

Voice of Subjugated and Unfulfilled Gender, in Emecheta's Novel: "The Joys of Motherhood"

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Abstract: The changing scenario of women has been one of the major themes in African women's fiction. As an eminent writer Emecheta, highlights the difficulties that women faces in modern Nigerian society. Emecheta, was born in 1944 in Nigeria to Igbo parents. She is a writer with piercing teeth and shirring fingers. According to her female characters nurtured ambitions as Centre of marriage and procreation. Cooking the family meals, honouring the husband bed and merging with home environment is considered to be her duties. Emecheta states that, the woman in present scenario acts as daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, mistress and not as a powerful woman. Emecheta through her novels illustrates how the identity of women is erased from the history of the Nigerian country. The Joys of Motherhood, describes the circumscribe existence of Nnu Ego a dutiful Nigerian wife and mother, who suffers poverty and humiliation in a traditional polygamous marriage. Emecheta depicts the fate of women oppressed, sexually manipulated and demonstrates through the central characters Nnu Ego.

"God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? she prayed desperately".

--Buchi Emecheta

African women's position is a pathetic and a problematic in the patriarchal society. In the case of feminist writers it is endangered and considered as evil. As feminist writer Emecheta, the emerging African woman writer, focuses on the condition of women both on their native land and abroad. She acts as the voice of African womanhood, among other feminist writers. Her fame as a feminist writer reached all over the world. Each of her work explores about women's status in African society.

Emecheta, through her novel The Joys of Motherhood, focuses on the African traditional and cultural conflicts, women's issues from a gendered perspective. The author states the injustice of male prejudice and social structure in her society. Emecheta, deals with the condition of her national women as rearing and bearing children, in the patriarchal society among polygamy or multiple marriage, in Igbo society. In the society girls were taught to understand that promiscuity brought great shame to their family and her society. Nnu Ego, the protagonist is an innocent and naïve girl, filled with hope of joys and rewards of motherhood. Ego's father tries his best to marry his daughter to a well-mannered man. When she cannot have children with her first husband, Amatokwu, her husband rejects her as barren, which brings shame to her family.

The social discrimination based on infertility is quite striking, she was called as "dry and jumpy – a nervy female, who is all bones". The mental and physical depression of Ego, as a woman in Igbo society and maltreating her as childless women is disappointment. An infertile woman is despised and in case of no heir is received, the woman is always the one to be blamed. Being a mother is considered as a women job. The second marriage with, Naife is also a failure, a loveless one and she manages to get pregnant, it gives woman a dignified precise status. After her son's sudden death, she reaches the state of insanity and attempts suicide. Epiphanies forces her to re-examine her role and function as a women in Ibo society. Again, she gives birth to a dead baby girl and failed as mother in her society. However, she manages to have successful children, later in the novel. Giving birth obviously is the physical and mental stress to women. Motherhood used as a tool to the emotions of Ego.

"At home in Nigeria, all a mother had to do for a baby was wash and feed him and, if he was fidgety, strap him onto her back and carry on with her work while that baby slept.....looking after babies was in itself a full-time job". Nnu Ego lives in a society, in which woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man and her definition as a mother of many children. As Emecheta notices, "gender inequality" in the colonial and indigenous patriarchal society, determines the value of human being: male child is attached excess importance while female child is considered as "other". We are told that how female's identity is constructed through her relationship with a patriarchal society. Hence, women are determined to deny any independent self. What constitutes their identity, self and being is a male dominated society. Ego begins to examine herself and worth as a woman in the society. She setup her own business to support her family and to survive. Emecheta states through the protagonist Ego, women are economic unit and a machine for producing male heir and rearing them. In the male privilege society, girls are not educated.

Emecheta states man's duty is to earn enough and girl's duty is to take part with their mothers in their business. Ego and her husband never thought of educating their daughters, they looked their daughters as an investment, which would bring them a good bride price for the education of their sons. Ego and her husband, give up everything to educate their eldest son and the remaining for their second sons' education. There were no thought of educating their daughters, who were looked as 'Bride Price'. Nnu Ego, felt that her sons will care for her as she ages. On the other hand Ego's elder son, chooses his own destiny, works as a research scientist and wins scholarship to study in US, finally settles there. Ego's twin girls, Kehinde, breaks with the tradition by marrying a Yoruba man. Taiwo, marries a clerk, stable home life, more traditional role of bearing and raising children. Ego reaches the peak in her society by settling her sons and daughters and considered as great woman in the village. This gives the status to Ego as fulfilled joys of her motherhood in the novel "The Joys of Motherhood". Ego assumes that her sons will come

home live and care for her as she ages. Her dream becomes a failure, as she dies lonely in the village, regarded as a mad woman. Only after her death, her children throw a lavish funeral and spends money for her funeral, not in her life time.

Ego the protagonist of the novel, is a symbol of all joys, despair and disappointment of motherhood. The extent of oppression and marginalization Nnu Ego, as a mother, experiences, hence, bodes Emecheta's critical view toward the African patriarchy. However, it doesn't mean Emecheta is devaluating mothering, rather it means that she is criticizing the way in which the

African patriarchal institution defines motherhood: as a patriarchal relation. Moreover, being alone- her husband was absent most of the time, Nnu Ego does her best to look after her children, even in the worst condition. She does petty business, sells firewood, and else, all because of her children. Even she saves money for her sons' educational fees. Once she says "On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them; I have to give them my all. And if I'm lucky enough to die in peace, I have to give them my soul." Hence, we are exposed that how Nnu Ego, as a devoted mother, sacrifices her youth, health and life for her children. Even, she has no time to make many friends: "she had never really made many friends, so busy had she building up her joys as a mother". Therefore, she dies a lonely death, with no child and no friend to talk to her. Ego sacrifices herself for the betterment of her children than for her wishes and for fashionable life.

"The Joys of Motherhood", Emecheta takes us a journey with Ego the protagonist, in her struggles in understanding and accepting the new ways of her people or clinging to her traditional values. Nnu Ego's life revolves around her children and through them, she gains respect in the society. Sons are the guarantee of secured old age and taking care of their parents, where girls are considered to be married and sent away, which brings great stress to womanhood. "On her way back to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife".

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* narrates the story of a traditional woman, Nnu Ego, who knows her identity and its completion in having many children especially the sons. Suffering from poverty, she knows herself rich, for she has three sons. It seems to her that she would have, according to Igbo tradition, a comfortable old age due to her sons' help. Having detailed Nnu Ego's painful life in Lagos, a colonized city, the novel ends with her tragic death alone. Yet, far from being devoted to her children exposing her joys of motherhood, Nnu Ego dies, at the end of the story, a lonely death "with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother". Through depicting the oppression and suffering Nnu Ego experiences in Lagos, Emecheta, indeed, highlights the effects of capital politics and colonial patriarchal regimes of women's marginalization and domination.

Reference

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- [2] Emecheta, Buchi: Review *The Joys of Motherhood*: <https://readinpleasure.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/review-the-joys-of-motherhood-by-buchi-emecheta/>