



PORTRAYAL OF LIVES AND EMOTIONS OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD

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Cite This Article: Dr. R. Dhayalakrishnan, "Portrayal of Lives and Emotions of African Women in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood", International Journal of Applied and Advanced Scientific Research, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 333-334, 2018.

Abstract:

Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian, has acclaimed tremendous place in African literature. She has written novels and among them *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Double Yoke*, *Second Class Citizen*, and *Kehinde* are well known. The present paper takes into consideration, her novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. Buchi is sentimentally attached to Nigeria and is concerned about the human conditions in her homeland. The novel is ironically titled by her because it exposes the sufferings of the protagonist who suffers from motherhood. It is the study of victimization and enslavement of traditional Igbo women to the dictates of Igbo culture. The novel reflects the different stages of motherhood and its consequences. She describes the hardships and problems faced by a mother. She tries to portray the polygamous patriarchal society and also ethnic problems of poor family through her novel. Through this novel one can understand the relevance of man – woman relationship in a male dominated society. Motherhood is a position which fulfills the cause of birth to women. Always women desire to uphold motherhood and to see her happiness in her children. Motherhood has its own speciality in every country. In Igbo society, nothing is important more than becoming a mother. If she produces more children she will be respected to the core.

Key Words: Acclaimed, Tremendous, Sentimentally, Victimization & Enslavement

Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian, has acclaimed tremendous place in African literature. She has written novels and among them *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Double Yoke*, *Second Class Citizen*, and *Kehinde* are well known.

Emecheta was greatly influenced by her mother who always relayed old stories. It is also a curious fact that many of the oral stories she happened to hear were heard from the other mothers of her family. This played an immense part in her and helped her to employ in her works. Through her novels, she has portrayed the lives and emotions of African women.

The present paper takes into consideration, Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. She is sentimentally attached to Nigeria and is concerned about the human conditions in her homeland. The novel is ironically titled by her because it exposes the sufferings of the protagonist who suffers from motherhood. It is the study of victimization and enslavement of traditional Igbo women to the dictates of Igbo culture.

The novel reflects the different stages of motherhood and its consequences. She describes the hardship and problems faced by a mother. She tries to portray the polygamous patriarchal society and also ethnic problems of poor family through her novel.

Nnu Ego and her mother Ona are the vital characters in the novel. Both of them are victimized in the hands of men. The novel speaks about the motherhood as a main theme and infertility, culture, religious sacrifice as sub themes. The plot abruptly begins with Nnu Ego, who attempts suicide by falling from the bridge in the Zabo market stall. 'In Media Res' is the structure of the plot which has middle, beginning and ending structure. Likewise *The Joys of Motherhood* also starts in the middle. From suicide, she is rescued by her father's well-wisher and he advises her. The novel suddenly takes its turn to the beginning and it is the story of Nnu Ego's father Agbadi and mother Ona. Agbadi is a well known person in the village Ibuza. Ona's father does not allow her to marry anyone because he urges her to give birth to a male child through him.

Once, Agbadi happens to meet Ona because of his wounds in the war. She nurses him. After her father's death, Agbadi tries to convince her to marry him even though he has two wives already. She often reciprocates him but the situation leads her to carry a girl child of Agbadi. The girl child is named as Nnu Ego and she has the resemblance of a servant, who was buried alive with her owner (the first wife of Agbadi). It's a religious sacrifice which was made by Africans a way back. One can see this kind of religious sacrifice in one of the plays of Wole Soyinka. *The Strong Breed* portrays the theme of religious sacrifice of a mentally retarded boy Ifada, for the sake of village people.

As a polygamous society, men start to marry many numbers of women as their wish and also without any age limitations. In this novel, the male characters marry too many women and certainly, they marry their brother's wives after their brother's death. It shows the voicelessness of women in the African patriarchal society. If women happen to be polygamous, then the value of culture will be lost. One cannot blame the country or culture but it is all framed by forefathers who were gender biased.

First, Nnu Ego marries Amatokuwa but she can't become pregnant. Due to this, she is branded as an infertile object. She is always haunted by the thought of bearing a child in her womb. Infertility is a main thing which makes women to blame. If a family does not receive heirs, the woman is always the one to be blamed. Nnu's husband states his view in this way:

"I'm a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me anymore". (JM, 32)

Amatokuwa marries another girl and settles with his children later. As a Father, Agbadi is grief-stricken a lot on seeing his daughter Nnu suffer. Soon Nnu marries Naife with hard pain. He is a dhobi for a famous doctor, Dr.Meers. Her haunting becomes true when she becomes pregnant through her husband Naife. She gives birth to four boys and two twin daughters. Being a mother, she says,

"The greatest joy of my life, Naife has made me into a real woman- all I want to be, a woman and a mother" (JM, 53)

Naife cannot satisfy his family needs. So he is compelled by Nnu to go for War field as a soldier. After his departure, she starts to lead a life of poverty with her eight children. Somehow or other she works very hard and starts to save money which paves the way for education for first two boys Nigozi and Adimabua. Without providing enough food to rest of her children she saves money and spends some money for Nigozi for higher studies. Carolyn Kumah, a critic, points out,

The type of formal education ensured was solely offered to boys, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school – a decision that would intensify the familial workload without guarantee of any future employment. (AWN 34)

As a typical mother, she wants her first son to take care of the whole family. But her thought fails. Nigozi gets settled in America without any guilt of greediness. She trusts upon Adimabua but her trust shatters into pieces. Adimabua traces his own way by having rest of Nnu's money. In between Naife returns and he is strained to take care of his brother's four wives due to his brother's death. In addition, he marries a young girl called Okpo. Nnu happens to suffer by her two husbands, two sons. Even though she is betrayed by her sons she takes a decision, "I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughters." (JM, 170) Emecheta herself points out the condition of Nnu, "Her love and duty for her children were like her chain of slavery". (JM, 186)

Through this novel one can understand the relevance of man – woman relationship in a male dominated society. Motherhood is a position which fulfills the cause of birth to women. Always women desire to uphold motherhood and wish to see her happiness in her children. Motherhood has its own specialty in every country. In Igbo society, nothing is important more than becoming a mother. If she produces more children she will be respected to the core. The traditional Igbo society has its own position for women with flexibility but they are exceptional from respect and equality with men.

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