
Feminism in The Novel The Slave Girl

Emecheta wants to explore new dimensions in this novel and her art of narration comes into picture with full force. She concentrates on the other aspects of femaleness that is not described in the novels of Chinua Achebe, Amadi and Gugi Wa Thiango. She exposes the psychological and physical toll on women that is imposed by society like the institution of marriage, polygamy, perpetual pregnancy, child birth, widowhood and illegal relationships. All the previous novels of the African male writers concentrates on the male perspective and judge the problems of female or sometimes they never bother about their problems. African male authors proudly declare that African females are more independent and courageous than their other counterparts in the world. The male writers completely ignore the problems of African females. Emecheta tried to rebuild the pillars of African literature. She adjudged the problems in female angle.

Chronologically Emecheta moves backwards in her novels. First she deals with the current period and in her later novels she focuses more on colonial Africa. In the novels of the Ditch, the Second Class Citizen, the Joys of Motherhood, the Bride Price and the Slave Girl, she focuses on early 1960s, 1950s, 1940s and the early centuries of that century. In her very first novels of the Second Class Citizen and the Ditch she concentrates more on her personal life. In later novels like the Slave Girl she focuses on the Girls' Adolescence and the institutions of the marriage and motherhood in her the Bride Price and the Joys of Motherhood. Emecheta's 'The Slave Girl' focuses more directly on a tradition rooted sense of order and its imbrications in its adherence to the slave girl motif. The slave girl's rebellion and defiance is a motif. This motif tells about the passionate protest of a slave girl ritually entombed with her mistress, violently clubbed into an open grave, her cries continued to resound. The motif was first introduced in the Bride Price with Akunna who displays a highly internal mental and psychological sense of slavery to her master's tribe and tradition, and it blooms fully in the Slave Girl, where the novel unfolds the full experiences of slave and its implications.

Emecheta tries to explore the female bondage and her underlying sense of female victimization and servitude. The sense of oppression and its condition varies from novel to novel of Emecheta. In the Second Class Citizen it is husband and racism of Whites, In the Bride Price it is traditional taboos and customs, in the Slave Girl it is men and in the Joys of Motherhood it is children. Whomsoever it may be the enslaving power of women is an unvarying constantly. Emecheta is one of the pioneering voices in the African women literature who raised the issue against the issue of women suppression. The novel depicts the story of a plight of women in the post colonial scenario. This novel seems to be very close in the themes and moods of the Bride Price and the Joys of Motherhood. But the ending is not pathetic like in the Bride Price and the Joys of Motherhood. Emecheta discussed the roots of slavery in the Bride Price. It was fully developed in this novel. The destiny of women was linked with the values of the African community. The institution of slavery is a deplorable thing, against the values of humanity and it is the root cause of women's servile status in African society. When it is applied to women the status of slavery is more crucial, her dependency, apathy towards her, cultivating secondary status in her mind and accepting it as a normal thing are all debatable issues and seems as the qualities of oppressive system. "The slave girl represents the historical importance of Africa and the slave trade, the intra-tribal slave system and the much larger question of one's right to one's

own identity, destiny and freedom." Emecheta wants to present the female bondage as a metaphor of African womanhood's servitude and subordinate position. Emecheta in this novel presents the life of a young Ibo woman in Nigeria. The plot begins with her childhood. Ojebeta is born in the early 20th century, in the village of Ibuza. Very few females will enjoy that fortunate condition because women are treated as secondary beings. But she is precious to her parents. She is the first female child to survive after many stillbirths and infant deaths of her parents. Such joy for the birth of a daughter is extremely rare: "Girl children were not normally particularly praised creatures, but her father had lost so many that they now assumed a quality of preciousness."

Her parents shower much love and attention towards their daughter. Her father makes an arduous and dangerous journey to Idu to purchase charms to protect Ojebeta from the evil spirits. But such love and affection ends abruptly when both of her parents succumb to influenza by leaving her as an orphan. Her parents' death is the end of her joys. She is taken by her younger brother to Onitsha and he sells her to one of his distant relatives, Ma Palgada. Ma Palgada is one of the successful market women in Onitsha. Ojebeta was sold away by her brother to purchase materials for his youth festival. Ojebeta joins her household as one of the slave girls, who assist her in the market and at home. Circumstances make a person. Ojebeta grew up as an attractive young woman, she imitates the manners of women in her society in which she was brought up. She undergoes the slave's absolute lack of rights and privileges. After the death of her mistress she obtains her freedom. She realizes that women are by appearance "free", but she cannot escape the dominance of men in her life. She is treated as a possession of men but the relationship only changes as he is her husband. She marries eventually after leaving Palgadas. In the novel Ojebeta is shown as a commodity and she was exchanged in one form of servitude to another. The novel ends with an ironical note: "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."

The life of Ojebeta seems different from other baby girls in Africa; her birth is much anticipated as she is the only female child of her mother who survived her infancy. But unfortunate things started from when she reaches seven. When she passes from dependent to independent stage i.e. young girlhood she was sold away by her brother to a distant relative for mere eight pounds, so that he could purchase anklets and beads for his arrival of age dance costumes. Her first encounter of life starts with that episode. Ojebeta tries to escape from the clutches of Ma Palgada. In many ways she resembles the heroines of Emecheta from the very beginning onwards. Ojebeta is intelligent, restive, passionate, unhappy, yearning even though her existence is in strain. The most dangerous aspect of her servitude life at the Palgadas family is not an abhorrent one. She forms close affiliations with other slave girls and even Ma Palgada seems to be benevolent towards her.

In this novel Emecheta discusses a woman's relationship with her community and it is set against a historical background, one which links her story with the history of her village, with contemporary events in colonial Africa and with the universal phenomena of cycles of birth and death. The prologue of the novel begins with the origins of the village, many generations before Ojebeta's birth by an Ibo Prince. Due to an accidental death of his opponent in the wrestling match, he exiles from his country and settles in this area of Nigeria. Symbolically Ibuza is a metaphor for death and exile. The life emerging out of death serves as a prologue to Ojebeta herself. She survived the death after the death of many children, symbolizes the sprouting of life

from barrenness parallels the history of Iboza. Her situations and the history of village are analogous. The background of the novel is set in the early years of the twentieth century, seven years before the prevailing of epidemic of influenza (1916) and till December 1929 when the Aba Riots took place. It covers 35 years of Ojebeta's life and dramatizes more bleaker than the Bride Price. This disease is prevailed before the birth of Ojebeta and after her birth. It killed lakhs of people. This disease is called the white man's 'felenza' or influenza by the Africans is believed to be caused by the presence of English people, another sinister disease. Emecheta narrated the disease in the novel – "Pom! Pom! Pom! The rumours that have been going round are true. Pom! There is a kind of death coming from across the salty waters. It ha. killed many people in Iseb Azagba, it is creeping to Ogwashi, it is now coming to us. They call it Fclenza. It is white man's death. They shoot it into the air, and we breathe it in and die. Pom! Pom.."

People are much fear about the mysterious disease which is very new for them. They speculate innocently and hopes to be spared from the disease "But this felenza was a new thing that the 'Potokis' had shot into the air, though everyone wondered why. "We have done them no wrong,' people said. They came to places like Benin and Bonny, bought healthy slaves from our people and paid us well. And this is how they thank us." Feleza came to Ogwashi and within days men started to drop like leaves down dead on their fans. Death was all of a sudden that relatives were even too shocked to cry. As the story moves on disease washed away many worthy people in Ogwashi. Oteh the aunt of Ojebeta laments that feleza had carried away the men who were men, what that left was the ghosts of men. One among the ghosts was Okolie, younger brother of Ojebeta, who sells her into slavery. Undoubtedly he is selfish to the core. He pushes her little orphaned sister into slavery for his own personal happiness. In the sense of Africa Okolie never behaved like a true man."Okolie on the other hand was everything his elder brother was not. True, he too was tall, for their parents were a tall couple. But Okolie was noisy, he was not very industrious and he hated going to the farm." Okolie was never behaved like an African man. He was so shy, does not willing to work hard in farm or in life. But he never do well and eventually sneaks away from the village to look for a white man's job after he failed miserably, as a brother, farmer, and as a husband. Okolie before