

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Buchi Emecheta is one of the renowned and famous African Women Writers, whose sole motif was to help the relegated and unwanted sections of the society and to improve the conditions, especially of the womenfolk. Through her projections of the female characters, she tried to put light on the plight and conditions of the African women, and also what it meant and caused to be a woman and a mother in the African context. Most of her novels' setting is Nigeria, Africa. And, her depiction of the female protagonists is unrivalled. Her literary intelligence reaches the zenith when she acts as a spokesperson for the rights of the relegated sections. One of the major themes of almost all of her novels is 'gender inequality'. She presents the patriarchal society and its conventional applications with a lot of dissatisfaction and disappointment. She was hurt and frustrated with such beliefs and applications that she took the help of her pen to write against such injustice done to the womenfolk. Another motif behind her writing such kind of novels was to focus on the men-folk's failure to see and understand womenfolk's ability and also their failure to treat them equally. She did not give up trying to fight for what was just.

The way Emecheta presents her heroines, discloses her understanding of feminism and womanhood. Her writings could achieve such height because of the presentation of African womanhood from a woman's point of view, and because of the flavor of her real life experiences. She presents how male domination and male chauvinism were at their heights in her time. Because of such applications, women were being deprived of their rights and freedom; for which women end up doing wages for the males. In the name of culture and tradition, women had been exploited and misused to a great extent. Women just had to keep on doing their duties and their wages. No matter how important their duties or responsibilities may have been; they were always pushed back to the background and were left unnoticed, and uncared for and were never given any recognition. Their roles and efforts were neither appreciated nor recognized. Hence, writers like Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo etc. have attempted through their writings to add the looming question of gender inequality in the African literature. They have tried their level best to support the

evolving of 'women' as 'individuals'; but, at times they too ended up failing for not being able to escape the clutches of traditionalism. Most of their writings were developed from their real life experiences, where they too had failed at times because of the prevailing patriarchy.

Buchi Emecheta painted all of her characters with the true colors of the African context. And, that is why her plots succeeded in giving the true flavors of the lives lived by the African women. The biggest plus point of Emecheta's writings is that she wrote from her real life experiences, i.e. her first hand experiences which provide the readers the first hand glimpse of the African society, tradition, culture, applications and practices.

It is not that the male writers failed to project the plight of women. And, it would be wrong if the males are blamed and institutionalized as the 'same' because, there are many male writers who have written and have been writing against the traditional mechanisms of gender inequality and gender relations. Powerful male writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Sembene Ousmane etc. are worth mentioning in this regard. Likewise, female writers like Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emedcheta etc. are some worth mentioning female novelists, who have projected the plight and conditions of the womenfolk of their time. They were not satisfied with presentation of the female characters and gender roles attributed by many writers. Hence, they wanted to re-present the true happenings with a fair point. By doing so, they also wanted to re-visit and re-establish the existence of women in a male oriented society. They have dealt with every major and minor institutions of gender inequality starting from female fetus, to the lost childhood of the daughters, to the marriage systems, to the fulfillment of motherhood, to the application of polygamy, patriarchy, female subordination, enslavement etc. Tradition has been keeping a very strong grip upon the mankind, and the customs make the grip even stronger. It is, if not impossible, very difficult to escape from such clutches because, both of them have been ruling over the whole mankind, whether as a group or as individuals. It is hard to break free from such reign for whenever such attempts were made, the rebellious heads of tradition and custom had risen. Its strong hold from the past would grow stronger and the freedom-seeker would get hushed. To break free from such vicious clutches, the individuals need a strong voice, which they can raise at all the needy situations and also the individuals should be able to register their discontent and disenchantment with the

methods and ways of life lived by the conventional, traditional and cultural believers. Such attempts were made by the respective protagonists of the above mentioned African women writers. These African women writers have presented their respective protagonists with such strong voice, and strong will with the motif to awaken 'self-consciousness' and 'self-reliance' among the hitherto submissive women.

The society upholds a lot of traditional and cultural beliefs, which gradually turn into social ethics and women are bound to follow them. Marriage, motherhood, infertility, polygamy, women dependence, women education etc. are some of such examples. From their birth itself, women face the discrimination based on gender. At times, the female fetuses are seen to be victimized at the hands of gender discrimination even in the mother's womb, with all the gender biased notions ultimately and with women suppression and oppression. The ethics and beliefs that the society applies are ultimately nothing but the rule of men over women. In the name of tradition, culture, ritual, convention etc. women are always suppressed, exploited, misused and mistreated. Because of such practices, women are deprived of their childhood. When on one hand, the sons at the age of three or four spend their days playing and enjoying around; daughters on the other hand, are assumed and expected to learn the household chores at such tender age. Their gender differences bring two polar opposite worlds to them.

There are many female writers around the world, who have tried to establish their heroines as 'individuals'. Though at many points they have failed to manage the continuity of such individualism; their efforts to give their heroines education, identity, strength, voice etc. are worth mentioning. It definitely was not easy for them to present their heroines with such exceptions than the practiced biased and prejudiced beliefs. For example, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Toni Morrison etc. are some of such women writers across the globe, who have shed light on the hollowness of traditions, meaninglessness of cultures, gender biasness and prejudices etc. They gave their heroines something which was very much necessary for the entire womenfolk, i.e. 'the awakening'. Through their re-presentations of the characters, they have always tried to focus on the relegated and unnoticed section of the society, who suffered the pangs of discrimination for being 'the second sex'. They have portrayed their characters with all sorts of explanations and harassments which have been in use upon women, and which should be eliminated from the society. Through such presentations of the reality, their sole motif was to provide 'the

awakening' to the womenfolk. What they had learnt from their real life experiences, they wanted to share them all with the womenfolk all around the world. While jotting down their individual experiences, they had expected the womenfolk to read them and understand so that they too fight and raise their voice for their deserving rights, just like the authors themselves.

In most of her novels, Buchi Emecheta has provided her heroines with the gift of education. Education, as Whilhelmina Lamb stated in *"The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta"*, "is the crucial liberating force in the lives of Emecheta's heroines, and in fact their degree of servitude is inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive." (pp. 479) Emecheta did not rely on the natural and gradual evolution of women's fate, which would someday be granted to the African women. She herself had fought for her rights to education. She knew the importance of education and valued it. Hence, she was well aware that to free the womenfolk from the deadly clutches of traditionalism and conventionalism, the womenfolk need to be educated enough for that would be their only means and key to their freedom. Only with the enlightenment of education, knowledge and understanding, women would be able to know their worth, start to value their individuality, raise voice for their rights and fight for their existence. And, that was why Emecheta tried to offer her heroines the power of education. She was well aware with the deadly practices of the traditions; from husbands and racist whites in *"Second Class Citizen"* to traditional beliefs and taboos in *"The Bride Price"* to master and husband-cum-owner in *"The Slave Girl"* to the society and its practices in *"In the Ditch"* and to children and motherhood in *"The Joys of Motherhood"*. She was quite familiar with such forces, which rule, oppress, suppress, exploit and threaten the women like some mighty tyrants. These tyrants have strong grip over the lives of women, which is not that easy to escape from. Until and unless one had enough strength and will power to raise one's voice against the odds and ills, freedom was impossible. Only the enlightenment of education could provide such strength and will power. Hence, Emecheta gave the power to her heroines so that her heroines could influence the lives of other women, who had been living under the clutches and grips of such tyrants.

The Indian literature provides a similar snapshot of the Indian women. Whether it is in India or in Africa, women are bound to oblige the tradition and culture, according to the prevailing patriarchy. Kamala Markandaya's *"Nectar in Sieve"* is such an example.

The novel is set in a rural village of India. Here, the protagonist, Rukmani went through every expectation and demand of the society; and at the end failed as a mother and as an individual. She suffered the pangs of identity crisis. Like Nnu Ego, in Buchi Emecheta's "*The Joys of Motherhood*", Rukmani too gave her all to fulfill the traditional and societal demands, in the journey of her quest for identity. She did not conceive right after her marriage, and when she did, she gave birth to a girl child. She was insecure with the thought of not being able to give birth to any son for her husband's family line. But, later on she became the proud mother of many sons. Yet she failed as a mother because her daughter Irawaddy was returned by her husband for she failed to conceive after her marriage. Despite the fact that Rukmani was a literate, she failed to secure the life and happiness of her daughter. Rukmani surrendered herself at the hands of the practiced beliefs, remained patient and accepted the reality as it came. Both the characters, Nnu Ego and Rukmani have many things in common. Both were the daughters of the headmen of their respective villages, both of them had a different and free childhood in comparison to that of the other girl children, both were married to the men who were not of their societal standards, and both of them were the believers of traditionalism. They both tried to create their own identity while fulfilling their urge to enjoy motherhood. Despite of being literate (Rukmani) and being a successful businesswoman (Nnu Ego); they failed to live independent lives. The lack of economic independence in one's case and the lack of education in the other's case, hold them so strongly that they could not free themselves from the clutches. They both spent their entire lives playing the roles of 'daughter, wife and mother'. They could never enjoy as 'woman'. Life could not become beautiful to them as their struggles failed to create their 'identity'; and thus they both became the victims of male subjugation, male stereotype and the male dominated society.

Buchi Emecheta's "*The Slave Girl*" is about an Igbo girl named, Ogbanje Ojebeta. The novel is about the 'slavery' system that was lurking in Africa in those days. The novel is set mostly in the Otu Onitsha. The protagonist, Ojebeta was sold by her own brother Okolie, when she was still a very young girl. Okolie had sold her to one of their relatives for he was not economically independent. His 'first gender' could not bring him economic independence. He had to rely on the wealthy people for money. He knew that he was not able to take care of his sister and that was why he sold her to Ma Palagada with the thought that she would at least get to eat there. Ojebeta later came back to her

hometown and was greeted by her relative Utheh. Utheh told her, “No woman is ever free. To be owned by a man is a great honor. So perhaps in a sense your brother was not too much in wrong.” (pp. 158) Such thought portray the mindset of the people of that time. Their custom gave them the right to sell their own sister. And, Ojebeta too had accepted that thought. She believed that no woman was ever free and women need to belong to some men. Her education, her trading ability everything failed at the hands of such beliefs. Also, her education was just for the name’s sake. The Sunday school that Ojebeta was sent to, taught her only the household woks, i.e. how to bake cakes, crochet and embroider. That was why her education could not bring any awakening to her. She still believed in the tradition that a male needed to free her by paying her slavery money. Though she herself was a trading woman, her custom did not set her free from its vicious clutches. That is why the novel ends with such an ironical note. After her husband, Jacob paid her slavery money to Ma Palagada’s son Clifford, the authoress herself said, “So as Britain was emerging from war once more victorious, and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she had helped to spread in all her black colonies, Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty-five was changing masters.” (pp. 179) That is to say, she could not set her free from the slavery. It came in a different form no doubt, and now she was owned by a new master. Ironically, Emecheta has stated the greatest truth of the society that no matter how modern we become in terms of our dressing, food habits or life style; we won’t be able to free ourselves from our traumatic experiences. It is mainly because, we have undergone through the same processes generations after generations for which our plight, condition, and sufferings have remained the same; and it is also because the end of patriarchy, slavery, gender discrimination etc. are more some words than practice in the real sense.

Emecheta’s most powerful, independent and self-reliant heroine is the university-educated Adah in both the novels, “*In the Ditch*” and “*Second Class Citizen*”. Here in these two novels, both the heroines are named as Adah and she represents Emecheta’s own story. Just like the authoress herself, Adah too had the craving for education; but she got entangled with the sufferings more, the more she craved for her freedom and rights. Especially in “*Second Class Citizen*”, Adah discovered that education was the only key to knowledge and thus self-reliance. She got so much power and strength from her education and profession that she did not hesitate for once while leaving her husband and taking the full responsibility of her five children. She deconstructed the custom of taking

care of the children under the shelter of men-power. She readily accepted to become the single parent than to send her children for adoption or to some orphanages. She had always stood up for her husband and helped him in every situation, especially the economical ones. Whenever her husband looked her down upon, she had always found a way out from that by using her intelligence. Yet she was discriminated. Her desires to visit her dream city was crushed by her father-in-law because she was a 'woman'. The dialogue, which Francis delivered to Adah reflected the gender biased mindset, "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). The father-in-law, who was otherwise always in support of Adah for she was the bread winner, did not support her in breaking the gender discrimination and fulfilling her dreams. He was rather of the view that his son got lucky with his marriage and won a good prize, "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) It was as though Adah was just an object in their eyes, which was set as a trophy in the household but never utilized in the true sense. In this novel too, Emecheta failed to liberate her heroine from the deadly clutches of the tradition and custom, even though educating her with the university education and blessing her with a profession. The novel ends with so many unanswered questions, and that's what makes the novel more interesting. Even after the court had given its verdict to Francis (Adah's husband) not to have any link with either Adah or her children; he went to her apartment claiming his rights over her for he couldn't believe his wife would ever leave him. He was sure that unlike his mother remained with his father; Adah too would remain at his feet for he was her husband and thus owned her. He had never seen such bold move taken by any women of his locality. He could not digest the fact that his wife demanded her rights over the custom. Hence, he went to her apartment, scold her with abusive language and beat her. Unlike the other heroines, Adah too ended up with frustration. The woman, who had never given up on her dreams, gave up fighting after struggling and succeeding so much. At the end, she was taken to her native village, to the customs and traditions.

No education, no confidence, and no courage can set a woman free completely until and unless she is respected, understood, and recognized for what she does.

'Women', the creators of lives, the ones who give birth and bring the lives to the earth safe and sound; yet they are always ignored, rejected, misused, maltreated, and looked down upon for being women, for being the weaker sex, and for menstruating. More than the womenfolk getting recognized and respected; the social taboos, the superstitions, the prejudices, the pre-conceived notions are trusted in the present society. Until and unless such kind of treatment and assumptions demolish, no amount of education can set the women free and nothing can bring them equality or equity.

"*The Bride Price*" is a reading of the traditional beliefs and the will power of the protagonist. Aku-Nna was a powerful woman for she could raise her voice against the set norms and conditions of the society and fight for what she wanted and desired. But, the traditional beliefs never ceased to chase her. After the death of her father, she was taken care by her maternal uncle. He in fact sent her to school and took care of her diploma education with the selfish motive that that would earn him a good sum of 'bride price'. Ironically enough, a woman used to worth more for her 'education', which was otherwise regarded as 'valueless' in a woman's life. Emecheta had created this heroine of hers with a lot of strong will power. Aku-Nna did not care for any custom and tradition, and fled with the man she loved. Her efforts had brought her happiness in the initial stages. But, like the other heroines, Aku-Nna too failed at the hands of traditionalism. Later in the novel, though her husband, Chike wanted to pay the bride price, her uncle did not accept that. And when Aku-Nna died of childbirth, people took the advantage to intimidate the other women by referring to her story. Even after being educated, strong willed and brave; her belief of superstition made her lose all she had accomplished earlier in the novel. Aku-Nna's story is an exploration of enslavement and degradation of women through the imposition of social and traditional taboos.

Buchi Emecheta herself had suffered a lot for being a 'female'. But, she never gave up on her dreams and hopes. It was no doubt that at some points she was helpless and sought someone's company and support, at some points she became weak; but, she never looked back. Leaving her biased husband for all that he did to her and living all alone taking the full responsibility of her five children in a foreign country had never frightened her. Rather, she was more and more confident with the passage of time. She discovered a new woman in herself, who was strong, confident, courageous and independent. All the experiences of her struggles and sufferings were penned down in her writings. Her first manuscript was burnt by her husband. That incident would have



discouraged other women but, in Emecheta's case, that gave her all the reasons to look forward to her career and her freedom from the clutches of the male domination. She was tired of pleasing and obeying the men-folk. All she craved for was an 'identity'. And, her situations could not stop her from creating that. Had she not been able to understand her rights, she would not have been recognized as one of the leading African Women Writers. Her fascination towards Flora Nwapa's writing had boosted her enough to have faith on her own abilities. She thought it necessary to take the help of literature for it was the only means to re-present the true color of the history and the prevailing struggles of African women. She knew that education and economic independence were the only two reasons that were hindering the womenfolk from getting out of the ditch. Through her writings, she wanted to make others aware of that fact and thus, she wanted to help the relegated section in coming to the forefront.

According to many educationists and psychologists, there is a method of learning process; called trial and error method, which is a fundamental method of problem solving. In this method, varied attempts are made until one succeeds or until one ceases to try. Just like the trial and error method, Emecheta's efforts could also be regarded as her trials to uplift the relegated section. She wanted to solve the problems of gender biasness or gender discrimination. She had attempted many times to set her heroines free from the gender biasness. She also had painted her heroines with will power, strength, abilities, identity (in some cases), education, profession, motherhood etc. Yet she could not free them from the clutches of 'gender discrimination'. No matter how hard she tried to make her heroines equal to that of the males or at times powerful and superior than them, her heroines always ended up falling in the ditch. The society, the tradition, the culture and the custom had much greater roles to play than that of the education or the identity. That was why her powerful heroines like Adah, Ogbanje, Aku-Nna etc. failed despite having university education, basic and trading education, and diploma education respectively. They failed mainly because they belonged to 'the second sex'. They were always looked down upon for being women. Had they been males with the same success and achievements, they would have been cheered and respected the most.

Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo etc. notable African female novelists have taken into consideration that no matter how the society sees it or how people take it; but, 'gender' is just a biological state of the individuals which describe their femininity or masculinity and nothing more than that.

They have proved through their writings that no matter how much and how long women are crushed, squeezed or broken down; they would always get up and stand still to fight for their rights. They would learn from their every failure and thus, from each others' experiences, they would gradually reach the zenith and get what they were being deprived of since so many years.

'Motherhood', as discussed by Emecheta and many of her contemporary novelists, is about the social constructions put upon women over their biological abilities. Many of such novelists' works show how even after pleasing and obeying the men-folk and meeting with all their demands, women still fail. Nnu Ego, in "*The Joys of Motherhood*" craved for a child after her first marriage. Her first husband, who took her as a precious gift at first; beat, abused, and discarded her for her failure to conceive. Emecheta did not stop there with the failure. She blessed her heroine with a second marriage, which was very rare for a woman in those days. With the passage of time, Nnu Ego was bestowed with seven living children. Her society considered a woman as 'complete' only when she became 'mother'. That's what Nnu Ego had learnt since her childhood and that was why she wanted to die when her first born had died. But then, her patience resulted with a lot of 'joy' for she became the proud mother of seven children. She was regarded as a 'good mother' for she could provide 'sons' for her husband's family line. Nnu Ego never tried to break through the customs. Rather, she kept her strong belief in the societal practices and followed them blindly. She remained a 'wife' and a 'mother' as much as she could. She never sought for her 'identity' or 'womanhood'. But, without her awareness, her motherhood ate her up. She gave all her life to feed her motherhood yet she had to die all alone by the roadside, unnoticed and unrecognized. Her traditional beliefs could not do much help in the colonial changes of the society. Her 'joys' of motherhood became so much 'sour' that after her death, when people started to go to her shrine and pray for children, "Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children." (pp. 254)

'Motherhood' is an emotion, a feeling, a joy, which is naturally felt and enjoyed by the women only. It gives them pleasure. But, it should never be an imposition. A woman should always have the liberty to get pregnant only when she is ready. If the society lets the women to enjoy the joys of motherhood according to their will and do not judge them for that, there won't be any mother dying such a miserable death like Nnu Ego in "*The Joys of Motherhood*".

‘Slavery’ or human trafficking is a sad reality of the history. There are many reasons relating to its practice. But, the reasons that have been dealt here are economical issues, tradition of keeping slaves and gender discrimination. “*The Slave Girl*” is a fictional biography of Emecheta’s mother, Alice Emecheta. Despite being the ‘assest’ to her parents for she was the only daughter who had survived after the death of so many other daughters, Ogbanje Ojebeta, the protagonist was sold by her brother to a distant relative at the age of seven. She had accepted the life and adapted with all that came in. just like other slaves, she kept her hush to all the sufferings and injustices done to her and the other slaves. She remained obliged to Ma Palagad for she believed that Ma owned her. She raised her voice for the very first time after Ma Palagada’s death, when her daughter Victoria wanted to take Ojebeta with her. Ojebeta asked for her freedom and went to Ibuza. Ma Palagada had trained all of her slaves with the basic education and also used to send her female slaves to the Sunday school to learn more about the trading and household chores. But, Ojebeta had to rely on her husband to set her free from the bondage of slavery even though she was an educated and experienced woman. Her education and training, and even her victory from slavery could not set her free from the traditional practices of the society. She no doubt was free from the bondage of slavery, but she was ‘free’ with a ‘new master’ (husband).

There are many African novelists who have painted the slavery history and presented them in their fictions. Such writings take us back to the history covering the vast range of time and space. Though we were physically not there in the history of slavery, but we can witness the sufferings and conditions of the slaves through the help of the fictions. And being educated, it is a test of our knowledge and understanding if we still follow and practice the slavery and deprive an individual from living his or her life freely while we do that for ourselves. As literature is a key to giving language to our thoughts, many writers, especially the novelists have written for the cause and upliftment of the slaves. With the help of education and a full honesty to the law, this social illness can surely be cured.

Emecheta’s narratives re-present the women of her time and also the women of the early decades, in Africa. All her narratives seem to conclude with the free but self-sufficient heroines. Her heroines get freedom only when they stop fighting and become self-sufficient. She portrays her heroines at different stages of life and in different situations, but amidst the same patriarchal setting. Her “*The Slave Girl*” is a projection of

the infancy and childhood of a girl child, who was sold by her own brother and thus enslaved by different masters in the due course of her life. Another important novel of Emecheta, *“The Bride Price”* is about the adolescence period of a girl, who took her decision and acted thus in that period of her life. She was cursed for doing what she pleased for it was not allowed to the womenfolk at that time. She had to suffer a lot for listening to her heart and for doing accordingly. Also, unfortunately she died proving the taboo to be true. Her *“Second Class Citizen”* and *“In the Ditch”* are about women who were independent, courageous, educated and confident. But, they were crushed to the core for having all those positive and powerful qualities. Their only joys, their motherhood and Adah’s writing career ( in *“Second-Class Citizen”*) kept their hopes up. One of her best novels, *“The Joys of Motherhood”* is about the marriage and motherhood, where the woman is crushed to the core for giving preference to her motherhood the most. The protagonist here was maltreated and her every breath and every bit of energy was squeezed out to feed her motherhood and also to fulfill all the needs of the whole family.

Through such projection of characters like Adah, Aku-Nna, Ogbanje and Nnu Ego; Emecheta records the different sufferings of different women at different periods. She paints the women in all her forms, characters, responsibilities and duties. Emecheta’s vivid and picturesque descriptions of such characters and their life stories are an effort to heighten the awareness of the African women. Her hope for the birth of the ‘new woman’ will not go in vain, if only women are treated well, respected, and recognized for all the sufferings they go through and for all the sacrifices they make to keep everyone of her family; and only if she is set ‘free’ from all the barriers of social, traditional, and cultural prejudices and practices.

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