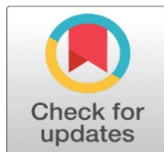


WOMEN AS A SUSTAINER IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE BRIDE PRICE

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ABSTRACT

Black women in general are oppressed and marginalized by their cultural customs and norms that is patriarchy centred. The archetype of woman is framed to accept the woes silently without resistance. This paper analyses the agony of woman as sustainers in various spheres. Eventhough, women get empowered in the society still it is not the same in every community. Igbo women remain as a prey to their culture. Buchi Emecheta, a black womanist writer exposes the woes and heinousness challenged by black women and also it exemplifies the ways to overcome burden and to empower women in their life.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Burden Sustainers, Victim, Double Marginalization, Heinousness and Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

The archetype of woman is structured to accept any kind of marginalization and atrocities. An invisible social construct pushes the woman into a state of otherness due to inequalities which is androcentric. The predicament of black women is worse as they are coerced to sustain burden heavier than the other woman. Simon de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* states that "Women are defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with the reference to woman, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. She also observes that he is the subject and he is the absolute she is the other" (334). This emphasizes male power as superior one. Emecheta paints women as burden sustainers by victimizing their pain and agony. Women from Igbo Culture suffers from various cultural ideology namely qualifying the virginity test, parturition of many children especially male heirs and polygamy. Moreover, they are also expected to maintain harmonious relation with other wives and accept polygamous marriage. So, in this aspect women remain as a sustainer of burden in their life.

The agony of the black Igbo woman is intimated with the virginity test. Women undergo trauma and fear while proving her chastity. If a woman passed in the most awaited test people around them celebrate the occasion and the groom's family thanked the bride's family by appreciating her. And it is mainly a jubilation to bride and groom. But incase if she

fails in the test. It was a greater ill and disgrace to the bride's family. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Nnu Ego, daughter of a chief Agbadi undergoes the virginity test and qualifies in it so they celebrate the occasion their reaction is expressed as, Agbadi's heart was full to bursting point when, the second day, the people from Amatokwu's compound came to thank him for giving them his precious daughter Nnu Ego. They did so with six full kegs of palm wine. Agbadi smiled contentedly and invited everybody in his own compound to drink. My daughter has been found an unspoiled virgin. Her husband's people are here to thank us. (JM 29)

This celebration proves the chastity of the women and furthermore, it tends to believe superstitiously that woman is not barren woman. But Nnu Ego's first marriage disapproved her superstitious belief that virgin will be conceived as she was unable to bear a child. Moreover, in the fiction *The Bride Price* Akunna fails to accept the virginity test by stating a lie and brings disgrace to her family. As the virginity test remains as a burden to woman in Igbo clan as it arouses tension and trauma in the mind of a woman.

The next step of qualifying virginity test is followed by the trial of fertility, as the cultural ideology expects to bear children, preferably the male heir. This was also laid as a burden on women. In Igbo culture, this was regarded as a primary one in marital life if the women fail to conceive it leads into a state of mental agony. Emecheta in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* showcases the mental trauma confronted by a women character Nnu Ego. Her anxiety and worries increase when she failed to conceive a baby. As the theorist Judith Herman visualizes the trauma theory by advocating that trauma can shatter the sense of self and social support in society. Nnu Ego faces lot of humiliations from her husband Amatokwu, who ignores her feelings and married another woman. The words of humiliation are reflected as, "If you can't produce sons at least you can harvest yams" (JM 33). These words caught her into a state of post-traumatic stress disorder in women which is constated as an outcome of verbal and domestic assault in a family. Finally, she was coerced to leave his house with a disgrace and shame and she was sent to her father's house.

The process of pregnancy and child bearing intertwined with joy and fear. Igbo women have an anxiety to bear a male heir inorder to prove her not as a barren woman. In Igbo culture their culture women who parturiated girl child equalizes with barren women. Emecheta in *The Bride Price* shows the coerced behavior of Ezekiel Odia on his wife Ma Blackie though she parturiated both boy and girl her husband forces her to have more male heir. By stating that he has paid heavy bride price and marries her in church yet, she gives only one male heir. It is reflected as, "I paid double the normal bride price for you he told her. And we were married in church. But what have you given me – just one son" (BP 2).

Another aspect of burden is the practice of polygamy. Through the practice of polygamy men enjoy all the privileges of marrying many women. Carol Dyhouse in her work *Feminism and the Family in England* states about polygamy as, "Woman cannot be said to be by her physical nature polyandrous as man is polygynous" (178). This practice worsens the inferiority state of women into more pathetic condition. Buchi Emecheta also exposes the evil practice of polygamy in her fiction *The Joys of Motherhood* Adaku, inherited wife of Nnaife when her husband dies, Nnu Ego gets envious by looking her and she was pushed into a state of jealousy and insecurity. Nnu Ego was unable to tolerate it when her husband spends his time with a new wife the agony is reflected as,

Adaku turned out to be one of those shameless modern women whom Nnu Ego did not like. Did she think Nnaife was her lover and not her husband, to show her enjoyment so? She tried to block her ears, yet could still hear Adaku's exaggerated carrying on. Nnu Ego tossed in agony and anger all night going through her imagination what was taking place. (JM 124)

Nnu Ego, remains as a victim of polygamy. Bitterest experience faced by NnuEgo, who suffers in a pathetic condition. Men gloat in the practice of polygamy as this state kills the joy and pleasure of women and keeps them in distress.

Thus, women remain as the sustainers of burden in multiple aspects. The cultural aspects undoubtedly push the women as sustainers in androcentric society. The cultural ideology which has domination by patriarchy oppress women in various constrains. Many of the women they become submissive and accepts the burdens on their shoulders without rebelling against it. It be outlawed when a woman realizes their capability and undergo self-actualization they can empower in the society. The process of self-actualization can be emphasized by asserting education to the women in the society.

2. ABBREVIATIONS

The Joys of Motherhood - JM

The Bride Price- BP

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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