

CHAPTER V

SLAVERY IN “*THE SLAVE GIRL*”

‘Slavery’, as the term suggests, is an act of allowing people to own, buy and sell other people. The slaves can’t simply break through. To gain freedom, they were needed to pay their slavery money; and they couldn’t demand money or any kind of remuneration for their service. However, according to the variations, slaves may enjoy some rights and protections as the laws or customs permit.

Slavery began way back than the written history has its records. It was practiced by most societies. Even though we, the so-called ultra modern people do not follow or let others apply slavery, yet our earth is not totally free from it because, what we have now is human trafficking. In the name of debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage etc. kinds of slavery is practiced. Even the histories have the record of Chattel Slavery which was practiced in the past. Chattel Slavery is a shame for the human race as it gave the power and right to some people to ‘own’ others.

Aristotle’s “*Politics*” talks about the political slaves and slavery in terms of politics. Aristotle mentioned how in the time of war slavery becomes the law, “... the law by which whatever is taken in war is supposed to belong to the victors.” (pp. 60) That is to say, things, supplies, food, people etc. whatever the victors took as the outcome of the war, belonged to them. Hence, they get to own the people and the things. In the “Introduction” of the book, the translator, Benjamin stated, “Slavery is natural; in every department of the natural universe we find the relation of ruler and subject. There are human beings who, without possessing reason, understand it. These are natural slaves.” (pp. 32) Whether it is in the form of a government job or a private job, there is always a relation between a boss and an employee. Also, according to Aristotle, “... the slave is a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily fame.” (pp. 62)

Like Aristotle, Orlando Patterson too, had dealt with slavery as a socio-political relationship in his book, “*Slavery and Social Death*” (1982). His title itself talks what Patterson had to say, i.e. the death of the society with the practice of the rule of one human upon another. At the very beginning of his writing, Patterson addressed the master-slave relationship as “one of the most extreme forms of the relation of

domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave.” (pp.1) Patterson has covered a wide range of time and place to write on the topic. His writing is a comparative study of the nature of slavery. To cover the wide range of time and space, Orlando has discussed the inner stories or the unheard stories of slavery in sixty-six societies. He has focused on the parasite-like relationship of master and slave where the masters live on slaves, where the slaves are socially alienated and dead persons.

After so many fights, debates, protests, Acts etc. slavery is now outlawed and banned everywhere. But, the hard truth to the human race is; even in the modern and educated world, the shameful acts like debt bondage, forced labor, trafficked slaves, child labor etc. are practiced. According to the report of Human Rights Watch 2003, over 15 million children were working in a slavery-like condition to pay off their family’s debt. In 2013, the Walk Free Foundation had reported the name of countries with the highest number of slaves which included India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, Thailand and many more.

In the year 2008, the government of Brazil rescued 5,000 slaves to eradicate slavery. In this process of eradication of slavery, Mauritania is regarded to be the last country. In 1981, up to 20% of the population was found in bonded labor. Even other parts of Africa like Nigeria, Congo etc. fall under similar kind of situations. Slavery has turned into a multibillion-dollar project. It has resulted into manual labor, forced into prostitution, child slavery etc. inhuman acts.

Even in America, slavery was practiced in a large number. Nelson Mandela’s autobiography “*Long Walk to Freedom*” is itself an example of such practice, of how the blacks were treated, of how the blacks suffered, and of how they struggled and fought for their deserving rights. With the truth to its very sense, Mandela wrote about his sufferings especially because of his skin color, his long twenty seven years in prison, the cruelty of the apartheid government and the rule of the whites over the blacks. He was especially targeted because he was educated and he could raise his voice. People listened to him and that was why he was regarded as a leader. Hence, he was hushed by the white men. But he proved everything wrong by gaining freedom for him as well as for his people. His life history can be taken as a great example as to the abolishment of slavery and the freedom of the blacks.

Edmund Dene Morel, a British pacifist, politician, journalist and author; in the Chapter III, entitled “The Story of the Slave Trade” of his book “*The Blake Man’s Burden*” states: “The Slave trade started by the Portuguese in the middle of the 15th Century closely followed by the Spaniards, and at a longer interval (1562) by the British, then in quick succession by the Dutch (about 1620), the French (about 1640) the Swedes, Danes and Prussians, attained the full extent of its terrible activities in the 18th Century.” (pp. 15)

The Slave trade at first began with the outcome of an adventure and religious prejudice. The great grandson of Edward III, Henry, and the Portugal Navigator was the originator of such a tragedy to the human race. He, with his two captains, once brought with them a dozen of Africans to Lisbon in 1442. There was a provoked attack on an African village and these people were captured. Later, they were converted to Christianity and were bonded on account of their primary needs for survival. Soon the Spaniards contracted with the Portuguese for supplies of Africans. Thus, the Africans were transported from their motherland into the ‘New World’ where ironically enough they get a new life of suffering from the unspeakable agonies. This went for some years in the same manner. Later, the Spanish Sovereigns started a new international policy to trade slaves from Africa to their lands. Soon the British, the Dutch and the Prussians too joined the scene. “It is computed in American records that the British were responsible in the twenty years, 1680-1700, for importing 300,000 Africans into the West Indies and the mainland.” (pp.17)

Five times’ as many Africans as Europeans went to the New World during the phase of European colonization. Most of the great businesses and industries depended totally on the African slave labor: from sugar in Brazil and Caribbean, to rice and indigo in South Carolina and Virginia, to cotton in Guiana and North America. In the name of slavery, the First World countries kept rising on the strength of the Third World countries. Rather giving recognition or being thankful; the world was divided into two categories by the colonizers: the First world and the third World, the Self and the Other, the Powerful and the Powerless etc.

The helplessness of the victimized of any part of the globe (especially of the Third World countries), their search for opportunities and hope in the New World, their wish and desire for a better life in the New World led them to the bondage of slavery; in which the dreams and desires of their generations suffered.

Such are the practices that Patterson had referred as ‘social death’ in his book “*Slavery and Social Death*”. But, according to the African historian Frederick Cooper, the ‘social death’ was not because of the application of such practices, but because of the ignorance of the “agency” of the slaves and also because of the ignored historical experiences of the slaves. (pp. 17) Many historians are of the view that the slavery would have ended way early if only the slaves didn’t remain so passive, whereas many others debated that in the course of time, numbers of slaves and slave organizations have rebelled and protested to put an end to such inhuman trade systems. Such matters are discussed in a wide range in David Eltis and Stanley Lewis Engerman’s book, “*Dependence, Servility, and Coerced Labor in Time and Space*”.

Slavery or human trafficking- whether in the household sphere or in larger aspects- has become a current issue for discussion in literature, only after the path-breaking or path-leading writings of the prominent writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Mariama Ba, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Ousmane Sembene etc. These black writers have discussed more about the chattel slavery which resulted with oppression across class, gender etc. These writers appeared with such a burning and important issue right at the time when African literature was focusing on social and political matters. Their attempt was remarkable for they took the right decision and made the right choice at the right moment.

Many parts of Africa gained their political autonomy during mid 1960s to 1970s because of the effort that the Africans gave on their political conditions. But soon after that they discovered that they were not totally free from their subservient position and were still under the grasp of European Imperialism. A number of Africans were yet to be freed from their debt bondage, forced labor, child labor, chattel slavery etc. The freedom had rather put the Africans in a myriad of political, social and economical problems. Their true plight and conditions were yet to be heard. Even after independence, they were voiceless. To re-present the actual plight and condition and the trauma of those sufferers, numbers of writers took the step. They voiced the remotest issues in their writings. Ama Ata Aidoo’s “*Anowa*” (1970), Bessie Head’s “*Maru*” (1971) and Buchi Emecheta’s “*The Slave Girl*” (1971) are such writings which do not celebrate the independence, rather focus on those parts that were left unnoticed. These pieces of writings do not simply narrate stories, but represent a rather deep meaning and their

understanding of the sufferers. They are the examples of the writers' understanding about the issue that were still lurking even after the independence.

Africa got its freedom in the late nineteenth century. The important political events took place very late which led to its independence. Though there were struggles for freedom when they were being colonized yet the most important event, i.e. the Civil Rights Movement took place on the international sphere whose goal was to get equality. It was initiated by the black sufferers living in the United States of America. This movement had its roots in the centuries-long efforts of African slaves and their descendants to resist racial oppression and abolish the institution of slavery.

Before the Civil Rights Movement, almost four million blacks were enslaved in the United States of America. Only white men of property could vote and the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited US citizenship to whites only. The goals of the Civil Right Movement were to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure legal recognition, citizenship rights and equality. Following the Movement, three constitutional amendments were passed, including the Thirteenth Amendment that ended slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment that gave African-Americans citizenship and the Fifteenth Amendment that gave African-American males the right to vote.

'Slavery', no doubt, is not applied on the basis of gender. It definitely does not see if the slave is a male or a female. Slavery is done irrespective to gender. But, the women suffer the most, especially the women of the Third World countries. As Sekou Toure states in his article, "The Role of Women in the Revolution": "...the human condition of the woman was-and in many cases still is-that of the slave of slave." (pp.10)

Slavery, no doubt have been practiced in many forms. But, here the gendered slavery would be discussed in accordance to Emecheta's "*The Slave Girl*" and some other select novels. Emecheta has mainly dealt with the theme of slavery from a gendered perspective in her novel. She has thrown light on the fact as to how women are enslaved in the name of so many practiced prejudices. One of her contemporary novelists, Ama Ata Aidoo tries to project some glimpses when slavery was still lurking. In her first play, "*The Dilemma of a Ghost*" (1965), Aidoo presents a newly married couple, Ato and Eulalie. The plot is set in Ghana, in early 1960s, shortly after Ghana gained freedom. Ato, a Ghanaian man; is a scholar and Eulalie is a young black

American woman. Both of them believed that love can conquer every odd. As they belonged to two different settings, they try to adjust with each other though most of the time they seem to fail. Even after independence people do not seem to have freed themselves from the stereotypical and distorted experiences of slavery. The in-laws fail to accept Eulalie the way she was; they took her as a rootless individual for she was a descendant of slaves. Both the in-laws and Ato expect Eulalie to get pregnant and bear children to the family but she seemed unable to connect with the family. In fact, Eulalie regards her in-laws as savages. In short, Aidoo wants to present a situation through her play, where a black girl fails to connect with a black family. Even though they had the same origin, they are now detached from each other because 'slavery' has led them far away from each other. Because of their bitter struggles and experiences, they now fear to trust and surrender to anyone.

Another writing of Aidoo catches the interest in this respect. Her "For Whom Things Did Not Change" is a short story published in the collection, "*No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*" (1970). The plot here is set in Ghana, a decade after its independence. The story is a brilliant example of how even after the end of slavery or to say the ban of slavery by the law itself and getting independence, people could not come out of their dilemma and how their traumatic experiences made them unaware of their present- free state. It's a hard fact that after living in a certain circumstance for generations after generations, it becomes hard to get rid of that habit and practice. The story is an acute example of the experience of the ones who suffered years after years; and how those painful memories of slavery kept on haunting those after even years of independence. It did not allow them to free themselves from their trauma. "My young Master, what does independence mean?" (pp.29) Zirigu, the protagonist of the story asked the question to his master which describes his experience and the innermost thoughts. Emecheta's "*The Slave Girl*" doesn't deal with slavery in such an extreme point, but it has a similar impact upon the protagonist. Like "For Whom Things Did Not Change", "*The Slave Girl*" doesn't deal with the traumatic experiences of slavery which dated back to the history of slavery practices. Like Aidoo, Emecheta's novel too deals more with the individual's freedom than that of the country's. Towards the end of the novel, "*The Slave Girl*", Emecheta no doubt talks about the freedom of the country as a whole. But, that she does to make her readers realize how much the freedom of the country has freed the individuals from their past experiences. Ojebeta, the heroine, here in this novel, suffered

the experiences of being enslaved and thus being treated as an object after she was sold by her own brother. But her traumatic experiences never set her free despite her freedom from slavery. It was more like she was used to the practices with which she grew up and like Zirigu in “For Whom Things Did Not Change”, Ojebeta failed to set herself free from her earlier habits. She needed someone to govern and control her. She was happy with her new master, her husband.

Ama Ata Aidoo’s “For Whom Things Did Not Change” is a story that stresses on ‘history’, the history of Africa. Zirigu is the mouthpiece of Aidoo, through whom; she gives an overview of the traumatic mindset of all the sufferers and the victims, and that includes almost all the Africans. Here, we find that ‘things’ or ‘situations’ never changed for the ones who had gone through the pain and fear of ‘slavery’. Here, Zirigu is a steward who went from serving white men to black men. Apart from the trauma of slavery, there is a constant dilemma involving male and female. Zirigu is an old man, who is very modest with his job even though he had to serve a quite younger man than him. But, when at home, his wife serves him his needs, he feels power and that everything is under control. This shows the presence of ‘slavery’. No matter who the man serves outside because that’s his ‘job’, what matters is at the end of the day he is served by a woman at home; and that gives him both power and pleasure. The insecurity of the ‘women’ is also depicted in the thoughts of Zirigu’s wife. When they had a son, Zirigu’s wife was glad and relieved that that was not a girl because she was totally aware of the dangers that consisted in a woman’s life in their culture.

In the story, Zirigu’s master changed from a white man to a black man, who may indicate a ‘change’, i.e. the country now belonged to the black educated youth that they could now develop and improve. But, for Zirigu there was no difference, nothing had changed because he was still serving someone. Some dialogues in the story which are not attributed to any specific character present a deep meaning:

If you ask them, why ten years after independence, some of us still have to be slaves, they say you are nuts to ask questions like that.

You are getting your definitions wrong. By what stretch of imagination does a steward-boy or a housemaid become a slave? (pp.15)

Zirigu was employed in the post-independent era, yet he could not free his mind from the master-slave relationship. He could not understand the difference between

being a slave and being a steward; if there was any. He sees himself as a slave even though the guest at the rest house tries to be logical:

Please Zirigu, I've said that you shouldn't wait on me hand and foot.

Massa!

Well, I don't see why you should. You are old enough to be my father.

My white Massa!

And I am not a white man. (pp. 14)

Kobina, the black master could perfectly see through what actually was happening. He understood pretty well the slave mentality of Zirigu. He tries to reason with that:

Massa...

Zirigu, how often should I tell you not to call me that?

But you are my massa!

I am nothing of that sort. I was born not six years when you were going away to fight. How can I be your massa? And this is a Government Rest House, not mine. I am not even your employer. So how can I be your Master?

But the other Massas, they don't say make I no call them so?

Hell they don't. That is their business. My name is Kobina, not Master.

Kob-i-n—a...K-o... Massa, I beg, I no fit call you that. I simple no fit.

Too bad. That means I'll have to leave here too, earlier than I had hoped. (pp. 19-20)

This conversation between Kobina and Zirigu take us back to Orlando Patterson's "*Slavery and Social Death*" where, the writer said, "all human relationships are structured and defined by the relative power of the interacting persons." (pp. 1) Here, Patterson referred to those who had experienced and went through the bitter experiences of slavery and had got stuck in those dilemmas because of the lack of the interacting persons who would ask and understand their sufferings or, who would now make them understand that they were free individuals after their independence. May be because

Zirigu's earlier experiences and sufferings remained unheard or unnoticed, he could not free himself from his earlier habits.

Slavery is at times practiced as a system, sometimes it is practiced like a curse, sometimes it is imposed, sometimes it is hereditary, and sometimes it is because of shifting from one place to another. At many times, migration also causes loss and longing. In fact, migration is much more painful. When a migrant is not treated properly and equally by a host country, or not welcomed and greeted by the host country; it affects the psychological, economical and sociological states of the immigrants. Such issues give rise to a number of social ills. If we go back to history, we would find out that many black people from the Third World countries had migrated to the First World countries, especially to America and England, in the hope of opportunities, for survival reasons and for better lives. But, they were not totally welcomed by the host countries and were offered only the odd jobs though many of them had all the required qualifications for some decent jobs. For survival and sustaining purpose, many surrendered to slavery willingly. Many African and African-American writers have tried to present the plights and predicaments of the immigrants through their poetry and fictions. They have tried to present the mental conditions of the people who had migrated to the First World countries. In America, the migrants were promised of equality and equity, and they were also given the 'American Dreams', though never fulfilled.

Langston Hughes, a poet from America, in his poem "Harlem" (published in the collection "*Montage of a Dream Deferred*", in the year 1951), talks about the 'American Dreams' which, were promised to the black (African) immigrants but, were constantly 'deferred'. He questions in his poem for he wanted to know what will happen to all those promised dreams, hopes, and expectations that have constantly being 'deferred':

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore-

and then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over-

like a syrupy sweet?

May be it is just sage

like a heavy load

or does it explode?

Here, Hughes asks such necessary and important questions in these few lines which definitely need our concern until they are not answered. At the times of migration (due to so many reasons), those blacks were welcomed in the host country. But, that welcome had conditions hidden. They wanted to use the helpless immigrants for their own benefits and the immigrants had to agree because in lieu of that they were getting their survival means.

Hughes' poem "Harlem" deals with the psyche of those who fought in the New Negro Movement. The history of English Literature records the African-American Great Migration that took place in the 1920s during the New Negro Movement. Harlem, a place in New York was the place which was affected with the movement the most. The movement is considered to be spanned for around ten to twelve years. It influenced many writers to write about the sufferings of the sufferers and the victims and also the sufferings of the host people. This movement caused the rise of African-American enslavement to a great height.

Though Ojebeta in "*The Slave Girl*" was migrated in her own country, just from her native village to a far off place named Onitsha, yet her loss and longing cannot be overlooked. Like those who migrated to other places in the time of war, or some other crisis, or for their own reasons; Ojebeta too had to migrate so that her brother could have a better life, or to say a better 'coming-of-age' celebration than the one which he could have been afforded without the money he got by selling his sister. Like Ojebeta, Chiago, and the other slaves of the Palagadas, were migrated from far and near places of Onitsha. All the slaves came to the Palagadas with the hope to eat three times meal, to sleep under a roof, to cover their bodies with clothes, and to have a better life than the ones that they were getting in their own places. No doubt, some of their dreams were fulfilled but, the cost of their simple and straight dreams were a lot. They had to sacrifice their freedom and had to surrender their 'selves' to their owners.

Frederick Cooper's "*Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*", a collection of essays, deal with a huge period of time ranging from 1492 to 1960. All the

essays question the very existence and impact of colonialism. As we could see in the novels of Buchi Emecheta, how colonialism had shattered the lives of the women in a patriarchal setting and how they were deprived of their rights and freedom when the males were enjoying all their rights from the traditional patriarchy and the advantages of the new colonial society. In the book, Cooper talks about the rulers, the imperial conditions, the identity crisis, the humanity, the modernity etc. all that concern colonialism. While doing so, his special focus was on African, South Asian, and European contexts. He has also dealt with the citizenship and the equality issues. Because of the continuous shaping and re-shaping of the counties, because of the ever prevailing problems of identity crisis; arose other social issues concerning citizenship and equality problems. These essays do not talk about only the women deprivations or the gender issues but, they discuss the issues including both the genders. In the due course of slavery, colonialism and modernity; men and women had suffered as a whole. Those experiences and impacts are well recorded through the essays in Cooper's book.

Published in the same year as "For Whom Things Did Not Change", Aidoo's play "*Anowa*" is a story of a girl who tries to break through the history, but was in constant failure after that. Unlike Ojebeta in "*The Slave Girl*", Anowa had a far different life. She had money, power, voice, freedom etc. yet she could not do what she believed was right because she was a woman and hence she had no right either to take any decision or to say anything in the matters that concerned the family. "*Anowa*" is the story of a modern girl who breaks through the stereotype by rejecting suitors proposed by her parents, Osam and Bandura. She marries a totally stranger, Kofi Ako. Her modern thoughts and approaches to life did not help her much because at the end both she and her marriage failed at the hands of the slave trader Kofi Ako.

With her modern and independent attitude, she could get herself a rich and powerful husband; but could not get different expectations from her husband. Soon after their marriage, Kofi Ako requested her to behave and act like the other normal women. Neither did he like nor did he support Anowa's independent thoughts. He expected her to remain in a patriarchal society and not to chase her dream. Also, he expected her to bear children for his family. But, Anowa's failure of bearing children not only depressed her but also made her husband frustrated. At last, he asked her to leave his house.

In the beginnings, Kofi used to care for Anowa a lot. Once he said to Anowa, "What I know is that if you stay out longer in this weather, you are going to be ill. And I

cannot afford to lose you.” (pp. 83) When Anowa failed to bear children and Kofi was suggested to re-marry, he refused to take another wife. Rather he took slaves so that Anowa will have less work to do. When the failure to bear children, depressed Anowa, Kofi could see through her and asked her; “...they all say the same thing. Anowa, what makes you so restless? What occupies you?” (pp. 97) She was suffering the pangs of not being able to meet with the expectations of the society, the culture, the tradition, the family and the husband. Eventually, Kofi became corrupted with the slave trade for he was blinded by the wealth he was acquiring from the trade.

Anowa had a different outlook too. Her modern thoughts allowed her to think in a liberal way. She had the courage to voice her thoughts. Once she told Kofi: “And tell me, when did I enter into a discussion with you about that? I shall not feel happy with slaves around... Kofi, no man made a slave of his friend and came too much himself. It is wrong. It is evil.” (pp. 90) She did not support the slavery. She did like to keep people in bond for their own benefits. She did not like a section of men folk ruling over another. At that point, Kofi said: “You know what? I like you and the way you are different. But Anowa, sometimes you are too different.” (pp. 90)

Anowa’s sympathetic heart towards the slaves and the ones who suffered could be seen through her conversation with her grandmother when she was really very young; which she often remembered:

What is a slave Nana?

Shut up! It is not good that a child should ask such big questions.

A slave is one who is bought and sold.

Where did the white men get the slaves?

I asked.

You frightened me, child.

You must be a witch, child.

They got them from the land.

Did the men of the land sell other men of the land, and women and children to pale men from beyond the horizon who looked like you or me peeled, like lobsters boiled or roasted?

I do not know, child.

You are frightening me, child.

I was not there!

It was too long ago!

No one talks of these things anymore!

All good men and women try to forget;

They have forgotten!

What happened to those who were taken away?

Do people hear from them?

How are they?

Shut up child.

It's too late child.

All good men and women try to forget;

They have forgotten! (pp. 45-46)

The grandmother had a lot of experiences which she acquired from her travels to many places; where she had seen the crucial images of slavery. Aidoo records a very tragic image of the slaves who had went through the pangs and hurdles of slavery. Their sufferings were so grave that they tend to forget them. Though it was impossible for them to forget or to free their minds from such traumatic experiences, they simply prefer not to talk anything about those incidents when their native people were taken away to the distant lands of the whites for slavery. Through her experiences and dialogues, Aidoo gives general information of the postcolonial Africa where things did not change. According to Maureen Eke, as stated in her "Diasporic Ruptures and (Re)membering History: Africa as Home and Exile in *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*" Aidoo's general "attempt to (re)cover, (re)member, or (re)memory Africa's history" presents a remedial and healing purpose. (pp. 76)

Anowa often prohibited Kofi not to trade slaves for that was wrong and evil. When Kofi suggested having one or two female slaves for she might be feeling lonely with only the male slaves around; *Anowa* refused to have any more slaves. Kofi then

referred to other lands where bonded men were treated worse than dogs but in their land, the bonded men were like they belonged where they were. Such different attitude and outlook kept separating them and eventually they had to end their lives of togetherness. The Old Man's question at the end which is directed to the whole society and its prejudice justifies or rather narrates the whole understanding of the story: "Who knows if Anowa would have been a better woman, a better person if we had not been what we are?" (pp. 64)

No matter what, no matter how modern, how strong voice women had; a woman is a 'woman' after all, the inferior sex. Hence, she can never have a different life at any cost. Her own husband, family, and the whole society regard her as a 'commodity'. Sekou Toure in his article, "The Role of Women in the Revolution" puts true color to the story of a 'woman'. A woman's dignity, self-respect and personality 'were trampled upon'. She is taken as the man's belonging. She is regarded as well as treated as an 'object'. Hence, all her garments, jewelries, children and other stuff were at the hands of her husband. Even though a woman is the 'source of joy and a faithful companion to her husband'; she can not at all raise her voice at any matter. 'The slightest pretext was a motive for divorce.' A wife and all her stuff belonged to her husband and he had every right to use them for his pleasure, 'without any restriction'. The husband could even break their relation of thirty or forty years if his wife did not behave according to him or in other words, according to the set norms of the society. (pp. 10)

This is very much relevant in the case of Anowa. The whole concept of marriage is nothing but a forced labor, where women are exploited at the hands of the men and the society. They are used and re-used by the both. Even the very concept of motherhood is seen as slavery in many cases. Women like Nnu Ego in "*The Joys of Motherhood*", Virmati in "*Difficult Daughters*" etc. gave their whole life and energy to feed their motherhood, for what it meant to them; which ultimately enslaved them for the rest of their lives. A 'motherhood', for which they could not have an independent life, gave them nothing in return. Rather, the most awaited and wanted motherhood took every little bit of their dream, hope, desire, struggle, pain, energy, love and destroyed them.

The social discrimination, norms and conditions kept the women-folk in subjugation, unskilled and confined to the domestic tasks only. To break through such concepts and stereotypical practices, the women-folk needed to realize the need of liberation, rights and equality. In many parts of the globe, women have realized that

liberation can come from foreign domination. If one needs liberation, one needs to at first liberate oneself from the domain of colonialism. Domination, exploitation and oppression in the name of colonization can never bring anything good. As Toure states in his article, "The Role of Women in the Revolution": "National liberty would be meaningless if it allowed the persistence in any form whatever, of the oppression and exploitation, of the social degradations and depersonalization and discriminations introduced by the foreign oppressors." (pp. 10) According to Toure, to ensure the positivity of any action, the women-folk need to attack and then overcome all the hurdles to their liberation. And most importantly, things that ensure equality between men and women must be supported and followed.

Buchi Emecheta's exemplary novel, "*The Bride Price*" is a twist-tale on the differences between the slaves and the free-born and the established taboo against inter-marriage of 'free' and 'slave'. "*The Bride Price*", the title itself suggests the buying and selling of a bride, i.e. a woman. Just like "*The Slave Girl*", here in this novel, the bride price suggests nothing but the change of masters. A woman's life is dictated by her father (or uncle in this story) before her marriage and by her husband after her marriage. A woman is oppressed at the hands of the men, society and tradition. The marriage and even the birth of a girl itself is as if a 'bond' that she needs to live her life according to the needs, tastes, requirements, pleasure etc. of the men in every form. Like a 'slave', a woman too has no life to call her own. In "*The Slave Girl*", Ojebeta too is at first governed by her father, but after her father had died her younger brother sold her to a distant relative for he was unable to take responsibility of her and also because he could use the money for his own purposes that he got from selling her. After that she was governed and controlled by her masters, the Palagadas. And finally, when she was set free from the slavery and was married to Jacob, she was dictated according to his rules and wishes. In short, a woman has no 'freedom' for herself; whether she is at her parents' home, or at her husband's home, or at her master's home; it is always going to be her 'owner's' home.

Aku-Nna, the central character of the novel "*The Bride Price*", fell in love with her teacher Chike, who was a descendant of slaves. According to the set norms and conditions of that traditional Igbo society, the descendants of slaves could rise to important position in public life on a frequent and quick basis than the free-born ones. Both the categories could have normal everyday relations. But when it came to the points

like owning land, marriage and religious offices; the unbridgeable gap came to the forefront. For such reason, Chike and Aku-Nna had to elope to share each other's company.

Their elopement was regarded as an open defiance of the Igbo marriage system and also the Igbo tradition. Aku-Nna's uncle and other family members had already selected a suitor for Aku-Nna for a high 'bride price'. As her father died when she was still in her childhood, she and her mother had to shift from Lagos to their traditional village of Ibuza. There Aku-Nna faced a lot of different situations: "The fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family." (pp. 28) It was a belief that a woman could no longer take care of herself or her family after the death of her husband. According to the Ibuza tradition, her mother had to marry with her father's brother. Anyway, her uncle turned to be a greedy man who wanted to marry her off at a high bride price, when she enters in her womanhood. But, Aku-Nna had other dreams. She wanted to complete her secondary school education, become a teacher and marry the man she loves. Chike was the man of love for her, but was 'unfit' according to the tradition for he was a descendant of slaves.

Aku-Nna found herself trapped somewhere in between the traditional beliefs and the Western missionary ways. Through her story, Emecheta projects the lives of the women in a traditional Igbo setting during colonialism. Women were expected to serve their husband, bear children (especially sons), and have a very little say in the household matters. In short, a man used to dictate the course of a woman's life. Like Ojebeta, the same course of life could be seen in Aku-Nna's story too. Though she was not a descendant of slaves, though she was a free-born, yet her uncle used to control everything from when she meets, to who she talks, to her schooling, to who she marries with. Aku-Nna had no hope to fight for her love, and elopement was not a choice for there was a prevailing 'taboo' or superstitious belief in the traditional Igbo society that "If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child." (pp. 176)

Aku-Nna not only completed her secondary school education, but also was able to become a teacher. A young man with a limp of her village, named Okoboshi, had casted his eyes on her and wanted her to become his wife. He, along with his family, kidnapped her. According to set norms and conditions of the Igbo society, the bride price

did not apply to the ones who abduct the girls or cut away a lock from the girls' hair. "Some youth who had no money to pay for a bride might sneak out of the bush to cut a curl from a girl's head so that she would belong to him for life and never been able to return to her parents: because he had given her the everlasting haircut, he would be able to treat her as he liked, and no man would ever touch her. It was to safeguard themselves against this that many girls cropped their hair very close;" (pp. 103) It suggests nothing but the exploitation of a girl's life in the name of custom. It is as though the girl has no right over her own hair.

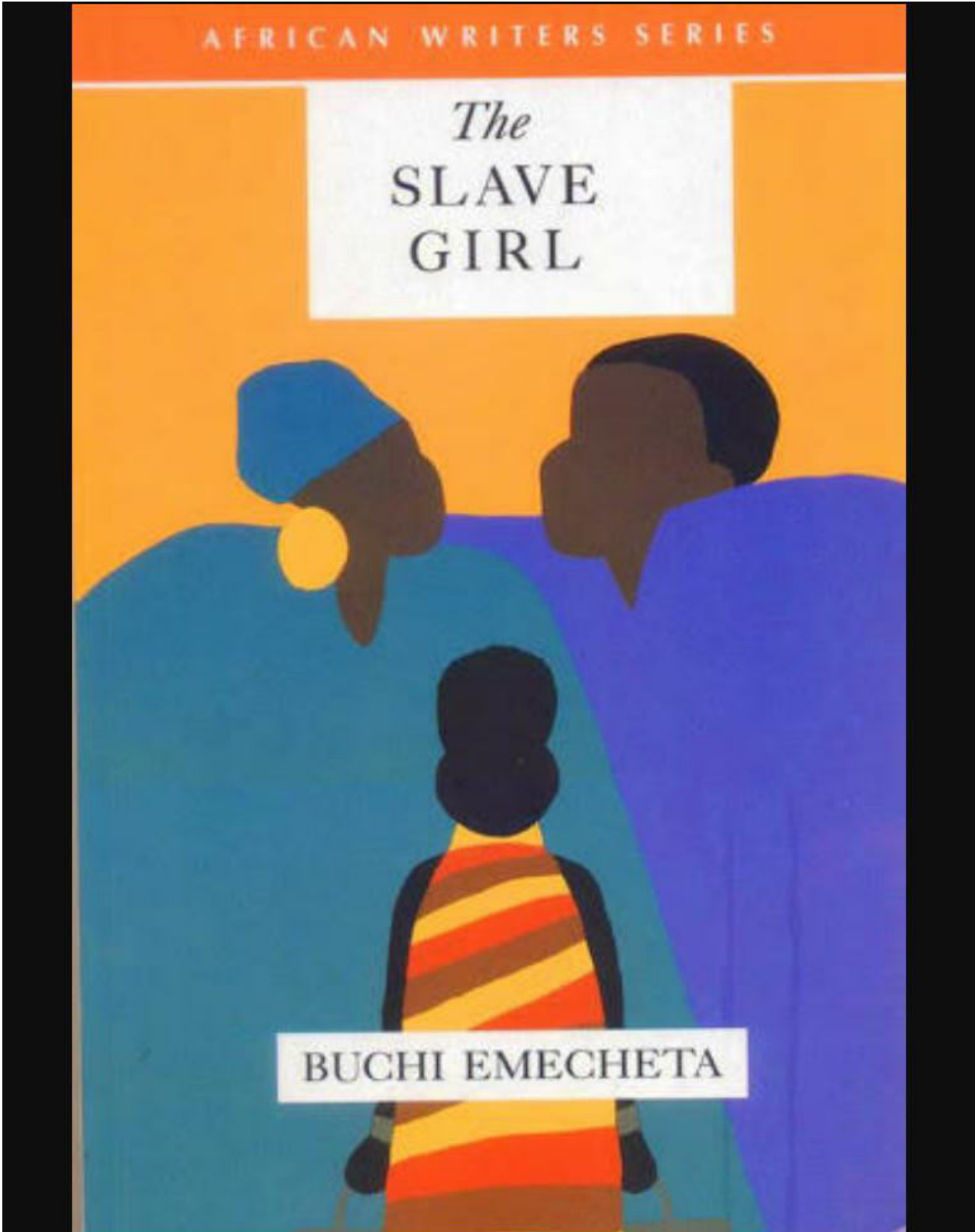
After the abduction, Okoboshi demanded his physical rights over Aku-nna. To save herself from such a situation she lied to have intimate relationship with Chike. Blinded by anger and insult Okoboshi promised not to touch her ever and re-marry other women and make her serve them. Aku-Nna, getting the very first chance, escaped from Okoboshi's house and eloped with Chike. No matter how much money Chike's family wanted to pay as her bride price; it was not accepted by her family, society and tradition.

Aku-Nna's life depended more or less on the greed of her uncle, just like Ojebeta's life depended on the greed of her younger brother in the novel "*The Slave Girl*". But, unlike Ojebeta, here in "*The Bride Price*", Aku-Nna took every chance to fulfill her dreams and to break free the traditional norms and conditions set for the women-folk. Ojebeta only accepted whatever happened and came to her life as her destiny. She had learnt from the other fellow slaves that it was their luck that they got to be the slaves of such a kind person like Ma Palagada. They accepted their luck in that way and so did Ojebeta. But, as for Aku-Nna, she eloped with the man she loved. She got a job as a school teacher. They were happy together for a certain period of their lives. But, she died at her first childbirth proving the 'taboo' true. After her death, her story was told and re-told by the parents to prevent their daughters from the curse of the 'taboo'. No

AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

The
SLAVE
GIRL

BUCHI EMECHETA



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one interpreted Aku-Nna's story as a woman's fight for her rights; rather everyone took it as an example or lesson to the women-folk who desired to live free.

Even after being raised in the city, far from the traditional cultures of the village and amidst the 'change' (colonialism), even after having education, even after raising voice against the stereotype through her acts and even after being a prized possession of her family; Aku-Nna in "*The Bride Price*", failed to bring any difference for her than the traditional life of a woman. Ojebeta "*The Slave Girl*" too had the fortune to learn the basic education like sewing, baking cakes, counting etc. She was sent to the Sunday classes at the church by Ma Palagada with the other female slaves so that they could learn to do some household works as well as could learn to look good and dress well so that they could attract more and more customers at Ma Palagada's shop. Although girls were not normally that much cared or preferred by a father, both Ojebeta and Aku-Nna were treated way more differently. Aku-Nna's father, Okwuekwu had lost so many children before her that they had a strong bond, "a kind of closeness to which she could not give name" (pp. 10) as it was far more different than the typical father-daughter relationship. Even on the verge of his death, Okwuekwu told her to "always remember that you are mine." (pp. 11) She was proud to be treated like a prized possession. But, she could not free herself from the grasp of 'slavery'. She failed at the hands of 'women slavery', "everything about her seemed stretched to breaking point." (pp. 164) Similarly, Ojebeta's parents too had lost many children before her, especially daughters. And when Ojebeta's mother was pregnant with her, both the parents had prayed to the Gods to let the child live. And finally, when she was born, they were more than happy. Her father in fact, went to the deep forest to bring some 'charms' for her so that they could bring luck for her.

Slavery, in its every form had been practiced in Africa. Both men and women suffered for years. While women had suffered twice the slavery suffered by men; men too were treated in inhuman ways, exploited and maltreated. "For three centuries the white man seized and enslaved millions of Africans and transported them, with every circumstance of ferocious cruelty, across the seas." (pp. 7) states E. D. Morel in the chapter II entitled as "The Black Man's Burden" from his book "*The Black Man's Burden*".

Another prominent novelist of Emecheta's time, Bessie Head, in her novel "*Maru*" talks about 'Masarwa' or 'Bushmen', a tribe who are descendants of slaves and

are untouchable. Masarwa is similar to that presented by Ato's family against Eulalie in Aidoo's "*The Dilemma of a Ghost*". In her novel, Head presents a love triangle between the three major characters Margaret, Moleka and Maru. The novel not only emphasizes on the love theme but also brings in a hope that 'love' is and can be the only reason to decipher hatred and social inequalities.

"*Maru*" is set in the African village, Dilepe, where the Bushmen or the Masarwa tribe had no values and was neglected. The masarwas were regarded to be the descendants of slaves. Margaret, the lead female character was regarded as 'untouchable child' and was looked down upon. Life was hard for a Bushman: "Africans in Southern Africa could still smile- at least, they were not Bushmen... There in no one [the Bushmen] can still turn round to and say 'At least I am not a ___'" (pp. 11)

Margaret got the name from the white missionary, Margaret Cadmore, who brought her up and gave her a life. She got a good academic career and was able to get a teaching job in Dilepe. For her, it was a new beginning. She could have hid her reality for no one in Dilepe knew her originality. But, she chose to remain true to her identity, which could acquire her number of admirers. The villagers of Dilepe were shocked to find out that their children were to be taught by a Masarwa. But, among those typical villagers, there were few who not only accepted Margaret for who she was, but also liked her.

Maru, after whom the novel is named, was a man of power and was in the line to become the chief of the village; fell in love with Margaret and wanted to marry her. On the other hand, Moleka, who was Maru's best friend, also happened to wish the same. The two men's friendship was unbreakable and they themselves predicted that a woman would be the reason for that to happen. Even after knowing the facts about Margaret's identity, both Maru and Moleka did not hesitate to proceed further. Moleka gave all that he had to win the love of Margaret. He believed that Margaret had something different in her that like the bright star she could lit his life. After Margaret's arrival, Moleka not only gave his all to win her, but also he broke the social distinctions and prejudice by dining with his servants: "He always says he treats his slaves nicely. He never says there ought to be slaves." (pp. 48)

Not only in his actions, but also in his words, the social evil, the discrimination and the prejudice started to fade away. But, things could not be understood by the slaves

for that were a lot for them to take in all of a sudden. They were well accustomed with the pre-conceived notions of the society. But, when Moleka brought in the change “A servant, not a Masarwa, who worked in Moleka’s home, spread the word that they no longer knew what was what. He said that all the slaves in Moleka’s home sat at the table with him when he ate.” (pp. 48)

While Moleka brought such a great change in his thoughts and applications, to win over his love; Maru on the other hand was ready to lose his ‘chieftainship’ for his love. If he was to marry Margaret, he definitely had to lose his power for it was unacceptable to have an untouchable as their chief’s wife, according to the set norms and conditions of the Dilepe custom. But, Maru’s firm determination was seen when he told his sister, Dikeledi: “If I have a place, it is to pull down the old structures and create the new.” (pp. 68) Bessie Head clearly directs her readers to the ways of tackling with such injustices and problems of the society, i.e., her strong believe in ‘love, ‘understanding’, and ‘education’. Her belief could be well read from the ways with which she has painted her characters in the novel. Her belief can surely bring hope in bringing peace and equality to the society.

Both the men, Moleka and Maru were not only ready to part with all that they had but also they turned that into a reality for the sake of their love and to show their love openly to the whole society. The story of their love represents or rather gives a hope that with the driving force of love, the prejudice and the whole society could change. If there were more sacrifices done like that of Moleka and Maru; the society could definitely be reformed. Through Dikeledi, who loved and respected Margaret in every way, Bessie Head speaks the ultimate truth, the message that she wanted to convey through her novel: “There’s no such things as Masarwa... There are only people.” (pp. 65)

Such a noble message Bessie Head gives through her novel, which really is the ultimate truth of the mankind. But, sadly enough, that is far from reality; because, in today’s world, competition, establishment, status, power etc. have blinded the mankind to such an extent that they no more can see where the humanity is leading to. Being a man, one is ruling over the other, one is selling the other for one’s material benefits. And, men get pleasure and satisfaction from that. The bitter truth of today’s world is that the world has come to a point where the whole world is divided into so many sections or parts such as powerful and powerless, rich and poor, first world inhabitants and third world inhabitants, male and female etc. that ‘understanding’ has become impossible.

Bessie Head gives a different image of slavery in her novel than the usual human trafficking or the buying and selling of slaves. She gives a rather 'foreseen' image of Africa where there would not be any distinction between a white and a black, a master and a slave. She does so through the story of Margaret Cadmore when she accepted the 'untouchable child' who was discarded and left to die alone by her native people for being untouchable and also because her mother had died. According to the rituals, when a person dies, others could not touch his/her offspring, especially when he/she is a Masarwa. But, Margaret Cadmore not only took the infant under her care but also gave her own name to that child, she kissed the foot toes of the young Margaret at bedtime, she educated her and gave her a beautiful life and an identity when her own skin colored people let her to die. Bessie Head's "*Maru*" is a breakthrough from the practiced and assumed 'slavery' in this regard. Also, this novel is a projection on the impact of slavery still left amongst the mindset of the people and their culture and tradition, even after the independence of their country and the ban of slavery by the government. Just like Aidoo's "*Anowa*", this novel of Head too deals with the traumatic experiences of the native people, who could not free themselves from their earlier practices and rules even after their national as well as individual independence.

Post-colonialism or Postcolonial study has come through a lot of critical expressions and has occupied a really very important space in contemporary discourse. In terms of the historical and chronological placement 'post-colonialism' comes right after the colonization process has come to an end. And since then, the idea of 'postcolonial state' suggests the following period when after the end of the empire, the colonies under the foreign rule have been revived and brought to the inhabitants who consider it their own. Hence, it refers to a state of independence from a kind of subjugation. The ideas 'independence' and 'nation' came to be known by the subjugated people. At this period of time, people got their independence from the reign of the other powerful countries. It is that method which helps the intellectuals to question the cultural perception in respond to the cultural donation of colonialism and imperialism.

But, at this point, raises the question of 'history' of the individual nations. Usually, post-colonialism is regarded as the way of viewing and being viewed. It records human relations among the colonial nations and the subaltern people exploited by colonial rule. Thus, the freedom of a country after colonial rule required the rewriting of the nation's history. Before the freedom, it used to be 'how' and 'what' the ruling

country viewed. That was their view which came in terms to be almost polarized in regard of the view points of the native inhabitants or the subjugated people. Therefore, rewriting of one's own history became important. Post-colonialism in this regard, gave the worth. It necessitated and facilitated the re-invention of a country's history.

The post colonial period then gave birth to another aspect, i.e. the decolonization. Politically, decolonization initiated the state of a hyphenated 'post'-colonialism; the rapidly changing world order in the twentieth century has been influenced by this aspect by then. It can also be said that the 'decolonization' gave rise to 'postcolonial identity'. Even, this drastic change was very much responsible for the revisionist attitude that qualifies most postcolonial theories.

Thus, the relation between the colonizer and the colonized became important to be presented and viewed by the colonized ones. Also, it became more important to view it in terms of literature where the anti-conquest narrative analyses the identity politics that are the social and cultural perspectives of the subaltern colonial subjects- their struggle and resistance to the culture of the colonizer; how such struggles and resistances complicated the establishment of a colonial society; how the colonizers developed their postcolonial identity; and how the binary of Us-and-Them is actively employed in neo-colonialism. The binary of the First World and the Third World, the Self and the Other, the Colonizer and the Colonized, the Voice and the Voiceless, the Occident and the Orient etc. shows the divisions of the rulers, i.e. the Europeans and the non-Europeans. The 'us-and-them' orientalist paradigm allowed European scholars to represent the Oriental World as inferior and backward, irrational and wild, as opposed to a Western Europe that was superior and progressive, rational and civil-the opposite of the Oriental Other.

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, an Italian writer re-presents African women as one homogenous group of 'women' in her writing, "*Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*". The title of her essay itself mocks at the whole womenfolk of Africa. She regards prostitution to be the only work option for African women. This thing was not at all appreciated by C.T. Mohanty, and she criticises Cutrufelli in her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Western Discourses" for characterizing every women of Africa as 'women of Africa' regardless of even class, community, race etc. For Mohanty, one cannot start a book with such a negative aspect, especially in the time of 1980s, when things were really getting changed. Back in those days, before independence, many

women depended on men and had lived their lives while fulfilling the needs of the men and the family; but that doesn't mean that even in those days 'free' women were not there. Hence, according to Mohanty, Maria was wrong in generalizing the entire womenfolk of Africa. Beside, Maria had presented the entire African women wolf in a total negative aspect, which was totally wrong for there were a number of artists, novelists, creators, and educated women even in those dark days of prevailing patriarchy and slavery.

C. T. Mohanty was true enough with her judgment. Because, a number of powerful women writers from each and every continent of the World are producing a lot of prominent and remarkable works. Many of them have acquired such position that every now and then their writings are seen to be referred in a way or the other. But the question here is what they usually deal with while writing or producing works? And the answer, which is known to all that most of the time it, is the plight of womenfolk. The women writers deal with such kinds of writings through which they have presented the plight and position of women in the so called traditional 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 and the scenes after that. 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 only women writers are writing for the women's plight. Men writers are also contributing in this sphere. But, ultimately, whether it is a male writer or a female writer, whether it is a women centric writing or not, whether the women characters get power or not; the writings always re-present ironically the place of womenfolk which is regarded to be inferior to the men folk.

Every thing has come through so many changes to come to the present point of modernization. The bad got good, the good got better, the better got best; but in case of women, things have been and are 'worst' only. In the due course of modernization, when on one hand men are evolving in the way to development, women are being used as always, as slaves, objects of sex, source of production etc. A woman is regarded to be woman only when she gives birth and helps in continuing the heredity of her husband's line. These are the themes that most writings on feminism deal with.

Buchi Emecheta, a very prominent and remarkable African woman novelist, has contributed a number of writings presenting such exploitations of women. One of her best novels, *“The Joys of Motherhood”* is one such novel, where she presents the position of a woman in the typical and traditional African society. Here she presents what it takes to be woman, what a woman goes through in the process of being a woman. Through Nnu Ego, the central character of this novel, Emecheta even critiques the idea of motherhood as a kind of slavery. No doubt Nnu Ego’s experience and sufferings are far more different than that of Ojebeta’s in *“The Slave Girl”*. Ojebeta, had to go through the pangs of slavery as a result of her own brother’s failure to both take care and take responsibility of her. Whereas, Nnu Ego in *“The Joys of Motherhood”* her own misconceptions of the joys of motherhood in the so called patriarchal society, had her entrapped and forced her to live like a slave. Like a slave, she lost both her freedom and individuality. In the due course of bearing and rearing her children, “it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned in her love for her children.... It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman’s sense of responsibility to actually enslave her.” (pp. 153) She suffered a lot of loneliness even after being a mother of nine children (including her dead 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 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, Adanwo, the senior wife of Nnaife’s elder brother advices 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)

This is how a woman is seen and used by the patriarchal society. Even we can say that under the core exploitation of the male dominated society, a woman needs to sacrifice her everything to please and satisfy her husband and the other male members of her life. this novel of Emecheta is a well projection on how at times the joys of motherhood itself entrap the women and make them spend their lives as some slaves, just fulfilling others' necessities and demands first and never considering for own desires and wishes. And, also not getting any recognition for what they do, suffer, and sacrifice in whole their lives. One of Emecheta's award winning and best example concerning the matter of slavery, "*The Slave Girl*", shows the predominant patriarchal order of the society. In this novel, Emecheta goes as far using slavery as universal condition of women in Nigeria. In this novel, Emecheta equates the institutions of slavery with marriage by simply exploring the conditions of the life of the protagonist Ojebeta, its heroine, first as a slave and then as a wife. Through her changed status, from a slave girl to a wife is simply described as change of masters and nothing more. It also depicts the limited opportunities and property status of women in Nigerian patriarchal society.

The story of this novel revolves round a female character, named Ogbanje Ojebeta. She was the beloved daughter of Okwuekwu and Umeadi. They got her after a lot of worships and sacrifices. The baby girls that Umeadi gave birth before Ojebeta, couldnot survive for long. Although they had two healthy and happy sons, they always desired for a baby girl. And when Umeadi gets pregnant again, we find Okwuekwu 'praying inwardly to Oboshi, the river goddess of their town Ibuza, to help his wife this time. He would have liked a baby girl....' (pp. 14)

Emecheta makes her heroine special by giving her importance. The fact that Ojebeta was special to her parents is demonstrated through her ogbanje charms, which her father brings from a dangerous place called Idu. As because the other baby girls of Okwuekwu and Umeadi had died, the villagers suggested them, 'Your child will stay this time if you tie her with safety charms. These must consist of cowries, tops of tins brought here by the Potokis, and real bells made from metal.' (pp. 18) These charms were regarded to help Ojebeta frighten the evils away. Also the intricate facial tattoos and the charms were to ensure that she will not be sold into slavery. But this is ironical enough that the girl, who was the most desired asset of her parents and was never to be sold, had the most unpleasant happenings in her life. Even though the ogbanje charms

could frighten the evils away and could make her survive, they could not help her to have a life to call her own.

However, Ojebeta's parents die of 'Felenza', an epidemic. Life became hard for both Ojebeta and Okolie. Also, Okolie was growing up and his 'coming-of-age' was approaching. He needed money to celebrate the occasion and to give a heartfelt treat to his friends. Having found no other way Okolie thought it would be better to sell off his sister at the hands of the rich. The seven-year-old girl was sold to a rich relative Ma Palagada, by her brother, Okolie. He sold her for eight pounds, and he uses that money for his coming-of-age dance. And to get that money, he made his little sister walk and travel a long distance from Ibuza to Onitsha, a place where this relative Ma Palagada, a successful market trader was staying. Though Okolie knew that his little sister would have to suffer a lot at that place, yet he thought that it would be better for her as because none of her brothers was able to look after her, and besides they had no such relative apart from Ma Palagada to take care of her. This was a kind of society, where a male, when was not ready to take care of his own sister, was allowed to sell his sister to ensure his better future. Ironically enough, the girl who her mother tattooed her face with "the most costly face-marker... no kidnapper would dream of selling her into slavery... if she got lost her people would always know her" (pp. 45); was sold by her own brother and thus she got lost into slavery.

What hurt the most, are the rays of hope seen in the eyes of young Ojebeta when she was travelling with her brother. She was so confident and carefree having her brother by her side to look after her. When she was offered food by the other servants of Ma Palagada, she did not have it though she was very much hungry after a whole day's journey. Rather, she wanted to wait for her brother to return so that they could share the food and eat together. But, for Okolie, money mattered more than his sister.

Almost at the same kind of situation, Chiago, another slave of Ma Palagada was sold. She believed "Her family would certainly have starved had she not been sold to this man, Pa Palagada, who had later handed Chiago to his wife. It was a blessing that at least her stomach had been sold with her, so her parents would no longer have to worry about how to feed her; and perhaps the money her head had fetched had helped her family for a while." (pp. 61)

Opposite to what Okolie had thought, Ojebeta had to live the life of a slave in Onitsha. She was one of many slaves at Ma Palagada's house. However, because of Ma Palagada's wealth and eventual conversion to Christianity, she was allowed to attend school; but only to make her learn how to sew. Although we talk every now and then about women empowerment and all, yet it is an open secret that women are still treated as some kind of object which takes birth to please and satisfy the men folk.

The book follows with Ojebeta at Onitsha with Ma Palagada and others. Ma Palagada is presented as a very strong woman with a keen business sense. She is a very hard working and soft hearted woman, and has accumulated a lot of wealth. But, according to the laws of the patriarchal society, all her wealth belonged to her lazy and passive husband. For the good nature of Ma Palagada, her slave girls gets what the slave girls of other homes did not. But, we must not forget that it is a society where there is no right or freedom for woman. It does not matter what and how much fortunate a woman is, for a woman is always a 'woman' with no power. Chiago, the eldest of the slave girls, was forced to have sexual relation with her master secretly. And eventually she becomes pregnant and gives birth to Pa Palagada's child. Sadly, she remarks somewhere in the novel that what choice she could have for she was nothing but only a slave girl. Here, we can see how the life of only a seventeen year old girl was exploited in the name of a male dominated society where women have no right to speak for her.

The hard fact of the society has been presented by Emecheta in her novel. As Ma Palagada was the most successful business woman in the Onitsha market; Ma Mee, another business woman was her rival and envied her success. She never missed a chance to target Ma Palagada. Once when Ma Palagada's slave tried to run away, Ma Mee, in the motive of insulting Ma Palagada, raised the point that one should be careful in trading slaves because buying and selling of slaves was abolished from the society and they were doing that secretly. Hence, she should be extremely careful if she wanted to do business. Emecheta's "*The Slave Girl*" presents an African society which is colonized yet not free from the traditional practices of the typical society. They still needed the help of the slaves to accomplish wealth. And 'freedom' was still a dream to the slaves. Ma Mee once said, "“Where would we be without slave labour, and where would some of these unwanted children be without us?” It might be evil, but it was a necessary evil.” (pp. 64)

After spending several months doing the household chores, sewing, looking after the shop at the Onitsha market, going to the Church to learn some lessons and skills; Ojebeta grew up. People started to assume “perhaps they’ll send her to keep their son amused.” (pp. 94) And that had happened to be true when Ma Palagada’s only son Clifford expressed his desire to marry Ojebeta, in quite a demanding way. “Me? But I am only your mother’s slave.” (pp. 117) was Ojebeta’s reply to the declaration of Clifford. To this Clifford said, “Have you never heard of masters marrying their female slaves, then?” (pp. 117) This shows how women were actually literally used by the powerful sex. The women folk have no kind of authority even upon their own lives. They are not even allowed to have their own consents upon their own marriages. This also reminds us of what Aristotle had told that a slave was a part of the master; and may be that was why Clifford had such assumptions.

When Clifford came home after completing his studies, he was taken by the beauty of Ojebeta. But, when he was rejected by her, he slapped her hard on both of her cheeks. She was so hurt that she wanted to cry, she complained that to Ma Palagada but to her astonishment, she was ordered to shut up. It gave Clifford the chance to punish her for every little mistake she did afterwards.

Even though, Ojebeta was given a better life than the slaves that belonged to the other rich people, she could never have a ‘free’ life. It was like she was living a slave’s life with a lot of complements. This could be assumed from the mother (Ma Palagada) and son (Clifford) conversation when Clifford expressed his final decision to marry Ojebeta:

But, so, this is serious, Ma was saying to Clifford. “Why did you not tell me long ago? I would have spent more on her upbringing—and, look, I paid for her.”

“Well, you can regard what you paid for her as her bride price. After all, you once told me that her brother had said you could give her away to whichever husband you wished when she grew up...”

“Yes, there can be no doubt about that. I bought her body and soul. She I feel we should have given her some more sophisticated training.” (pp. 129)

Later, after the death of Ma Palagada, Ojebeta decided to go back to her hometown and she was granted freedom by Pa Palagada. By then, Chiago took to play the role of Ma of the house. May be, in her case, the slavery can be regarded as the

means of her power and authority that she got after becoming the Ma of the house which she used in convincing her husband to grant Ojebeta her freedom. If that would not have happened, Ojebeta had to live the rest of her life as a slave because Ma's eldest daughter, Victoria wanted to take Ojebeta with her to her husband's house so that she could look after her children and everything else that she needed.

Back home, Ojebeta was received warmly by her village mates. She was now free to do what she liked. She started her trade in there that she had learnt from Ma Palagada and her school education. She also knew how to read. Later, there she was proposed for marriage by Jacob, an educated and hardworking man. After getting her approval, he pays her slavery money to Clifford because it was believed in the Igbo society that if the bride price was not paid then the woman dies at her first childbirth. Jacob was very much afraid to lose or to have any harm coming towards his Ojebeta. And as legally, Ojebeta was owned by Palagadas, he arranged a meeting with Clifford and they all agreed to return her slavery money or rather pay her bride price. Thus, she was set free by a man even after having education, experience, courage and confidence. And hopefully she led the later part of her life quite happily because she was indeed quite happy at the end.

But, to any educated person, her freedom came in another form of slavery. She just got handed down from one master to another. She herself said: "The contract is completed, after all these years. I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own town Ibuza; my mind is now at rest... Thank you, my new owner. Now I am free in your house. I could not wish for a better master." (pp. 178-179) The words that she used such as 'free', 'master', 'owner' themselves narrate the condition of her present status. John Stuart Mill was true enough when he associated the law of marriage with that of slavery in his essay, "*The Subjection of Women*". Mill was of the view that in a typically traditional society, even the institution of marriage was performed like that of the bond of slavery. Just like a slave depends on his/her master for every little thing, a wife too is forced or to say made to depend, follow and obey her husband in everything. In both the novels of Emecheta namely, "*The Bride Price*" and "*The Slave Girl*" we can see that the customs and rituals that are done in the name of marriage are nothing but some bonding to ensure the right of the husband over everything that belongs to his wife, from her body to her emotion, to her thoughts, to her abilities, to her time, to her wishes, and to her dreams.

Even after trying again and again, Emecheta couldn't get rid of that society where Women Empowerment for women was just a mere dream and nothing else. Therefore, we can see that even after being educated, Ojebeta was once again bought by a new master, Jacob. Otherwise, as she was a trade woman by now, she could have paid her slavery money and could have set herself free.

"The Slave Girl" is about the mistreatment of women than simply a feminist's ramblings. It is about the condition of women, where they try to find a position in the society which is something more than babies and kitchens. It talks about the binary position of women, where on one hand they want a change and better position for them, and on another, they have to settle for what tradition and the society itself dictates. If that would not have been so, then the ending of the novel would have been something else. If women would not have compromised with the traditional society, then Ojebeta, being a bit educated and earning trader would have paid her slavery money by her own. She would not have let Jacob take her dignity away by paying her slavery money. Emecheta could have made her heroine stronger by doing so. But, in her mind, may be the patriarchal society which is cruel enough for women and does not give any space or identity to women, was lurking, where women are still seen as subalterns and voiceless.

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