

The Cry Of Emecheta's Ojebeta

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Literature has reflected various lives and paved way for the betterment of numerous dying creatures. Writers of ages, different culture, class, religion and country reciprocate the day to day happenings and events to record in the history. The lives of the dark skinned people also find a place in the literature. The blacks are referred as the dark skinned people as the author finds it derogatory to address them based on the tone of their skin. The writers who wrote about the dark skinned people and the writers who emerged from that race have exemplified their life incidents in the record to reveal to the world about their struggles and sufferings.

The dark skinned writers have mainly focused on the oppressions and subjugations of their people as they are never given an opportunity to celebrate their existence in this world. Once they are under the colonizers who suppressed and oppressed them as blacks, as slaves and considered them as mere humans. They are enslaved in their own countries and also sold to other regions to acquire their maximum labour. After the long struggle and with the emergence of great leaders thereby, the dark skinned people gained independence.

The freedom which the dark skinned people have acquired does not exist long as they are again chained by their own people. Especially, women are treated with least care and often subjugated in the domestic and social level. The dark skinned women are doubly marginalized as they are once the victims of the colonizers and forever the victims of their patriarchal society. Not only as women but as girl children right from their birth, women are oppressed and are forced under the masculine power. The demeaning attitude of men towards women makes women feel inferior and the meanest sex.

Buchi Emecheta a Nigerian novelist 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 the equal rights. She has to undergo various forms of struggle and oppression to make a better life for her and her children. However she manages to work as a librarian in the British Museum from 1965 to 1969. Emecheta carries the burden of her family as she is denied of any assistance from her husband.

Emecheta in her *The Slave Girl* has portrayed the life of a young girl who is thrown into slavery by her own brother and how she paves the way towards her emancipation. The novelist has made the protagonist into a successful woman who strives hard and uplifts her life as a slave and redeems her from slave hood. Though she is able to overcome the struggles and make her life a better one, the path she travelled is full of hardships and miseries. The novel shows how a girl's life is determined and controlled by her brother who takes the advantage of selling her and how she emerges as a woman who rejects the offer of her slave master and prefers to be independent in her own land.

The life of Ojebeta, is tormented by the selfish act of her lazy brother Okolie. Okolie is a foolish boy who does not want to earn and work in the farm, yet enjoys all the privileges of the family. Okolie and Ojebeta are left alone as their parents are dead. Okolie is worried about his future with a bare hand and a little sister. However, being an immature boy he feels that his upcoming age group dance is much more important than Ojebeta, the younger sister who is spoiled by the pampering of their parents. He chooses to sell his sister and utilize the money to make him up. The lives of the girl children are often destined and determined by their fathers or brothers. Mineke says, "In the Igbo society, a woman is always owned by a man. First, she belongs to her father until she is of an age when she can be [married]. Pre- arranged marriages are normal. How the daughter feels toward her husband is of little importance. After acquiring her, she is only valuable in terms of producing offspring, preferably males" (2008). This callous attitude towards women has made them believe that they are toys in the hands of men.

Emecheta pens down her life experiences and happenings in her novels. The story of Ojebeta has happened in the life of her mother who is sold as a slave and sustains her life as a slave girl under the dominating patriarchal power.

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Ojebeta is sold and left alone in a strange land. The journey which she had made has made her so fragile and powerless that she fails to enquire about her brother's intentions. She is drained to nothingness that as soon as she is offered food, she left her clutches on her brother and grasped it to quench her hunger. Women are originally burdened with so many responsibilities and duties that the moment they secure knowledge about the injustices that is inflicted upon them, they become wimp to rise against them.

Ojebeta realizes that she has not come for a visit with her brother but for her permanent stay alone. As a girl of seven Ojebeta is only a child. Losing her parents at a very early age was already too much for her and now being sold by her brother she could not call upon to her eldest brother as he has no concern towards their family. It is unacceptable that a child is abandoned at the age of seven, especially a girl child. She cannot trust anyone and is thrown out of her comfort zone. Emecheta has portrayed the yearning of this little girl as, "Ojebeta was a child brought up with so much love and so much trust that it never occurred to her to distrust a smiling face" (SG 53). Ojebeta's father Umeadi and her mother has taken extra precautions in bringing this girl alive to the world. Fishburn describes it as, "Umeadi and her husband take extra precautions with this one, adoring her with elaborate charms to prevent her from returning to the land of the dead" (93). Now Ojebeta feels lonely without her parents.

Ojebeta feels like death has stricken her in a foreign land without her parents or her brothers to lean on or rest her burdens upon them. Innocence is often rewarded with advantages and distrust. Being unaware of the devious plans of her brother Okolie and Ma Palagada, Ojebeta waits for her brother to take her back home. Emecheta portrays the heart breaking moment of Ojebeta as, "Almost fainting with that kind of disappointment and sense of unfairness which is sometimes inexplicable, Ojebeta the only living daughter of Umeadi cried out once more in despair, this time to her dead mother: 'Save me, Mother, for now I am lost.'" (SG 59). Like Ojebeta, many innocent women and girl children are trapped under the guise of care and trust. Post-colonial Nigeria has encouraged slave trade and the sales of small girls has become a common practice. The cold-hearted slave traders executed their trade in the back drop of capitalistic economic condition.

Ojebeta's constant search for her brother shows her fear and anxiety as she is now the only left over in her family. As Emecheta describes her anxiety, "'I am going to look for my brother'... 'Will my 'little father' be here soon?' ... 'If I can't find him, my big brother', she said to herself as she ran, 'I shall go back to Ibuza to the hut of my big mother and wait for him'" (Girl 56, 57). Ojebeta could not imagine that she has to line as a slave for the rest of her life; as a domestic slave who would do all the house hold chores and endure all forms of oppression.

Life of Ojebeta is full of disappointments and unfairness. It is sometimes explicable that she cried out in despair. The lives of other slave girls who has experienced similar torments in their lives rings an alarming bell to Ojebeta that her life is at stake. Many girl children are sold as slaves so as to lessen their economic burden. One of Ojebeta's co-slaves, Chiago is also a domestic slave, the senior most who is also deceived and sold as a slave by her family. Chiago is forced to accept her ill fate as she is comforted that at least her family did not want to share for her stomach too. Some of the girl children accept their condition and exist as slaves. While some girls rebel as they hope that they could relieve some day only if they protest. Emecheta pictures the plight of a runaway slave as, "... a slave who made an unsuccessful attempt to runaway was better off dead. Such a slave would be so tortured that he or she would be useless as a person, or else might be used for burial" (SG 61). Ojebeta is shocked to hear about the unlucky slave who will be buried with the mistress. These slaves are physically and verbally abused till they meet their ends. Ma Palagada justifies the act of slavery. While Ojebeta is crying for her life, Emecheta on the other hand reasons the act of selling and buying slaves. It is with them that the slave traders are able to become richer. On the other hand, it means that the slave traders are dependent on these slave children. Lavine quotes Hegel as, "... the slave lives by the work he performs and he becomes independent through this work, whereas the master remains dependent on the slave's labour" (222). Meanwhile it is because of these slave traders, these girls from poor families could fill their stomach and learn good trade. The novelist has portrayed the sad truth of the slaves as, "'Where would we be without slave labour, and where would some of these unwanted children be without us?' It might be evil, but it was a necessary evil" (SG 64).

At the master's home, as she grows up, she is horrified to face the oppressive measures meted out to the slaves. She is secluded, threatened and physically assaulted by Pa Palagada along with other slaves. There are moments in which she has to cry for help from her dead parents. She has been sexually assaulted by the master's son, Clifford whom she does not want to marry. She is verbally abused by her mistress' daughter, Victoria who wants to take Ojebeta to her foreign land to take care of her children. Luckily she gathers courage to deny her choice and takes up the courage to inform her master that she wants to be freed as her mistress is no more. Emecheta describes her rejection as, "'I am not going to Bonny with you,' she shouted defiantly. 'I am going to my people. I'm going home!'" (SG 144). Ojebeta bearing all the oppressions and subjugations has finally empowered herself and emerges as a freed slave. She does not wish to marry her master's son and stay as a slave forever rather she choose to stay with Jacob once her brother pays for her. Quoting Sartre, Lavine presents the views on freedom as, "I am indeed free, says Sartre, but my freedom is a dreadful freedom. I alone choose and am responsible for everything I am, I do or think, but I did not choose to be free. As conscious being, I am condemned to be free" (360). Ojebeta is relieved and has moved to her native to enjoy the mushroom of freedom.

Works Cited

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<http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/wom4oi.html/November2008>.
- [7]. Emecheta portrays the hatred of the people around on seeing a new born girl child, through her character Adah, in *Second Class Citizen*, a girl child's birth is not celebrated, rather ignored. "She was a girl who had arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. She was so insignificant" (SCC 7).