

## A Study of Theme ‘Slavery’ in Buchi Emecheta’s Novel: “The Slave Girl”

Savita F Nagannavar

Research Scholar, Department of English, KSAWU Vijayapur India

### Abstract

Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was a Nigerian born British novelist. Buchi Emecheta's novels deal principally with the life experiences of Nigerian women, who are subordinated in an indigenous society deeply influenced by the western values introduced by British colonists. Emecheta who mainly writes about women, explores challenge women's roles at great depth and traditional ideas of women's activities in society. In the novel 'The Slave Girl', Emecheta turned our attention to the distinctive colour of existing and cultural networks of slavery in Africa at the turn of the century. With the mastery of language, she brings to life the story of Ogbanje Ojebeta, and weak Ibuza girl sold to a wealthy aunt by her own brother. The novel illuminates strict and harsh treatment for weaker girls who are sold to domestic slaver. At the same time, it provides the rare and unique moments of humanity of perpetrators and victims. Ojebeta, a Nigerian woman who is sold into slavery in her own land after disease and tragedy leave her orphaned as a child. In her fellow slaves, she finds surrogate family that attaches together under the unbending will of their master. As Ojebeta becomes a woman and discovers her need for identity and freedom, her family and home, she realized that she would ultimately choose her destiny. However, throughout the novel we constantly remember the lack of woman value. In my view the slave girl stands as a strong indictment of cultural behaviours for women.

### Introduction:

The Slave Girl is a 1977 novel by Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta that was published in the UK by Allison and Busby and in the US by George Braziller. It won the Jock Campbell Award from the New Statesman in 1978. The novel was Emecheta's fourth book; it was dedicated to her editor Margaret Busby. Buchi Emecheta in full Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta, was born on July 21, 1944, Nigeria and died on January 25, 2017, London, England, Igbo writer whose novels deal largely with the difficult and unequal role of women in both immigrant and African societies and explore the tension between tradition and modernity.

Emecheta married at age 16, and she emigrated with her husband from Nigeria to London in 1962. She began writing stories based on her life, including the problems she initially encountered in England. These works were first published in New Statesman Magazine and were later collected in the novel *In The Ditch* (1972). That work was followed by *Second Class Citizen* (1974), and both were later included in the single volume *Adah's Story* (1983). Those books introduce Emecheta's three major themes: the quests for equal treatment, self-confidence, and dignity as a woman. Somewhat different in style is Emecheta's novel *Gwendolen* (1989; also published as *The Family*), which addresses the issues of immigrant life in Great Britain, as do *Kehinde* (1994) and *The New Tribe* (2000).

Most of Emecheta's other novels including The Bride Price (1976), The Slave Girl (1977), The Joys of Motherhood (1979), Destination Biafra (1982), and Double Yoke (1982) are realistic works of fiction set in Nigeria. Perhaps her strongest work, The Rape of Shavi (1983), is also the most difficult to categorize. Set in an imaginary idyllic African kingdom, it explores the dislocations that occur when a plane carrying Europeans seeking to escape an imminent nuclear disaster crashes. Emecheta wrote an autobiography, Head Above Water (1986), and several works of children's and juvenile fiction. She was made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) in 2005.

#### The Slave Girl "Slavery":

The Slave Girl is far more than a feminist's ramblings. It is a book about the mistreatment of women and that intensely talks about their condition as they try to meld the present and the past together in their effort to find a position which is much more than the kitchen and babies. It tells of women who want to be more but have to settle for what tradition and the society itself dictates. It is one of the very best pre colonial African books and is heartily recommended. It won the Jock Campbell New Statesman Award.

At the very beginning of the novel, Emecheta spoke about the family background of Ojebeta. Okwuekwu and Umedi are husband and wife. They had two sons Owezim description of the morning. Emecheta was connected to the cycle of life with a beautiful description of the morning. Emecheta was connected to the cycle of life with the cycle of nature. Umedi was expecting a baby at this early stage. Okwuekwu orders his sons to go to farm as if he is not concerned his wife's labor pain. After asked Owezim about his mother Okwukwu told about Umedi's labor pain had started. Okwukwu did not remember how often she was pregnant, because he stopped thinking about it.

He has lost many children at birth, and he does not remember that number. He did not dispute for his wife's pregnancy because it has become regular for her. She was alone at home and nobody will go to help her labor pain. An unknown named woman Ukabegwu's wife, arrival to help Umedi. These women is not permitted to enter the house of a man who has earn the Alo because as she is a "unclean" woman. (means "unclean" is an abuse). The term is used for people belonging to the woman and subordinate. This reflects the social hierarchy. The group of people belonging to this category do not have their identity. Umedi gave birth to her daughter. They named daughter OgbanjeOjebeta, after the loss of many girls while delivery this baby girl Ojebeta survival.

Emecheta has provided details on what women do during the baby's birth. In those days these women did not find any medical treatment. Men are not particular concerned about this women's problem. Women were left to maintain their pregnancy. There women were carried cooking knife during their pregnancy. It is dangerous to cut the cord from knife and risky for their life but these women make it usual of it. It was a daily and simple thing that women had to learn to deal with the problem. The woman's body is used as plaything and after leave her alone to suffer.

Before the epidemic disease called "Felenza" (it is white man's death). They shoot it into the air and people breath it in and die, most of the Ibuza people including Ojebeta's parents died by felenza. However, to avoid such a disaster for Ojebeta, Okoli leave their village Ibuza and decide to move where their relative live in village

called Ontisha. During their outdoor journey they meet their aunt Uteh and her husband Eze, who do not allow them to continue their journey. Unfortunately, early in the morning, Okoli and Ojebeta continue their journey and they go without telling them. They take boat until they reach for a long way to Ontisha village.

After reach Ojebeta was troubled that she has never seen such a large Otu market with different people, culture and with variety kinds of materials. This came from 'The United Africa Company'. Surprisingly, she has said that most people will glance on her. In fact, Ma Palagada was a wealthy woman. Okoli decides to sell her sister to her because he needs money. Without any choice, Ojebeta's brother took eight English pounds, the amount suggested by the buyer. Ojebeta was lost. She was evacuated. She screams and tries to run away. She cried and feel that she has lost. Ma consoles her and said that:

"You are not lost, little girl with pagan charms", she replied. "You are just a domestic slave".

It was not only screaming of Ojebeta, it is the cry of every Ibuza girls and women. Ojebeta was not able to understand anything, but she only understood that something terrible was going to happen with her, so she cried aloud. The child who grew up with so much love, care and perception has now been lost. Ojebeta's charm was removed by her beloved parents. She wanted to keep her charm as per her survival depends on her. She did not know that as young girl she had no slave has saved any identity; since they had no identity, day money was not paid them. Ojebeta returned to her self-esteem. It's hard to behave like someone else who has lost her identity but still wants to hold her dream.

She married Jacob. In masculine tradition every woman should marry traditionally whether slave or free. She has learned that a woman always belongs to men. A woman is owned by her people before the marriage, she was the new owner when she was sold, and when she grows new men get a bride price and she sold her to her husband. The son of Ma Palagadas Clifford returned after many years later and Ma Palagada was not good enough, so her daughter came to live with her two children. Ojebeta is given special duties to care for Victorian children. Chiago, another slave girl was sexually harassed by her master Pa Palagada. Chiago also sold as Ojebeta. Chiago was kind to Ojebeta. After know about the arrival of Clifford, Chiago was distressed. During this time, Chiago cried and said:

"Oh, you were too young then. You don't understand. He fiddles with me. He used to make me do things... O my chihelps me in this household." (92)

Chiago was the seventeenth girl at that time. To Ma, she was a skilled slave, earn money and Clifford was used as a plaything. Chiago also did not speak what sort of Clifford insisted on forced her. It means that she cannot explain what's going on in her. Chiago could not tell it to any of Palagadas. But even she also failed to share her problems with her fellow slave girl. In addition, Chiago, was also a victim of Pa Palagada. Chiago was twenty-two years old and concealed the secret in her heart. In the market place. Chiago was suddenly fell sick and her eyes were red. Ojebeta told the Pa Palagada about the illness of Chiago. Ojebeta went to the room of Pa Palagada with Chiago. Chiago was left on the door of the room to go inside. When Ojebeta takes Chiago to Pa's room, they as Pa's response. When he saw Chiago's illness, he said that:

“Now what’s the matter with you my little mother? Come-oh, how hot you are...”  
(123)

Ojebeta was surprised because this kind of response was usually given to the wife. Slave women had to become the wife of their male masters and even Ojebeta remembered that once Clifford told her that one day he would make her his wife. A few days after Ma’s death, Pa called Ojebeta extremely, Ojebeta went into his room and was surprised to see Chiago with the little baby boy. Ojebeta was sure about Chiago, that she was going to become a new mistress to Pa. he made look as if Chiago had come back to help simply in the house. No one know that Chiago’s baby father was Pa Palagadas.

Chiago was took promise by Pa that he should make her his wife. They secretly made no difference in the Chiago. She did not criticize him. Chiago was considered to be the most prestigious servant of her child at Palagad’s house and she did not criticize her. Clifford was affectionate to Ojebeta but did not marry her. After Ma’s death he went away and did not return for a long time. A cruel woman Miss Victoria daughter of Ma wanted to take Ojebeta because she was a hard worker. Miss Victoria never missed the opportunity to humiliate Ojebeta. Miss Victoria also wanted to do charge on Ojebeta as what Ma had paid for her. Victoria never asked to choose of Ojebeta because she was a slave girl.

Victoria was powerful and rich woman, and was unable to understand the states of lonely and remote girl from her home from this all Ojebeta wanted to go home for her people. Her bride price was the only gateway of Ojebeta’s freedom. She could not think of run away without paying because she was then treated as a runaway slave and tagged runaway slave put her in a hostile state. Conversely, she is expecting a bride’s price from her future husband because she is a slave. Ojebeta permits and receives the amount of four shillings from Pa. Victoria wanted Ojebeta to be inherited. She wanted Ojebeta’s body and soul to be a permanent servant. Victoria laughed on Ma’s plan when Ojebeta told Ma’s plan that Ma wanted Ojebeta for Clifford. Victoria strongly said to Ojebeta that:

“I must say that you slave girls certainly do have ambition. Chiago wanting to take over the whole household and you want my brother to marry you? So that’s the situation. Well, let me tell you, slave girl from Ibuza, this can never be so. You are a slave. Come with me, and you shall have your freedom in a few years, without having to repay a farthing.” (145)

Victoria dismayed it angrily because she hoped to obey her mother inherited, it did not fulfil and Victoria wanted to take revenge. She wanted a strong place and strength and money. Ojebeta moved to her town and her people warmly welcomed her. She asked them about her brothers. The town’s people said that they did not know much about Okoli and their elder brother Owezim want to do job for white man’s job so, he left the village. Ojebeta decided that she would not leave the village although her brothers were not there one of Ojebeta’s relative Ukabegwu, invited her to stay with them. He said that:

“I hold your family ofo, the symbol of worship for your family; if your brother Owezim should die, your bride price will come to me.” (150)

The relative of Ojebeta want as her bride price and its his strength because he's a man. Ibuza men enjoy their bride price and these men only had right to inherit the girl's. Uteh, Ojebeta's went did not want to lose her again and she wanted to live with Ojebeta. Ojebeta and Jacob married. Clifford came to get money from Jacob because his mother paid Ojebeta's brother and according to tradition, Jacob had to pay the bride price. Clifford went to finalise everything with Jacob and her two brothers. Clifford was surprised to see the changes in Ojebeta but wanted to end his business to clear his life once and for all. Ojebeta wanted to ask a number of questions but Jacob sent back her to kitchen room by sharp gaze. Clifford had just got his money. Jacob gave eight pounds to become a new owner. Ojebeta was happy to have a new master. Ojebeta said that:

"The contract is completed, after all these years. I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own Ibuza; my mind is now" (178)

"Thank you, my new owner. New owner now I am free in your house. I could not wish for a better master." (179)

### **Conclusion:**

In the novel 'The Slave Girl' by Emecheta, insight into gender questions in obvious. The writer redefines the traditional ties between people who are at home as feminist. And while doing so, the woman has got home and outside energy and visibility. Women like Ma Mee and Ma Palagada turned assume weakness into strength. A woman under slavery is problematic. Women's experience and expectations are varied and complex. Finally, the main protagonist Ojebeta is now free in Jacob's house. But this is just fictional spot, and readers can easily see that Ojebeta is not yet "free". Although she is now a mature woman. She cannot change the masters. The slave-dominated form of traditional marriage is found in this novel. So, The Slave Girl novel is said to be a study of oppression of women by men.

### **References**

- [1] Anita Kern: "World Literature Today, Vol 153 No. 1. The three worlds of Luso phone Literature (Winter, 1979) published by Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma).
- [2] BarnaliTahbildar, "The Role of the Nigerian Woman in Emecheta's The Slave Girl, English 27, 1997.
- [3] ChinezeChukukera, Gloria. The Joys of Motherhood ChinezeChukukera (185), Gender voices and choices: Redefining women in contemporary African fiction: Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1995.
- [4] Erica Dillon 99. "A passage into Antithetical Adulthood: Emecheta's The Slave Girl", English 27, 1997.
- [5] Mezu, Rose Ure. "BuchiEmecheta" " The Bride Price " and " The Slave Girl". A Shizonalytic Perspective. Ariel. A review of International English Literature, 28.1(1991).