

**Resisting Hegemonic Gender Relations in
Buchi Emecheta's Select Novels**

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Summation

Chapter IX

Summation

The status of women in Nigeria has transformed during pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial as the cultural mores and societal values kept changing. In the precolonial times Nigerian women were provided authoritative role in politics and other institutions in the society. Precolonial Nigerian societies had defined and clearly delineated social roles for women. Women were provided with titles if they possess social power which helped them in the management of wealth. Precolonial societies were patriarchal, though the men were considered supreme, senior women were revered. In Nigeria more than three fourth of the women engaged themselves in trade or worked in farm, thereby contributing to the family income. Thus economic independency ensured their social significance and provided them courage to face challenges they came across in their life. According to Ellis, “It is rarely known that 90% of Nigerian women are working mothers who trade and farm to provide for their families, ensuring that they have a source of income and economic clout where necessary. This system has existed since pre-colonial times” (33).

Each community has a distinct culture and unique qualities. Women play a pivot role in safeguarding the culture and tradition of her community and in transmitting it from one generation to another. Women are expert in storytelling, narrating the past events and thus hold their culture as the pride of their community. Thus women thereby guide the future generations to lead a life of morality and to retain their ancestral culture.

Queen Shoshovi in *The Rape of Shavi*, being the queen mother she is bound with societal responsibilities. She takes the law in her hands when she finds that the problem

had become severe beyond her control and provides judgement. Queen Shoshovi advised Prince Asogba to stop his expedition and to look after the country when the total tribal kingdom was about to be destroyed. She preaches the ancestral pride of Shavi and guides the prince Vivon to rule the tribal kingdom in a proper manner. Shoshovi and the other women characters in the novel *The Rape of Shavi* are perfect examples of traditional women bound with hospitality and affection. They never deviate themselves from their traditional customs. They consider themselves as the torch bearer of their society and do their duty perfectly. Their strong willpower and courageous spirit helps them to solve all the problems that they have encountered. They remain attached to their traditional way of living and do not wish to change their customs to suit the engulfing modernity. They guide their young generations and takes care that their traditional norms with the intention that norms should be followed and should be transferred to the forthcoming future generations.

Sociocultural attitudes toward women are largely negative, positing that woman is basically inferior to man. Exceptions to this belief of the female as the “second sex” are reserved to those mythical figures such as divinities, earth goddesses, water spirits, priestesses, rain-queens and so forth. [...] Igbo society, like most patriarchal societies, limits a woman’s scope and talent by restricting her to male-dominance and domestic spaces. According to her [Buchi Emecheta], particularly weighted against the Buchi Emecheta’s *The Rape of Shavi* Igbo woman are entrenched traditional customs that marginalize woman as “other”. (Umeh 1)

During the colonial period, there was drastic change in the position of women in the society. The authority provided to women diminished drastically. Colonial rulers displaced women leaders from the social roles as traders and as custodians of their culture

such as conducting women's council meeting and market meetings, providing judgments to women related issues and deputed men to take decisions in issues which were exclusively delineated to women. The actions taken by the colonial rulers minimized women's power to contribute in the social, economic and political spheres. "Men's efforts to end their autonomy in the name of foreign principles propagated by missionaries 'that women should stay at home, submit to the will of the colonial officials and their husbands, and essentially renounce their economic and social privileges' were intolerable" (Coquery-Vidrovitch 161). Marginalisation is another type of oppression that the native people face in the hands of their white masters.

Marginalisation is a process of social exclusion that results in individuals and/or groups experiencing deprivation, either of resources or social links. A very key aspect of marginalisation is the economic, religious, social and / or political disempowerment that a person may experience within a society on the grounds that they are lacking in social recognition and value. Typically marginalisation occurs concurrent with income, poverty and reduced wellbeing. It manifests in limited access to housing, education, employment, health care, and social networks, and also in reduced social participation, access and support dimension. (Maslen 9)

Emecheta's protagonists who belong to the colonial period were governed by their native traditions and customs. Though education gives them strength to defy the unwarranted customs yet they fall a prey to their traditional beliefs. These characters suffered because the age old beliefs were entrenched in their subconscious mind. As Buchi Emecheta comments in *Head Above Water*, "I had realized that what makes all of us human is belonging to a group. And if one belongs to a group, one should try and abide

by its laws” (Fishburn 166). The protagonist of *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood* are caught between tradition and modernity.

The young and timid Akunna, in *The Bride Price* had the boldness to elope with her lover Chike opposing the tribal customs. The submissive and innocent Akunna gets an abnormal courage to protest for her rights to get married as per her wish. Later Akunna was disturbed as she started to believe that the Igbo superstition that a woman whose bride price is not paid would not survive her first childbirth. She believed that the spiritual force would punish her as she had disobeyed their tradition and dies during childbirth. Akunna was shackled by the superstitious beliefs and the black magic of her stepfather which made her lose hope in the end.

Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl* was sold as a slave by her own brother. She courageously comes out of slavery and then joins her relatives. She was shocked to realise that her relatives were eager to get her bride price. She again fought for her rights and marries Jacob. Later Ojebata forced her husband to pay her slave price to her master as per their tradition. She thus remains a slave to her new master, her husband. The subjugate position of Ojebeta remains the same. Like Akunna she takes the right decision, reveals her protest and leaves her master’s house, thus escapes from slavery, secondly she stands firm against all her relations in choosing her life partner Jacob and marries him. Though she was courageous by breaking the traditional norms to marry Jacob, later she loses her individuality and becomes submissive as any traditional women of her society. Ojebata stands testimony to the fact that women remain slaves in their own house. Toyin Falola observes:

. . . Men are regarded as the heads of households while a woman has relevance as a mother and wife. She keeps traditions and kinship alive by bearing children and socializing them. As a bearer of children, she acquires respect within the household; as bearers of male children, she acquires prestige and ensures the stability of her marriage and the continuity of kinship and its traditions. (252)

Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* undergoes all types of struggles and tortures for the sake of her children and finally meets her end at the road side none to take care of her. She never reciprocates to prayers rendered to her by her children after her death. Nnu Ego lives a sacrificial life and set a perfect example of women, bound by the spirit of motherhood. She proves to be a successful mother as she had raised her sons who are well educated and would hold important position in society. Nnu Ego was born in the colonial Nigeria when economic independence to women was negated. She stuck on to the notion that women have no control over their lives. In her obsession over raising her children, she failed to realise the changing norms in the society as women started gaining autonomy in the postcolonial period. Nnu Ego teaches a great lesson by her innocence and ignorance that women in future should not remain like her. The novel is “a radical questioning of the myth of motherhood as it has crystallized in African societies and writing ... The events and actions lay bare the dark side of motherhood and undermine the myth of maternity as a source of happiness” (Sougou 93-94).

In the colonial period women were dismissed from social positions of power and the society followed “male privileging colonial ideology that empowered local men and their male-dominated, male oriented native authorities, agencies and customary courts” (Nzegwu 6). In the postcolonial period women started to fight against the oppressive

forces in society and strived to regain their rights to participate in political, economic and social establishments. “Though men had collaborated with women activists to fight for independence, men relegate women to subordinate and useless positions in politics after independence, ensuring women did not feature prominently in the political, economic and social structure” (Okome 78). The social status experienced by women is fixed by the customs followed in the society. In Nigeria, women’s strength is assessed by their cooperative responsibility and societal bondage. In the postcolonial Nigeria women were not promoted so their status took a backseat and men were put in the forefront. Due to large scale moving to the cities, native people were culturally displaced as the native culture disintegrated.

Thus, the sentiment of communal solidarity of the village, under the pressure of the colonial situation, led to the exporting of its men into a new and often alien world, a process which in its turn would usually lead to a breakdown of this very sentiment of communal solidarity... These new values were the result, at least in part, of three major elements of colonial rule. For reasons internal to itself, and deriving from its own need, colonial administration brought with it order, modern education, and improved transport and communication. Each of these was to play a major role in changing the perspectives of the African. (Wallerstein 34)

Missionaries who introduced education also gave more opportunity to men than to women. Comaroff is of the opinion that western education strengthened the patriarchal notions, “The accomplishment of a missionary in Central Africa is that the husband is a jack-of-all-trades without doors and the wife to be a maid-of-all-work within” (64).

Though the postcolonial society curtailed the empowerment of women, a few women

were able to get educated and thereby were able to work as teachers, nurses and could occupy better positions in society. Though women were subjugated in the colonial period they progressed with determination towards modernity. It has become the destiny of modern women to balance themselves among the existing modernity of the city life, as a professional contributing to the economy of her family as well as following the traditional way of life and her commitments as a wife and mother. They demanded to be considered as equals and revolted against the maltreatment imposed on them.

Emecheta is concerned equally with the dual issue of i) the biological control of woman whereby sexuality and the ability to bear children are the sole criteria which define womanhood and ii) the economic control of women within the colonially imposed Capitalist system whereby women are placed at a disadvantaged graver than they had faced in pre-colonial economic structures. Capitalism which brought the mixed blessings of urban development and modern ways of life, did not change traditionally accepted modes of oppression, such as bride-price and polygamy, and, in fact, often reinforced them. (Katrak 159)

During the postcolonial period there is a tremendous change in the approach and treatment of women. Postcolonial Nigeria saw the emergence of the new women; those who are educated and ready to break the norms set by the patriarchal society. Though these new women are empowered they struggle between the traditional setup in which they are brought up and the modernity that exists. The expression “New Woman” was coined in the 1880s in the series of articles published in the periodicals in America. These new women are able to fit themselves to the existing modernity and are able to withstand any challenge. They are able to identify the shortcoming that exists in their position and

provide a solution for it. New woman is the one who is able to raise her voice against patriarchy, to oppose sexual codes set by the traditional norms and bold enough to confront gender disparity. These new women do not allow themselves to be defined by the standards of society and they create a unique identity of their own through their educational qualifications, so that they stand away from the crowd of other stereotypical women victims.

Commentators observing the bourgeois woman's growing engagement with educational, political, and occupational pursuits outside the home began by the 1890s to characterize her as the "New Woman", an independent person with a public role. Successive generations of women and men from various political and social perspectives invoked the phrase in analysing and celebrating the changing behaviour of modern women - or in abhorring or condemning it. Although new womanhood was primarily a middle-class discourse, the phrase "New Woman" eventually encompassed many meanings, accumulated class-specific stereotypes and as Carol Smith Rosenberg has argued, challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power. (Todd xxvii)

The postcolonial Nigerian society expected women to be educated as well scrupulously follow their tradition. Through *Double Yoke* Emecheta tries to emphasise that men should understand the changing perspective of the women's role in the society and should be life – partners and not masters to their spouse. Nko, a young and bubbling college student was abused by her Professor. She is a modern girl with traditional ideas inscribed in her. She longs to get a good education and to lead a sophisticated life as any traditional women would live. When she found that the men whom she believed to be her

guardian has become her predator, and her lover Ete had betrayed her, she immediately hates both and readily takes a firm decision to lead an independent life by becoming a single mother as she stood determined in her decision of giving birth to the Professor's child. Though her decision is bold and astounding, she is educated and her willpower provides her a strong sense of determination to take this decision.

Emecheta's women characters belonging to the African diaspora struggle against diverse prejudice such as gender inequality and racial discrimination and they try to establish themselves. African diasporic women feel alienated in the host country because of racism and in Nigeria they lack a sense of belongingness because of the oppressive hegemonic patriarchal structure that is practiced. Emancipation from personal traumatic experience was not an easy task for Gwendolen and Kehinde. Though they live in London, these women carry the burden of their traditional practice and the crux of their culture along with them. In an interview with Joyce Boss, Emecheta declares thus;

Well, I am still writing about African Women. In the past I have put in men's views ... Double Yoke, and parts of *Destination Biafra* - to show that I can do that, but I feel it's no longer necessary. I am not challenging the male writers. I have enough to write about in my own field. My backdrop may shift slightly from real Africa to the African Diaspora. But I think I'll still be seeing everything through the eyes of women. (100)

Gwendolen was abused by her neighbour Uncle Johnny and to her shock her father indulges in incest with her. Unable to reveal both the adversity to others she lost her mental stability. According to Andrinne Rich, "[t]he woman's body is the terrain on

which patriarchy is erected". (130-141) Gwendolen becomes pregnant of her father's child. Gwendolen decides firmly to continue her pregnancy and gives birth to the child. Unbearable to withstand the guilty consciousness, William meets his death. She withstands all her trials which could be abnormal for any girl of her age. She faces the society with a determined mind, never worried about the tribulations that she would face in the future. She sets herself as an example of the audacious women who are brave enough to face any challenge in their life. Though Gwendolen is a victim of sexual abuse she doesn't give up but rather defies patriarchy through her determination to raise the child as a single parent. Gwendolen takes a decision which is heroic and proves that motherhood would provide such a courage and strength to every woman.

Gwen's boyfriend Emmanuel cares for her more than her mother. Emecheta is not being insensitive to women's predicament and to the way a mother is sabotaged by patriarchy into withholding love from her daughter. Mothers of Sonia's generation, like her own mother and Nnu Ego in *Joys of Motherhood* and Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price*, are probably ill-equipped psychologically, because of their situation with respect to old and new influences, to fight their conflict with much success. (Yongue 88-89)

Kehinde belongs to the postcolonial period, educated and economically empowered. She was initially a traditional bound lady filled with conventional ideas, but when she found out that her husband Albert has betrayed her by marrying a second wife, she could not tolerate his betrayal and leaves him. She completes graduation from the university and gets a government job by her hard work.

Kehinde becomes a stronger woman than before with a new insight and is ready to face the society and its traditional norms that suppress the women. When her son Jacob claims legal rights to inherit her property, Kehinde refuses to bequeath her property to him. Kehinde does not fall a prey like Nnu Ego who suffered due to her undue love for her children. Kehinde remains submissive to her husband until she is tested beyond her control. Barfi, posits thus, “Female figures are multiply victimized by oppressive forces of race, gender and class, though one cannot refer to them as a homogeneous group (26). Through Kehinde, Buchi Emecheta “not only destroys myths about women’s contentment with the status quo but also gives fresh insights into women’s struggle under male domination and women’s ability to map out strategies that enabled them to survive the patriarchal society that was structured to dominate and oppress them” (Ezeigbo 6).

African women writers discuss the status of women in the domestic and social sphere as their primary concern. The postcolonial Nigerian literature is a “complex package of interconnecting items which often must be read together in order to comprehend a total message” (Umeh 249). Buchi Emecheta being one among the prominent African women writers has dedicated her works to aid women to improve their living conditions. The novelist and her sister group of writers strongly hoped that their pen would prove its worth by bringing a change in the life of these women. These women writers believed that their writing would help the women to break the obstacles that prohibit them from moving forward. Buchi Emecheta’s women protagonists are doubly disempowered as they are treated as second-class citizens in the society and are treated as a subaltern in the domestic sphere.

African women writers vocalize their simultaneous experience of multiple oppressions as...gender is (only) one issue out of many. Consequently, an African feminist theory cannot only deal with the 'male-female' - problem because abolishing one of the oppressions will not solve the problems facing African women.

Achieving equality between African men and women will still leave the problems of neo-colonialism, racism and imperialism. (Edith 25)

Buchi Emecheta aims to educate and to render a helping hand to women to march forward. In an interview with Adeola James, Emecheta spoke about the epicentre of her creative focus thus: “First of all, I try to ask: why are women as they are? Why are they so pathetic? When you hear about traditional women who were very strong, you wonder, why are we today so pathetic, so hypocritical?” (42). In many interviews Emecheta has insisted that her “main criticism is of women enslaving themselves” (qtd.in Adeola). While Emecheta empathises with the uneducated women, she criticises educated women who “still submerge themselves into this type of system which they know is wrong” (qtd in Umeh 65). Emecheta felt that male writers did not give an authentic portrayal of women characters; she felt that the male writers present women stereotypes such that “the only good woman is the woman who slaves for her children, no matter what the cost. She must ask nothing for herself ... there is a tendency to consider a woman who works outside the home, and is thus not a mother in the traditional sense, as a threat to her husband” (Schipper 45-6).

Realistic portrayal of women and their sufferings forms the main theme in Buchi Emecheta’s novels. In an interview with Oladipo Joseph Ogundele, Emecheta says: “Apart from telling stories, I don’t have a particular mission. I like to tell the world our

part of the story while using the voices of women” (Umeh 449). Gender disparity starts from birth and girl child is neglected and grows up observing the inequity meted out to them. Through socializing women were trained to be passive victims by the patriarchal society. Though women had abundant potentialities she had to forget her potential and becomes a puppet in the hands of the domineering societal force. Kadija Sesay, comments on Buchi Emecheta as an African feminist writer thus, “Her fictionalised life story showed women that they could survive and succeed through adversity and abuse and stand up for feminism – all without using those actual words” (The Guardian). Bell Hooks comments about feminism from the African context thus:

What we need is a feminist revolution in Black life. But to have such a revolution, we must first have a feminist movement. Many Black folks do not know what the word feminism means. They may think of it only as something having to do with white women’s desire to share equal rights with white men. In reality, feminism is a movement to end all sexism and sexist oppression.” (124)

Emecheta’s prime protest is on gender inequality as she was prohibited to attend school while her brother is permitted. The author presents through her women characters the societal norms and the traditional customs that existed in Nigerian society. She acts as a spokesperson of the suppressed women which is explicitly articulated in her writings.

The shared awareness or consciousness of female oppression has included the ideas that women as a group are oppressed; that they are institutionally victimized and forced into subservient relationships to men; that despite differences, women share a common gender identity and that the heart of women’s fight is a quest for

freedom from all subservient roles. Moving from subservience to freedom; transforming dependency and subordinate relationships into self-definition, purpose, and autonomy; changing institutions which foster oppression into institutions based on equality and respect - these are the roles of liberation, the ideas comprising the consciousness of female liberation. (Balsler 7)

Gender disparity was ingrained in the Nigerian culture. The author herself has been suppressed by the predominant belief of Nigerian people that only sons would help in the progress of their lineage, while daughters are considered to be a burden right from their birth. While boys were provided with education and other facilities the girl children were denied all these rights.

Thus, it respects African woman's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons. It sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy with respect to child care and the sharing of household responsibility, traditions which are compatible with modern working women's lives and the problems of child care but which were distorted with colonialism and continue to be distorted in the urban environment. (Olaniyan and Quayson 563)

The institution of marriage becomes an exploitative system wherein gender disparity is reinforced and women are kept repressive as they immerse themselves in domesticity and the demands of motherhood. In Igbo society, women were respected only if she becomes a mother and the respect and honour provided for her will continue only if she gives birth to a son. This convention even goes to the extent of intimidating the

existence of women, who does not give birth to a son. In the traditional society, young mothers were not permitted to take up trading activities like participating in markets and in women council meetings. These beliefs are deeply rooted in the psyche of Nigerian women, so the women who could not give birth to a son or if they could not attain motherhood considered themselves as useless and so they were ready to accept any type of disgrace rendered on them by the patriarchal power. The girl children are brought up with the belief that they will be considered successful in their life and will be appreciated only if they become mothers and this code of belief is passed on from mothers to their daughters for generations.

In *The Joys of Motherhood* Nnu Ego is divorced by her first husband because she failed to conceive a child. In her second marriage she kept on begetting children. She was obsessed with her role as a mother to such an extent she became physically weak and psychologically exhausted as she negated herself and kept sacrificing for her children especially her sons. She was stuck on to the traditional norms of being a wife and a mother and failed to observe the societal changes and the improved status of women in the postcolonial society. Her undue love for her children was the reason for her embittered state in which she died.

Buchi Emecheta considers that women are victimized in the name of motherhood. By positing motherhood as a sine qua non condition to acquire a true social identity, the Igbo express their attachment to their culture as it is rooted in their collective consciousness... Incidentally, when she fails to fulfil these social norms, her female identity is automatically put into question and this considerably impacts

her social integration. She may not be chased from her community but, she loses all the social respect granted to a mother. (Guessan 4)

Sisterhood, a prime concept of feminism is a recurring theme in almost all of Emecheta's novels. Sisterhood helps the women protagonists to overcome patriarchal oppression. The women protagonists are capable to face the reality of life, as their sisterhood provide them support in handling their problems. Obioma Nnaemeka states, "Women appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves" (19). In *The Slave Girl*, the slave girls in Ma Palagads's household supported each other and thus was able to overcome their ordeals. Ojebata was able to escape from slavery because of the moral support provided by Chiago. Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* was able to overcome her depression after her first marriage failed because of the support system that existed between the women in her community.

In *Kehinde* the concept of sisterhood is represented by her sister Ifewinye and her friend Mariammo. When Kehinde is upset, unable to accept that her husband has turned polygamous, it is her sister Ifewinye who consoles and supports her. Kehinde's friend Mariammo sends her money for her travel so that Kehinde can escape from the suffocating family situation and reach England to start her life on her own. Ayoko in *The Rape of Shavi*, is able to retain her self-confidence though she is a rape victim because of the sisterhood that exists amidst them. The women of their community made Ayoko realise that she need not feel guilty because Ronje is the culprit and he should be punished. If there is a lack in establishing sisterhood, it leads to the failure of the protagonist.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego lets down Adaku during the food strike as they fail to develop a sense of sisterhood. Thus Nnu Ego succumbs to the patriarchal precepts of the society. In *Gwendolen*, mother-daughter bonding is a failure as Sonia fails to understand her daughter which makes Gwendolen face psychological trauma. Patricia Hill Collins says that in an African woman's journey towards self-actualisation "other Black women may assist a Black woman in this journey toward empowerment, but the ultimate responsibility for self-definitions and self-valuation lies within the individual woman" (112).

Given that we know all too well how comforting sisterhood is, we must welcome it and its rewards for others as well as for ourselves. Thus, for the moment, let us reflect on how much more beautiful our world would be if all sisters simply loved each another. Our children would be more secure, for they would have not just one female guardian, but many to attend to their needs. (Hudson-Weems 93)

The novelist firmly believes that the economic independence and education are the two forces which would provide freedom to women. The women protagonists of Buchi Emecheta resist the hegemonic gender relations that stop them in achieving their goals. They come out victoriously against all the forces like patriarchy, tradition and superstition that hinder them and block them in moving forward. Ketu Katrak commenting on this paradigm shift writes, "Female covert resistances are undertaken with self consciousness and remarkable creativity that decides to take risks and confront domination selectively and strategically in the interest of self preservation" (3).

The girl children had to overcome various hurdles to get educated which is evident through the protagonists. Akunna was allowed to continue her education because her step-father thought that an educated girl would fetch greater bride price. Ojebeta was sent to school because the rich sent only the slaves to the schools run by the missionaries; later education gave her the courage to break the bonds of slavery. Nnu Ego realises the importance of educating girls very late, but she trains and prepares her daughter in petty trading. Nko, a village girl who aspired to accomplish graduation in a university had to undergo the travails of sexual exploitation by a Professor who lacks integrity. Gwendolen was burdened with household work because it was expected the girl child should support her mother in her domestic chores, as a result she underperformed in the school and later discontinued studies. Kehinde was sent to a boarding school because it was believed that she would bring ill-luck as was a twin born. Kehinde was able to regain her self-esteem and lead an independent life because she was educated and was holding a reputed job. Katherine Frank terms Buchi Emecheta's heroines as "the most compelling example we have of the New Woman of Africa. She embodies a liberating potentiality, of a rich, active and fulfilling future for the African woman, and she embraces a future without men" (85). Education has a strong influence on the women as it gives them strength to break the cultural norms. Buchi Emecheta very clearly emphasises that education is the only means of salvation for women from the stifling patriarchal norms.

Buchi is successful in portraying rebellious women characters who totally contradict their societal norms. In her novels, she discusses themes like responsibility of women in marriage association, and the prominence provided to men in the family. African feminism "strives to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the

heterogeneous cultures of Africa. Feminisms in Africa, ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies” (Nkealah 140).

The heroines of Buchi Emecheta’s novels are daring and are ready to revolt against restrictions that are forced on them. Aduku in *The Joys of Motherhood* decides to live alone, starts a business, educates her two daughters and emerges as successful woman who has realized her potential. Kehinde walks out of her failed marriage, completes a university degree and acquires a government job. Thus the novelist has created a paradigm shift regarding the outlook of women’s status in society by representing women in her novels as independent and courageous. Emecheta says, “I write about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable” (qtd in Ojo-Ade 76).

Thus Buchi Emecheta’s women characters are found to be true examples of setting an example to the society. They consider it as their moral duty to help others with their education and the knowledge they possess. They are the women of soil who live for their people with a traditional feeling of affinity working for the upliftment of their fellow beings in their society. Though women were suppressed and subjugated for ages by various means. Women might appear to be physically weak but she is bounded with tremendous will power which has been proved by the novelist through her woman protagonist. Gloria C. Chukurere states that Buchi Emecheta’s “belief that the failure or success of a character depends not only upon extraneous factors but also upon the character’s individual strength of will” (206).

Subjugation of women is a recurring issue that Buchi Emecheta discusses in her writing. Patriarchy employs the institution of marriage and motherhood as its means to curtail women's autonomy. The novels explore the oppression of women through rigidly enforced rules and religious taboos. The writer through the protagonist tries to create a new perception of the future filled with hope for women.

Buchi Emecheta's women protagonists are caught in the flux between tradition and modernity. The novelist presents myriad women ranging from simple village women, women who have completed school education, women with university degree and economically independent women with good job. Though educated these women are bound to their tradition and breaking free from this bondage becomes a herculean saga. *The Bride Price* and *The Slave Girl* challenge the false notion of tradition that constricts the emancipation of women. *The Joys of Motherhood* interrogates the socio-cultural value attached to motherhood that reinstates the subjectivity of women. The problem of sexual abuse where women's biological vulnerability is seen as means to keep her subjugated is discussed in *Double Yoke*. Though education was believed to be the means to end patriarchy, but Nko is sexually abused by her Professor and she becomes pregnant with his child. Gwendolen is victimized by her own father, yet she reorients her life by focusing on her daughter as the centre of her existence. Gwendolen overcomes her psychological trauma and regains inner strength to reorganize her life. Kehinde, a first generation immigrant declares herself as an independent woman as a defiance against her husband who turned polygamous. Kehinde was able to assert her self-respect as she was educated and had a reputed job in the host country. Kehinde proves to be a hybrid individual who has assimilated the best of both the African and western culture.

Emecheta states that though the nation was progressing in various spheres after independence, yet the status of women was improving in a very slow pace. However they may be educated, wherever they may be born, born to a person of high rank or low rank, whatever may be the self-esteem they possess, the women are made to surrender themselves to patriarchal domination. They are made to consider themselves as second-rate human beings. Their self-esteem is erased and their originality is lost in the name of tradition and customs dictated by the society. Transformation of these suppressed women into empowered individuals need the support of women writers like Buchi Emecheta whose writing would kindle in them the desire to self-actualize their potentials.

The analyses of Buchi Emecheta's novels reveal that the quintessence of African womanhood is their resilience in the face of adversity. The gradual development of women from a repressive state towards progression and attaining independence is evident in her novels. The novelist represents through her writing that a social reorganization should take place in Nigerian society so that the position of women would undergo a drastic change, their beliefs and traditional customs should not oppress women, they should come out of the shells that they have built for themselves. Throughout history women have resisted gender hegemony that is ingrained in the male psyche, the modern women are valiant enough to forge an identity for themselves. Through her works Buchi Emecheta has rekindled the dormant power lurking in women, so that they would fight against injustice, clamour for equality and assert their individuality.

Buchi Emecheta believes that her responsibility as a novelist is to throw light on the repressive state of women of all ages. Her primary intention is to give voice to the defenselessness marginalized women, who are dominated by hegemonic power structure

ingrained in the cultural milieu. She proves herself as a writer with a distinctive concern towards women related issues. Gender bias is the major theme discussed and the prerogative of her novels is to promote women to liberate themselves from the unwarranted practices in society; to self-assert their potentials and emerge empowered as independent women with self-worth. Relentless quest for identity, indomitable spirit of resilience, persistent assertion of self-esteem are the major characteristics of the women characters. Buchi Emecheta through her novels stimulates the young readers to understand the plight of women through the ages to realize their potentials and to claim equality in the social and domestic sphere.

It is remarkable to note that from down the ages African women irrespective of the political changes have clung to their cultural tradition. The agony and anguish of women and their lasting faith in their self-worth has been clearly exposed by this celebrated writer. Buchi Emecheta's works are the testimony to the fact that women have overcome numerous hurdles with vigour. Buchi Emecheta's contribution to African literature has been widely applauded as her work brought to limelight the plight of the African women thus the author has reckoned respect for African women's writing worldwide. Let the ensuing researchers delve deep into the author's work and bring forth new vistas for understanding the concept of womanhood.