

Patriarchal Subjugation And Female Liberation In Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*

Dr. R. Shiloh Jeya Jeevan^{1*}

^{1*}Assistant Professor, Department of English, The American College, Madurai – 7, shilohjeyajeevan@gmail.com

Citation: Dr. R. Shiloh Jeya Jeevan, et al, (2024) Patriarchal Subjugation And Female Liberation In Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 4971-4973

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.3733

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is the supremacy of men over women and children beginning from the basic unit of a family and has its roots and branches over the public sphere. Female subjugation refers to any attempts made to keep women in an inferior position through control. Women are controlled, possessed and even commodified in a way that devalues them. They face battering, sexual harassment and violence everyday within the four walls. This has not utterly defeated women but they too have started reacting to this kind of oppression and has inspired them to take daring steps towards liberty and various other new avenues. Liberation is the act of freeing oneself from any forms of oppression and living in freedom. This paper attempts to do a study on patriarchal subjugation within a family. The study contributes to the liberation of women through resistance, education and assertiveness seeking a new liberated self in the selected novel of Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*.

Patriarchy is a social system that upholds the idea that men are superior to women. It is a term that is used to describe a system of social relationships, values, norms and behaviour patterns that are designed to encourage a privileged position for men. American Socialist Allan Johnson says, "a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male centred"(Johnson 5). Patriarchy has an exhaustive history. It has permeated through centuries and even ancient texts reflect it. Patriarchal origins can be traced by revisiting the tracks of human evolution when human existence was dependent on hunting, which was a male dominated activity. It is believed that men are physically strong, capable of decision making and bold enough to lead whereas women are weak, meek and are only entitled to bring up their progeny and to feed the whims and fancies of the male. This has slowly led to the process of enslavement of women.

An inevitable consequence of patriarchy in families is the oppression of women in several forms. Men controlling women is culturally defined as a core aspect of patriarchal manhood. Women are indoctrinated from childhood to accept and normalise their subordinate roles. They face violence, abuse and unequal treatment at home, work and society. Domestic violence is the establishment of coercive control and fear in a relationship through various forms such as physical assault, psychological abuse or even sexual harassment in families. Deep rooted cultural values and economic dependence force women to stay in abusive relationships and they become incapable of freeing themselves from such violence. Some women believe that they deserve beatings for their failed responsibilities. Women are often possessed and are controlled in all the ways that ultimately devalue them. The institution of marriage has become a licence for men. Men hold the key to succession in the family and thereby force women into subjugation. Marriage, which means partnership and commitment, has become patriarchal where women have to submit themselves entirely to men.

The impact of literature is undeniable and it acts as a form of expression for each individual. Women narratives present compelling female characters who give voice to the situations faced by women. It motivates young girls and women to act and behave when it comes to roles pertaining to them. Women's literature reflects the reality of lives as it offers a powerful mixture of personal accounts, big issues and Women's lived experiences. Issues of patriarchy are still present in African context since colonial times and it has solidified subjugation of women. Female subordination has taken intricate forms in countries such as Africa and is grounded in patriarchal tradition and culture. Awareness for women's liberation, changes in family practices has inspired many women

writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nadine Gordimer, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Helen Oyeyemi and Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi have illuminated the gender-specific ideologies and this has resulted in the initiation for a global change.

Florence Oneyebuchi Emecheta (21 July 1944 – 25 January 2017) was a Nigerian born novelist, based in the UK from 1962 has authored more than twenty books. Her famous works include *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Prize* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Her stories are stories of the world where women face universal problems of oppression and subjectivity, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical. Her works reflect Igbo society's attitudes about the necessity of motherhood as well as the double standards of both men and women. She doesn't consider herself as a feminist, saying, "I work toward the liberation of women but I'm not a feminist. I'm just a woman...I like to tell the world our part of the story while using women's voices" (Daniel, Eniola. *The Guardian Nigeria News*). Her works reflect the identity and the motives of feminism. In each of her writings she laments and protests against oppression, powerlessness and the voiceless aspects of life that manifest and dictate the lives of African women.

The novel *Second Class Citizen* is about Adah, a woman from the Ibo tribe, who moves to England to live with her Nigerian student husband. She soon discovers that life for a young Nigerian woman living in London in the 1960s is grim. Rejected by British society and thwarted by her husband, who expects her to be subservient to him, she is forced to face up to life as a second-class citizen. She is subjugated by her husband and is made a member of marital rape, sexual assault and violence. It is the search for her freedom from the patriarchal system as she takes a daring move towards freedom reassuring her identity. The novel displays how men have treated women and what African women go through and provides how they ought to be treated equally.

Women from African societies face discrimination and unequal power distribution and barriers because of the patriarchal systems. Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, a semi-autobiographical novel, centres on the life of Adah, a Nigerian lady who struggles to achieve independence while facing a number of obstacles. The story takes place in two settings: Nigeria, where Adah is born and raised and secondly, the United Kingdom where she migrates seeking a better life. In the story, her dreams of education and empowerment clash with the traditional expectations that are placed upon her as a wife and mother. Patriarchal conventions limit her ambition of education. Her dreams start to nudge her but her parents would not send her to school. Higher education was reserved only for the male society and women in her society had to stop only with schooling. As Adah's mother passes away, she has to deal with cultural expectations that prioritise her marriage and motherly responsibilities ahead of her personal ambitions. Nigeria is rooted in family relations and traditions. Therefore the womenfolk are expected to prioritise marriage and motherhood rather than becoming economically independent.

Francis, the protagonist in the novel *Second Class Citizen* is the representation of a character entrenched in patriarchal values. He assumes a strong position in their marriage and his disregard for Adah's ambitions highlights how he reinforces women to be a submissive character in the patriarchal system. The concept of decision making is completely denied to Adah as her husband takes full charge of the decisions. Throughout the novel, Francis shows his disinterest in Adah's goals. He questions Adah's purpose of attending school. Francis engages in infidelity and hurts Adah's feelings. He proves his power dynamics within their relationship. Francis engages in an extra marital affair and says that it is a small mistake. This highlights the double standards of the patriarchal set up and the acceptance of male indiscretions while they condemn the same thing in a woman's life. Francis constantly reminds Adah of her position as a traditional wife and mother and urges her to take her subservient role. He often tells her that her place is in the kitchen and her duty is to take care of him and the children. The character of Francis reflects a patriarchal mindset that limits Adah and her growth. His actions instil the idea that a woman should conform to the desires and expectations of their husbands. He holds the position of power and control while Adah is forced to be passive and submissive. Furthermore, Francis' dismissal of Adah's dreams shows the patriarchal devaluation of a woman's goal.

In Francis's terms, Adah is given a subordinate role. He often reminds that her primary duty is to support and serve him. Additionally, Adah experiences emotional manipulation so that Francis could preserve his dominance and power. Francis's behaviour poses restrictions upon Adah that affect her identity and personal growth. Adah's struggle under this patriarchal system is the story of many women in the society till now. Societal pressures also take a toll on her choices. Her decision to marry Francis, and his abusive behaviour of lack of support reveals the pressure to fulfil the role of a married woman. The novel also depicts the economic implications of patriarchy where Adah is financially dependent on Francis who restricts her ability to pursue her ambitions. Patriarchy limits a woman's financial agency. Patriarchy emphasises that women should adhere to the conceptions of femininity and beauty. Adah's journey is marked by living in a patriarchal society, enduring emotional abuse and internalising societal expectations.

In the present scenario, it has become the need of the hour for a woman like Adah to redefine herself and revolutionise the concept of womanhood itself. Adah begins aspiring for liberation from such a patriarchal setup. From the period of prolonged limitation, Adah moves towards the phase of protest against male standards and values. It is the period of resistance. The early life of Adah begins with a resistance. When girls are kept back from schools, Adah resists the ideology and goes to school. Even after her marriage, when Francis is unwilling to take care of the children, pregnant Adah leaves the house for work leaving everything half done in her house. She does not speak about it to her husband. She smiled inwardly. She gives a taste of Francis's own behaviour and he had to try his experience on household chores and babysitting. When Francis urges on having more children despite the deplorable condition of the family, Adah takes up her courage to take birth control pills for her protest and never informs her husband. Despite Francis forcing Adah to go to a work that is underestimated best suitable for housewives, Adah goes to a decent job as a librarian and writer and earns more money than that of Francis. Adah decides to leave their abusive relationship and is prepared to lead a new life without the intervention of such men. She has transformed her identity from being a frail person to an independent individual. The narrator talks about a recurrent voice that tells her to walk out from her husband. Her theme of life is resistance and defiance. Adah feels the urge to write her own story as well. She had written her work *The Bride Price*. When Adah was away, Francis burned her work on the stove. He says that he did not want to put those papers in the dustbin as Adah would pick them back. Thus, he utterly destroys her brainchild. Through the help of the police, Adah ends her relationship with Francis and walks away into freedom along with her children. Adah has embraced her freedom and fought for it. This fight has made her a liberated woman freed from the clutches of patriarchy. She goes on to live independently making her own choices and decisions. The life of the female protagonist reflects that it is the inherent right of women to freedom and expression and to decide their own destiny and choice of living. She left a note that a woman should stand up for herself and should not be ashamed of herself to tell the truth nor should she fear any judgmental attitude of the society.

Educated women expect a change in their opinion of life towards family and society. The idea of women's empowerment is the ultimate goal of most of the policies concerning women. Empowerment is not only the action of providing educational, social and economic opportunities but discovering the inner strength of women. Education becomes a powerful tool to change the position of women in society. It provides a platform to challenge and change the traditional gender roles as it can help to overcome bias and promote equal opportunities for boys and girls. Women education fosters skills such as leadership, confidence and abilities that enable women to actively participate in decision-making so that they could advocate their rights and freedom. When women hold positions of power and influence of their own lives, it helps them bring diverse perspectives, thus, promoting equality. Educated women become the catalysts of change, and they challenge discrimination within their families and society and inspire the future generations. Thus, through education and empowerment, Adah, the female protagonist, has asserted her liberated self and embraces her salvation. Buchi Emecheta makes use of Adah to describe the story of women who face problems of oppression and subjectivity. Adah searches for her freedom and discovers her identity as a black woman. This novel celebrates the author's pushback and resistance as it is an inspiration for many.

Reference

1. Daniel, Eniola. "I Work Toward the Liberation of Women, but I'm Not Feminist, Says Buchi Emecheta." *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News*, 29 Jan. 2017, guardian.ng/art/i-work-toward-the-liberation-of-women-but-im-not-feminist-says-buchi-emecheta.
2. Johnson, Allan. *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*. 3rd ed., Temple UP, Philadelphia, 2014.
3. Thangavel, Sudharsan. *The Role of Education in Empowering Women and Promoting Gender Equality*. 22 June 2023,
4. www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-education-empowering-women-promoting-gender-sudharsan-thangavel.