher, political economist and civil servant has written the famous essay “*The Subjection of Women*”, with the help of his wife Harriet Taylor Mill. The essay

particularly argues for the rights, equality and equity between both the sexes. Mill had the belief that the greater happiness would come to the mankind only with the moral and advancement of the humankind. And, to make that happen, he wanted to make everyone aware of the need of the equality and equity between both the sexes. In his time, (also in Buchi Emecheta's time) women had to live their lives under the forgiveness or sympathy of their fathers, brothers, husbands or sons. In short, they were subjected to the whims of the important male figures of their lives.

"*A Room of One's Own*" was written with the concept of women both as writers of and characters in fiction or literature. The 'room' that the title talks about is nothing but the figurative space that the women writers sought for their space in the literary tradition which had been dominated by men since long. Through the title, Woolf presented her views that "...a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." (pp. 4) She also gave her view stating her reasons as to why women writers had been absent from the literary or fictional scene, "In the first place, to have a room of her own ... was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble." (pp. 52) It was because women education was not given any concern or importance in those days. And also, a career for women, especially the career of a writer, was out of the context. Women education or career was possible only in the exceptional cases. Even her father Leslie Stephen, believed that only the male children of the family should be sent to school and provided with education. To present the pangs of such discrimination, she creates an imaginative female character and named her Judith, who is referred as William Shakespeare's sister with the same potential as him. But, while William was sent to school for being a boy, Judith had to stay at home for she was a girl. Her entrapment within the four walls of the house was stated as "She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But, she was not sent to school." (pp. 47) And thus, every girl child's imagination, ability of creativity and potentials were neither ever encouraged nor inspired, for which they happened to believe on their inability to do anything without depending on a male. Woolf's essay is a representation of the fact of how women became dependents and remained absent from the scenes of literature and fiction because of the practice of gender discrimination in the society. Her essay emphasizes both on the importance of education for every child of the families and space for the girl to decide what she would like to choose for her.

Gender study, though very new, has already wide spread in the spheres of literature, language, history, political science, cinema, media studies etc. It talks mainly about gender inequality and gender re-presentation of the biological state of the individuals. Simon de Beauvoir stated in her "*The Second Sex*" that one never takes birth as a woman rather, one becomes one. The statement is true enough when it comes to the point of gender application. Though 'gender' should have been the concept of one's masculinity and femininity on the social and cultural spheres, it is rather used as being male or female in its entirety.

'Gender' is more a practice than a theory. According to some gender theorists, gender has three different categories: gender identity, gender expression and biological sex. Each division deals with how one's masculinity or femininity works, which fluctuate depending on the surroundings. But, in practice, 'gender' is seemed to be dealing with especially the third category only.

Judith Butler, the great gender theorist on the other hand, is of the view that there is no such distinction between nature and culture or gender and sex. She stated in her book, "*Gender Trouble*" (1990), "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all." (pp. 10-11)

In her book, Butler has criticized a number of feminists and women writers for their agreement on the point that the 'women' need to identified in the political, economical or societal perspectives. But, according to Butler, identity politics was more a harm to the women than any help. She preferred and favored a new feminism that critiques the established assumptions of identity and gender. In her book, she mainly deals with the distinctions and differentiations that are often made between gender and sex. She has protested against the prejudice that 'sex is biological' and 'gender is a cultural construction'. But, to her, sex and gender do not vary much because, both of them are constructed. Sex is biological and depending on that one's behavior is functioned. Hence, they are just the reflections of each other.

Butler wanted to erase those pre-conceived and applied assumptions of distinctions between sex and gender. Through her work, she attempted to create a new feminism or at least a new understanding of feminism from which the gendered pronoun

is removed and that it is never presumed to be a reasonable or reliable or any sensible category. Butler hated the fact that women and their biological facts were taken for granted and presented by the writers or the psychologists or the theorists as they pleased. She was distressed that there was no same rule, judgment or understanding to treat both the male and female sex and their gender as the same. According to her, the human body was a natural entity and hence it should be left that way. She raised a justifiable question in her text "*Gender Trouble*", "How are the contours of the body clearly marked as the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significance are inscribed, a mere fact devoid of value, prior to significance?" (pp. 129)

Feminists like Barbara Smith, Bell Hooks etc. are of the view that to erase gender distinction from the society or to wipe it out, there needs to be a strong feministic stand. Smith, in her path breaking essay, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" said, "Feminism is the political theory that struggles to free all women; women of color, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women- as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women." (pp. 190) On the other hand, Bell Hooks stated in her infamous book "*Feminism Is for Everybody*": "What we need is a feminist revolution in Black life. But to have such a revolution, we must first have a feminist movement. Many Black folks do not know what the word feminism means. They may think of it only as something having to do with white women's desire to share equal rights with white men. In reality, feminism is a movement to end all sexism and sexist oppression." (pp. 124) In short, both the writers are of the view that women would be free from such clutches of gender biasness only when there would be a proper 'understanding' of feminism. Hooks wrote her book on the view that there should be a free feminism, free from every divisive barrier; then only there would be justice to the understanding of feminism.

In African Literature, the feminists, the women writers and the female critics have tried to explore the experiences both positive and negative, of all the African women. While showing the positive sides, they have projected the unique and active roles of the African women that they have been playing through and through. For example, there have been African women who were queens, warriors, fighters, priests, crafts persons, skills persons and more importantly mothers etc. These are such roles that have been played by the women-folk. But, all these roles are seemed to be demolished behind the scenes of all the negative experiences, such as polygamy, forced marriage,

child marriage, and violations between the female relationships for status etc. That was why, the African women writers have given their best effort so that they can make some space in the literary world where they can project and speak solely about the African women, their experiences and their sufferings. Before that there was only masculine presentation of everything and the scenes were preserved for them only. But, when the women writers crossed the threshold, they pull forward all the male stereotypes and prejudices that were dominating the scenes earlier. But, the female writers did not stop simply presenting the injustices suffered by the women-folk for being the weaker sex, but also, they tried to give possibilities, and to create new women, who are strong and independent. To do so, they gave such powers and chances to their heroines, making others, especially the women-folk, aware that they can live and fulfill their dreams if they go in search for it, that they too can become strong enough to demand what they want and can reject what they do not like, that they do not need to depend on the males to carry on their lives, that they too have all the rights to have equality, that they are not just sex objects and sources of reproduction.

The gender studies in African context show the African female writers' grudge and anger when they attack men for they hold the men-folk responsible for the prevailing helpless and poor conditions of the women-folk. To project such plight and condition of the women-folk, the female writers deliberately present the kind of plot and characters in their writings where they can reflect the true colors to their readers. The creations or the works or the writings of the female writers always have a scope or possibility for a positive change. It is firstly because; they wanted to break through the barriers between men and women which always create the dominator-dominated or master-slave relationships. Such relationships always end up making women voiceless, ignored and oppressed. And secondly because, they wanted to make all the females aware that they had possibilities against male chauvinism and male domination.

Though the victims remained the same, the views of the ones who represent their stories, varied. African Female Writers have given new meanings, new practices and new interpretations to the set stereotyped male literature and male presentations. Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba etc. are such names, who not only broke through the male stereotypes but also, gave new ways to re-read and understand the actual plight and condition of women. Flora Nwapa's epoch making novel "*Efuru*" was a great success thus making her a trailblazer. She was the pioneer

Nigerian woman writer to apportion positive and symbolic roles to female characters. She gave her heroine all the power and wish to act accordingly. "*Efuru*" gave new interpretations to the then set monolithic interpretations and gazes on female sex. She introduced a new way to see and understand a woman. She did not stop with success of "*Efuru*". Her subsequent novels, "*One is Enough*" and "*Women are Different*" concern on the evil cultural practices like forced and child marriage, polygamy, women exploitation, slavery etc., especially those sides that the male writers could not bring into focus or rather, failed to put women in their rightful places.

"*One is Enough*" is a novel that centers round a woman's life who aspires to have a life to call her own. When Amaka, the protagonist found out that her husband had been secretly in a relationship with another wife and was planning to bring her home, Amaka rejected her husband because she strongly disapproved the custom of polygamy. The novel records the struggles of the protagonist in finding her identity and individuality in a male dominated society. "*Women are Different*" is a novel that deals with the lives of a group of Nigerian women. With the moving group, the story records the childhood and adulthood of the women. While doing so, the novel mainly records some universal problems faced by the women. The financial dependence of the women, lack of opportunity for women, difficulties in the relationships like 'marriage' and the problems and dilemma of bringing up the children as single parent etc. are well projected in the novel. Likewise, Buchi Emecheta too has projected some similar experiences in varied situations where the women as individuals were crushed under the expectations, demands, prejudice, and

AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

*In the*  
DITCH



BUCHI EMECHETA

Source: <https://goo.gl/images/6BzSxG>



wishes of the men-folk. Through her renowned novels like *“The Slave Girl”*, *“The Bride Price”*, *“Second-Class Citizen”*, *“The Joys of Motherhood”*, *“In the Ditch”* etc.; Emecheta has brought to light what the male writers could not for so many years. The women writers tried to focus, especially on the facts that surround the women, such as the weight of feminine opinion, the independence of her economic position, and the power that the women exert by holding the pestle and the cooking pots.

*“In the Ditch”* is a novel written in an autobiographical tone. Both this novel and *“Second-Class Citizen”* revolve round the central character named, Adah. Adah is the mouthpiece of both these novels. In the chronological aspect, *“In the Ditch”* comes second as it records the later part of the life of Adah. And her early period is recorded in the novel *“Second-Class Citizen”*. *“In the Ditch”* is about the struggles and sufferings of the single parent of four children Adah, in a foreign land amongst the unknown people who never favored or supported her. Adah suffered a lot of bitter experiences for fighting against the set norms and conditions of the patriarchal society. All her sufferings came because she chose to live her life without any male support. She was at times targeted, abused, and threatened by her landlord and others. A woman without any support of man is always seen as weak and helpless in the patriarchal setting. As she went against that notion, she had to pay the price. Her weak ‘gender’ gave others the liberty to abuse and to threaten her. Because she was a ‘woman’, she was seen as weak, helpless and dependent. Seeing a woman working all alone, taking care of her four children all by herself without the help and support of any men was an out of this world thing for the Africans.

‘Gender’ differentiates the biological sex, behavior, competencies, etc. and divides the males and females on the basis of such differences as masculine and feminine. That sounds good up to that point only. But, when it comes to application, it goes way beyond than what the actual meaning of gender suggests. People, no doubt, act differently in all the aspects such as political, social, cultural, psychological etc. according to their gender differences. What goes wrong is that women are never treated as a ‘whole’ and ‘complete’ being; rather they are treated and made to believe that their sole purpose on this earth is to serve the men. And, this leads to social inequality. Because of their different sexual organs, men and women are treated differently. Men are made to believe that they are born strong and are destined to rule over the females. While on the contrary, women are made to believe that they are born only to fulfill all the

necessities and demands of the men. Elizabeth Brown Guillory, in her famous book *“Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationship in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature”* says, “A daughter is raised by a mother to be a nurturing and caring person. The daughter is taught to care for others in the family and to believe in the ultimate value of the family... favoritism to the son damages not only the daughter but also society.” (pp. 163)

Because of such different treatments of two children of different sex of the same womb; the girlhood and the womanhood of the daughters get affected. They do not get equal support and freedom like that of the boys. As their wishes, dreams, hopes and confidence are shattered into pieces right from the beginning of their childhood, the girls grow up to become dependents on men, or to become their slaves. In short, the daughters get neither a proper childhood nor a proper womanhood.

In fact, there are many instances when female fetuses are seen to be aborted. It is as though the female fetuses do not have the rights over their own mother’s womb. Just because she is a female, a weaker sex, and cannot strengthen or enhance her father’s lineage or family line; she does not deserve to live. The mother is not even allowed to cry or mourn at her pain. In her book *“Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationship in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature”*, Elizabeth B. Guillory also states, “... they are taught that pain is not to be given a voice, which often results in insanity. Those who can withstand pain go on to teach their daughters to work hard, produce children and endure pain” (pp. 6)

Such a lesson a woman is expected to learn for herself and to keep passing it to her daughters and granddaughters. And, she is expected not to break the tradition or to oppose. In short, a woman has no right over her own womb; she cannot decide which child of hers would survive and she cannot even cry or express her pain at child birth and child loss. The women are regarded as good mothers, who follow each of their husbands’ words, produce sons to their husbands’ family lines, and teach their children those very lessons that have been in practice since long. And, because of the lessons that they get since their childhood, they happen to act accordingly. Hence, the evils of gendering do not lie simply in the social aspect, but also in the traditional aspect. Buchi Emecheta’s Nnu Ego from the novel *“The Joys of Motherhood”*, is one example of such a character who, spent her life with the hope to enjoy the joys of being a mother. She not only gave birth to sons for her husband’s line but also, supported her husband with all the household and trading works. When Nnaife, her husband was sailing to some unknown land and was away from home, Nnu Ego managed every single expanse of her children.

But, when one of her daughters eloped with the man she was in love with; the whole society and her husband blamed her for giving her children such bad manners. No one ever considered what she had done for her family, but everyone judged her on the basis of what one of her daughters did. Nnu Ego followed exactly what her traditions had taught her since her childhood; that she needed to be a mother to become a complete woman, that she needed to serve her husband with everything she could for that was her sole purpose on the earth as a woman, and that she needed to give her body and soul to the bearing and rearing of children so that she could have a fulfilling life. But, at the end, her traditional beliefs had crushed her to the core.

In the traditional settings, women are treated as ‘weak’ figures. Buchi Emecheta, in her novels like, *“The Joys of Motherhood”* and *“The Slave Girl”*, has presented the ways and concepts with which women were brought up. Since their early childhood, they were made to believe that they were the weaker sex compared to the men and hence they need to depend on them. Also, it was told to them that without the shelter of a male, a woman’s life was impossible and miserable. Even, J. S. Mill has talked about the same thing in his infamous essay, *“The Subjection of Women”*. According to Mill, in the traditional patriarchal society women are brought up in a way as though they were weak, emotional and docile. ‘Emotion’ is the strength of women, but it is shown in the negative sense to them. Also, Mill was of the view that if women were treated equally, there would be a more peaceful society because, women would be able to live their lives according to their own consent without being directed by the men regarding what to do and what not to do.

Mothlabane’s drama *“Iinkunzi Ezimbini”* is also based on such concepts. Mothlabane is a South African femal writer, writing in her native language, Xhosa. The drama deals mainly with a married couple. The traditional superior identity of the male is at stake in the drama. The husband, Sibonda informed his neighbor, Gcisa that his masculinity was at stake because his wife Nolasti was answering him back at home. Sibonda was a kind of man, who never saw or treated women equally. He was so much blind with the traditional practices of male superiority that he found it unbelievable when his wife answered him back. Simply, at that point, he found his position in the house at stake. His beliefs and notions re-present the beliefs and notions of everyman. He is everyman, who blindly praise and support the patriarchal society. Through him, Mothlabane presents the concept that prevails in the mindset of the men-folk, that they

cannot allow their wives to object their opinions, that wives should never be allowed to oppose or protest or disagree, and that the society expects the husbands to control and rule over their wives. That was why it became a big issue for Sibonda when once his wife Nolasti answered him back that he couldnot stop himself from discussing the matter with his neighbor.

Chinua Achebe is one of the most famous African novelists. Even after being a 'male', he writes to fortify the women-folk, and always presents his works with the true colors. Reading his works is like visiting the African context in the real sense. He presents the facts and happenings of the African society without any artificiality. One of his widely circulated and greatly read novels, "*Things Fall Apart*" projects a lot of themes that concern women suppression, gender discrimination, motherhood, patriarchy, women subjugation, male stereotype, marginalization, male domination etc.

Here, in the novel, Achebe does not present his heroine as a weak, dependent and helpless woman; but, as a strong, independent and powerful character. He allows her to voice her mind and her thoughts, which are actually absent in a patriarchal society. But, he did not forget to put light on the true masculine face of the society as well. When Nwoye, the son in the novel, despised the established links with the church goers, his father, Okonkwo contradicted him. "How then would he have begotten a son like Nwoye ... Perhaps he was not his son! No! ... How could he have begotten a woman for a son? Looking at his favorite daughter, Ezinma, he had thought: 'She should have been a boy.'" (pp. 61-63) Here, the father is frustrated when he found out that his son Nwoye preferred his mother's fantasies more than his father's stories of bloodshed and violence. He wanted his son to become as masculine as he was. He did not want his son to adore the fantasies and imaginations at all because; he regarded such topics as the matters of women and believed that men needed to live in and with the reality only. Through the above quotation, Okonkwo points out the exact facts of the male dominated patriarchal society. The patriarchal society wants sons for the father's line; but, that very society rejects the son if he commits any mistake or goes against the wishes of the father. When a son does well, he is regarded as the father's child; but, when he does something bad, and then only he belongs to his mother. It is as though, according to the set norms of the society, men deserve only the 'good' and women get the discarded ones.

Some same kinds of situations are seen in one of Buchi Emecheta's famous novels, "*The Joys of Motherhood*". Even Nnu Ego too, in the novel, was fed up with

such two-way standards of life. She was disgusted after giving all her life, energy, dreams, joys etc. to feed her motherhood. What she was paid off with at the end was blame, hatred and abusive rebukes. She understood quite well that “When the children were good they belonged to the father; when they were bad, they belonged to the mother.” (pp. 232)

Andrea Cornwall, in his edited book, “*Readings in Gender in Africa: Readings in Series*”, presents two different sets of meanings in regard of women and gender studies. Those two different sets of meanings are ‘women as victims’ and ‘women as heroines’. He stresses on how there have been changed meanings of women re-presentations in the literature, especially in the African context. The writings that re-present ‘women as victims’ present the ever prevailing male dominated patriarchal society, which suppress and oppress women and make them more and more powerless, voiceless and dependents on their male counterparts. On the other hand, there are other re-presentations of ‘women as heroines’ in the literature, where the women are presented as strong, assertive and self-reliant. Cornwall’s edited book; hence, gives the polar apart projections and interpretations of the same sex, i.e. the female, which had otherwise been always overlooked.

Mariama Ba’s “*So Long a Letter*” is one such example where we can see both the sets of meanings in regard of women and gender studies as stated by Andrea Cornwall. Ba here, in this novel, re-presents two different kinds of women. One is the projection of the traditionally expected women, i.e. the ‘women as victims’, helpless and dependent. And, the other is the projection of a ‘new’ woman, who defied the roles of traditionally expected women, i.e. the ‘women as heroines’, confident and self-reliant. Ramatoulaye is the projection of ‘women as victims’. She accepted all the sufferings and pain given by her husband by rejecting her and bringing a second wife even after the twenty-five years of happy marriage and twelve children. But, she did not leave her husband. She believed that she belonged to her husband and she kept on keeping her faith that way till the end. On the other hand, Aissatou is the projection of ‘women as heroines’. Though she had a love marriage and her mother-in-law never favored her, she was happy with her husband. But, when her husband went for the second marriage to make his mother happy and promised Aissatou only to love her; she left him. She did not believe in the polygamy. Hence, she left her husband a letter explaining her actions, went to the United States and never returned. There she established herself as an individual and never looked back.

Ama Ata Aidoo's "*Anowa*" is a representation of the traditional, helpless and dependent women. Through her heroine Anowa, Aidoo represents the expectations of the society from a woman; especially, how women should believe the traditional values and follow them, and how they should concentrate only on bearing children for her husband's family line. Anowa's mother, Badua spoke the traditional beliefs of women when she said, "... marry a man, tend a farm and be happy to see her peppers and her onions grow. A woman should bear children, many children so she can afford to have one or two die." (pp. 12) These lines were told when Anowa desperately wanted to conceive but, she was unable to succeed. Anowa too, like every other woman, wanted to have a happy and content life with her husband and children but, she was unable to conceive every time she tried. On the other hand, In "*The Joys of Motherhood*", the central character, Nnu Ego regarded herself as a 'prisoner' because of such set believes of the society. At the beginning, she suffered a lot for taking time to conceive. Her people, relatives, in-laws and the whole society had started to assume her as a barren woman. In fact, because of her failure to conceive, her marriage failed. No doubt, she later had a second marriage and became a proud mother of seven children. Despite that she was not happy. She could not be happy because she was always entrusted with the roles by the society that she had to keep on playing without any question or enquiry. While spending her whole life in playing those roles and satisfying her people, she could never have a little bit of time for herself to relax and to enjoy the joys of her motherhood. Earlier, as Badua stated in Ama Ata Aidoo's "*Anowa*" that in the traditional setting of Ibadan, wives were given a yard of land to cultivate and to be happy with the harvesting. But, Lagos had changed a lot with the coming of colonialism. There was not much land to be owned and provide the wives with. Hence, to help her husband economically, Nnu Ego had to do business. All the women did that in Lagos. Though the demands and expectations of the husbands remained the same, everything other had changed. When Nnaife was working under the Meers, Nnu Ego had a bit relaxing life though she did not like her husband working under the white men. Also, at that time, they did not have any children. But, when Nnaife was appointed in a ship, and had a job; what it seemed to Nnu Ego a relieved and relaxed life in regard of economic stability, became a burdensome one. In the absence of her husband, she had to manage everything. She had to take care of all the costs all by herself for she was not getting any kind of help from Nnaife. Her desires and wishes for the joys of motherhood became sour towards the end of the novel. She said, "Never, not even in death. I am a prisoner of my own flesh and

blood... The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life." (pp. 210)

According to the pioneer of gender studies, Judith Butler, who stated in her path breaking work, "*Gender Trouble*" that gender is not "a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of [habitual] acts*" (pp. 179) But, people view it way too differently. Unlike other women, Anowa (in the novel "*Anowa*") was educated and was strong enough to speak her mind. Her husband, Kofi Ako kept on reminding her that "... a good woman has no mouth and brain." In fact, though theirs was a love marriage, when Anowa objected to have slaves and urged her husband not to keep slaves, Kofi Ako said, "Who are you to tell me what I must do or not do?" (pp. 29) "We all know that you are a woman and I am the man." (pp. 30) Even in another novel of Emecheta, "*Second-Class Citizen*", the protagonist, Adah claimed her desires to become a writer. But, she was ignored and looked down upon too pathetically by her husband, Francis, on the basis of her 'sex'. He shuts her with the opinion that women were brainless and that the writing career was not meant for women.

As daughters, wives or women; they always had to suffer the pangs of gender inequality. Just because of the female gender, they are always seen as weak, powerless, voiceless and dependents. It is as though, they do not deserve to relax and enjoy their own lives. As daughters, they are always expected to please their parents and brothers by doing all the household chores and helping their parents in earning more money so that the sons can get an education and a comfortable life. As wives, they are always expected to please their husbands, fulfill all the demands and wishes of their husbands; and to bear as many children possible, especially boys for the family line of their husbands. And, as women, the society always expects them to behave and to follow the male stereotyped practices without any question, objection or protest. They are never seen as individuals or human beings. Nnu Ego's cries (in "*The Joys of Motherhood*") to the Gods, speak of a woman's desperation to get her free from the bondages of the society. "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" (pp. 209)

Buchi Emecheta's award winning and widely renowned novel, "*The Slave Girl*" brings in the submission of women and their acceptance of gender inequality practiced

by the traditional patriarchal society. The novel also identifies the differences between the gender roles played by both females and males. One of the strong female characters of the novel, Ma Palagada was a famous and successful businesswoman. She set her stall in Onitsha Market, which succeeded in getting more and more customers. To make her business strong and to keep that going, she needed more helping hands. And, therefore, she gathered slaves from wherever she could and provided some of them with the basic education so that they could help her with both her trade and her domestic works in a better way. Many other business men and women envied her for her great success in trade and her ability to keep so many slaves. It was all Ma Palagada's credit that she was so much sympathetic and good hearted woman that she gave much more liberty, freedom and privileges to her slaves than that of the other slave owners. But, despite all these good qualities and hard work, an undeniable fact that Ma Palagada was a woman, brought her down from all of her credits. In fact, she got no credit for all that she did. As the traditional society saw the women as powerless; Ma Palagada could not own the slaves despite the fact that she had paid for them with her hard earned money. All her slaves belonged to Pa Palagada and he owned them because he was the man. Though, Pa Palagada was never into trading and had never worked so hard like Ma Palagada yet he happened to own everything because he was the man of the house and also because he owned Ma Palagada. Without doing any work or making any effort, and simply by misusing the female slaves to fulfill his desires and abusing the slaves, he happened to own everyone and everything in the Palagada house. "It was a known fact that although Ma Palagada was the one who had bought them, they ultimately belonged to Pa Palagada and whatever he said or ordered would hold." (pp. 112)

And, therefore, he took the advantage of such beliefs and practices, "He was one of those big, manly males who would not hesitate to tell you that women were brainless, mindless and easily pliable." (pp. 99) He used his female slaves for his own fulfillment. He had his eyes cast upon Chiago, a slave whom Ma Palagada had bought. When she was new in the household and fell to his prey, she got scared, frightened and cried at times. But, time taught her to get used to the behaviors of Pa Palagada. It was only Chiago, who Pa Palagada wanted him to be served by. Whenever he had to cut his nails, or wanted a massage, he used to call for Chiago only. He took advantage of such situations and touched her private parts. She taught herself that she had no right to protest or deny. So, with the passage of time she let him do whatever he wanted to do



with her without giving any reactions. He used to make love with her and she had learnt to stop protesting. But, ironically she believed what Pa Palagada told her, that "... he had promised her 'her' freedom and that he would one day make her his second wife." (pp. 94) The irony here is that the freedom that Chiago desired was supposed to be coming with the fact that she had to be Pa Palagada's second wife, whether she wanted that or not. Her consent never mattered. And, she too never tried to voice her thoughts, nor did she ever try to fight for her rights. Her total submission to Pa Palagad proves what the daughters believe since their childhood, i.e. "All her life a woman always belonged to some male." (pp. 112) whether it be her father, her husband, or her master; a woman is never free.

Such treatment of gender biasness is nothing but the result of how one views it as. It is one's understanding that gives meaning and interpretations to what gender is and how its application should be. For instance, Pa Palagada never wanted to view women anything more than mere sex objects and sources of pleasure, fun and production. But, Pa Palagada is not the only man in the novel, who embraces such views. His son, Clifford, who went to the city of Lagos for his education, held the same notions as his father. He too believed that he could treat the slaves as he wanted for his mother had paid for them. Like his father, Clifford too wanted to have a relationship with a slave girl, named Ojebeta, the protagonist of the novel. After coming home from Lagos, when Clifford had seen Ojebeta for the very first time, he wanted her. He knew that his parents had wanted him to marry some white-men's daughter. But, he had cast his eyes upon Ojebeta. He wanted to marry her. Ojebeta was too young to understand the complexities of slavery then. She had always thought that she belonged to Ma Palagada and hence she needed to take orders from all of her family members so that she could get her food and shelter. But, when Clifford expressed his desire to marry her, she said, "But I am only your mother's slave." (pp. 117) It was because, though she had heard the masters marrying their slaves but, she could not imagine how that happened. She was unsure of whether to be "glad or unhappy". (pp. 118) She was very shocked at that moment. Clifford had once wanted to impose his masculinity and mastery by trying to kiss Ojebeta forcefully. When she hesitated and screamed, she was slapped right on her face so hard that she could not cry or shout any more. The blow had put her to shock and she wondered what kind of likening Clifford had for her. On one hand, he demanded to like

her so much that he wanted to make her his wife and on the other hand, he slapped her when she protested against the forceful relationship.

Pa Palagada represents everyman of the Nigerian household. He is strong, powerful and 'male'. Without even going to business or working, he owned everything that Ma Palagada earned. He demanded, "Palagada is my wife, don't you forget that." (pp. 116) Even after working hard, earning money for her family, buying slaves for the family's help, and managing the business; Ma Palagada did not get any authority over the success which she had achieved from all of her hard works. Pa Palagada never considered Ma Palagada's hard works. He never gave any recognition to the womenfolk. Pa Palagada had the habit of looking down upon at the entire womenfolk of his life, even his own daughters. He believed that women are created only to satisfy and please the men with whatever way they could. But, at the end of the day he cried for his mother whenever he was hurt or sick. That very Palagada, who "roared like a mad lion- so terrible was his voice that the whole house seemed to shake" at all the times; "... always cried for his mother whenever he had the slightest ailment, even if it was an ordinary minor touch of malaria. He was one of those big, manly males who would not hesitate to tell you that women were created as playthings for men, that they were brainless, mindless, and easily pliable. And yet it was to a woman that he would go to pour out his troubles, wanting her to listen, to sympathize and make appropriate noises, to give him a cuddle, tell him how handsome and kind he was, and how everything was going to be all right and that he should not worry. Yet he never respected any woman." (pp. 98-99) Here Emecheta presents the women in their strongest incarnations. As 'mother', women are way stronger than the rest of her roles or incarnations. The stronger gender, i.e. the males always takes shelter of their mothers whenever they are hurt, scared or frightened. Their masculinity gives way in such occasions when they know that only a mother could heal them from that, and then they turn to their mothers. But, those same women must have been used and misused in the name of duty, responsibility, tradition, marriage, motherhood and expectations. When on one hand, the males exploit the females in the name of tradition, culture, ritual and custom; they seek shelter of their mother, an incarnation of female. Emecheta has very tactfully presented this fact in her projection of the society and the male stereotypes. Simon de Beauvoir was also of the same opinion that in their solitude and loneliness, men always turn to the women; whether it is his mother, his wife, his daughter, or his female slave.

Through her novels, Emecheta presents a different kind of slavery, which is practiced upon women. Women are doubly enslaved for being 'women'. Firstly, they are enslaved as 'slaves' either as a result of their poor financial condition, for a living, for human trafficking or for their helpless condition. And, secondly, they are enslaved as 'women' either for the fun and pleasure of the men, for sex and children, for male stereotypes, or for gender inequality etc. That is why Emecheta equates the system of marriage with that of slavery. She presents marriage as nothing more than change of masters. When Ojebeta met Jacob and thought that he was the man of her life, she was happy. When Jacob proposed to marry her and take her back to her own village and back to her brothers; Ojebeta was more than happy. And, when Jacob wanted to pay back her slavery money to her master, Ojebeta wondered what she had done to get such a gentleman as her husband. But, in truth, Jacob wanted to pay back her slavery money because he knew that until and unless he paid the sum, he could never 'own' her in the true sense. And, only to 'own' her completely, he had called Clifford to his home and paid off the amount that Okolie had taken when he sold Ojebeta to Ma Palagada. Ojebeta was so happy that she said to her husband, "Thank you my new owner. Now I am free in your house. I could not wish for a better master." (pp. 179) None of the people, who were present there at that time, wondered how one could be free under some owner. Rather, everyone was happy. It was because, that was the custom of the society. That was what applied and followed in the traditional society. And, that was divine to the inhabitants.

In regard of Ojebeta's basic education, we could clearly see that her basic education failed to bring her any sense of freedom or identity or individuality. We all know that to break through the set norms of patriarchy and to bring in equality and equity, women need to educate themselves at first. They need to know the value of education; they need to understand what they can conquer with the enlightenment of education. Bell Hooks, in her book "*Educating Women: A Feminist Agenda*", stated that many of the females who participated in the recent feminist movements were all educated. But, they had failed to have a thorough look over the sexist exploitation of the women and the failure of the number of educated women. Hooks cited the vital changes that education could and should bring to the lives of women. With the help of proper education, according to Hooks, women would be able to understand, get ideas, gather information as well as convey them. Then, as Hooks said, education would be able to

help expand the sphere and limits of women's imagination and also develop their thinking ability. A good education would also be able to give birth to the logic and reasoning so that the women would be able to fight against the norms and conditions of the society and bring changes to them and the society as well. Also, there would be a better understanding of each of the woman's sufferings and struggles and that they would be able to aid each other in the true sense. And, to turn all these beautiful dreams into reality, women need to be literate as well as they should be able to value the abilities of reading, writing, and thinking.

According to Simon de Beauvoir, gender identity or gender inequality is more determined by the society than by the biological sex. She stated in her thought provoking creation, "*The Second Sex*" that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. The notions of gender inequality, gender discrimination, gender differences, gender biasness, gender identity etc. are inherent from the society. The social practices of such evils not only make the women inferior to men in regard of their gender, but also it describes all the possible chances and opportunities for a woman to grow as an individual, which she had been denied of since always. The social construction of the feminine identity enslaves the baby girl as soon as she is born. According to such constructions, a woman can never be free. As soon as she is born, she is destined to serve her parents (especially the father) and her brothers (if there is any). She should also work and help in the family income so that the sons of the house get a good education and a comfortable life. In "*The Joys of Motherhood*", when the youngest daughters of Nnu Ego expressed their wishes to go to school like their brothers and have education, Nnu Ego shouted at them saying, "But you are girls! They are boys. You have to sell to put them in a good position in life, so that they will be able to look after the family. When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you." (pp. 197) Her daughters understood what Nnu Ego meant. They accepted their fate and kept working hard day and night so that their brothers could have a good education and then a good job and thus a good life. It is as though for being girls or to say for taking birth as females; they had lost their rights to education, their dreams and hopes and their childhood too.

Anita Desai, an Indian English novelist, gives one such kind of instance in her novel, "*Fasting Feasting*". Through the novel "*Fasting Feasting*", Anita Desai presents the gender inequality in the Indian context. When Mama was telling her eldest daughter, Uma, about her childhood; she actually presented the true colors of the Indian traditional

male stereotypes, though she herself was unaware of it. She said, “In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family.” (pp. 19) Kate Millet, in her book “*Sexual Politics*” considered gender as “the sum total of what is appropriate to each gender, by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and oppression.” (pp. 31) But the reality was far away than the ‘fiction’ and ‘consideration’.

No doubt, education too was denied to the daughters in the Indian context. But, apart from that Anita Desai throws light on the sad fact of how ‘food’ was also gendered. Good, nutritious and costly food was given to the males only. As if for being girls only, they had to lose their rights over some selective special foods. The gendering of males and females perhaps never considered that females too had tongues and stomachs to taste and eat such foods. Also, women had to appear themselves in the ways the males were satisfied or pleased with. They had no rights over their own interest of whether to put make up or not, whether to wear traditional or modern, whether to act sophisticated or poor etc. Just because the women belonged to the ‘female’ sex, they lost rights over their own bodies, interests, and dreams. For instance, in the novel “*Fasting Feasting*”, Aruna was a modern girl who knew how to put make up, how to present herself in front of an audience and how to behave in a sophisticated manner and that was why she had a marriage of her desire. She could even control her husband’s habits as she was accepted by the norms of the society and also as she had absorbed all the impositions put upon the women by the society. But, Uma failed to absorb those impositions put upon her. She did not know how to present herself or how to appear in front of an audience. She had no knowledge regarding the ways of dressing to impress others. Hence, she had a failed marriage and she remained a burden for her parents. Here, we can quote Simon de Beauvoir from her writing, “*The Second Sex*”, where she had stated regarding the space and choice of the women: “She can also permit herself defiance of fashion and ‘what people will say’; she is freed from social obligations, dieting, and the care of her beauty.” (pp. 595)

Beauvoir definitely meant that women should be free enough to live her life in her own ways. And to make that happen, women should be permitted to have some space for their own so that she could feel free to think for herself. If we evaluate Emecheta’s novels in this kind of aspect, then we would find character like Adah in “*Second-Class*

*Citizen*” who was powerful, educated, strong, determined and a proud single parent in a foreign land. Whereas, we have another character, Nnu Ego in “*The Joys of Motherhood*” who was submissive, dependent, and typical kind of woman in comparison to Adah. Both the characters were created by the same writer, and both the characters belonged to the same native land and same patriarchal setting. Yet, there was difference between them because one chose to educate herself whereas the other chose to keep having faith in the tradition. Though it seemed at certain points that both the women were succeeding in their own ways, at the end we can see them failing because of the lacking of that space and freedom Virginia Woolf had mentioned in her book.

In the first part of the novel “*Fasting Feasting*”, we find that Uma was snatched of her dreams of education and schooling when Mama was pregnant with her baby brother, Arun. Uma was suggested to discontinue her education at first. But, Uma used to protest against such suggestions by reaching school earlier than the other students and by being impatiently waiting for the summer holidays to get over and the school to reopen. All her efforts came to an end when she failed in an exam. Mama and Papa got their golden chance to put an end to her education and keep her at home so that she could be helpful to her mother in the household chores. Mama said, “What’s the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother.” (pp. 31) Later, she also suggested Uma by saying, “You’ll be happier at home. You won’t need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you... Till then, you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house.” (pp. 32)

The patriarchal society not only expects, but also demands the females to do according to the wishes of men. In a patriarchal society, men get the privilege to run the families as they please because; they are the ‘heads’ of the families. What adds more to the continuity of such a discriminated is women’s acceptance to all those discriminations. Women learn to compromise, adjust, accept and adapt all the traditional and cultural expectations bestowed upon them. They are taught to be submissive, giving and content with their husbands’ actions. They are taught to suppress their actual feelings and agree to whatever the men-folk decide for them. Freedom, opportunity, career, individuality, rights etc. were mere words in the lives of the females, or to say that such words were applicable to the world of the males only. In “*Fasting Feasting*”, Uma’s confusion in regard of gaining a career and living a life for one’s own ‘self’ is well presented by Anita Desai. Uma was denied of education when on the contrary, her

brother, Arun was given all the opportunities to have an education not only in India, but also in the foreign country, Massachusetts. Uma always wondered how her brother might be free in the foreign land, and free from the clutches of parenthood, tradition, custom, and gender inequality. But, she could not understand what a career could offer to an individual. She failed to understand the infinite possibilities and freedom that a career could offer to an individual that it was the utmost priority of an educated person. “A CAREER. Leaving home. Living alone. These troubling, secret possibilities now entered in Uma’s mind... But Uma could not visualize escape in the form of a career. What was a career?” (pp. 120) Uma had accepted the fact that in a male dominated society, both education and career were meant for the men. Women had nothing to do with them.

Even Ojebeta too, in “*The Slave Girl*”, accepted things as they were. She took every happening of her life as the way that they should have been so. Even after getting freedom from the clutches of the Palagadas and doing business of palm oil in her hometown; and even after having a bit of education; Ojebeta never considered herself to be strong and able enough to pay off her slavery money. “In her own way Ojebeta was content and did not want more of life. She was happy with her husband, happy to be submissive, even to accept an occasional beating, because that was what she had been brought up to believe a wife should expect.” (pp. 173-174)

In “*The Joys of Motherhood*” too, Emecheta presents a submissive woman. Emecheta gave her heroine a chance of second marriage. She gave her heroine, Nnu Ego, the chance to do business. She made Nnu Ego strong enough to fight against all odds to manage her household and everything else that concerns her family, when her husband sailed off to an unknown land as a cook on a ship. She gave her heroine enough power to withstand the obstacles of single-parenting in a city which was being colonized. But, she could not set her heroine free from the set norms and conditions of the society. Emecheta failed against the male stereotypes of the patriarchal society. She could not set Nnu Ego free from the strong clutches that the men made society had had upon the females. Even after being the bread winner of the family and even after being the single parent of her children for so many years, Nnu Ego could not set her free from the prevailing gender roles of the society. “Nnaife is the head of the family. He owns me, just like the God in the sky owns us. So even though I pay the fees, yet he owns me. So in other words he pays.” (pp. 245) Through this dialogue of Nnu Ego, we get a glimpse of the women mindset. How the women mindset is made to believe and understand the situations

keeping in mind their positions as inferior to the men, is well projected in the novel. Nnu Ego herself admitted her husband to be her owner. Hence, like Ma Palagada, Nnu Ego too gave all the credit of her hard work to her husband simply because the society considered him as the 'head' of the house.

Women are never treated as complete human. They do not get to enjoy their human rights. No books or documents say specifically about 'what and which' are human rights, but they are commonly known as the fundamental rights that the certain Constitutions of the certain Countries and some Commissions promise to provide. But many people are still there who are deprived of those rights and are yet to be rescued from certain suppressions. And this problem is seen mainly in case of the weaker sections of the society, as for example the powerless, the poor, the people living in rural or backward areas and most prominently the women folk. Here, at this point comes the question of 'Gendering'. Why and on what basis is this gendering done?...again to which there is no certain and specific answer, apart from this we all know that the powerful rules over the powerless. But again, then rises the question of 'Imperialism'. If a country, ruled by some others would have been practicing all these social ills such as suppression, division, gendering etc. then that would have been a different case. But, if we talk about a country like America or Africa or even India, it is something very much unacceptable.

The inequality in gender or gendering of women remains an unsolved problem. Even after the so called 'freedom' and 'independence', women are not yet free from those typical norms and conditions which were imposed upon them a long way back. But, 'men' have broken through all norms and conditions, restrictions, social barriers etc. If that would not have been so women would not have needed to write, ask and beg for what they already deserve. Women are not given as much space as men for which Virginia Woolf had to write "*A Room of One's Own*" asking for the space of women, where they can be their own selves, can understand themselves and can act as they like. But that was not so and to present this, Simone de Beauvoir has written the "*The Second Sex*", where she says that women are actually regarded as the second sex, the unnoticed, unimportant, rejected part of the society. She portrays that suppressed and gendered scenario of her time.

But, it is also a fact that things have not been same as before. Where on one hand numbers of remarkable women writers are coming to the scene, other women are getting inspired by those thought provoking writings on another and literally many of them are



breaking through the pre-conceived notions. Women are deconstructing the pre-conceived notions at a pace but another fact is that a number of women are still seen through those so called 'typical and conservative' ways, and as the 'same' regardless of so many differences.

It is known to all that the Europeans had ruled almost all over the World for a great period of time. During that time, or it can be said that during that reign the terms like suppression, male domination, stronger vs. weaker, gendering etc. were applicable and at the same time acceptable. The whole scene was divided into two parts: the Colonizer and the Colonized, or the First World Countries and the Third World Countries etc. But, things have and should have changed with the coming of the realization of individual freedom and rights. Instead of that, even after the individual freedom of the countries from the dominating British reign, the tags like the Third World Country, the Weaker Section etc. have not been lifted. And thus, it can be said that we, the people of those Third World Countries are still being ruled by the First World Countries. We are still being presented as the 'Other'. And it is very shameful that even after realizing our own needs, deserving and rights we are not fighting for it. It is as if we have adjusted and are comfortable with the pre-conceived notions. But, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist, in her essay "*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Western Discourses*" published in 1984 said that we, the women of the Third World countries, are not 'same' as the First World Countries re-present us. There are a lot of differences among us. And, a kind of difference is seen in the fiction writers who are seen rescuing through their writings, those deprived and gendered folks.

From a survey of recent (works published in 1980s and in early 1990s) Western Feminist theory on 'Third World Women', Mohanty concludes that this was not yet the case, and that 'assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West, characterizes a sizeable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world.' Mohanty examines how research on women in the Third World has been shaped by the interests and standpoint of Western feminists who have taken the West as the primary referent. Her essay tries to break through the monolithic binary of 'self' and 'other' which was brought by the West. Here, the 'self' is the men and the Western women. The Third World Women are gendered

doubly; they are not only the 'other' to men but also to the Western women. Likewise, Hazel V. Carby too stated in her work "*White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*", "History has constructed our sexuality and our femininity as deviating from those qualities with which white women, as the prize of the Western world have been endowed." (pp. 163) Such writings and comments mean nothing else but one thing that the gender distinction and gender discrimination are nothing but the construction of the society.

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, an Italian writer generalized the entire African women as one homogenous group of 'women' in her essay, "*Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*". In her essay, she declared prostitution to be sole work option for the African women. She may have some base no doubt, but she was very wrong to put a comment, so strong, on the entire women folk of Africa. C.T. Mohanty protested against such re-presentation of Cutrufelli and she criticizes Cutrufelli in her essay "*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Western Discourses*" for generalizing every women of Africa as 'women of Africa' regardless of their differences on the fields of class, community, race etc.

Gender inequality remains a major barrier to human development. Women have made great strides since a long time, but they have not yet gained gender equality. The disadvantages facing women are a major source of inequality. All too often, women are discriminated against in health, education, political representation, making decision, labor, market, organizing etc. with negative repercussions for development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice. It is noticed that the position of human and many aspects and things have changed with the coming of colonialism and post-colonialism. Things got better than before in a way or the other. But for women, it was only the 'worst' that they got. Just for an example Cutrufelli's essay "*Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*" can be mentioned here, where she cites the marriage rituals of an African tribe, Bemba, as a multistage event, whereby, a young man becomes incorporated into his wife's family. He takes up to live with them and gives his service in return of food and maintenance. Physical relationship with his wife was allowed only after the girl becomes mature. The community people organize a ceremony and after that only the man can have legal authority over his wife. If the husband forcefully wants to have any right over his wife, he will then have to pay penalty for that. This used to be the scene of the Bemba tribe, before colonialism. But, after colonialism, the marriage system

got changed. The bride is taken to her in-law's house in return of money. And, as a result, the Bemba women have lost their protection of the tribal laws that they used to have before colonialism. The laws gave freedom to women over the married relation but with the coming of colonialism, the power goes to the hands of the male, and thus women are gendered again.

Same kinds of things are seen to be portrayed by the African American novelist Buchi Emecheta, in her novel *"The Joys of Motherhood"*. Through this novel, Emecheta presents an African scenario where the women folks were seen to be used as objects of production and housekeeping only. The novel records a time of pre- and post-colonialism. Colonialism had shattered the lives of women only, because the expectations and demands of the husbands in both the settings remained the same. It was only the women, whose 'identity' was moved. In the traditional society, a man could marry as many wives as he wanted and then he provided separate huts to live in and separate plot of lands for farming and producing food, to each of his wives. But, in the colonial society, the lands were taken by the Portuguese people for their industrial and business purposes and eventually it impacted upon the previous privileges of a woman. The privileges that the women were enjoying in the traditional society were lost in the colonial society. In the colonial society the wives of the same husband had to live under one roof, sharing the salary of the husband among all the wives and their children.

African writing in English is very new to the genre of African Literature. People have taken to write only after colonialism. Very few women writers are mentioned in this history, powerful male writers are dominating the scene. But, it does not mean that powerful women writers are not available. Some of the powerful women writers are Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo etc. Flora Nwapa's *"Efuru"*, Mariama Ba's *"So Long a Letter"* etc. are such kinds of writings through which they have presented the plight and position of women in the traditional African society with all its true colors. Also, they have presented the changes that take place upon the lives of the women with the coming of colonialism. Their writings can be regarded as the writing back to the male dominated patriarchal societies where, no freedom is given to the womenfolk. Or, in other words we can say that in the name of deserving rights, the womenfolk gets a limited area to play their roles with a number of restrictions. It is not that women writers are missing out from the scene of literature. Some powerful male writers like Sembena Ousmane, Ngugi Wa Thiongo etc. are trying to help and support

the womenfolk through their writings. They have tried to present the true history of female sex, and presented women as 'what' and 'who' they actually are.

Though Buchi Emecheta's novel, "*The Joys of Motherhood*" centers round a female character yet throughout the whole novel it doesn't feel like the women folk are playing any independent and powerful role. The 'gendering' of the women folk is well presented here in this novel. This gendering or even we can say that the violation of human rights goes to such a great extent that the joys of motherhood that once used to complete a woman became sour and burdensome. Even, the 'colonialism' which we take as a way to modernism could not change the prevailing patriarchy or the male dominated society. Here, Emecheta not only critiques the idea of motherhood, but also the coming of colonialism that supported the 'men folk' by giving them every right and power and 'changed' the women's position by not allowing them even a room of their own.

In the novel, Emecheta has mainly dealt with the concept and idea of motherhood and has critiqued the idea of 'motherhood' twice. Firstly, she has criticized the idea for giving so much importance and necessity to being a mother for a woman; and secondly, she has criticized for turning this most beautiful feeling, into a sour and burdensome one. Emecheta presents Nnu Ego as the central character of the novel who was the asset to her mother, Ona and the prideful daughter of her father, Agbadi. As she grew up, she turned to be a very beautiful, pulpy and adamant girl like her mother used to be. Many young, powerful and successful men had cast their eyes upon her. Though at first Agbadi did not want part with his beautiful daughter and Ona's only remaining, later he realized that she needed to get married because he was not going to be by her side forever. And thus, Amatoku was chosen for Nnu Ego's husband. He was a rich and strong man. The marriage was completed with due customs and rituals of their tradition and culture. Agbadi was given huge amount of 'bride price'. The most precious asset of Agbadi and Ona, was thus sold in the name of marriage. This concept and practice of bride price in the marriage bring a question mark to the very existence of women. Women lose their identity or individuality where such custom is applied. And thus the concept of gender discrimination comes for such rituals are done only against the women and never ever for the men. The buying and selling of the women in the name of marriage is followed in many cultures over the globe which is applied for only one gender, i.e. the females.

Later, in the novel, we come to know that Nnu Ego was rejected by her husband as because she could not conceive. A woman, in such kind of society, is categorized as

juicy or barren on the basis of being able to conceive. “A woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman”. (pp. 65) Strangely, after the failed marriage, Emecheta gives her heroine a great right that other women got very rarely, i.e. a second marriage. But, the twist is that Agbadi arranges the second marriage with a person named Nnaife, who lives faraway in Lagos. The choice of the groom from a distant land, was to get rid of the ‘shame’ of a second marriage, or may be a failed marriage. But, the second marriage too was done with an exchange of ‘bride price’. Anyway, right after the second marriage she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy, who died a few days after his birth. Here we can see how a society imposes certain rules and regulations upon women and how the human rights like equality, freedom etc. are violated. To become a mother was thought to be so much important that there happened to be no place in the society for a ‘barren’ woman. And, this thing hurt Nnu Ego in such a way that she tried to commit suicide. Here we can have a glimpse of the violation of the right to equality and the right to freedom. When a man can marry as many women as he wants and can become the father of those children from his wives who are ‘juicy’ and can reject the ‘barren’ ones; why women who fails to conceive are not given the liberty to adopt a child? Why giving birth is considered so much important? Why is a woman’s position considered according to her motherhood? Why the importance, rights or preferences of a woman is given depending upon the number of children she bears?

In H. O. Agarwal’s book, “*Human Rights*” we find that the first agreement on a comprehensive statement of human rights was when the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nation General Assembly in 1948. Article 1 says that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 11 says that Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) demands equal rights to women and men to social security. Also, article 22-27 of the UDHR says that each contracting state is required to take steps to the maximum of its available resources to achieve progressively the full realization of the rights without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The creation of a regional agency to protect human rights was first proposed at the African Conference on the ‘Rule of Law’ at Lagos (Nigeria) in 1961. This Conference was sponsored by the International Court of Justice. A resolution was adopted which is known as Law of Lagos inviting the African Governments to study the

possibility of adopting the African Convention on Human Rights. The African Charter, also known as Banjul Charter, was adopted on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1981; but, was literally followed from 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1986. Later, the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU) replaced the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on July, 2002. On 1998, the Protocol to the African Charter was adopted by which African Court was established. The African Charter is regarded to be unique in the sense that it has given emphasis on ‘people’s rights’ which reflect African social traditions of collective and group life. Some of them are: Equality before the law (Article 3), Right to liberty (Article 6), Right to enjoy the state of physical and mental health (Article 16), Right to education (Article 17), Right to equality (Article 19), Right to existence (Article 20), Right to economic, social and cultural development (Article 22), Right to national and international peace and security (Article 23), Right to a general satisfactory environment (Article 24) etc.

But, every kind of right is seen to be restrained in case of women. To depict this, numbers of fiction writers are writing things depicting the real life situations of the women. And, sometimes they give their women characters some rights to remind the readers ‘how’ and ‘what’ they are lacking in. May be, keeping all these in her mind, Emecheta has tried her best from every aspect to let her heroine avail the deserving rights. Nnu Ego, in “*The Joys of Motherhood*” gives birth to a number of children. Yet, throughout the novel, it is nowhere that she finds her identity or authority. When her husband was away for a long period of time and she was not getting any financial help from him, she managed to put up a stall of her own all by herself. She managed to feed her hungry children. But, all the while it was due to her husband that she was managing the things. She believed her husband to be her owner and hence whatever she gets, the credit was her husband’s. Even, when towards the end of the novel, Nnaife was in jail and could not support his family; Nnu Ego managed everything, even the school fees of her sons. When, during the trial in the English court, she was asked about it, she said that her husband was managing everything and helping her. And when it was asked ‘how’, she replied: “Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me, just like God in the sky owns us. So even though I pay the fees, yet he owns me. So in other words he pays.” (pp. 245) Even, Nnaife too is found to believe so when he says, “Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner?” (pp. 50) It is a pity that paying ‘bride price’ gives the ‘license’ to a man to rule over and to own a woman. And, according to the customs, paying the bride price meant the authority over an individual. There was no freedom even in their

thoughts. They accepted themselves to be owned by ‘fathers’ before marriage and by ‘husbands’ after marriage. It is as if their lives are never meant to them.

Through Nnu Ego, Emecheta even critiques the idea of motherhood as a kind of slavery. In the due course of bearing and rearing her children, she suffered a lot of loneliness even after being a mother of nine children. That typical society, which regards that girls are to be married off and boys are to be educated and do jobs and business is very much prominent here in this novel. Even though Nnu Ego sent her elder daughters Kehinde and Taiwo to school, that was only for a short period of time. There is a kind of clash between traditionalism and modernism in her mind, but at the end she always preferred the traditional one. At one point when she was talking with Adaku and Mama Abby, she herself says, “I am beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in school. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man.” (pp. 212) But, at another point, when she was asked about the education of her daughters, she replies that after paying the school fees of her elder sons Oshia, Adim and Nnamido; she cannot afford the school fees of her daughters. “They will be married in a few years. They can earn an added income by trading. The most important thing is for them to get good husbands.” (pp. 213) When Nnu Ego was in Ibuza, taking a break from the busy trades of the city lives, Adankwo, the senior wife of Nnaife’s elder brother advises Nnu Ego, “...if you are ever in a bad patch with the boys’ education, don’t forget that girls grow very quickly; the twins’ bride price will help out.” (pp. 178)

Here Simon de Beauvoir is apt enough to be mentioned. In her famous deconstructing composition, “*The Second Sex*”, she said:

Most women simultaneously demand and detest their feminine condition, they live it through in a state of resentment, vexed at loving produced a woman, the mother greets her with this ambiguous curse: ‘you shall be a woman’... sometimes she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate: ‘what was good enough for you, I was good enough for you, I was brought up this way, you shall share my lot.’ (pp. 533-534)

Definitely the haunting experiences of the deprivation and the discrimination had made the womenfolk to believe in the prevailing customs. Thus they followed them blindly. They thought that the way they were brought up in, was the way destined for everywoman. Hence, they accepted that without any complains or protests and also

followed those customs for their own daughters also. Nnu Ego in *“The Joys of Motherhood”* does the same kind of things. She believed that girls were born to married off so that they could provide children, especially ‘sons’ to carry on someone’s family line. Also, she believed that the bride price that the family got from their son-in-law was a fortune to them. They could use that money to make their lives better and especially to use that money for their sons. So, in short, women were made to believe that their sole purpose on this earth was to get married, to provide the bride price to her family, and to bear children for her husband’s line.

But, even after living her life in accordance to the norms and conditions of that society, she had no one by her side during her last days. Her children chose their own lives in their own ways, Nnaife started to look at her with much venom, her community people blamed the way of her upbringing. “Nnu Ego had allowed herself to wonder where it was she had gone wrong. She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. She had had nine children, and luckily seven were alive.... Still, how was she to know that by the time her children grew up the values of her country, her people and her tribe would have changed so drastically, to the extent where a woman with many children could face a lonely old age, and may be a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman?” (pp. 247) Thus, even after sacrificing her whole life for everyone’s sake, pleasure and comfort, she had to die by the roadside, uncared and unnoticed.

Buchi Emecheta’s autobiographical novel, *“Second-Class Citizen”* got a huge number of readers after its publication because of its ability to bring the actual plight and condition of women to life. Apart from criticizing the patriarchal society for the stereotypical beliefs, Emecheta presents her own struggle to gain access to school, job, career, identity and everything else for being a girl. Emecheta brings in all the factors of the society which are biased in regard of gender. She represents how a girl child is denied of education, how a woman is seen inferior to men and how a wife is never appreciated for being the bread winner of the family.

In the novel *“Second-Class Citizen”*, the protagonist, Adah is the wife of Francis and the bread winner of the family. Despite her hard work and success, she was never appreciated. Neither was she ever praised or recognized. But, Adah was happy with her status and her abilities. Since her childhood, Adah was a very strong and confident child who could bring her thoughts to her words. She was able to fight for her rights to education. Adah’s ability to express her mind in words was her first step towards her

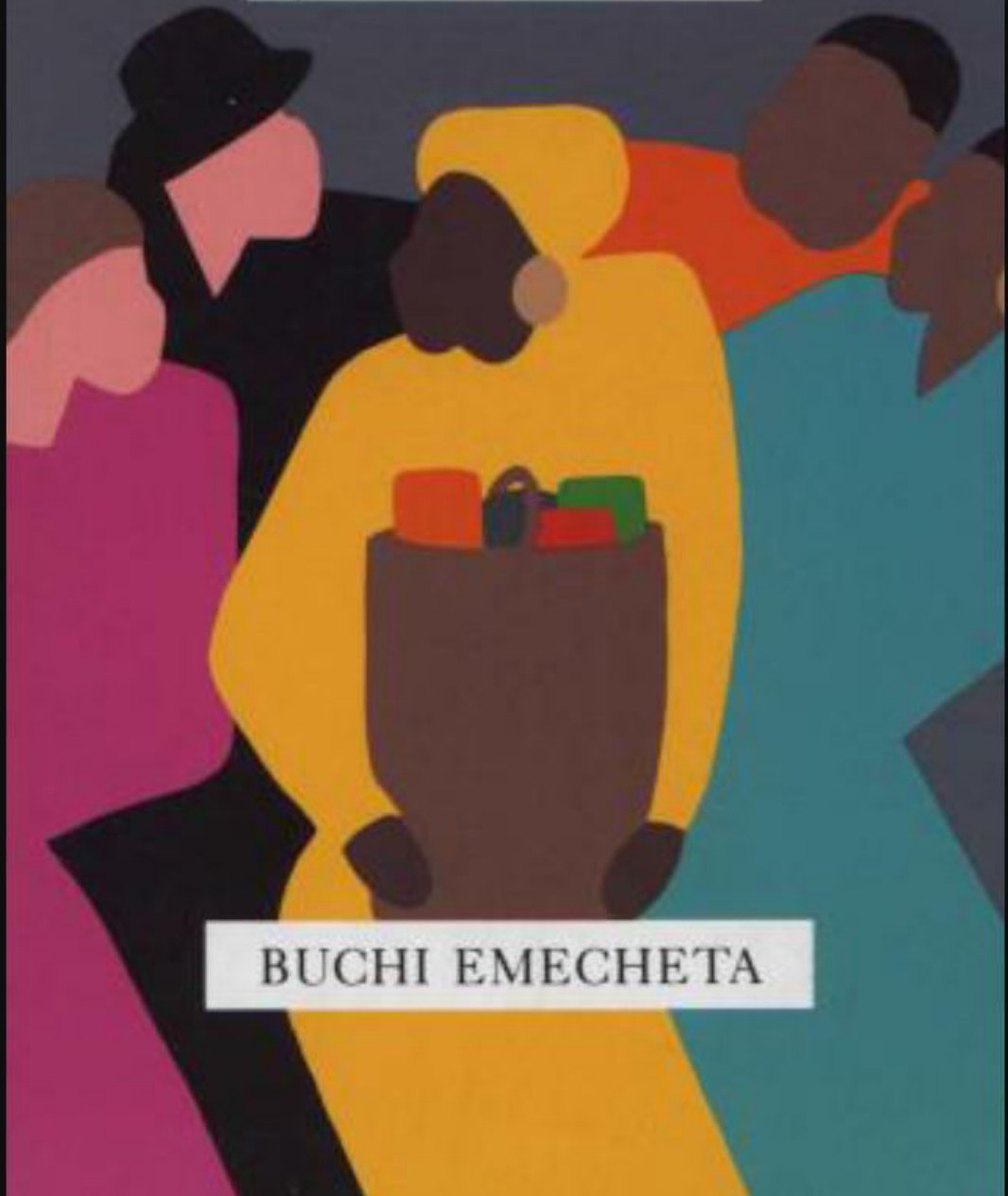


achievement and victory against the male dominated patriarchal world. Since her early childhood, Adah had resolved herself “never in her life... to serve her husband’s food on bended knee.” (pp. 20) She was somehow inspired in her childhood for the rights and equality of both the sexes. She had seen her mother and aunts following the traditional rules where they get neither any rights nor any equality nor any freedom nor any recognition for all the sacrifices they had been making.

The novel begins with the belief of the Nigerian people that Western education is a key to success in the changing Africa. Buchi Emecheta’s mouthpiece, Adah too believed in that. But, the locals of Ibuza believed that sending ‘boys’ to the school and making them educated would be a wise act. Educating the ‘girls’ never happened to be a wise thought to the people of Ibuza. Girl education was never considered or given any thought because, girls were believed to be the family makers and people also believed that that was the sole purpose of the girls on the earth. Hence, the girls were encouraged and at times forced to do every kind of household works to serve that purpose in a better way. Girls were never that much of a matter of concern of the family. People preferred boys than girls. In comparison to the boys, girls had no significance. On

AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

SECOND-CLASS  
CITIZEN



BUCHI EMECHETA

Source: <https://goo.gl/images/VAE2iR>

that regard, it was insignificant for Adah's parents to keep a record of even her birth. "So, since she was a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant." (pp. 1) The novel itself begins with such negativity. A family, a tribe and the whole society was disappointed at the birth of a girl child. The birth of a girl child was not celebrated, and even if it did, it was not that much of the celebration which was organized at the birth of a boy. The gender politics is very much rooted at birth of the child itself. And, then it plays its role as the children grow up and the time for education comes up. When on one hand, Western education and then higher education in the foreign countries was planned for the boys, the girls were thought to be not worthy of education. And even if the family considered education for girls, it would have been on the following basis, "A year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn how to sew." (pp. 3)

Adah was very much interested in going to school and educating herself like the boys. She expressed her desires to her parents. And, she was then put in school with the belief that she would be done with her desires within a year or two. Adah was an exception than that of the other African women. Traditionally, the African women were deeply rooted to their gendered and housekeeping duties. But, Adah wanted a change in her life. She craved for education at a very early age without even knowing that that was a key to independence. She broke through the earlier images and assumptions of fragile and weak women. In a traditional society, women are respected and praised on the basis of their duties and responsibilities that they fulfill. But, even after fulfilling all their responsibilities, they are positioned as 'second' because of their 'feminine' gender. Adah, did not want to end her life being a fragile and weak woman, who plays her role within the four walls of the house and remains on the second status.

Adah got the inspiration to go to school and to become educated, from the town's first lawyer, who came from the United Kingdom to their village. The way he was welcomed and the way people looked forward and prepared for his arrival; it seemed to Adah that he was no less than a God. Such respect and attention was given to him because he had the Western education and a job. Adah succeeded in fulfilling her dreams. She not only completed her school education, but also married to the man she fell in love with. She was an exception in every form. She had a great understanding at a very early age, which was unimaginable and that amazed others. She happened to bring a

good sum of bride-price to her family at her marriage. She adored her husband, Francis. Everything seemed good up to this point because, even though the gender discriminations prevailed, she could conquer that to some extent.

But, her problems began after her marriage. Because of her education, she could get a job which was appreciated by her in-laws as that would mean more money to the family income. And, that was also one of the reasons that her parents could demand a high bride-price in her marriage. But, her lover-cum-husband, Francis seemed to have confusions regarding letting his wife 'work'. He said to his father, "Do you think our marriage will last if I allow Adah to go and work for the Americans? Her pay will be three times my own. My colleagues at work will laugh at me. What do you think I should do?" (pp. 20) His father, though supported his daughter-in-law to have the job and work for the Americans; but, not in a good motif. He said, "That money is for you, cannot you see? Let her go and work for a millions of Americans and bring their money here, into this house. It is your luck. You made a good choice in marriage, son." (pp. 20)

Since her early childhood, Adah dreamt of completing education and going to London. She wanted to see the place from where a lot of educated and smart people came. London had always been a wonderland for her. When she got to know that Francis was going to London to complete his higher studies, she expressed her desire to accompany him and thus, fulfill her dream. But, the males of her in-laws were not of the view to send her there. Rather, they wanted her in Lagos to work there and send money to help and support her husband in London. Also, people were of the view that travelling to the foreign countries was not meant for women. Emecheta here presents the hegemonic relationship between the males and the females; and how the females are always controlled by the males in every matter. It is reflected through Francis' dialogue to Adah, "Father does not approve of women going to the UK. But you see, you will pay for me, and look after yourself, and within three years I'll be back. Father said, you're earning more than most people who have been to England. Why lose your good job just to go and see London? They say it is just like Lagos." (pp. 24)

Adah remained silent. She did not protest or show any emotion. The irony here is a woman who works hard for the family and even takes responsibility of her husband in the financial matter, is not allowed to fulfill her own dreams. But, soon she was in London to take care of her husband when he fell ill. By that time, Adah and Francis had their first son, Vicky. Francis was delighted to see a new Francis there in London. He

had accustomed himself with the trend and fashion of London. He kissed her publicly, which was neither encouraged nor accepted in her village. She saw a new Francis, who turned himself into a 'civilized', which was the synonym of 'western'. He tried to act 'modern'. He wanted to prove that he had adapted modernity to its core. But, the reality was far more different than that. His notions never changed. Even in the modern world of London, he did not give up on his practice of the patriarchal male domination over the females. The expectations from the females remained the same even in the modern London as that of the traditional Lagos. The way Francis behaved with Adah inside and outside of home shows his artificiality and his biased conception of modernity. Inside the home, he remained the same old Francis, who thought him to be superior to his wife. His powers as a male and as a husband remained the same. Adah had no rights to protest or answer him back. If ever she did, she was replied with sharp comments and harsh words. Having witnessed such dualism, Adah understood quite well that whether it is in Lagos or in England, a woman's plight and conditions were never going to change. She knew it right then and there that; women had no right to speak even in a so-called modern society.

The title of the novel itself suggests about inequality. Emecheta goes to the extent of presenting the double gender biasness that a woman faces because of her 'second sex'. Simon de Beauvoir asserts in her pioneering book, *"The Second Sex"* that men were superiors for being men and that they were regarded as the first sex, the first gender. Women came second in the list of gendering. They came second for being the second sex, the weaker sex. In *"Second-Class Citizen"*, Adah was at first discriminated when she was born because her people expected a boy. Then she was discriminated when it came to education because, her parents preferred education for their sons. Then she was discriminated and in the true sense, sold, when her people married her off with Francis for the big amount of the bride-price. Then she was discriminated when she was not allowed to accompany her husband to England. She was already a 'second sex' in her own city of Lagos. But, when she finally visited London, she suffered the pangs of 'class' inequality. The blacks were treated as second-class people in the cities of the first class people. For being a Nigerian, and that too a woman, Adah had to face the harsh reality of life. She understood the hypocrisy quite well that the African men were allowed to go to the city of London, to get education, to get modern and to get civilized; but, the same privileges were forbidden to the women. Firstly, women were not allowed

to go to the UK, as Adah's father-in-law had said. Secondly, women were not allowed to be the bread winner as Francis believed. And thirdly, women were not allowed to write books according to the male beliefs of that time and, that was why Francis had burnt the first manuscript of Adah because, he was jealous of her abilities and success, which were never given any chance to any women in Lagos or in Nigeria to come to the light or to forefront.

But, gradually, Adah learnt to fight for her rights. At first, she breaks through the imposition of 'mothering a number of children' by deciding to abort her fourth child. Abortion is definitely not a good choice. But, she proved that women need not bear and rear a number of children to become happy and content in life. She clearly expressed her views that she had gone to London to study and not to keep getting pregnant and mothering her children. She wanted to be happy and content with the three living children that she had. She rejected motherhood which was the only wish of all the other women in Africa. But, Adah wished to become educated and gain knowledge. Her wish was to a great extent a possession of the males only, because knowledge ultimately brings 'power' to the individuals and 'power' was the sole possession of the males. But, Adah fought for her dreams. She was not ready to submit herself as an obedient and loyal wife, who would still be happy with all the restrictions and prohibitions from fulfilling her dreams. Rather, she chose to be a disobedient wife. She did so by forging Francis' signature. She was told by the nurse that to abort the child she would require her husband's signature in a particular form. Adah knew that Francis would never sign that form because he would rather want to see his wife taking care of his children and the whole household than to see her as a working woman and becoming successful. But, Adah was so much desperate for her education and job that she forged her husband's signature. Her victory was might be for a short while, but she proved her strong will against the men dominated society. Soon after that she ended up being pregnant again. Yet, she never lost her faith, "She was going to live, to survive, to exist through it all." (pp. 158)

Adah had looked forward to her marriage since her childhood with the hope that she would get the chance to fulfill her dreams through it. She had expected her husband to be an understanding one. Just like Uma, in Anita Desai's *"Fasting Feasting"*, Adah in *"Second-Class Citizen"* interpreted marriage as a means of freedom from the clutches and entrapment of the male stereotypes. Uma too had viewed marriage as a key to her

freedom and happiness. She was fed up with her demanding parents. Uma was entrapped in her own household, where she had to sacrifice every single dream and desire of her for the sake of her parents, her people, her brother, the society and especially for the prevailing gender inequality. The marriage that she hoped would set her free from such clutches, rather brought her back from where she had started. After her two failed marriages, her parents thought it would be better to keep her at home and not to waste any more money on her. Also, she was not even the reason behind her failed marriages. It was because of her parents' lack of concern about her, because she was deprived of her education to learn, because she was deprived of her childhood to grow, because she was deprived of her 'space' to understand and because her parents were so desperate to marry her off that they readily accepted whatever proposals came, without even proper investigation either of the family or of the boy. Later, Papa was frustrated because he had lost a lot of money in the name of dowry, that too two times. Mama and Aruna were concerned if Harish, Uma's husband had touched her or not. On the other hand, Arun, for whom Uma sacrificed her education, her childhood and everything, was lost in the world of comics. Nobody tried to know if Uma was alright or not, what she was thinking, how she was feeling, if she wanted to cry etc. In such a way, Uma was entrapped for the rest of her life. Her only hope shattered into tiny pieces.

Just like Uma, Adah (in "*Second-Class Citizen*") also looked forward to her marriage as a means of key to the fulfillment of her dreams. But, she was stunned to find out rather a contradictory image of what she had hoped for. Her in-laws considered her as a source of income; they appreciated the money that she had brought home but not her. Her husband was jealous of her abilities and envied her success. And the country, which she had always desired to visit, categorized her as a 'second-class citizen' for being a female of the Third World Country, Africa. The most striking truth comes to light when Adah expressed her desire to stop with conceiving and mothering her children; and rather to focus on her studies and career. Francis viewed his ideas regarding the position of women in the male dominated society, "A woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in; to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time. There was no need to have intelligent conversation with his wife because, you see, she might start getting new ideas." (pp. 175)

These views of Francis give the readers the actual meaning of both the title and the novel. Francis' views represent the whole patriarchal society which sees women as nothing but slaves. In a society, where gender inequality prevails, a woman is seen as nothing but an object, which the men-folk use to fulfill their needs. Also, they see women as the source of reproduction, which are bound to cook meals, wash their clothes, do all the household chores and even help the males in farming or business field if the necessity arises. But, women are not allowed to enjoy the pleasures of love making. They are forced to do it if the men have the mood. They do not consider if the women are sick, tired, busy or not in mood. They would beat the women to their senses until they surrendered. And, after the love making, the men would keep lying down on the bed and relax, while they have all the authority to order the women to leave the bed and get engaged with their duties and responsibilities. If the views and assumptions of the males are true that women are sex objects only; then it is rightly applied here because, objects do not have feelings, emotions, desires or urge.

Later, when Adah tried to reason with her desires to fulfill her dreams and giving examples of Flora Nwapa, who could become a successful writer in a white-men's country even after being a black woman, Francis said, "You keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are black. The white men can barely tolerate us men, to say nothing of brainless females like you who could think of nothing except how to breast-feed her baby." (pp. 178) Francis regarded Adah as a brainless woman, who was not only studying in college, but also worked and earned enough to look after her children, household and the cost of her husband's education. In fact, Francis went to the extent of looking down upon the mothering nature of women. He regarded breast-feeding and nurturing children as not much of important works. And, he equated a woman's knowledge and ability to nothing and generalized the entire black women-folk as brainless. He discouraged her saying she could never become a writer because she was a woman, a second-class.

According to John Stuart Mill as told in his essay "*The Subjection of Women*", that it was actually a contradiction created by the men themselves. They knew for sure that women were capable of doing the things that they prohibited them from doing so. Mill has completely denied such discrimination. He believed that what women were capable of should be found in practice only and not through some baseless and illogical thoughts and notions. Because of those prejudice, according to Mill, the society has been



suffering a lot. An educated woman can contribute in a greater intellectual development of all. Hence, Mill was of the view that women should be allowed to have education and identity for the betterment of the individual, the family and also the society.

When in the novel "*Second-Class Citizen*", Adah showed her manuscript to prove her abilities, which she had been writing secretly all these while, Francis got furious. While on one hand, Adah's eyes were dazzling with hope and pride; on the other hand, Francis' eyes were burning red with anger. He declared her work as 'rubbish'. And, with a lot of jealousy, envy, anger and aggressiveness; he threw the manuscript into fire. Her work, the manuscript was like a 'child' to her. She had been nurturing it with a lot of care, love, concern, hope and expectations. Her work was praised and appreciated at her workplace. But, her husband burnt the manuscript saying, "I do not care if it is your child or not. I have read it, and my family would never be happy if a wife of mine was permitted to write a book like that." (pp. 181)

After that incident, it was very much clear to Adah that she could never have the future she had been dreaming of. Adah is the mouthpiece of Buchi Emecheta's own story. Emecheta's husband, Sylvester Onwordi is represented through the character of Francis. Emecheta's first novel, "*The Bride Price*" was burnt by her husband because he could not stand Emecheta's success as a good student, worker and writer. She could not publish the novel in its due time for it was totally burnt. She took five more years to write and thus restore the manuscript again from her memory. Though she started her career with her second book, she never gave up on her hopes. When Onwordi acted in such disastrous way with her, she decided then and there to leave her husband and live alone. It was a challenge for her to live without the support of male in a male dominated society. But, she had the courage to withstand the challenge and face that. She left Onwordi and filed a divorce case against him. She took the sole responsibility of her children; and faced a lot of struggle as a single parent having five children to look after, a degree to achieve and a job to maintain. But, Emecheta could outshine everything. She fought against all the odds and came out brightly. She proved all the gender biased notions as wrong. She brought hope and possibilities for other women that women can become a lot more than simply remaining as the men's pets or slaves. She also proved that to succeed, women do not need to depend on the males at all.

Likewise, Adah too decided to end her marriage with Francis. She could not remain submissive and act like a slave to her husband any more. She could not adjust

with the conditions of the patriarchal society any more. The society expects women to keep their mouth shut and remain docile at all the situations. But, after what Francis had done with her, it became crystal clear to Adah that she could not any more stay with her husband. It was either to stay with her husband as a submissive slave or to set herself free from all the conventional attitudes of the society and make her dreams real. Adah was determined in her mind what she needed. But, Francis on the other hand, had never in his nightmares, thought that his wife would ever leave him. Like a parasite, he kept on feeding on Adah and demanded that to be his legal right. Without any shame he left his job when Adah got a job, which paid her with thrice the amount than that she was earning from her previous job. But, he never gave any recognition to her. Rather, he never left a chance to humiliate and torture her. Deep inside, he was actually jealous of her success and could not stand that jealousy, which ultimately get its way through his anger, abuse, misbehave, torture, beatings etc. He also equated Adah with his mother on the basis that they both were women and wives; hence, they had to suffer and tolerate everything. He said, "My father knocked my mother about until I was old enough to throw stones at him. My mother never left my father." (pp. 183) As if that was the fate of all women.

Adah kept feeding and taking care of him right from her marriage to the point when she decided that she could not do that any longer. She gave Francis everything in return of few children. Francis gave Adah nothing more than the children, which he could claim fully as his own. According to the set norms and conditions of the patriarchal society, the children belonged to their father. When Francis had seen his first born, Vicky, for the first time, he had said, "Just my image, I can now die in peace." (pp. 33) That statement had given Adah both happiness and sadness. Happiness to see a father's love and pride for his son and sadness to realize that her son belonged to her husband and not to her. But, Adah was in total shock when during their trial in the court regarding their divorce, the magistrate had asked Francis about the maintenance of the children; he said, "I do not mind their being sent for adoption." (pp. 185) Adah was awestruck hearing that. She could not believe her ears. She could not believe the man, who was few years back very much proud of his children and used to claim his authority upon them, now did not have any concern or care for their maintenance. Here, Emecheta projects her heroine with strong power. The first-class 'male' feared to take responsibility and was ready to leave his children. On the contrary, the second-class 'female' took responsibility of all of her five children and also her studies, job,

household, and her career as a writer. The so called first-class chauvinism was taken down at once with just one strike of a second-class female. She took the sole responsibility of her children and herself. She never sought for any help or support from her husband. With her hard work and determination, she completed her graduation and while studying for her degree, she remained punctual with her job in the library. She was happy and content with the court's decision, which ordered Francis to stay away from her and her children.

Here, Adah took a deliberate step against the set patriarchal norms and conditions. She did not want to spend the rest of her life under the forgiveness of Francis who now was not at all concerned for his own children. From such a behavior, Adah got enough inspiration to break through the applied norms of 'faithful wife'. She raised her voice in protest and put her thought on the table to be digested by her husband. She did not fight in any violent way, hers was a silent revenge. She took responsibility of her children and thus wanted to pay back the male society for what they have been doing all these while, i.e. by looking down upon them. Yes, here we get the image of Buchi Emecheta's 'new woman' and Simon de Beauvoir's 'free woman'. Adah now no more had any fear and she dared to challenge her husband as well as the whole society by taking the responsibility of her children upon her own shoulder which was otherwise, a responsibility destined to men only.

The novel ends with a quite negative impact. Even after struggling and fighting so hard, even after giving her all to prove her identity; Adah could not bring any change. Adah was taken back to Lagos, the place from where she had started. One of her childhood friends found her in the city of London tired, broken and beaten. He never tried to wonder what had happened to her. Without a doubt, he believed that Adah was still in a relationship with Francis because; she was once married to him. The thoughts of Adah's friend show women's failure to break free from the conventional practices. The friend could not see the cut marks and the scars on Adah's face and body that were left as a result of the brutal beatings of Francis. Some were fresh because even after the court's order, Francis used to come to her door demanding his rights over her and used to beat her till his anger was gone. And, even if the friend had seen the marks, he might surely have ignored them with the thought that that was nothing new in a husband-wife relationship because, he too was a male with all the conventional beliefs and faith on the patriarchal society.

“*Second-Class Citizen*” is a novel that deals with gender inequality, patriarchal society, male chauvinism, women submission and the typical traditions and cultures. Even though Emecheta tried her best to beat every odds and set her heroine free; she failed. Emecheta even put her own experiences to make her readers feel the reality. Her deliberate efforts failed every time she tried to bestow her heroine with freedom and power. At the first place, Emecheta let a girl child to take birth; but, her arrival was a disappointment to the family. Then in her childhood, she craved for an equality; but, Adah was denied of equality and her own mother sent her to school with the determination to stop that within a year or two. After that Emecheta let her heroine gamble with marriage with the hope to fulfill her dreams; but, Adah failed there badly with a great bad luck because, both her husband and her in-laws used her for their financial benefits only. Emecheta then let her heroine the liberty of having a job; but, that liberty or achievement was also treated as the benefit of Francis only. In fact, her job entrapped her because, like a parasite Francis started to feed on her. Adah also got the privilege of becoming a proud mother of five children; but, her motherhood was all in vain because, according to the society, the children belonged to their father only. The children too preferred their father than their mother even after all of Adah’s sacrifices and sufferings. Last but not the least, Emecheta gave her heroine the power of education and career as a writer; but, she failed there too. Francis burnt the manuscript saying that women were not meant to be writers, that they were brainless. Her education, no doubt, had given her the opportunity to have a job, to visit and stay in her dream place, and to obtain the career of a writer. But, they all failed in other means. Adah was ignored by her parents, her people, her husband, her in-laws and her children too. Her children wanted their father in their lives more than they were grateful to their mother for keeping them alive. In short, “*Second-Class Citizen*” is a projection of men’s failure to see women’s pain, to accept women’s ability, to accept gender equality and to understand women.

Almost in every work of Emecheta, we find the fight and quest of the womenfolk for their rights. Not only Emecheta, but also many other female novelists from different countries and continents have projected the women as some objects in the patriarchal setting. In a male dominated society, women were always treated as some owned possessions of the males. Women’s plight and predicaments were never taken into consideration. Their wishes, desires, dreams, hopes etc. always were shattered and broken. Their voices were hushed and their opinions were neither asked for nor heard

out. In a typical patriarchal setting, women existed only to please the males and to fulfill their demands. Just like some objects, they were brought from one place to another through the process of marriage, they were then put in the corner of the house to show them off to others, they were used and misused whenever the necessity occurred, and at times they were also caressed and pampered whenever the owners felt the urge for that. Until and unless the womenfolk themselves do not realize their worth, it is hard for them to come out from the ditch they had fallen into. It is high time, as Judith Butler's has stated in her infamous "*Gender Trouble*" that "we 'women' should become subjects and not objects." (pp.144) Women need to understand that they were a lot more than some sex objects and their ultimate duty was not to please their husbands in bed. Partially, (in some places) women were getting to be enlightened with such knowledge. Even we can find it in Beauvoir's words (in her work, "*The Second Sex*"), "now she is no longer in service as a sexual object, but she is the incarnation of her species, she represents the promise of life, of eternity." (pp. 518)

No doubt Emecheta paints her protagonists in the female form yet there seems the lacking of gender equality and gender equity. Her heroines are strong enough to fight against the odds set by the society but, they are at many times seen failing at the hands of gender inequality. Despite having the courage to protest against the society to marry according to her own wish, despite of having the strength to take care of seven children all alone, despite being educated enough to work in a foreign country and being a proud single parent, and despite having the voice to speak her mind; she is always crushed, squeezed, broken, and looked down upon for being a 'female'. But, that is not what Emecheta wants to convey through her writings. What Emecheta wants to tell her readers is that there will be struggles and hurdles awaiting at the paths of the women- hurdles in different forms, problems in many shapes, and struggles in indefinable structures; but the 'fight' is what that will always matter. Only when the 'women' would fight, quest, and search for their rights; there would be the rise of the strong, powerful and independent 'new women'.

WORK CITED:

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1969.
- Agarwal, H. O. *Human Rights*. Allahabad: Central Law Publications, 2006.
- Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Anowa*. London: Longman, 1970.
- Ba, Mariama. *So Long A Letter*. English Trans. by Modupe Bode Thomas. Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1981.
- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. Ed. and Thans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- Brown-Guillory, E. *Women Of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationship In 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routeldge, 1990.
- Carby, Hazel. *White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*. In *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Cornwall, Andrea. *Readings in Gender in Africa: Readings in Series*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa. *Women of Africa: Roots of Opression*. Italy: Zed Books, 1983.
- Desai, Anita. *Fasting Feasting*. Ed. Suman Sarma. Assam: Aditya Book Distributor, 2013.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *In the Ditch*. London, UK: Pan Books Ltd., 1972.
- . *Second-Class Citizen*. Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1974.
- . *The Bride Price*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- . *The Slave Girl*. United States of America: Ninth Paperback Printing, 2002.
- . *The Joys of Motherhood*. London: Heinemann, 2008.

- Hooks, Bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Pluto Press, 2000.
- . *Educating Women: A Feminist Agenda*. Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Mothlabane, H. *Iinkunzi Ezimbini*. Johannesburg: Centaur Publications Heinemann, 1994.
- Nwapa, Flora. *Efuru*. Nigeria: William Heinemann, 1966.
- . *One is Enough*. Nigeria: Tana Press, 1981.
- . *Women are Different*. Nigeria: Tana Press and Africa World Press Inc., 1986.
- Smith, Barbara. *Towards a Black Feminist Criticism*. 1983, pp. 190, 1095-1133.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1929.