

11

WOMEN AT RECEIVING END IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S NOVELS

*Kakasaheb D Dhaygude*

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,  
Sant Ramdas College, Ghansavangi,  
Dist. Jalana, MS, India*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:**

*Culture and traditions play a major role in the development of a human being. From the historic times society gives more importance to the age-old traditions and customs. Sometimes these traditions become the root cause of injustice to one section of society. They act as a hindrance in the development of human beings. Under the name of culture and practices man victimizes woman and her emotions and feelings are suppressed. These traditions become a tool in keeping the women perpetually at the background. The woman is also forced to accept her subjugation. The present paper attempts an in-depth study of how cultural practices help men to marginalize women in Buchi Emecheta's novels.*

**Keywords:** *Culture, Marginalisation, Polygamy, Subjugation, Tradition, etc.*

Man and woman are one of the most beautiful creations of the god; they are equal in his eyes. At the time of the creation there wasn't any difference between Adam and Eve, none is superior and inferior to the other. They were the complements to each other. As one cannot think of human body without its vital organs in the same way man is imperfect without woman, as one cannot separate a leg or a hand from the human body without hurting it, in this way man and woman cannot be separated from each other, if man is considered as body, a woman would be the soul and without soul there is no body. But as the time passes, because of traditions and culture, man has acquired the dominant position and woman is relegated to second position in the society. The male dominated society started treating woman as a subsidiary to man. There are some matriarchal societies where woman acquired dominant position compared to her male counterpart. But the most dominant form of family is patriarchal one and the male members of the family played major and decisive role in these kinds of families. As most of the societies are male dominated, the male child gets more importance and attention in every aspect of life and the woman and girl child are marginalized and treated badly. This discriminatory treatment is the result of culture and traditions which play a crucial role in the discriminatory treatment towards woman and girl child. So the world of woman is confined to the kitchen and bedroom; she becomes a mere supplier of pleasure to men and even she is denied proper food, education and at care.

Her major duties are to prepare food for the family and provide male children for the family so that the legacy of her family may not be discontinued. Buchi Emecheta was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1944 in Lagos, Nigeria. She belonged to Ibuza heritage. After immigrating to United Kingdom in 1962, she worked as a Librarian and Community teacher. She received many prestigious awards like Best Black Writer in Britain 1978. Jack Campbell award, 1979, Daughter of Mark Twain, and American Literature Award. Emecheta has more than twenty publications to her credit; they are *In the Ditch, Second class citizen, The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, The Joys of Motherhood, The Family* and many others. Her autobiography *Head Above Water* was published in 1986. She wrote her own experiences and about the victimization of women and girl child in African male dominated society. Her works echo the voices of the subaltern people. The outcry of marginalized can be heard in her major works. These marginalized people are women, girl child, slaves, widows and deserted women.

She always presents the experiences of the weaker and oppressed people and their sufferings in a way to evoke the sympathy of the readers.

Buchi Emecheta wrote more than a dozen novels. Her novel *In the Ditch* (1972) is a story of a Black, Immigrant Nigerian woman. The central character, Adah represents the author. It is an autobiographical novel, set in North London. She took lot of efforts to go to London. When a woman went to England for better opportunities and higher education she was coldly welcomed in her land of dreams. She finds herself in a kind of ditch of miseries from where there is no escape. It shows how racism is prevalent in London. It is a realistic picture of the precarious condition of Black Housing. It is also about the pitiable condition of a talented Black Woman writer. Emecheta in her autobiographical novel *Second Class Citizen* talks about the struggle of a black African woman for fulfilling her dream of education. It is also about the oppression and exploitation of a girl child.

*The Bride Price* is a story of Akunna, a young Ibo girl. After the death of her father, Akunna and her mother Ma Blackie and her brother Nna-Nndo moves from Lagos to Ibuza. *The Slave Girl* is about the girl, Ogbanje Ojebeta who was sold by her own brother Okolie Ma Pallagate after the death of her parents. It is a story of misery of a once loving girl child. *The Family* is the story of a young black Jamaican girl, Gwendolen Brillianton who was deserted by her parents Emecheta in her another work *The Joys of Motherhood* talks about the inhuman treatment given by the society to the slaves. It is a picture of a society where a human being is commoditized. In the traditional African society when a woman is died, her female slave is forced to die with her mistress and if she denies she is killed and buried along with her dead mistress. When Agbadi's first wife, Agunwa, died, her female slave is buried along with her.

The first experience of the discriminatory treatment woman gets in her own home and the victimizers are her own near and dear ones. Emecheta's works deal with the pitiable condition of African woman in the traditional society, her major characters are children, widows, old and dejected women, slaves and she presents their picture in a realistic manner. Her works also shed light on the ill-treatment of a woman by another woman; a woman inflicts pain on another woman. How a mother mistreats her own girl child and gives more attention to a male child is one of the major themes of her novels. The mother sacrifices the education of a girl child on the altar of male child education.

In *The Second Class Citizen* Adah's mother says; "Even if she was sent to school, it was very doubtful whether it would be wise to let her stay long. A year or two would do as long as she can write her name and count, then she will learn to sew (Emecheta, *SCC*, 9).

Her parents pay much attention toward the education and up breeding of male child because they think that after the marriage of their daughters, the male child will carry their family's legacy and he will look after his old parents. So the male child always treated in a special way and always given preferential treatment. He is provided better educational opportunities and at the same time the girl child is used as eve ready unpaid labourer without bothering about her feelings and this is done under the name of tradition and age-old practices that after marriage the girl should know cooking and other household activities.

These kind of discriminatory practices were abundant in African society. The African society was male dominated society, it is also slave owning society which is also infected by the evil practices like child marriages where at the time of marriage the consent of the girl is subordinated with money, where girls for the sake of high bride price are married to old men who seems to be older than the girl's father. A woman is considered as a commodity which can be sold and purchased like animals. The bride price is given as well as taken; the polygamous African society allows men to keep as many wives as they wish. Women are won in wrestling contests as trophies. A man's prestige is measured by the number of wives in his household and the man who is switching his faith from one wife to another expects loyalty from all his wives. So the man is always shifting his loyalties from one wife to another wife. He does not have any respect towards these women because they became a burden on the financial recourses of the family. Under these circumstances the conjugal rights of a wife are overlooked.

The African tradition also allows its male members to inherit the wives of the deceased brothers and their relatives. So the women are totally dependent upon their husbands. The man is the principal breadwinner of the family so it becomes difficult and cumbersome for him to maintain a large family. So the end sufferer is woman who doesn't get proper food and education, she is psychologically as well as physically starving in this orthodox society. African culture and the age-old traditions play a

major role in the discrimination against a woman. It gives more importance to a male child. It celebrates the birth of a male child with much fanfare and the same happiness disappears on the birth of a girl child.

In her novel *The Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta says that, “At the time of Adah’s birth; she was a girl who arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy, so since she was such a disappointment to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth she was so insignificant (Emecheta,SCC,7).

So a woman is revered as well as worshipped when she gives birth to a male child and she is neglected, despised, ignored and even divorced as soon as she is childless or unable to produce male children. Even mothers also want a male child; Nnu Ego prays to the fertility goddess; Please pity me, I feel that my husband’s people are already looking for new wife for him. They cannot wait for me forever. He is the only son of the family and his people want an heir from him (Emecheta,SCC,31).

The prestige of a woman depends upon the number of male children a woman produces. The novel *Joys of Motherhood* gives a picture of a society where woman is used as a machine for providing male children. In her works Buchi Emecheta presents the inhuman treatment meted out by the males to the women, the males consider wives as mere object of giving pleasure to them irrespective of their feelings. Her job is only to provide a child to the family, in *Second Class Citizen* Emecheta says about Adah’s husband, Francis;

To him a woman was a second class human, to be slept with anytime, even during the day, and if she refused to have sense beaten into her until she gave into be ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meal ready at the right time (Emecheta, *JOM*, 181).

She also gives a realistic picture of the tradition of slavery in her novel *The Slave Girl* where the prosperity of a family is measured by the number of slave. Slaves were brutally treated and bought and sold like animals in the markets. They were buried alive along with their dead masters. Even the close relatives of the family, to evade the responsibility sold the girls to slave traders. Child marriages were an accepted norm of the African society. They were married at an early age because of the bride price. A woman is never allowed to be wealthier than a man, whatever the woman possesses and earned becomes the property of her husband. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Francis’ father says, “Where will she take the money to? The money is yours can’t you see? Let her go and bring their money here into this house. It is your good luck you made a good choice in marriage, son” (Emecheta, *JOM*,17). To conclude, one can find the woman at receiving end in Buchi Emecheta’s novels. She portrays a culture and society wherein woman is treated as a commodity and used as a tool for satisfying the wishes of men. They are victimized, marginalized and abused. The culture subjugates the woman and it brings havoc in the life of women .It directly or indirectly helps the male domination and exploitation of woman.

## REFERENCES

1. Brown, Llyod, *Women Writers In Black Africa*, Greenwood Press, Westport Ct, 1981.
2. Emecheta, Buchi, *Joys of Motherhood*, Heinemann, London, 1979.
3. -----*.Second class Citizen*, Allison and Busby, London, 1974.
4. -----*.The Bride Price*, Heinmann, London, 1976.
5. -----*.The Slave Girl*, Allison and Busby, London, 1977.
6. -----*.The Family*, Braziller, New York, 1989.
7. -----*.The Joys of Motherhood*, Heinemann, London, 1979.
8. Chukurere, C., Gloriagender, *Voices And Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction*.Engu, Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1995.
9. Frank, Catherine, *The Death Of A Slave Girl: African Womanhood in The Novels Of Buchi Emecheta in World Literature written in English*, 1982.

10. Ogundipe, Leslie, O., *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*, African World Press Inc, Triton, 1994.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

**To Cite the Article:** Dhaygude, Kakasaheb, D., “Women At Receiving End in Buchi Emecheta’s Novels”.*Literary Cognizance*, I-2 (Sept., 2015): 56-59. Web.

