

SKIRMISH OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES IN THE NOVEL OF BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE BRIDE PRICE*

J.Jency Prathesha

Reg No: 18113284012008

Research Scholar, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University
Abishekpatti, Tirunelveli- 627012, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr.R.Margaret Joy Priscilla

Head of the department of English

Women's Christian College, Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University
Abishekpatti, Tirunelveli- 627012, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

This paper explores the struggle of the women in economic and the oppression of women was revealed through the novel of Buchi Emecheta *The Bride Price*. The economic state was encouraged by the Igbo women in various situations. Emecheta symbolize the financial status through the character Ma Blackie in the novel *The Bride Price*. In Ibuza she started to trade palm kernels. Her profit was used for her children education. The bravery of the women was shown through the character Akunna. Akunna developed her knowledge by receiving western education in Ibuza. In childhood the girls were taught if the bride price was not paid that woman will die at the first delivery. These are the superstitious beliefs of the people in Ibuza. As the result of the bravery she delivered a baby girl, Joy. Finally, the beliefs of Ibuza culture were fulfilled by the death of Akunna.

A culture in change forced the women in dilemma and torn among their unwavering respect for Nigerian culture however engaging to accept the western inspirations that may possibly certify their path to liberation. Several feminist principles have progressed in different nations centered on the fights and the realities of women of that specific country. Emecheta's contradiction stems from her awareness of the pre-colonial position of Igbo women. Meanwhile in pre-colonial periods Igbo women have declared their control in politico financial provinces through their bodies. In African Literature there are many famous writers. Among them Buchi Emecheta is popular for the novels. The novels are *The Bride Price*, *Joys of Motherhood*, *The Slave Girl*, *Second Class Citizen*, *The Rape of Shavi* etc. This Paper deals with the novel *The Bride Price*. This novel makes a wide analysis of women's struggles, male domination and about the courage that leads them to destroy the traditional duties. The financial individuality enjoyed by Igbo women are also exposed in Buchi Emecheta's character of Ma Blackie in the novel *The Bride Price*. Ma Blackie by the benefit of her visit in Lagos obtains positive look of self-possession of an urban woman and is represented by the narrative to be different from rural women. In most of Emecheta's novel rural women are teased as speechless and rough. After the death of her husband Ma Blackie was inherited by Okonkwo the senior brother of her husband. She extremely involved in the financial needs of Okonkwo household after Ma Blackie's

arrival to her native village. She returned to her village with the small savings of her husband's contribution account money. She offered into the trade of palm kernels. "The little capital Ma had managed to save from her husband's gratuity she invested in palm kernels." (73) Her profit was used for the education of her children apart from the household needs. In spite of her cultured individuality, financial independence and bodily power were based on her figure. She was well known to everybody as a giant woman, straight and tall which eradicates the power of the tradition. Though there is a male-controlled socialization even females admit value systems and native directions which are observed to symbolize African female identity. She fails to progress the emotional connection with her lovable daughter Akunna and Chike. She feels pain in two points at first she tries to raise her bond with her affectionate daughter Akunna and the next to rise against the purpose of the approved romance between Akunna and Chike. The protagonist of the novel Akunna came to Ibuza her native place after her father's death. Her dilemma shifted their place from Lagos to Ibuza. Buchi uses this as a device to highlight the simple difference between contemporary beliefs and traditional duties. Akunna and Nna-nndo soon grew accustomed to things at Ibuza, learning at school the European ways to living and coming home to be faced with the countless and unchanging traditions of their own people. Yet they were like helpless fishes caught in a net; they could not as it

were go back to the sea, for they were trapped fast and yet they were still alive. (102)

Akunna's had an absence of emotional closeness with her stepfather and her mother till the entry of Chike came into Aku's life. Chike was the son of an Oshu, the descendant of slaves. Chike's father Mr. Ofulue took advantage of public and its education system and helped to receive the western education. Education helped him to become rich in Ibuza as well as an educated man and his children also treated high in the society. His elder son was a gynecologist and other one Chike was a school teacher. Sougou writes,

Despite its dogged resilience, tradition seems to be losing out to modernity, which is depicted here in the economic status and confidence of Mr.Ofulue, who is sharply contrasted with Okonkwo. Ofulue epitomizes, perhaps, the ideal modern African man. Their social freedom, personalize victory over traditional institution. (sougou, 71)

Chike was an educated man and he got the western education. He joined St.Thomas Teacher training college in Ibuza and at present he is a primary school teacher and also guides Akunna. She had well experience with modernity because she was brought up in Lagos. Hence she was not interested in the Ibuza marriage customs. Being a modern woman Akunna fell in love with Chike. Her stepbrothers and step sisters are against towards Aku's friendship with the slave Chike. Akunna's cousin Ougua guides Akunna her step father Okonkwo would kill her if he came to identify the friendship with Chike. Her stepbrothers planned to kill her. Akunna's love was against Ibuza customs. The general dissatisfaction was experienced by Akunna. Over the importance Emecheta plans to disclose the difficulties challenged by a single person to breakdown the oppressive duties.

After the arrival of Akunna to Ibuza the custom interrupts her life in variable ways. According to Ibuza culture the start of mensuration represents a teenager's change from girlhood to womanhood. The family of Akunna gets ready her to marry to another family. Akunna fears a lot to inform her family about her first menstrual cycle. If they came to know that Akunna attained her womanhood they immediately prepare her to marry to someone chosen by her family. Womanhood for her signify trap into the involuntary marriage and at last when after some months reveals her menstrual cyclic period, her mother lists the rules and the regulations carry out by the women throughout the cyclic time. Emecheta says these restrictions are used as a tool to oppress the women.

Akunna's age group girls are also trained if the bride price was not paid during the marriage that will cause the women to die during her first childbirth. Otherwise the marriage becomes a failure life or the child of their

marriage will die that makes their life into the world of sorrow. Akunna got the western education in Lagos before her father's death. The modernized education was given in Ibuza and this education gives her the courage and brave to erase all the customs. Education leads her to destroy all the restrictions of the culture and elopes with Chike. Before the elopement with Chike, she is kidnapped by Okoboshi. Aku was forced into marriage and she tells a lie to escape from the rape, she told that she had slept with chike. Akunna's performance can be understood as a struggle of an individual, influenced by the beliefs of western, against the clear restrictions believed by Igbo women. If Akunna was born and brought up by her parents in Ibuza, she will be like her cousin Ougua unconscious about the western system and the customs. She did not have any courage to deny the rules of Ibuza culture of their community.

After the elopement with Chike, she plans to live a happy married life. Chike searches and finds a job and Akunna too got the job as a teacher. Akunna's pregnancy was a happy news to their family. Then the different tricks of Igboland are wide-open in front of Akunna's family. Akunna finds her in the midst of the trap of biologically, psychologically, traditionally and also by the superstitious beliefs. The traditional entrapment is in various types. At the elopement with a slave is not unforgettable. Okonkwo will not forgive her. On the other side she was hold by the superstitious beliefs of the customs. If the bride price was not paid the woman will die at her first delivery. But the beliefs are unfulfilled in the life of Akunna:

But if she was forced to live with these people for long, she would soon die, for that was the intention behind all the taboos and customs. Anyone who contravened them was better dead. If you tried to hang on to life, you would gradually be helped towards death by psychological pressures. And when you were dead, people would ask- Did we not say so? Nobody goes against the laws of the land and survives. (175)

She dies while giving birth to a baby girl Joy. Her death marks the conclusion of her struggle with the recognized regulations of the land. Emecheta signifies that the single individuals particularly women however they retain revolutionary ideas or activist morals cannot eliminate single handed the local practices.

References

1. Emecheta, Buchi. *The Slave Girl*. New York: George Brazillier, 2008. Print.
2. Sougou, Omar. *Writing Across Cultures: Gender Politics and Difference in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta*. Amsterdam: Rodophi, 2002. Print.