

Pains of the Women in the Chosen Novels of Buchi Emecheta**Gifty Davis D.V. (Reg. No. 19213284012036),**

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Abstract

Every born human being is subjected to trials and tribulations in their life. Pain in life is inevitable and it can destroy manhood physically, mentally and emotionally. Especially, women undergo lot of pain under controlled and subjugated environment. Black women are doubly marginalized as they are oppressed by the colonizers and also by their own men. These patriarchal societies which dominate women in all aspects pressurize and demean their lives. They are abused, harassed, criticized, dishonored and treated more like animals. These women are silenced and are forced to accept the ill fate imposed upon them. They are denied of choices. Some women who take control of their lives are marked as immoral or remain unnoticed in the society. Women who strive to live without the support of men face numerous struggles to exist in this world. Above all, living is not an easy task for women and girl children in a restricted domestic life and a socially constraint society.

Key words Sufferings, helpless, bride price, motherhood, endurance.

Pain is universal. Pain takes form when it is inflicted upon any living being. Pain becomes unbearable and a torture as the victim is helpless. Men and women of different ages undergo sufferings in various forms. Women especially under the patriarchal society undergo numerous hurdles and struggles with endurance and disappointments. They are put into the suppressing environment by their own parents and their women. Women are treated to be inferior to men, in their house, in their in-laws' house and everywhere. Women endure pain and become lifeless, however they live to fulfill the needs of the family and to carry out the duties and responsibilities that are imposed upon them. Dr. Junali Dekha and Shruthi Shukla in their article, "Female Representation in Web Series" states the significance of a woman as a responsible wife and a good mother rather than an independent being who fulfills her desires. In *Pushpavalli* series, the protagonist says, "Amma! My job is in the children's library. So, I will be working around children it will make me a better wife" (22). This indicates that the protagonist is convincing the family and the society that she is being a responsible mother and a good wife so as to portray herself as a perfect and a typical woman. Unlike a man who does not take charge of the household chores, she hides all her desires and sacrifices her ambitions for the betterment of her

family. Women are willfully forced to choose jobs that fulfill certain parameters as they are burdened with familial responsibilities.

Women as mothers also enrich their daughters with the knowledge of their duties and responsibilities as women. Girl children are tuned right from their childhood to become a responsible woman. They are cared and brought up as precious gems. Once they come under the patriarchal society, the so called society which controls women under the guise of protection, they are enslaved and treated badly. Emecheta, a Nigerian novelist and writer portrays the painful experiences of girl children and women of the Igbo community in her novels.

Emecheta faces inequality right from her childhood as she is denied of education unlike her younger brother. Due to her continuous persuasion, she is able to attend the All Girls Missionary School, and then to the Methodist Girl's School in Yaba, Lagos. Her marriage to Sylvester Onwardi interrupts her education and moves to London in 1962. By the age of twenty two, she had five children- Florence, Sylvester, Jake, Christy and Alice. Emecheta's initial life is an apt example of how women are considered as unequal human beings to share equal rights. However she manages to work as a librarian in the British Museum from 1965 to 1969. Emecheta's marriage was not as peaceful as she believed to be.

Emecheta could not prolong in any job as she is abandoned by her husband with her five children. She has depicted her agonized journey through Adah in *In the Ditch*. While men are given many choices women are denied options. Emecheta portrays her helpless condition as, "She had taken all her holidays, maternity leave, compassionate leave and every other sort of leave the Civil Service could think of allowing people like her. There was a limit to human sympathy, even that of the bosses" and finally Adah made a drastic decision and says, "I am resigning my job at the Museum!" (ID 37). She is left with no choices in her life. Life is miserable and violent with Onwardi, her husband that Emecheta writes to keep her sanity. Emecheta could not tolerate the injustice imposed upon women by the masculine power and the pain that women endure to sustain and survive each day. This article is an attempt to bring out the pain endured by black women in select novels of Emecheta.

Emecheta through her Adah, in *In the Ditch* indirectly voices her disapproval of woman being the sole responsible factor for taking care of the children. She is definitely not denying her love for the children however she argues that if this duty is shared by both the parents, then it would be easier for the woman to exercise and fulfill her dreams and desires. Emecheta describes the pathetic condition of a single parent through her character as, "She, an African woman with five children and no husband, no job, and no future, was just like most of her neighbours--- shiftless, rootless, with no rightful claim to anything" (ID 37). Emecheta also portrays the worthless husband of her life in her autobiography as, "But Sylvester refused to go to work! ... He insisted that he came to England to study, not to work for me to stay at home simply to wash nappies, knit jumpers, and indulge in my lazy dreams" (HAW 49). It is so painful for women when their husbands do not understand their need and neglect them in their daily chores. Women are left without any choice other than fulfilling the household duties and ultimately they forget the purpose of their existence.

As experienced and highlighted by Emecheta in her chosen novels, women are suppressed right from their childhood. Even the birth of a girl child is ignored and neglected by her own family and the society also plays a vital role in discarding the existence of a girl child. No child is expected to be born as a girl. However, she is celebrated only for the bride price that she would fetch her father or the men in her family in her later years. One of Emecheta's important characters Adah, from the novel, *Second Class Citizen* is an apt example for despise a girl child receives in her birth. Emecheta describes the scene as, "So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth" (SCC 7). As she is an unwelcomed child in her family, nobody bothers about her existence. Whenever a girl child is born, the gathered relatives would talk of the ill-luck she will bring to the family. However, the mother of the male child has a different role to play.

A mother who bears a boy child is praised and worshipped in the community. The whole family celebrates the birth of a boy child. Sharma, an Indian critic presents the importance of a male child as, "A son carries on the name of the family from generation to generation" (9). It is a general belief of the Igbo people that if they have a child, it should be mainly a male one to enjoy a social status. Sharma's views bear witness to it as a son can maintain the name of the family for generations together. This issue is clearly evident in *The Joys of Motherhood* where two women bear children at the same time. Adaku gives birth to a male child while Nnu a female. The honor and respect which she earns is far from the shame and disappointment which Nnu had experienced. Emecheta has vividly portrayed how attaining motherhood is considered to be the sole purpose of a married woman.

Every girl child is brought up with some expectations. Either be it some duties and responsibilities or the wealth they incur from their marriage life, at every point of their life every girl child has to pay an opulent price for her survival in this world. Nnu of *The Joys of Motherhood* is harassed when she fails to conceive a child, immediately after her marriage with Amatokwu. She is ignored, dishonored, ill-treated and abused for her delayed pregnancy. The fault fell only upon her and nobody questioned Amatokwu. Instead, steps are taken too early to find a new bride for Amatokwu. The cry of Nnu to her goddess is portrayed as, "Please pity me. I feel that my husband's people are already looking for a new wife for him. They cannot wait for me forever.... Please help me" (JM 33). He also fails to console and comfort Nnu. Amatokwu behaves as a typical patriarchal man and ill-treats his wife.

Polygamy is another major issue that dictates the life of many women. Often men in the Igbo community marry early and immediately after the birth of their first child, they find another woman for them. He also brings her into the same hut where he lives with his first wife and starts living. This creates an insecure feeling in the mind of his first wife and the other trouble there upon. To make matters worse, it is the duty of the first wife to arrange everything for her husband and the other woman to begin their new life. Emecheta describes Nnu's anxiety as, "She was used to being the sole woman of this house, used to having Nnaife all to herself, planning with him what to do with the little money he earned, ... But now, this new menace..." (JM 118). She has to endure all the humiliations and abandonments to stay forever with her husband and

for the betterment of their children for which her religion has provided her good moral support. As Emecheta says, “Her new Christian religion taught her to bear her cross with fortitude... Meanwhile they had to keep body and soul together somehow” (JM 89). The culture and tradition of the Igbo community has demeaned woman through patriarchal dominance and uneven practices. As the culture allows men to own any number of women as he pleases while a woman is not appreciated to do it and she goes unnoticed.

Women in the chosen novels of Emecheta are never portrayed as having numerous relationships. This indicates that polygamy is appreciated only for men and women are forced to stay loyal to her husband. Women have to endure this for her long lasting relationship with her husband. This fate of women which is tangled with men is seen as a curse on women and Emecheta points out the unyielding prayer of Nnu as, ““God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage? ...”” (JM 186). Women are portrayed as helpless without men in their lives.

As women are expected to rear so many children, one after the other they suffer inconvenience and become physically weak. When too many children are born in short interval of time, they lack proper food and nutrition. These families become financially unstable and in education due to low income and heavy expenses. While men work outside home, women in particular are expected to shoulder all other responsibilities of the family. So the blame easily falls upon the mother if she fails to feed good food for her children and gives no education. Most of the women do not complain against breeding so many children instead they adore their children as they are symbol of love.

Most mothers in spite of taking good effort fail to render proper nourishment to their children. Many children die of malnutrition and poverty. They could not blame their husbands because they already make day time useful in farms and other silly jobs. However, there are men who do not provide for the family and demean their wives and children. Nnaife of *The Joys of Motherhood* after losing his job at the white man’s house sits lazily in the house and blames everybody for his ill- luck. He did not want his wife Nnu to go out and bring for him but he did not want to work. Many men like Nnaife in the Igbo community, do not allow their wives to provide for them and they also do not go out. In such cases, women are pushed into difficult circumstances where they cannot disobey their husband and could not see their children die of poverty. Emecheta portrays the unwilling heart of Nnaife as, ““Do you want to lose him as you lost Ngozi, while you’re looking for money? Who is going to take care of him when you go out to sell your stuff?”” (JM 86). Nnaife is jobless and he does not want Nnu to work and earn for the family. Nnaife feels inferior to share the responsibilities of house hold chores.

Women as machines, as properties and as human beings at last are never respected as a living thing that God has created to be partners of men in this world. They are subdued, made workers, as child laborers, as child producing machines and so on. Even though women strive to make life better for the whole family and for the society, their life is at loose ends. If she produces children, she is cursed for not bearing male children. If a woman bears only one child, she is marked as an infertile woman. If a girl exists

without her parents she is taken as a burden and is sold as slave. The patriarchal society does not appreciate the existence of a free woman. The society which should be the pillars of safety for women stands as an obstacle in all walks of life. However, women are not as weak as men portrays. They evolve as powerful weapons that gun a missile of life for others.

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