Chapter: 4
Critical Analysis of Select Novels of Buchi Emecheta

4.1: Introduction:

This chapter aims to study Second-Class Citizen (1974), The Bride Price (1976), The Slave Girl (1977), The Joys of Motherhood (1979) and Double Yoke (1982) by Buchi Emecheta. In the light of these five novels the researcher will study the position of black women. The study will help to see that how Emecheta is looking back at the centre from the marginal position. The present chapter brings in light that how being a woman Emecheta challenges the power of supposed centres and the privileges taken by the oppressors over the oppressed and the dominant over the dominated. Emecheta has used the double voiced discourse to challenge the colonial imperialism as well as patriarchal imperialism. The researcher has put all the characters of her novels in subaltern category to hear the voices of the subaltern when they speak. The researcher has broken the chronological order of novels and has put them under different titles to show the growth and development of characters as Emecheta tries to define ‘woman’ through her fictions.

4.2: General Elements of Approach:

Before getting on works of Buchi Emecheta it is necessary to understand African culture which shaped her as a woman, as an individual and as a writer. Emecheta is a Nigerian born cross-cultural figure. Emecheta is self-conscious about her African culture. She has situated woman in African context and her fictions give expression to the aspirations and problems of black women. Emecheta challenges the hegemony of male authors and the representation of black women in African literature. Being a female novelist she challenges the societal practices which are hostile to women. The notion of ‘alien’ has been constructed in her discourse. Though Buchi Emecheta’s culture is in many ways common to other cultures, but what catches our attention is how and in what way its values and traditions differ from other cultures. Emecheta has framed Africa in her fiction. She has invoked a larger sense of Africa by asking question of what Africa meant to her. Reading of Emecheta does not blur the distinctions among the African
culture but it insists upon Emecheta’s African as well as Western experiences. Emecheta’s fictions have been deeply informed by her African heritage.

Emecheta has theorized women in her works. Her women characters can be best viewed and understood from subaltern perspective. Buchi Emecheta’s novels are the tales of girls and women who are oppressed, entrapped and sometimes killed between their deep connections to “tribal customs and their attraction to cultural modernity”. (Vicki K. Janik) Emecheta has presented her women characters with limited success. They negotiate between the old and the new. Her women characters are painfully aware about the traditional and western way of life. Emecheta has written about imposition of white and western values on indigenous people. Set in postcolonial Ibuza, Lagos and contemporary London her stories show how girls and women are counseled to accept male privilege. Women characters challenge their men’s right.

In her novels Emecheta shows that how gender identity is constructed through socialization of child. Starting from the birth, through childhood to adulthood, social expectation for male and female differ. Simon de Beauvoir, a French feminist critic, in her *The Second Sex* gives a new dimension to the definition of woman. She views that how a ‘woman’ is socially constructed.

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*)

Women are entrapped in the circle of gender difference and from the childhood they have been trained to behave in a particular way. Entrapped in this circle, each child inculcates the roles of their kinds. Gender factor is deeply rooted in the fabric of African tradition. Gender determines women’s status, roles in the domestic/private spheres and the levels of their participation in the political/public sphere. Compared to the male tradition, the female tradition in African literature is a recent phenomenon. The reason behind this was, ‘women did not enjoy comparable educational opportunities, so that correspondingly fewer acquired the literacy, let alone the university education, that have traditionally been prerequisites for the writing of African literature in European languages.’ (Brown) Gender politics permeates all aspects of
African social life. In the colonial reinforcement of gender dichotomy, the male became the privileged inheritor of formal European education. The female was disadvantaged by the fact of her gender, her role confined to domesticity, and excluded from more lofty pursuits such as education. These effects continued to haunt women. There is an urgent need for more attention to the ramifications of gender identity and its implications for the African woman. Africanists and gender theorists alike emphasize the need for a balance, a revision, or the establishment of egalitarian national governments that incorporate gender planning in their public policy matters affecting women. In patriarchal society gender construction exposes that maleness is socially esteemed and femaleness is in subordination or in servitude. The between a man and a woman is due to biological difference. A woman is always understood in relation to man. Simone de Beavoir in her *The Second Sex* writes:

> “Woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other.” (Beauvoir, The Second Sex)

Women’s otherness is the result of biological difference. In male writer’s perspective the hero of the novel exhibits his world publicly whereas female characters are confined to traditional or limited roles. Male writers rarely explore/expose the implications of gender imposed limitations on women. In different societies gender construction is based on local conditions and traditions. Sexuality is a system of social structure of control, management, and oppression. According to Luce Irigaray, in both political and ethical terms, sexual difference is perhaps the most urgent issue to address in the modern world. Masculinity and femininity are culturally-specific ideologies and contextually-determined practices. To explore gender it is a need to search how body’s physicality is presented and performed. Foucault’s concept of prison can be helpful to understand how female bodies were exploited in the prison constructed by patriarchal culture.

In *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* published in 2012 Dianna Taylor writes that Foucault has written about the concept of prison in his *Discipline and Punish* published in 1975. He writes that crime was considered as an offence against the sovereign, an offence that was quite literally
an attack against the sovereign’s body politics. To punish torture was considered as an effective method. This gave rise to prisons.

“The prison was the place where what Foucault calls docile bodies were created, bodies that were both efficient in performance and obedient to authority.” (Taylor 76)

Based on this quotation we can say that in Emecheta novels there were no actual prisons where the criminals were kept for to be punished. In her works home became a prison, prison for women. Laws were formed for women and they had to follow them. Going against the laws of patriarchy was considered as a very serious offence and for that women were punished. Marring the person of her father’s choice, fetching very good bride price to her father, being an obedient wife and giving her husband a male child to carry the name of the father were the laws formed for women. One of the major laws for women was to remain ‘pure’ and ‘virgin’ for her husband. If a woman, for any reason, failed to follow the laws of patriarchal system, she was punished by the system. From this perspective if we study Emecheta’s works, we will definitely find out that how women were positioned in society. They were not free. All her women characters were tortured by the male members. For Emecheta’s women characters home was worst than prison. It was the place where their bodies were tortured and exploited. By the method of torture their bodies were made passive and docile. The women were sexually tortured. They were forced to bear children, sometimes at very premature age girls were impregnated and became the victims of cruelty of men.

Language or linguistic patterns are not enough for women to share their bitter experiences. However Emecheta has tried her best to pen down and express the plight of women in words. Foucaudian discourse, in actual sense, talks about freedom, about liberty. He believes that the power relations do not exist if one does not get liberty. Emecheta has raised her voice and wrote about the ‘self’. In his Technologies of the Self Foucault wrote:

“The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity. That is not a modern trait born of the Reformation or of Romanticism; it
is one of the most ancient Western traditions. It was well established and deeply rooted when Augustine stated his *Confessions.*” (Taylor)

The word ‘self’ is general so it is applicable for both, male and female. From Foucault’s perspective in writing there is not a boundary for men-women. The boundaries were created by men. By raising her voice Emecheta goes against the patriarchal laws and claims for freedom which is the right on any individual. About discourse Foucault emphasizes that discourse is the primary arena in which effects of power are manifested. Foucault notes that discourses are related to power in much more complicated way. He wrote:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it...discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (Taylor)

In the dialogues of Emecheta’s characters the effects of power can be seen. The language the women characters have used is the language of subaltern. Victimization, subjugation, marginalization and domination are reflected in the speech of Emecheta’s characters. But apart from that Emecheta has resisted against the domination. The cries of women should be heard by all. She made a very effort and intended to decolonize women from masculine colonization.

Being a feminist Buchi Emecheta focuses on the victimization of women in her community. The majority of her novels are written when Nigeria was in the clutches of colonialism and Lagos was the capital city. The native people were influenced by the air of civilization. They had no idea of what the word means. The titles of Emecheta’s novels are ironic. The titles like *The Bride Price, The Joys of Motherhood, The Slave Girl, Second-Class Citizen* and *Double Yoke* all reflect the plight of women in Igbo community. Like other cultures and society in this culture also women face problems. It is possible that the level and types of problem differ. They are suppressed by the men folk. The major issues are colonial ideology and patriarchal ideology. Women’s voice is muted and they are marginalized in the society. Gayatry Spivak’s approach to subaltern is feminist. She views women as subaltern. Stephen Morton in his *Gayatry Chakrovarty Spivak* published in 2003 writes:
“Always cutting-edge, always provocative, Spivak champions the voices and texts of those marginalized by western culture and takes on many of the dominant ideas of the contemporary era.” (Morton)

Spivak’s theory can help to analyze and understand Emecheta’s women characters. Being a woman Buchi Emecheta was less focused by the critics and readers. She changed the centre of her novels. She keenly reads the life of women in Nigeria so her novels are gynocentric. She is doubly marginalized. She has penned down the grave experiences of women. In her works she has posited women as displaced. The women characters of her novels are displaced socially, politically and culturally and they belong to subaltern group.

Spivak sees women as subaltern subject. She universally speaks for all women, regardless of differences of class, religion, culture and nationality. Emecheta writes that for black women racism is more problematic than sexism. First because of gender difference women were banished from the central position, and second is the racial difference. Racial difference has put all the people belonging to the ‘Third World’ in marginal position. At first, Emecheta rejects the notion of power and refuses to be dominated by the dominants.

According to Kristeva heterogeneity of rejection, means refusal and refusal of refusal. She believes that it is the double aspect of negation. Revolution in literary art is a practice or a process of change. It is apparently simple and well-ordered. In this duplicitous mechanism the poetic text resists and breaks the unity imposed through claims to order language.

“In every kind of society and situation, the text’s functions are therefore to lift the repression that weighs heavily on this moment of struggle. It is a function that particularly threatens or dissolves the bond between subject and society, but simultaneously creates the condition for its renewal.” (Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 208)

There is a link between subject and society. The subject is a product of social order. In Emecheta’s works it can be said that woman is a subject to society. In her texts Emecheta tries to lift up the repression, repression of women. Kristeva also writes that language is dominated by male structures, desires and forms of thought. Her revolution is essentially a feminist revolution.
“As soon as this power is recognized as such, it situates itself on the side of the symbolic, of institutions, apparatuses, structures that recognize no “feminine specificity” and that subordinate the problematic of reproduction to that of production. In this symbolic space, mother-woman is consequently either denied or fetishised: her self-possessed enjoyment is objectified, exchanged and lost.” (Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language)

Language and society are male dominated. Everything is structured and organized by men. This shows exclusion of women, of feminine forms and of feminine processes. Emecheta’s fictions move round the same issues. Her novels are centered round the issues like child bearing, motherhood, bride price, inheritance of property etc. she attempted to situate a woman. In her fictions Emecheta is looking back at the tradition and modern values. She examines that how traditional and modernity has shaped and constructed a ‘woman’.

4.3: Double Yoke:

*The Bride Price*, written by Buchi Emecheta is published in 1976. It is the story of a girl named Aku-nna whose father dies leaving the family in helpless condition. In The Bride Price Emecheta raises critical issues like bride price, forceful marriage, so called traditional values and so on. Death of Aku-nna’s father disturbs the easy going life of the family. It is the turning point in their life as they had to go back to Ibuza, their village. Aku-nna’s mother, Ma Blackie is inherited by her husband’s elder brother. She moves to Ibuza with her children. They were welcomed by Ibuza people. Aku-nna was accompanied by Ogugua. For the first time Aku-nna learns about strange Ibo customs when Ogugua tells her:

“Your mother will become my father’s wife. My father has inherited everything your father owned, and he has “inherited” your mother too.” (Emecheta, The Bride Price 23)

The above dialogue spoken by Ogugua reflects how a woman is constructed and framed by a man. Here the choice of woman is not asked. Nobody wants to know what her wish is. She
simply has to move with the command. People believed that it is the tradition, decided by men so no need to tell ask women about their choice. Women, in this community, are forced to accept the subordinate roles. It reflects patriarchal ideology. A woman is made a woman. Their minds are conditioned so they have accepted to remain in the frame. For them it matters nothing whether they live with their parents or with their in-laws, they are treated as ‘other’. The grave reality is women are ‘other of other’ because the nation was colonized and the natives were treated as ‘other’ or subaltern by the colonizers. The culture is paralyzed. Women are treated as ‘second sex’. Sons were given preference and they were loved by all because they carried the name of the father and made them immortal. After Aku-nna’s father’s death everybody was crying. At the time of lamentation her uncle Uche tells everybody not to cry. Pointing to Nna-nndo he says:

“Look,’ he shouted to the other mourners. “Our brother is lying here now, but he is not dead. He has left a son behind him. One day we shall all be proud of Nna-nndo…” (Emecheta, The Bride Price 18)

He also has a daughter but she is not considered. It is an indirect way of avoiding daughters. The father is interested in getting the bride price of his daughter only. She fetches an amount of money to her father and by that way she is source of income. It is one of the reasons that girls had no choice in their marriage. When Aku-nna’s father dies a voice rang out calling on Death:

“Wake up, Death, and see what you have done! You took Nna-nndo’s father away from him! You took Ezekiel away before he could enjoy the bride price from his daughter Aku-nna. You took him away forever and ever!” (Emecheta, The Bride Price 14)

It is the market of marriage and an act of selling a woman. The meaning of Aku-nna’s name is ‘Father’s wealth’. A boy’s family has to give bride price to girl’s parents before marriage as it is the tradition. After marriage, on the bridal bed the husband checks virginity of his wife. In Igbo community people use barrel of wine as a symbol to pass a message of girl’s
purity. If the girl is virgin the groom’s family goes with the barrel full of wine and if she is impure they take an empty barrel. Every time a woman is the victim of patriarchal ideology and it is impossible to break this ideology. So bride price is a very big issue in Igbo community. By doing such things they have fixed a woman’s identity because what society expects them to do is to work and produce children for their husbands. They have an inferior status in the family, that of a slave.

_The Bride Price_ is a story of a young Aku-na who dares to choose her own life partner against the wish of her father. Aku-na, a Nigerian girl is allowed to complete her education because her diploma degree will enhance her bride price. After education Aku-na has a new vision for life and her dreams give her strength to rebel against the traditional customs of her community. _The Bride Price_ deals with the problem of teenager in the traditional Ibuza society. The main conflict in the novel is between Aku-na’s choice of her life partner and her uncle’s intense interest in getting her bride price. Aku-na, the girl of sixteen, who dares to challenge tradition, dies by her lover’s side in childbirth. Aku-na is neither strong nor old enough to survive the throes of labour. She fell victim because she lacked support and sufficient guidance to guide and inspire her.

In _The Bride Price_ the fight is between old and new, between love and tradition. Emecheta tries test the old saying which is just a saying. It has nothing to do with the practical life.

“There’s an old saying that ‘Love will always find a way’. But is that true? What happens if love is forbidden by customs and traditions, and so gets caught in a battle between the old world and the new? How can love find a way then? Tradition is not an easy enemy to fight.” (Emecheta, _The Bride Price_)

In _The Bride Price_ Emecheta tells the story of a young girl, Aku-na whose life is forbidden by customs and traditions and she gets caught in a battle between the old and the new. Aku-na’s life shows that tradition is not an easy enemy to fight with. When the novel was written Nigeria was in the clutches of colonialism and Lagos was the capital city. When the novel starts Aku-na, with her family lives in Lagos. But she has to move to Ibuza with her family. Buchi Emecheta, in this novel studies the Ibo culture.
Buchi Emecheta is a feminist. She focuses on the victimization of women in her community. The title of the novel *The Bride Price* is very critical. The title suggests that it is about price of a bride. Aku-nna means ‘father’s wealth’. In Ibo community the daughter fetches a very good bride price to her father. It is a source of family income. In this community marriage has become a business. Bride price is a marriage payment. The effect of marriage payments cut off the girl from her parental roots. There is a principle of intergeneration debt because the father uses the bride price for his daughter to repay the debt which he has given on his own marriage. This aspect of marriage system has played a significant role in determining gender relation. When Aku-nna’s father dies people came at her home. In Indian context the bride price can be connected with the dowry system. In India matrimonial relations are decided upon the dowry system and on the name of tradition the parents of the bride are forced give dowry to their daughter. The dowry should go to the girl but it goes to the in-laws of the girl.

Perhaps this is the reason that the girl in this community is not allowed to marry the man of her choice. Marriage payments are an example of patriarchal ideology and bride price is in a way buying a woman. From the very beginning the stand is taken against marginalization and commodification of the women and girls. Emecheta criticizes this discriminatory practice which is based on gender difference.

Aku-nna is thirteen and her brother is of eleven. Her father works in a factory. He married with Ma Blackie in church. They have accepted Christianity as their religion. Aku-nna is very dear to her parents. She aspires to study. Unfortunately her father dies when she is very young. With her mother and brother she moves to her village. It is a tradition in Ibo culture that the elder brother inherits the property of the younger brother including wife and children, if the later dies. Aku-nna’s father Ezekiel Odia dies. Aku-nna and her brother Nna-nndo could not understand the matter but because of uncomfortable silence in the family they understood that their father is dead. People came for funeral ceremony and Aku-nna, being a daughter, was forced to cry. It was a belief in their culture that it was right for girls to cry more than boys. The role of a husband or father is superior to wife or mother in any Ibo family. When Ezekiel dies Aku-nna to her brother Nna-nndo says:

“Then her brother’s high, childish voice broke the silence. “We have no father,”
he said.”
“But Nna-nndo, you are wrong,’thought Aku-nna. ‘It is worse than that. We have nothing. Our father named you Nna-nndo, “Father is the shelter”. We have not only lost our father. We have lost our shelter too.” (Emecheta, The Bride Price 11-12)

Women are treated as second to men. Their role is sub-ordinate to men. Sons are loved by all because they will keep their father’s name alive. They will make him immortal. Man is the centre of the family. Emecheta has shown the death of the man in a family but in the absence of man she has not dismantled logocentrism and hierarchy rather she has created more tension in the lives of women. In Ibuza people believe that a woman cannot do anything simply because she is a woman. Culture is male produced and women are given stereotype roles in male dominated culture. By focusing upon the female protagonist Emecheta has challenged the myth of men always being at the centre. She actually wished to drag out the reality of a woman’s life. It is easy for men to dominate and to inherit a woman like a thing but they cannot reach at the depth of a woman’s heart to know that what happens to a woman when she is objectified. Simple women from the village do not raise voice against because in Foucault’s concept they have been made docile physically and mentally. They simply accept role given to them. Emecheta being an intellectual woman is aware about the injustice done to women and that’s why she raised her voice against the system.

Ma Blackie, inherited by her husband’s elder brother, moves to Ibuza with her children. They were welcomed by Ibuza people. Aku-nna was accompanied by Ogugua. For the first time Aku-nna learns about strange Ibo customs. Ogugua said:

“You’re almost fourteen and you still do not know our customs! Your mother will become my father’s wife. My father has inherited everything you father owned, and he has “inherited” your mother too.” (Emecheta, The Bride Price 23)

To convince Aku-nna Ogugua gives an example of woman who was walking nearby. Ogugua said that the woman’s husband died and she was inherited by her husband’s brother. The woman was not the first wife of him as he had other wives but the woman was happy with him. Women and girls were colonized mentally. They have been
trained to be good daughters of traditions. The criteria for a woman’s happiness are
decided by men so women have to learn to be happy within the limit only.

In Ibo culture bride price is paid for girls. An educated girl can fetch a huge amount of
bride price to her father. In Ibo culture girls are the source of income for family and treated as a
‘thing’ only. Buchi Emecheta is critical of her own culture. She has presented a grey side of her
culture. Aku-nna is fifteen and goes to school. The other women in the family do not mind Nna-
nndo going to school because he is a boy but they are not ready to let Aku-nna study. Okonkwo’s
son Iloka questioned on Aku-nna’s education. Okonkwo allowed Aku-nna to go to school
because people pay high bride price for educated girls and Okonkwo wants to satisfy his
ambitions by getting bride price for Aku-nna and his daughter Ogugua. Okonkwo dreams for a
huge bride price but she is a girl. Soon menstruation starts and Aku-nna becomes a ‘woman’. In
Ibo community it is a tradition the man who cuts the lock of a girl’s hair can carry her away
without paying her bride price and nobody can deny. The piece of hair makes the girl ‘his’,
forever. Aku-nna loves Chike but Aku-nna’s family and her relatives believe that he belongs to a
slave family because his family had once been slaves.

Chike is very handsome and is a school teacher. Local girls pretend as if they do not
know that Chike belongs to a slave family. Chike looks down on the local girls but never
respects them because they are not good enough for an educated man like him. Chike’s parents
know about his adventures but never said anything to him. Chike’s father tells him not to harm
Aku-nna but this does not affect him because Chike loves Aku-nna. Aku-nna is forced to marry
the man of her father’s choice but she manages to escape from there by making a false story.
Afu-nna’s husband told her to be submissive and threatened her. He said that if she would not
surrender he would ask his friends to hold her in bed. But Aku-nna said that she is not virgin.
After this Aku-nna was beaten up cruelly by her husband but she could save herself for Chike.

Aku-nna runs away with Chike and marries him but her bride price is not accepted by her
father. In Ibuza people believe that if the bride price of the girl is not paid the girl would not
survive after the birth of her first child. In The Bride Price Aku-nna also dies after giving birth to
her baby girl whom she and her husband, Chike named Joy. The Bride Price is a love story and
Chike treats Aku-nna gently Aku-nna’s death is gendered because she gives up in labor pain
after her baby’s birth. The born baby girl’s name is symbolic. Her birth has taken her mother’s
life. Moreover she may be responsible for her parents’ misery. But Buchi Emecheta has
intentionally given her name ‘Joy’ because she has put a question on a woman’s joy or her rights to have joys in male dominated society. Aku-na leaves the texture of the novel. Just like Nnu-Ego for Aku-na also the fruit of motherhood and childbearing was bitter. Aku-na is fully dependent upon her husband. After Aku-na’s death Ibuza girls were told stories, some stories were created. They were told not to break the tradition. Women were caught up in the yoke of tradition. Emecheta has left the story like this without giving any solution to it.

_Double Yoke_ by Buchi Emecheta is a story of a young undergraduate couple published in 1982. In this novel Emecheta has dealt with conflicts in neo-colonial society. The novel can be called a campus novel as it is about the students of university and the actions take place in the campus. Education became a key for young people to save the lives of them as well as of their family member and their community. Though the novel is set in a campus it reflects the social life of people. Emecheta is concerned with the exploitation of youth especially women in modern Nigeria. She has very powerfully created an image of woman in this novel. The characters are carrying the burden of double yoke; they are caught by the tradition and modernity. At the same time they want to be both traditional as well as modern especially men and the mixture of traditional and modern men fail to accept the ‘new woman’. _Double Yoke _is a woman’s struggle in modern society who aspires to study to help her family and also wants to be a good wife. _Double Yoke_ is a story of two undergraduate students Ete Kamba and Nko. Ete and Nko are the two opposite pillars which can never come together. Both are having their own perspectives and a man fails to understand a woman’s perspective and puts her into the well of trouble.

The novel starts with the entry of a new lecturer who is surprisingly a woman, Miss Bulewao.

“What was new about this one was that she was a woman!”

“Not that the well-informed female was a new phenomenon in a country like Nigeria, in the early nineteen eighties, but the unusual thing about this one was that she was outspoken, almost as outspoken as the village women whose daughters had been to the UK and became been-tos and were now so perfect in hypocrisy.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 1-2)
In the modern Nigeria all wanted to cop up with modernity, a change but men were still not ready to accept a woman with knowledge and power. The new professor was a woman and her gender surprised all the male students. When Miss Bulewao enters in the class she becomes the centre of attraction. She is a creative writer and she is here to teach student how to write creatively. Brilliant male students aspire to follow her.

“He was wishing to be as successful as a woman: he was wishing to adopt the method used by an ordinary woman in the field of Arts!” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 9)

Miss Bulewao is a successful woman. She is a new woman with her own logics of life. She has broken the myth of female fragility because as an individual she is very strong. She is different from any other Nigerian women. It can be said that Nko follows the footprints of Miss Bulewao as she also wants to study and earn university degree with first class honour. Nko wanted to have both the worlds. She wanted to be an academician as well as a good and obedient wife. Nko was ready to carry “the old yoke of motherhood and wifehood with the new academic one.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 97). But the tragedy of Nko’s life is that she is unable to make herself free from the shackles of male gaze. Emecheta has used Ete Kamba as a medium to show a man’s attitude towards women. An African educated man in Ete Kamba wants a submissive wife.

He said: “A woman who is not married is better off dead.” Ete Kamba declared uncompromisingly. (Emecheta, Double Yoke 63)

Though a woman is educated or not but she is always caught up in the yoke of marriage. Education could not help women to make themselves free. For example in The Bride Price Aku-nna is allowed to get degree only to fulfill her father’s selfish wish and ultimately she becomes the victim of traditional culture. Nobody thought of a woman or a girl’s progress. In Double Yoke, Ete wants a traditional wife but with a difference of education. It means even after being educated a girl has to be in subordinate position.

“He wanted to further his education, and he knew that education was one of those preoccupations that demanded ones whole attention. And now that he had met
Nko, he would like her to be younger than he was and to be in a lower grade at school. He would like all this very much; well, after seeing the way his mother, but with this difference; she must be educated. Yes that was the type he would like. A very quiet and submissive woman, a good cook, a good listener, a good worker, a good mother with a good education to match. But her education must be a little less than his own, otherwise they would start talking on the same level.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 26)

The above paragraph reflects Ete’s expectations from his wife. He is caught between tradition and modernity. Education has not helped him to rise from his level. His attitude towards women is the same. His educated wife must be subordinate to him. She must perform her domestic duties well with perfection. It is expected from a woman that she must not argue with her husband though she is educated; as women are suppose to be less intelligent. For women, whether they are educated or not, it will not make difference. Education has not helped women to break the chains of tradition and patriarchal power as in patriarchy men have right to rule over women. Ete’s mother was for him a role model. He would love to marry the woman who is just like his mother. Because “his mother, to him, had been the epitome of womanhood, the type whose price was above the biblical rubies. The type who took pride not in herself but in her man, no matter what, even if he commanded her to walk through fire, the type that never questioned. He had thought all women were like that, and should be like that.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 37).

When Ete got through university entrance exam and earned scholarship his parents threw a party and Nko was invited. At that night Ete controlled her body and Nko was submissive and yielded herself to Ete. She allowed him to touch her body and kiss her. “She allowed him, she gave in, and she gave him all, her body yielding, responding to his demands, his thirst, his hunger.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 52). He entered in her body as he wanted to know her. He wanted to know the truth. After he had done with her Ete’s father said:

“I am sure she was warm and yielding. Lucky girl, with a young man like you, her future is secured. Women love security.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 52)

In patriarchy security is only provided by men. A woman’s safety is in the hands of men. A woman must be possessed by a man. She must belong fully to her man and she must be a
virgin. A question came into his mind that was Nko a virgin? He thought of himself as a silly young man who forgot to check that the woman with whom he was making love was a virgin or not as “he wanted a virgin, an educated virgin, nice wholesome unspoilt for his bride when he qualified.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 54). Ete wanted to quest for Nko’s virginity so he asked:

“You are not a virgin are you?”
“Were you a virgin? Or are you still one? Swear that you are a virgin.”
“I swear to nothing. It is unchristian to swear.”
“What do you say to a girl who is not married and yet not a virgin? Is that Christian? What a Christian girl would let herself be disvirgined by the wall? If you were a virgin, which I’m quite sure you were not, - I went to check – you see, so I know. There was not a drop of blood. You are a prostitute, a whore, and you keep putting on this air of innocence as if you were something else. A whore, a shameless prostitute!” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 56-57)

“You must tell me the truth. You are not leaving this place until I know the truth.”
“You called me a prostitute. Because of that, but you forgot that it takes two people at least to make any woman a prostitute, by your definition. You seem to be forgetting the men who slept with the woman. So if I am one, then what are you?” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 58)

“Men are never prostitutes, I have never heard of men being called prostitute.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 59)

At this Ete became furious and said:

“You cannot talk to me like that, in my room. No woman has that right to talk to me like that…my mother wanted me to marry you…you cannot talk to me like that.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 59)
Nko has to be pure to marry Ete and virginity is the only sign of purity so Nko has to have it and it must be proved. A woman’s virginity is a man’s pride and psychologically a man’s pride must be satisfied. In postcolonial context nations and land are imagined literary as women. So if the nation is colonized or the land is conquered by the colonizers it hurts the pride of the native people. To save the pride the native people fight back and resist. Ete’s getting furious and curious to know about Nko’s virginity reflects the mentality of native people. Ete’s feeling for Nko that she is his woman is the same when the native people talk about land as their land. Society would always question upon a woman’s virginity but nobody would raise a voice against man if he is pure or virgin or not. The truth of a woman’s purity decides her fate. Here Ete wants to control Nko’s body and a woman cannot have sexual freedom in a male dominated society the way a man has. If a woman has relation with other men she is labeled as prostitute. A woman has no right to ask a man whether he has slept with other women or not because they are free, they have power and moreover they are men. Men never want to realize that there is always a role of man to make a woman a whore so for this a woman should not be blamed. Nko was right when she raised her voice against this but very deliberately it was denied by Ete because a man cannot stand such humiliation. Ete wanted to find out whether Nko was virgin or not so he went too deep into her body but he despaired. He could not find Nko’s virgin blood so he felt very alone and lost. He never thought about Nko’s loneliness and loss. She had nothing to lose then. Ete told her to promise him:

“That you will never sleep with any man but me.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 61)

Another example is Akpan, Ete’s friend. He wanted to marry a girl of sixteen who should not be stupid but will be completely illiterate. Akpan says:

“You bet. My future wife must also be a great cook. The only qualification I want.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 132)

Akpan says that he will have a full control over her. He thinks that it is difficult to control an educated wife because if a woman is civilized she must be rejected by men. Like Ete, Akpan also wants a wife who is plain for him only. Ete tells to Akpan:
“I know, you want to go into the village and marry an innocent girl to breed and clean for you. And I’m sure you’ll want her to be a virgin too.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 132)

Akpan laughed and said:

“Why not. The son of the queen of England did the same only last month. They even had to check to see whether his future wife was not only a virgin but that she could bear children. And even the mother of Jesus we all worship had to be a virgin, and few people would like to admit that Jesus had brothers and sisters…so you see that I am not asking for the impossible. I am only asking for the ideal…I do not mean to pry, but if you feel there is anything I can do to help.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 132)

Here, virginity is considered as an ideal thing. Ironically it is the only way to judge a woman’s purity. On the other side the paragraph means that how easy for men to judge women. To judge a woman socially has become very easy and natural for men. They have the right to decide women’s future in a patriarchal society. Prof. Ikot and Ete Kamba sealed Nko’s life. Nko keeps her head covered with a scarf because Ete told her that it suits her and with the covered head she looks pure like a nun. The change one can notice that whenever Nko entered in Prof. Ikot’s office her head was not covered. Both the men put her in a very critical situation from where she had to find her own way. Nko’s roommates Esther was right when she said:

“Cannot you see that men will always put us where they want us to be?”
(Emecheta, Double Yoke 100)

In any role men become superior to women. It is impossible for them to treat women as equal. Whether it is the yoke of marriage or any other profession but woman is a thing to be possessed. Here possession is not simply possession but the right and freedom to be violent, to torture or to give pain to a woman’s body. To become a wife a woman has to be plain for her man. Esther says: “Some men feel secure with you if you were plain just for them.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 101)
A man feels secure and can have relief when he makes sure that his woman is not having affair with other men. Psychologically it is their id, libido which makes them selfish. The way a child never give his/her toy to another child to play the same way a woman is a plaything for a man and he cannot stand the fact if his possession is possessed by any other man. This brings feeling of insecurity to them. Ete wanted to take revenge when he learnt that prof. Ikot slept with Nko. Nko wanted to prove that there is nothing in the world which a woman cannot do. She was steadily going towards a formidable goal. She wanted to be a simple young modern woman whose ambition was to be a modern wife with a career, and children of her own. She wanted to be a successful woman in both ways. She picked up a project under Prof. Ikot’s supervision.

He took her at Kwa Falls and made love with her. She became like a wooden doll and let him have what he wanted. She lost her innocence just for her family because she wanted the First Class honours degree. When she asked for the degree her voice was very clear and determined. She said:

“I want a First Class honours degree. I do not care how you do it, I want a First Class honours.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 140)

For Prof. Ikot it was enjoyment. He played not only with Nko but with other girls on the campus also. Nobody complained against him.

In a very natural way he told Nko: “One has to work very hard for such grades, you know,”

Nko told him: “You mean as hard as I have worked today at the Kwa Falls?” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 140)

Nko has changed now. It shows that she was not going to let the man take disadvantage of her. She said:

“You mean I take sex like food? That all the girls on this campus do that simply to pass their exams? I’ll tell you sir that most girls here come to read for their degrees. If they become what you think, which is ‘prostitutes Nigerian style’, it is
because people like you made them so. But with me sir, you are not going to be let off lightly.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 141)

Prof. Ikot is a religious man but the reality is he has put on a mask of religious hypocrisy. Ete Kamba is a modern man but it is difficult for him to leave his traditional behind. It is because of Ete the Prof. Ikot came to know about Nko. Ete wanted to take revenge just to prove his masculinity. He wanted to marry Nko. He thought of her as his dream girl. As he is having traditional mindset he wanted to possess Nko.

“Ete Kamba turned round fiercely, slapped her on both sides of her face and snarled at the same time. “If I kill him, it is not because of you, you cheap whore, I am killing him because I am a man. Why do not’ you tell your confessor to hit me back?” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 150)

Ete went to Prof. Ikot to share his woes with him. Ete became so selfish that he forgot that he shared the secret of his girl friend. The secret he should not share with anyone; not even with his friends. Nko said:

“You call him my confessor, but what of you? Who told him how we met and all that, enh? Answer me, Mr Holier than thou. Did you tell your friends that, enh?”
“I am not asking you to understand. But if I am a whore, you two made me one. Always remember that.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 150)

In Double Yoke Emecheta has presented the modern Nigerian culture and in a modern culture the condition of women is worst. She has talked about fallen Nigerian women. The text of the novel is in defense of women and Emecheta has in a better way tried to give reasons of diseased culture. Not only Nko but most of the girls were exploited by men. Emecheta has talked about the problems of the modern women. Women tried to break the traditional boundaries to create their identity, their world but they failed to create a safe world for them, a world in which women are safe. They wanted to create a ‘safe zone’ and safety is possible only in the absence of men. The new woman is surrounded with new problems. Women are exploited at school, at university, at work place etc. Men reduced women using their sex to get their certificates so the
power was and is always in the hands of men. Nko’s roommate Julia was exploited by her houseboy when she was six. Her example shows that girls in newly free nation lost their virginity at tender age and they were left to suffer throughout the life. Miss Bulewao questions Ete Kamba “are you strong enough to be a modern African man?” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 162). Miss Bulewao is a modern African woman with the power of education, with new light and fire. She tries to convince Ete to understand Nko but Ete told her: “Madam, you seem to be forgetting that I am a man. I can do what I like. A man can raise his own bastard, women are not allowed to do that.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 162)

Madam told him: “But young man, Nko is going to be a graduate from this university. She too can afford to look after her own bastard. Or you mean to tell me that having children out of wedlock is another masculine preserve? I know your problem. You are wandering what people would think of you. You think you will say you have gone soft in the head, or as mothers used to say, that, that woman has given you some love meat to eat and you can no longer think as man. Our people think that only women should be loving and may be forgiving, and that a man who does that must have eaten his wife’s love meat. You must have heard of Hitler. They say he loved cats and music. Can you imagine that? Only men with large hearts can love and understand. That does not make them weak. It makes them great.” (Emecheta, Double Yoke 162).

When a woman writer participates in a discourse she remains true to her womanhood. In this novel Emecheta has talked about many yokes; the yoke which are prepared by society and men for women. Emecheta has talked about the freedom of women by remaining in the patriarchal premises. Whether the woman is a house wife or an educated working woman but she has to remain under the thumb of men. The masculine ideology never let them have the full freedom. So through male characters Emecheta throws light on the rigid African mentality by giving voice to female characters. Only women bear the burden of yokes. In The Bride Price women have to carry the yoke of tradition. The suffocation caused by tradition is so strong that it causes death of Aku-nna, a young girl with dreams to acquire education but her dreams are scattered when she moves back to Ibuza, the place which represents tradition. She breaks the Law of the Father by marrying Chike, the man of her choice but she meets the tragic end. Traditionally people believed that Aku-nna’s bride price was not paid so she died in the first child’s birth. Chike sent money to Aku-nna’s father but the bride price was rejected by him.
young, educated boy like Chike also believed in the tradition. *The Bride Price* is ironic in nature as in the novel Emecheta criticizes the traditional culture which is constructed to control a woman’s life. In *Double Yoke* Emecheta has shown modern Nigeria in which young people aspire to study. The modern Nigerian culture is diseased and there is no change in women’s condition. In neo-colonial Nigeria youngsters wanted to be modern but with traditional outlook so modern Nigeria new problems for women. Women were expected to be submissive just like traditional Nigerian woman, but with a little change of education. Young boys wanted an educated wife just to add feather in their crown. They were not ready to give equal status to women. Girls entered in university but there were people like Prof. Ikot to manipulate and exploit them for degree. For example is Nko is impregnated by Prof. Ikot but she accepts the challenge and she is ready to be a mother, she is ready to give birth to the child. This is the move Emecheta has taken in this novel.

4.4: Quest for Self:

*The Slave Girl* published in 1977 by Buchi Emecheta is an irony upon Nigerian culture. The title of the novel reflects the burden upon the soldiers of a girl. The word ‘slave’ is a label for the girl. *The Slave Girl* is a story of Obejeta whose journey starts from girlhood and end with permanent slavehood. Emecheta has not given identity to the girl. The title suggests Emecheta’s quest for selfhood. Being a female novelist she is searching for a place, a place free from gender bias where a woman can be known and respected as a human being. Ojebeta’s parents die when she is very young. She is left with her two brothers. After her parents’ death her brother Okolie wants to sell her. He takes her to Onitsha market and sells her just for seven pounds and ten shillings. There she becomes a domestic slave. Ojebeta is lost, she is displaced. She screams and tries to run away. To Ma Mee she says:

“Oh, my mother, I am lost.”

Ma Mee replies:

“You are not lost, little girl with pagan charms,” she replied. “You are just a domestic slave.”

Ojebeta cries out in despair to her dead mother Umeadi:
“Save me, Mother, for now I am lost.”

Ojebeta is helpless and screams:

“Let me go, let me go!” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 59)

This is not just the scream of Ojebeta only. It is the cry of every girl and woman of Ibuza. Emecheta’s women characters are subalterns. A woman is muted she is in Fanon’s context “wretched” (Fanon) in patriarchal society. When a subaltern woman speaks, she will definitely cry out. It will be the voice of an unheard who wants to be heard by all. In Can Subaltern Speak? Gayatry Spivak has discussed about how subaltern groups were exploited by the politics. They vainly try to escape from this exploitation. The historical and structural socio-political situations do not guarantee that the subaltern groups will be recognized or their voices will be heard ever. Emecheta tries to define slavery and meaning of slavery in cultural context. In African context its meaning is changing the masters.

*The Slave Girl* a story of Ojebeta. She is a dying fish. In the very beginning of the novel the Emecheta has talked about the family background of Ojebeta. Okwuekwu and Umedi are husband-wife. They had two sons, Owezim and Okolie, the former has reached at Nineteen and the later is of Sixteen. The novel starts with the beautiful description of morning. Emecheta has linked the cycle of nature with the cycle of life. At this early time Umedi is expecting a child. Okwuekwu orders his sons to get ready to go to the farm as if he is not concerned with his wife’s labor pain. As Umedi is tired Okwuekwu ordered Okolie to fill his pipe. When asked by Owezim about his mother Okwuekwu told that Umedi’s labor pain had started. Okwuekwu did not remember how many times Umedi got pregnant as he had stopped thinking about it. They has lost so many children at birth, so many that he could not remember the number. Okwuekwu did not bother himself for his wife’s pregnancy as it has become a routine for her. She is alone at home and no one is there to help her in her labor pain. An unnamed woman, Ukabegwu’s wife came to help Umedi. This woman is another example of marginalization by marginalized people. This woman is not allowed to enter in the house of a man who has earned the Alo title as she is an “unclean” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 3) woman. Emecheta has put the word in inverted coma to show what it means to be unclean. ‘Unclean’ is an abuse. The word is used for the woman also and the people who belong to subordinate position. It reflects the social hierarchy. Emecheta has not given an identity to this woman. This is intentionally done by Emecheta as the groups of
people who belong to this class do not have their identity. They do not have a room of their own in hegemonic structure of the society. They live and die unknown. They are displaced even from the margin as they are victims of victims. The unnamed woman is three times marginalized as she is suppressed by the imperialist ideology, patriarchal ideology and upper class women.

Umedì gave birth to a daughter. The daughter is named as Ogbanje Ojebeta. After the loss of numbers of daughter she was the one who survived. She ran to inform her dibia and sent and messenger to her husband.

“Umedì too was a great runner, and she ran now, not caring that she was still losing heavily from the recent birth. In common with most Ibuza women, she treated the event in a very straight-forward manner, requiring none of the modern paraphernalia that now attends the birth of a child. A pregnant Ibuza woman would simply always carry a cooking knife with her, just in case she gave birth to her baby on her way to or from the market or farm. If she were lucky, she might have someone with her who could cut the cord; if not, she would cut the cord herself, rest a while, put her new baby on her back and thread her way home.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 19)

The above paragraph is about childbearing, giving birth to a baby and motherhood. Emecheta has given the details of what women do at the time of a baby’s birth. These women did not get any medical treatment during those days. Men were not concerned with this particular problem of women. Women were left to manage their pregnancy. Carrying cooking knife to cut the cord was dangerous and risky for their life but they become usual of it. As it became a routine and very simple thing women had to learn to tackle with the problem. It is another example of patriarchy as women’s body is used as a play thing. A woman’s body is used as a plaything and after being done she is left to suffer. Emecheta’s works are the mirror image of plight of women in patriarchal society.

Ojebeta’s parents died of felenza and she was left alone with no body to look after her. After the death of her parents life became a challenge for Ojebeta and she started a journey, a journey to Onitsha market. She went there with her brother Okolie. She had no idea why she was going there. She had many questions but her questions sounded foolish to Okolie so she started
talking with her dead parents. Emecheta has put Adah, a protagonist of *Second-Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta and Ojebeta in similarly different situation. Adah’s birth did not bring joy to her parents where as Ojebeta was a loved child as she survived after the death of many daughters. Ojebeta was free in her girlhood. She was treated as a precious jewel by her parents and was very famous because of her charms. As women cannot be free in patriarchal society, Ojebeta had to give up her freedom. She was used as an income source by her brother Okolie. Ojebeta had been sold by Okolie. From the world of freedom Ojebeta was lost in the world of slavery for which a woman is conditioned. The same way Adah’s life is also a life of a slave. She had to look after her family and her husband. Both these women characters are slaves of masculinity and they are destined for that because they are women. Okolie in his rush and self-analysis decided Ojebeta’s fate that she must be sold and so she was sold to Ma Palagada, an upper class woman. It was a strange destination for a child of seven. Ojebeta was so startled that she burst into tears and called out:

“My mother, please come to me, I am lost!” (Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* 53)

Ojebeta could not understand anything but she could only sense that something terrible was going to happen with her so she cried out in agony. A child who was brought up with so much love, care and trust was now lost. Ojebeta’s charms, which had been tied on her by her loving parents, were taken away. She wanted to keep her charms as her survival was dependent upon them. She requested the blacksmith:

“May I take them with me?”

She also requested Chiago:

“But my mother and my father gave them to me. I do not want to lose them. Please can I keep them. Your mother, there in the stall, she won’t see them. Please…. ” (Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* 72)

Ojebeta was helpless and her demand and a wish to cling to her charms were symbolically to cling on to her individuality her selfhood. As a little girl she did not know that no slave retained any identity: whatever identity they had, been forfeited the day money was paid for them. Having her charms back was for Ojebeta regaining her self-respect. It was difficult for
her to behave like somebody else as she had lost her identity but still she wanted to hold on to the dream of it.

She married Jacob. As it is in the masculine tradition that every woman, whether slave or free, must marry. In her life she has learnt that a woman always belonged to men. Before marriage a woman is owned by her people, when she is sold she belonged to a new master, and when she grew up the new master would get a bride price and sold her to her would be husband who would control and possess her. Clifford Ma Palagada’s son had come back after many years and Ma Palagada is not well so her daughter with her two children had come to live with them. Ojebeta is given special duty to look after Victoria’s children. She had been ordered by Victoria to have bath twice a day. Ojebeta was playing with the children and Victoria’s daughter turned the china plate upside down on her. At this Victoria pounced on Ojebeta, hitting, pulling, spitting at her. Victoria was also hissing:

“You good-for-nothing slave! You bush slave!” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 114)

When Clifford tried to take his half-sister Victoria back she shouted at him and in a voice of fury said:

“Why, she’s only a slave! What is she to you?” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 114)

Victoria’s this statement reflects the evil of social hierarchy which is common in every culture. Ojebeta was only a slave for Victoria. This shows master-slave relation between Ojebeta and Victoria. Once a slave is always a slave. The relation between these two women also shows victimization of a poor woman by an upper class woman. Poverty was a disease for Ojebeta. Clifford was affectionate towards Ojebeta. He wanted to share his life with Ojebeta but could not tell her directly because as a master it was impossible for him to propose a slave directly because that would be a dramatizing issue and would be considered weakness on Clifford’s part. He wanted to make Ojebeta his wife so he asked her:

“Not just work for me, but to live with me. Or do not you want me to make you my wife when you grow up, in a year or two?” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 117)
Though Clifford had affection for Ojebeta and was romantic with her but he twisted the language. It was his wish to have Ojebeta but Clifford played with words and presented his wish differently so that no one could realize and his love for a slave girl was considered a weakness and he wanted to hide his feelings for Ojebeta. He also said that:

“Have you never heard of masters marrying their female slaves, then?”
(Emecheta, The Slave Girl 117)

The relation between master and slave women was traditionally accepted. It was believed that to be a wife and if not a wife then a mistress of the master was a dream of these slave women to lessen their work. These women wanted to be attractive to win their masters’ heart. Women’s condition was so worse that they were ready to be even mistresses. The slave women were sexually harassed by their male masters. It was difficult rather impossible for them to shield themselves against the situation. These women were forced to accept the situation silently.

Chiago, another slave girl was sexually harassed by her master Pa Palagada. Chiago was also sold like Ojebeta. When she saw Ojebeta crying she was almost near to tear. Chiago was sold by her own people and after eleven years the picture of her family is dimmed in her mind. Chiago felt pity for Ojebeta. Chiago was troubled to know about the arrival of Clifford. Nwayinuzo told Chiago not to worry about him as her duty is to do his work the way she did for Ma. At this Chiago cried out:

“Oh, you were too young then. You do not understand. He fiddles with me. He used to make me do things...O my chi, help me in this household.” (92)
(Emecheta, The Slave Girl 92)

Chiago was by the time a girl of seventeen. The above sentence shows how she had been used by her masters. For Ma she was a skilled slave who could earn money well and Clifford she was used as a plaything. Male masters took all the possible chances to molest their female slaves. They had no right to raise their voice against this physical violence as their lips were sealed. Chiago could not even speak what type of things Clifford forced her to do. It is left incomplete. It meant that what had been happening to her was not possible to explain in words. Chiago could
not tell this to any of the Palagadas but she also failed to share her woes with her fellow slave
girl. Moreover Chiago was a victim of Pa Palagada also. Pa Palagada had many times insisted
her to help him in his bed. He gave her a promise that he would make things easier for her.
Chiago knew that Pa Palagada liked her but she hated the very sight of him. He had insisted on
her rubbing his back and cutting his nails, while he occasionally dipped his huge hands into her
blouse. Not only Clifford but also Pa Palagada used to fiddle with her. It was indeed terrible for
her but now she had accepted everything. She stopped protesting herself against this and learnt to
keep quiet about all these things. This is in Foucault’s concept the creation of docile body.
Chiago was used as a plaything by the both father and son. Chiago was crying and she said:

“I remember the last time,” Chiago went on. “I was foolish in those days. I was
bending down sweeping the floor when he came up behind me and jumped on me.
He pulled at the small breasts I had then…I was not at all developed…It hurt so,
and I screamed. Do you know what he did? He slapped me on both sides of my
face. I cried and told his mother, and was ordered to shut up. He must have told
some story to his father, because for quite a long time he would cane me
mercilessly for any little thing I did.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 94)

Chiago had no control over her body. Her body was a toy for Clifford and Pa Palagada.
He loved to torture her and Chiago’s pain was a pleasure for Clifford. She had to accept
everything silently. Her scream was symbolically a voice of resistance and for that she was
punished and bitten up cruelly by Clifford. She complained his mother, Ma Palagada but she
remained unheard. It is common with the subaltern group that their voice remained unheard
forever and nobody cared for them. After this incident Pa Palagada used to cane her for a very
simple and minor mistake. Chiago’s life was sealed with the Palagadas. Sold by her family and
slaved by the Palagadas she was suppressed by all. Both Ma and Pa also wanted that Chiago
must give herself to their wicked son. Both father and son wanted her as their mistress. Chiago
did not like either of them. While talking with Nwayinuzo Chiago said:

“Yes, I certainly do not want the father to feel that I like his son better than him. I
do not like either of them. But what can I do…” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 94)
Through the word ‘certainly’ Emecheta meant that whatever Chiago was doing or had done was by force. She was aware about her condition but she was helpless. She could not do anything to protest her.

Chiago surrendered to the odd circumstances of her life as being a woman she was destined for that. Chiago had had to give in completely to the man’s gross appetite. Whenever Ma Palagada had gone out to another village for her profession Pa Palagada would call Chiago in his bed room on any pretext. Many a time Chiago had come out feeling physically ill and mentally disturbed. Emecheta has not written clearly about what happened in the room. She had encoded a message that the physical illness of Chiago is due to sexual harassment. Pa’s bedroom was a torture room for Chiago and she was afraid to go there. She had to allow Pa to enter in her crevice as she was promised for her freedom. The word freedom does not mean that she will be freed forever. Pa promised her that he would one day make her his second wife. It is all uncertain because when this ‘one day’ would come is uncertain and becoming Pa’s second wife was going to get her into another world of slavery. Her marriage with Pa would be a permanent cage for her. Chiago knew everything but she yielded and after that things had been relatively easy for her.

Chiago was then twenty-two and she had concealed the secret in her heart. Pa Palagada was very fond of her was becoming a common knowledge. At the market place Chiago suddenly felt ill and her eyes were red. When her mistress was ill Pa had come many times in the middle of the night to Chiago and forced her to go in his bed room. She cried and rebelled against Pa in her heart but never complained for that because she had no body to complain, no body to listen to her, no body to console her. There were many people but all were deaf and dumb to Chiago’s troublesome life. Pa could be quite tender and solicitous towards her when not drunk. Nights with Pa Palagada left her tired and sleepy in the mornings. Ojebeta informed about Chiago’s illness to Pa Palagada. Ojebeta went to Pa’s room with Chiago. Chiago was left at the door of the room to go inside. After that nobody knew what happened to Chiago. Ojebeta remembered seeing the quarrelsome cook, Ma Basi, taking a bowl of hot soup into Pa’s part of the house. She was not sure whom the soup might be for. It was a long time before Ojebeta saw Chiago again and nobody in the Palagada house commented on Chiago’s absence. But when Ojebeta took Chiago to Pa’s room she overheard Pa’s reaction. When he saw Chiago ill he said:
“Now what’s the matter with you my little mother? Come – oh, how hot you are…” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 123)

Ojebeta was surprised because this kind of reaction was generally given to the wives. The slave women had to be the wives of their male masters and Ojebeta remembered what Clifford told her that he would one day make her his wife. Chiago’s constant absence haunted Ojebeta. After few days of Ma’s death Pa called Ojebeta furiously. She went into his room and was stunned to see Chiago with her little baby boy. Chiago said that she had just come back. Ojebeta was sure that Chiago was going to be the new mistress but Pa made it look as if Chiago had simply come back to help in the household. Things were done very cleverly that everybody in the household treated her as a slave only who had had the misfortune to have a baby. People asked her:

“What’s baby is he?” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 139)

Nobody knew that Chiago was the mother of Pa Palagada’s child. Chiago was given the promise by Pa that he would make her his wife. He did it so secretly that it did not make any difference in Chiago’s condition. She was a thing for Pa to be amused with. He made her a mother of his child but she was permitted to be his wife only in his bed, secretly. When Chiago disappeared she was alone and she had come back after months, with a child. Pa arranged for her and when the thing was done Chiago came back. Emecheta has not written about the gap it is left for the readers to understand that what happened to Chiago is clear. Chiago was treated as a very prestigious servant with a child of her own in the Palagada house and she never criticized Pa. Ojebeta was ordered to go with Miss Victoria so with her belongings she went to Pa’s part of the house and saw Chiago picking up Pa’s dirty clothes; performing the duty of a wife. Chiago had to perform the duty of a wife for Pa but she was just a mistress. She was there to serve him in his bed and to do his work. For fellow slave girls and women it was her misfortune to have a baby. From their reaction seemed that it could happen with any slave girl and they had to accept it. Moreover the extreme point of sadness was that Chiago had never objected to the situation. Her other unfortunate friends guessed that Chiago was going to live in the house forever. In the end it
comes to everybody’s notice that Chiago was living happily with Pa Palagada and their four growing sons.

Clifford developed affections for Ojebeta but did not marry her. After Ma’s death he went away and did not return for a long time. Miss Victoria, a vicious woman, daughter of Ma wanted to take Ojebeta at Bonny as Ojebeta was a hard worker. Miss Victoria never missed a chance to humiliate Ojebeta. Ojebeta did not wish go to Bonny with Miss Victoria as was somewhat confused and hurt by Clifford’s frequent absence from the house since Ma’s death. She wanted to know that was it that he was avoiding her or he was kept busy seeing to business affairs connected with the market? Miss Victoria wanted a charge on Ojebeta as Ma had paid for her. Miss Victoria said:

“Ojebeta, Ojebeta! Where is that stupid girl? Ojebeta, come here. You must get ready. We are leaving for Bonny by the first ferry tomorrow morning. I want to leave this house as soon as possible. Do you hear me?” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 140)

Victoria never asked for the choice of Ojebeta because she was a slave girl. Victoria had no value for Ojebeta when she called her a ‘stupid girl’ and the word ‘must’ indicates that being a slave girl Ojebeta had to obey the command of her mistress. Victoria was powerful woman because she was rich so she could never understand the condition of a girl who was alone and away from her home. Ojebeta wanted to go home, to her people. She said:

“I want to go back to my people.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 142)

She was firm in her decision without caring that whether her people really wanted her or not. She was sure that at her home she was not going to get meat means luxurious life so she was ready for mushroom. She knew that she could be free after repaying the amount paid by Ma to her brother and for that someone had to come from Ibuza to set her free. In this regard she told to Amanna:

“I know. That’s why I am not secretly running away. I shall tell them all that in the big house, and promise to pay them back one day. My bride price will be
enough to do that, because my brother told Ma to free me as soon as my future husband repaid her with my bride price.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 142)

The only gate of freedom for Ojebeta was her bride price. Without repaying the amount she could not even think about running away because after that she would be treated like a runaway slave and the tag ‘runaway slave’ will put her in more hostile condition. For her freedom is not free. Ironically her expectation of bride price from her future husband is also a kind of slavery because he would be her new master. Ojebeta got permission and the amount of four shillings from Pa. She went to Miss Victoria and told her in a voice of fury:

“I am not going to Bonny with you,” she shouted defiantly. “I am going to my people. I’m going home! Her heart was beating fast. Her eyes were round and shone with the first joy of freedom. “I’m going home.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 144)

This is the voice of a suppressed and displaced individual. Here she wishes to regain her lost identity. It can be connected with Ojebeta’s wish of having her charms back. At both the points she wants to cling to her individuality. She still has self-respect for herself and wants to preserve it. It gets reflected when she raised her basket to protect her from Victoria’s beating. Victoria wanted to inherit Ojebeta. She wanted Ojebeta’s body and soul, as an everlasting servant. So Victoria forcefully said:

“You cannot go. We bought you. You’ll be treated as a runaway slave. I will see to that. You must come with me.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 144)

It is the example of class difference. Victoria is an upper class woman and Ojebeta is a poor girl. Ojebeta is denied to regain her individuality because Victoria needed her. Ojebeta’s slavery is an answer to Victoria’s authority. So the force is natural. Moreover Victoria had inherited nothing from her mother so she wanted her share. Victoria’s scolding to Ojebeta is her frustration of not getting property. Victoria wanted to set a business like Ma and it was impossible without having a helping hand like Ojebeta. Victoria would not accept or tell it
directly to anybody not even to herself that she needed Ojebeta. Not only for Victoria but also for the Palagadas Ojebeta is the representative of other slaves who had to be the slave to make them masters. Masters cannot be masters without slaves. As written in C. P. Cavafy’s poem, *Waiting For the Barbarians*:

“They were, those people, a kind of solution.” (Cavafy)

In this poem Cavafy has written about the king, the courtiers and the legislator who were waiting for the barbarians to come. Throughout the day they all waited but in the evening all were confused and thinking. The day ended but the barbarians had not turned up, they did not appear. It means that the Empire must find out whether the barbarians exist or not. The Empire is not interested in knowing about the barbarians who are ‘others’ but for the Empire the existence of barbarians was an answer to the existence of the Empire. The poem ends with this line that the barbarians were a kind of solution to the authority. The same way the slaves were solution to the Palagadas. The slaves cannot have a wish for better life and if they have it will be crushed by the bourgeois. When Ojebeta told Victoria about Ma’s plan that Ma wanted Ojebeta for Clifford Victoria laughed. Victoria said:

“I must say that you slave girls certainly do have ambition. Chiago wanting to take over the whole household, and you wanting my brother to marry you? So that’s the situation. Well, let me tell you, slave girl from Ibuza, this can never be so. You are a slave. Come with me, and you shall have your freedom in a few years, without having to repay a farthing.” (Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* 145)

Miss Victoria laughed at the both the slave girls. She misinterpreted them. She forgot about her Pa. Chiago never wanted to take over the household. She was there because of Pa. Pa wanted Chiago forever. Ojebeta also never thought about it. It was Ma’s wish but Clifford went away. It can be said that Ojebeta was spared from becoming another Chiago. Victoria constantly reminded Ojebeta of her identity, the identity of a slave which is constructed and created by the Palagadas and her brother Okolie. Otu market was a centre where things were sold but it also became a centre of human tread. Ojebeta is a representative of those who were sold by their
people at the Otu market. When Ojebeta entered in the Palagada house she helped the readers to meet the other slaves who also had been sold by their family members. Many of them had no idea that which part of the country they had come from, where was their family, etc. Otu market was a place where the fate of the poor ones was sealed as at this place their individuality was snatched away from them and they were made slaves. Miss Victoria never treated Ojebeta as a human being she called her a slave only. When Ojebeta denied going with Miss Victoria she became furious and said:

“Give me back everything my mother gave you, you ungrateful slave!”
(Emecheta, The Slave Girl 145)

Victoria wanted everything back from Ojebeta and she called her ungrateful slave. This ungratefulness was because Ojebeta raised her voice and asked for her right by denying being the slave of Victoria. Slaves had to be obedient and loyal to their masters. The word ‘ungrateful slave’ also shows the mentality and perspective of masters. The capitalist people always believed that all poor people were wicked and ungrateful. The capitalist ideology had changed the very concept of being ‘ungrateful’. Every time a slave had to face this kind of insult and humiliation. The slaves were never treated as human beings by their masters. The picture of the Palagadas presented by Emecheta was both ridiculous and noisy. With Marxist approach the picture of the house was of class division. There existed two classes, rich and poor. The capitalist viewed the working class as greedy, selfish, and ungrateful. That cannot be sure about the workers. From the subaltern perspective the bourgeois are cunning and greedy. For example, when Ojebeta denied going to Bonny with Miss Victoria, she shouted at Ojebeta. Victoria took Ojebeta’s garments and trampled on them. She fumed and cursed Ojebeta. Victoria was searching for the earrings, the silver bangles and the chain, she took it all. She left Ojebeta’s clothes scattered and trodden on the ground. She told Ojebeta:

“If you want these silver trinkets back, you will have to come to Bonny to get them!” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 145)

Ojebeta knew that the jewelry were precious and for her freedom was more precious than the jewelry. Ojebeta was not going to surrender for the trinkets as that would make her a
permanent slave. Ojebeta wanted to taste “mushroom of freedom” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 146). Victoria did it out of anger and disappointment because she had hoped to inherit from her mother which was not fulfilled and she wanted to take revenge. All Victoria wanted was money. She wanted a dominating position, power. She became inhuman and her inhumanity was madness for Ojebeta. Just like Ojebeta, other subaltern groups looked at the dominating people as mad.

Ojebeta went back to her town and was warmly welcomed by her people. She asked for her brothers. The town people said that her elder brother, Owezim left the village for white men’s job and they did not know much about Okolie. Both of them were in Lagos. Ojebeta decided that she would not leave the village as her brothers were not there. Ukabegwu, one of Ojebeta’s relatives invited her to live with them he said:

“…I hold your family ofo, the symbol of worship for your family; if your brother Owezim should die, your bride price will come to me.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 150)

This relative of Ojebeta wanted her bride price and it was his right because he was a man. In Ibuza only men had the right to inherit the girls and to enjoy their bride price. Uteh, Ojebeta’s aunt never wanted to lose her again so she wanted Ojebeta to live with her. When she put her point forward she was interrupted by Ukabegwu’s senior wife. The senior wife said:

“But you are a woman! How can it be that you want to inherit the girl? It is not your right! (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 150)

This is an example of conservative nature of women in Ibuza. Women think in favour of their husbands. Masculine ideology works behind such mentality. A woman has no right to inherit the bride price. Women could not think about a woman’s freedom.

Ojebeta got married with Jacob. Clifford came to get money from Jacob because his mother paid to Ojebeta’s brother and as per the tradition Jacob had to pay the bride price. When Clifford came to get the bride price he was dumb with astonishment because he felt the change is Ojebeta. He felt that she had changed completely. Clifford went there to finalize everything with
Jacob and her two brothers. Ojebeta’s brothers never did anything for her now they have come for the bargaining. The old Ojebeta- the energetic, laughing one was lost somewhere. Clifford wondered to see the change in Ojebeta but he wanted to end up the business to clear out her life once and for all. Ojebeta wanted to ask several questions but a sharp glace from Jacob sent her back to the kitchen. The men set to finalize the arrangements for her “permanent ownership” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 177). Clifford had come to get his money only. Jacob paid eight pounds for Ojebeta to become his new owner. Ojebeta was happy to have a new master. She said:

“The contract is completed, after all these years. I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own town Ibuza; my mind is now at rest.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 179)

She also says:

“Thank you, my new owner. Now I am free in your house. I could not wish for a better master.” (Emecheta, The Slave Girl 179)

The tone in the language is ambiguous and ironic. The readers may feel that it is spoken by Ojebeta as she is happy to be released from her previous master and to be sold to her husband master from Ibuza. It can also be said that it is the tone of irony because Emecheta has used the word ‘contract’. It is intentionally used because it is about marriage. It shows how marriage has become a platform for a woman to be sold. Behind Ojebeta’s happiness patriarchal ideology plays a vital role in which a woman is trained to be happy for having a man as her master. The language of Ojebeta is a language of a slave. The word ‘free’ does not mean freedom for her. Her husband is her ‘new owner’ and she lives in his house. It means metaphorically she does not belong to the house. So there is not a place for a woman in the world to be owned, or which can be called hers only. Willingly or unwillingly a woman has to accept the situation because there is no other way to escape. Emecheta mocks at the strange tradition. She writes:

“Women,” laughed Owezim, “they love to see money spent on them.”

“Yes,” agreed Clifford. “They love to know that they cost a lot of money.”

(Emecheta, The Slave Girl 179)
These dialogues show the outlook of men for women. Women are playthings for men. The masculine structure of society has put women into the periphery that they have been conditioned to look at themselves from a man’s perspective. Emecheta’s these words are in certain ways seeing and thinking of the functioning of power in society. The power decides the tradition and cultures of the colonized others. This shows the structures of thought and the workings of power. For a woman freedom is not free. Emecheta in *The Slave Girl* writes:

“No woman is ever free. To be owned by a man is a great honour.” (Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* 158)

Women are possessed or owned by men. Linking women with the national identity helps to see the nation as a feminine figure. The way a woman cannot be free the nation also cannot be free from the colonial clutches. A woman’s image is static and passive in patriarchal colonialism the same way the image of colonized nation is static. The colonized nation has to be feminine so that the ‘First World’ nations can be masculine. The colonized nation remains ‘the slave girl’. Identity of women is lost in male dominant society.

*The Slave Girl* is a story of Ogbanje Ojebeta. Her birth brings joy to her parents. Unfortunately she was sold by her brother. She is forced to become a slave. She remains slave forever.

*The Slave Girl* follows the fortunes of Ogbanje Ojebeta, a Nigerian woman who is sold into slavery in her own land after disease and tragedy leave her orphaned as a child. In her fellow slaves, she finds a surrogate family that clings together under the unbending rule of their master. As Ogbaje Ojebeta becomes a woman and discovers her need for home and family, and for freedom and identity, she realizes that she must ultimately choose her own destiny. (Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*)

The theory of human identity is problematic because it can be studied on the basis of cultural difference in race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, religion or identity. Identity can be political, national, social, cultural, racial, historical or religious. So identity is a very complex
term to deal with. But apart from all these gender identity is constructed. Simon de Beauvoir asserts:

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir, The Second Sex)

For de Beauvoir the category of gender identity is just not determined by the biological sex; rather gender identity is socially constructed and this can be resisted through social and political struggle. There are some critics who are against de Beauvoir as they believe that biological difference is the base of differentiating gender. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva agree with de Beauvoir that feminine identity is a social construct. At the moment of childbirth just after the declaration of gender that the new born baby is a girl she is enslaved by social rules and norms of patriarchal society. The Family, the State, Education, the Law and the Media are powerful patriarchal institutions and they play a vital role to reinforce and regulate the discourse of gender. In Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader edited by David Lodge in her critical essay ‘Feminism and Critical Theory’ Gayatry Spivak argues:

“My own definition of a woman is very simple: it rests on the word ’man’ as used in texts that provide the foundation for the corner of the literary criticism establishment that I inhabit. You might say that this is a reactionary position. Should I not carve out an independent definition for myself as a woman?” (Lodge 495)

According to this definition a woman cannot be free. She cannot have her independent identity. She constantly has a risk of falling prey to her binary oppositions that perpetuate her subordination in culture and society. Spivak argues that the sexual difference between men and women has put women into the minority group. Moreover Spivak argues that there is a difference between the representation of the ‘First World’ women and the ‘Third World’ women. Based on this argument the research tries to investigate the representation of African women in Buchi Emecheta’s works. Women characters of Emecheta do futile attempts to construct their identity or to be known by all. African women are given typical roles such as obedient wives and caring mummies. In African cultural and social context it is the meaning of ‘woman’. It is necessary to understand women in African context, how they are treated. They are dislocated or
displaced from their place. Here the word ‘place’ does not mean geographical place it means social place or status; position or value of a person in society. Women’s displacement from their social status resulted in identity crisis. It is the result of biological difference between men and women. In patriarchal capitalism the voice of a woman is muted and suppressed and her desire of self-expression becomes uncontrollable. A ‘Third World’ woman writer is doubly suppressed and she has to express herself within the codes of patriarchal structure in a new language, in the language of the masters. It means though a novel is written by a woman, it has a paternal premise. A woman writer tries to communicate through her marginalized voice. Speech and silence can be put as binary opposition because speech is for masculinity and silence can be a synonym of femininity. In such awkward situation if a woman writer fails to make her women characters speak loudly, she encodes them within the structure of the novel. As per the tradition a woman writer has to follow the patriarchal tradition she cannot create a novel which can be called hers only, a novel without male dominance. She has to put man at the centre but her frustration comes out when she decenters him from the position by putting woman at the centre. In that sense it is the deconstruction of patriarchal ideology. So the ‘Third World’ women writers aggressively attack on the colonialist and patriarchal ideology and they try hard to create feminine ideology.

4.5: Defining Self:

*Second-Class Citizen* published in 1974 is written by Buchi Emecheta. The novel has some autobiographical elements. The emphasis is laid on Adah’s struggle to gain access to schooling as Emecheta herself struggled a lot to gain education. From the beginning Emecheta has taken a very strong stand against the discrimination of women. When she wrote the novel, in Nigeria people believed that western education as a key to success in changing Africa. They thought that it was wise to send boys to school because they were likely to support them in their old age. Girls were excluded from it as they were fated to marry and join another household. Education was very costly so people preferred to spend money on sons rather than on daughters. Emecheta is painfully aware about the fact that women are subjected to class, race and gender-based oppression or discrimination. Through the life and struggle of Adah, Emecheta in this novel, tries to define a woman’s self.
In *Second-Class Citizen* Adah’s life is torn between Ibuza, Lagos and UK. Her dream is to study. Adah desires to write but her desire is pitted against the forces of an egotistical and unemotional husband and largely indifferent white society. Being a female writer Emecheta consciously efforts to speak out against the subjugation of Igbo women. Buchi Emecheta quests for an ideal social change. Because she is a woman she belongs to nowhere as she is a disappointment to her parents, her in-laws and in general to the society. In this novel also, Emecheta connects the string of Second World War to show the destruction caused by it.

“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. One thing was certain, though: she was born during the Second World War.” (Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* 1)

In all Igbo families boys were given preference for education. This shows how gender politics is deeply rooted in this community. Adah is passionate to go to school but there were discussions going on about sending her school. Adah’s mother told to her friends:

“A year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn how to sew.” (Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* 3)

Adah started school. In this school Yoruba or any African language was not taught. Language is a major key to understand culture. If children are not taught the mother tongue they are slowly driven away from their roots. It is an ideology which tries to vanish the originality of the natives. Emecheta has shown how the dominant ideology operates to discriminate the native people. Emecheta is concerned with patriarchal and imperial ideology.

“Traditionally, women are considered sacred and fragile, and are respected mostly on the grounds of their gender and housekeeping duties. Historically, women are positioned as second in command in the family.” (Peter Okoro Nwankwo)
The above quotation is about the expectation of society from a woman. Traditionally a woman is respected on the grounds of her housekeeping duties but she is given a second status in a family. A woman is labeled as an ‘angle in the house’. This label is given to a woman on the base of her capacity to do sacrifice for her family. In *Second-class Citizen* Adah is altogether a different woman. From her childhood she struggles to survive her dream. She wants to study. It was her unconscious wish to become powerful by getting knowledge. She deconstructs the image of a fragile woman. She does not like to be fragile. She never wishes to be praised on the grounds of gender and her housekeeping duties. In spite of her knowledge and equivalent capacities, ahead of her husband she is treated second to her husband in her family. She tries hard to have a control over her body, just like Nnu Ego. It has been always typically believed that women are peace maker. They have to take care of their family, whether they are single or married. The same role is expected from Adah but she differs from the other women of community. Adah finds herself in hot water. She helplessly faces the odd situation. She is circled by problems of adjusting in a new way of life with her dry husband.

Starting from the childhood Adah was told very good things about Ibuza that she came to regard her being born in a God-forsaken place like Lagos as a misfortune. The town’s first lawyer was coming from United Kingdom. The Ibuza women were preparing to welcome him. Adah’s father pronounced ‘United Kingdom’. He pronounced it so heavily that it sounded like a respectful expression. He pronounced it as if he were speaking of God’s Holiest of Holiest. The people in Ibuza believed that going to United Kingdom is surely like paying a visit to the God. Emecheta writes of the women of Ibuza:

“They dyed their hair, and straightened it with hot combs to make it look like European.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 2)

This sentence mirrors the wish of the natives. The natives are unaware of the so-called joys of civilization and all its pitfalls. They are happy to welcome the man as they have never had the taste of civilization. They are unaware of the fact that the day will come and the civilization will become opium for them and hook them all. Adah’s mother and her friends were happy to have their photo taken by Europeans. On the name of civilization the white people draw a line of difference and the non-whites were put in the category of ‘other’. Logically the
difference of ‘we’ and ‘other’ is baseless because if questions are asked about ‘we’ and ‘other’ they will remain unanswered. In this wish of looking like the master lies insecurity. They imitate the white people and are slowly driven away from their originality. The effect of white community is so much that the natives feel hesitation for their look. These women do not want their hair naturally curled. The natives believe the lawyer Nweze was going to be their messiah and he will bring facilities for the Ibuza people. The women were doing practice of singing, to welcome the lawyer. In their songs they sang a line:

“Ezidihhi hi de ogoli, oma oba” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 9)

Its meaning is ‘When a good man holds a woman, she becomes like the queen.’

Women are in the psychological clutches of patriarchal ideology. Whatever they think, even for themselves, it is always from a man’s perspective. A woman is dependent upon a man. Man holds a powerful position and controls a woman, physically and mentally. Nobody was interested in taking care of Adah. She became responsible at premature age. Everybody wanted the amount she was going to fetch for her family. She married Francis. After her marriage she got a job. Her husband had a trouble with it. He asked his father:

“Do you think our marriage will last if I allow Adah to go and work for the Americans? Her pay will be three times my own. My colleagues at work will laugh at me. What do you think I should do?” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 20)

Though Adah is an educated woman she needs to seek permission from her husband. She has to live under the thumb of her husband against her wishes. Francis does not want Adah to work simply because her income will be more than his. This dialogue of Francis reflects his mindset and his inferior superiority. He has that fear of insecurity or losing the power because his wife is educated. This shows a man’s unconscious wish that a woman should be in subordinate position to him. Francis can be compared with Ete Kamba from Double Yoke. Ete also wants an educated wife but he thinks that his wife must be lower in grade than him. Ete believes that if a wife is intellectually equal to her husband than she would start arguing on the
equal ground. Both Ete and Francis fear to lose their status. To Francis’s question his father replies:

“You are a fool of a man, you are. Where will she take the money to? Her people? Her people, who did not even come to congratulate her on the arrival of baby Titi? Her relatives, who did not care whether she lived or died? The money is for you, cannot you see? Let her go and work for a million Americans and bring their money here, into this house. It is your luck. You made a good choice in marriage, son.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 20)

The conversation between the two men shows where they have positioned a woman. Though Adah earns her earning goes to her husband only. She does not have a right to keep it with her. Her position in the family is just like a servant. The conversation shows lack of empathy for her. Society never allows a woman to create her own identity. Adah’s education could not help her to get rid of domesticization of herself. Adah was given special treatment on days of her payments. Francis decided to work for half day only. He goes to meet Adah at her work as a bodyguard of hers and money. Adah kept her nick name ‘Igbo Tigress’. She still wishes to go to United Kingdom. She expressed her desire to go to UK. But the circumstances are such that she has to sacrifice her wish because her husband wanted to go there first. Adah was given responsibility to send twenty pounds every month. Apart from this she has to take care of her children and she has to help in paying fees of some of Francis’s seven sisters. She feed herself, her family and saves money to fulfill her dream. She wants to make her family a family of Igbo elite. Every time Adah would have to pay for all the plans in the family but the decisions would have been made behind her back. She was treated like a puppet in the family. Adah found herself alone since nobody thought of giving support to her. She was force into a situation dictated by society in which, as an individual, she had little choice. She wanted to move to a new country, among new people to enjoy her own life. Adah’s happiness was disrupted by the news Francis brought to her. He said:

“You know how old-fashioned Father is.”
“Father does not approve of women going to the UK. But you see, you will pay for me, and look after yourself, and within three years, I’ll be back. Father said, you’re earning more than most people who have been to England. Why lose your good job just to go and see London? They say it is just like Lagos.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 24)

The above quote is spoken by Francis. Adah is a passive listener. It shows hegemonic relationship between man and woman. A woman is always controlled by masculine power. Men control women physically and emotionally. Adah earns for the family but she is not allowed to live her personal life. Her life, her dreams, her everything is for the family only. Being a woman she must give priority to her family first. She has to sacrifice her wish of Going to UK as the family planned for Francis first.

Second-class Citizen is a description of ‘second-class’. When Francis moved to England for further study the whole family turned out to the airport to wish him a safe journey. Adah did not cry. All her relatives stared at her as at the time of departure from her husband they could not see tears in her eyes. Nobody told her anything because she was going to pay for Francis. She did not mind that but it was too much when Francis wrote to her:

“You did not cry for me. You were very happy to see me go, were you not? Was that why you did not wish to appear in my send-off photograph? You did not care for me.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 28)

Adah did not explain anything to Francis and she kept on going in her life and did everything for her family. In a patriarchal society a wife has to cry for husband to prove her love and loyalty. When Adah went to England she received a cold welcome. She was stunned to see a new Francis. Francis kissed Adah publically which was not allowed in their culture. Francis was delighted to see his son Vicky. When he saw him he said:

“Just my image, I can now die in peace.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 33)
In Adah’s culture girls are counted as children but they are not considered or given importance because only boys/sons carry the name of the father. Francis’s kissing Adah publically and his delight to see Vicky reflects irony and paradox of the situation. In his life Francis tried to be ‘modern’ as ‘modern’ is understood as a synonym of ‘western’. It was for him civilization. He has adapted western style but his views about women are the same. His views about women reflect that gender issue is common everywhere whether it is Nigeria or England. The land of white people has not helped Francis to fill his life with new and reforming thoughts. He treats women second to men as if it has become a tradition in any patriarchal society. Adah gave a strong answer upon Francis’ joke of death. To this reaction Francis said:

“This separation of ours has made you bold. You’ve never in your life told me that I was lying before.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 34)

The sharpness in Francis’ voice reflected his attitude towards his wife that how he treated her. It was something like that African males were allowed to come in England and get civilized but the same privilege for females was forbidden. At this sharp reaction of her husband Adah kept mum as being a woman she was made for it. Silence was her language.

In phallocratic society motherhood and childbearing are the oppressive effect of patriarchal domination or sexism. It is a “phallic activity” (Ruthven). This system which is male dominated makes a woman powerless and the fact is women will remain powerless forever. Society is male-specific and that’s why it is called androcentric or phallocentric. Sexual differentiation is biological and phallus is taken to be the principle signifier of the male. The possession of phallus is in symbolic way entails the possession of power in patriarchal society. In a phallocratic order this enables a man to have domination upon women, in social relations. Women are mastered by man. The passion for mastery results in molestation or rape of women. It is called a phallocratic oppression of women. Men use phallus to control women’s body.

Based on this argument the study of Emecheta’s works reveal the same kind of sexual politics. In Emecheta’s world marriage is a legal and systematic way of mastering women. In Second-class Citizen Adah as an individual fights with patriarchal capitalism of her community. Adah’s wish to educate herself is symbolically a wish to have control in her hands because knowledge is a symbol of power and power is always a possession of men in society. The
paternal premise of the novel is also about the issue of motherhood and childbearing. Adah has children and she independently takes care of her children when her husband goes to America for study. She goes there and gets job in a library where as her husband studies only. In her family she is a bread winner. As the power goes to a man only Adah is mastered by her husband. Adah is the mother of three children and now she wants to control her productivity. She is worried about her study and so she is not ready for her forth pregnancy. She goes to a Family Planning Clinic and learns about the jelly, the cap, the pill and so many other things. Francis denied her by saying that men know how to control themselves but she decided to make plans behind his back. Francis denial does not mean that men can control themselves but it means to control a woman’s body and motherhood. Adah has no right to decide whether to conceive Francis’ baby or not. She is made a mother of three children before she reached the age of twenty-one. Adah asked a motherly-looking nurse:

“Please, could I have the Pill? You see, I am not twenty-one yet and if I had another child it would be my fourth, and I originally came here to study and bring up two babies I brought from home. Can you help me? I need the Pill.”

(Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 149)

Adah does not wish to become mother of a fourth child. She is a modern woman who wants be ready with all equipments of birth control. It is her denial of motherhood. She wishes to have freedom to think and act like an individual which is not allowed to anys African women. Adah rejected to be an obedient and loyal wife. She is firm to get an opportunity of exercising her own will and she proved it by forging her husband’s signature. She did forgery because she was given a form by the nurse to be signed by her husband. She did not care for anything else except her study and job. It is a wish of any woman. Adah’s all efforts failed and she became pregnant again she wanted the pregnancy terminated. It is a new challenge for her.

“She now saw this situation as a challenge, a new challenge. When she was little and alone, the challenge had been that of educating herself, existing through it all, alone, all by herself. She had hoped that in marriage she could get herself involved in her man’s life and he would share the same involvement in hers. She
had gambled with marriage, just like most people, but she had gambled unluckily and had lost. Now she was alone again with this new challenge that included her children as well. She was going to live, to survive to exist through it all.”
(Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 158)

The above passage is about Adah’s struggle for survival. Adah swings between hope and despair. It is not only the struggle of Adah but it is the struggle of every woman in male dominated society. Emecheta tries to get the answer of the question which has been asked by many feminist critics, ‘what it means to be a woman’. She had expectation from her husband but her life was ruined. She becomes a victim of domestic violence. It is her existential struggle as a woman. She decided that “if the worst came to the very worst she would leave Francis with her children since she had nothing to lose but her chains” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 161).

These chains are stronger than iron chains because these are the chains of traditions. Adah started writing a novel which she named The Bride Price. This novel of Adah was over romanticized because she had put everything that was lacking in her marriage into it. It was Adah’s dream world in which Adah wanted to fulfill all her dreams. Her husband is not one of those men who would adapt to new demands with ease. His ideas about women were still the same. In Francis’ views,

“A woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in; to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time. There was no need to have intelligent conversation with his wife because, you see, she might start getting new ideas.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 175)

For Francis, Adah was a second-class human and he treated her like a slave girl. He could never tolerate an intelligent woman. But at any cost Adah was not going to give up. She wanted to show her creative work to Francis to show him that she has not wasted her time as he thought. She told Francis about The Bride Price. He was not interested in Adah’s talk and kept on watching The Saint on a new television which they had hired. Francis said:
“You keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are black. The white man can barely tolerate us men, to say nothing of brainless females like you who could think of nothing except how to breast-feed her baby.”

“That may be so,” cried Adah, “but people have read it. And they say that it is good. Just read it, I want your opinion. Do not you know what it means to us if in the future I could be a writer?”

“Well Flora Nwapa is black and she writes,” Adah challenged. “I have seen her books in all the libraries where I worked.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 178)

Francis humiliates Adah by saying that she cannot write because she is a woman. He calls women brainless and Adah’s work ‘rubbish’. In his views a woman’s only job is to be a good mother only. Adah is only a domestic animal for Francis and she cannot be a writer. Adah’s work has been praise by all but for her husband it is nothing. To prove that she can write she gave example of Flora Nwapa who is a black female writer. It shows Adah’s determination and strong will to be a writer. Bill, Adah’s friend called The Bride Price her ‘brainchild’. Francis burnt Adah’s child. Francis said:

“I do not care if it is your child or not. I have read it, and my family would never be happy if a wife of mine was permitted to write a book like that.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 181)

After this incident life with Francis became purgatorial. It was plain that he would not like to have an intelligent wife. He had conventional attitude towards women. It was like this that a successful woman might crush the male ego so roots for success are denied to her by a man. In his thought and behavior Francis was inhuman to Adah. After this she left Francis to be separated. She lived with her children in a flat. Francis went there and said:

“In our country, and among our people, there is nothing like divorce or separation. Once a man’s wife, always a man’s wife until you die. You cannot escape. You are bound to him.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 183)
Marriage is a system of legal suppression of women. A woman in Igbo community cannot escape from the clutches. In patriarchal society this system of legal oppression allows men to manipulate women. Francis had the same idea about women. He had no respect for his mother also. He enjoyed using a female body as a toy. He played with it by torturing and got cruel pleasure. He even said:

“My father knocked my mother about until I was old enough to throw stones at him. My mother never left my father.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 183)

As if suppression of women had become a tradition in androcratic society. Men feel proud for biting their wives. Women were not supposed to open their mouths at any condition. They had to be submissive and docile to their husbands. Women had to carry the burden and they had to sacrifice everything for being women. Francis had given his mother’s example to convince Adah that she could not separate herself from her husband. Francis was a parasite as he was dependent upon his wife. He even left his job when Adah got a new one by thinking that Adah would earn thrice an amount of her previous job. He had given nothing to his wife except children which he could claim fully his own. Even as a father he failed. He had given children to Adah just for his sexual pleasure. He just wanted to get physical with her as he could be to anyone else. Adah became a mother of four children but Francis failed to become a father of his own children. Adah’s four children are the living symbol of Francis’ physical violence to her and it also shows that how Adah’s body is control by her man. She tells to Francis:

“Yes,” agreed Adah again, “but was there a month when your father did not pay the rent, give food money, pay for all your school fees? Can you, Francis, show me some vests or anything these children can lay their hands upon which you can claim to have bought for them? No, Francis you broke the laws of our people first, not me. And remember, Francis I am not your mother. I am me, and I am different from her. It is a mistake to use your mother as a yardstick. You never loved or respected her. You simply tolerated her, I know now, because it never crossed your mind to work and send her money like other Nigerian students do. That should have warned me. In the short courting period we had I noticed that you
never thought of giving her anything. It was always you, you all the time and she, poor soul, was always giving and giving to you. To her nothing is too much, no human is good enough for you. You remember the saying the man who treated his mother like a shit would always treat his wife like a shit? That should have warned me, but I was too blind to see them.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 183)

Here is a voice of a woman who never spoke before. Emecheta has given speech to Adah. Adha argued with Francis that he had done nothing for his family or even for his mother. In Adah’s view Francis was a gainer who gained first from his mother and then from his wife. He never had sympathy for any of these female characters. Francis went to Adah’s flat and she was beaten up cruelly by him. Adah wanted protection from such destruction so she went to the court. There the magistrate asked her to present her marriage certificate and birth certificates of her children but unfortunately she could not do so. Francis had burnt them all. He said they are not married and the children are not his. When he was asked by the magistrate for the maintenance of the children he said:

“I do not mind their being sent for adoption.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 185)

This was the final stroke from Francis to Adah. Adah could not imagine that Francis would let her and children down like this. With this sentence Emecheta has decentered Francis as a man, as a husband and as a father from his position. Emecheta has shown a man’s mean interest in female body only. In actuality when they have to face the reality they step back. It is the woman who proves herself bold enough to face with any challenges of life. After hearing this sentence Adah got courage and in a very loud and clear voice she told to the magistrate:

“Do not worry sir. The children are mine, and that is enough. I shall never let them down as long as I am alive.” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 185)

Adah never intended to get any financial help from Francis as he was jobless. She never wanted the law to interfere in her life but it became necessary for her because she just wanted the
court to order Francis to stay away from her and her children. After this she left the court and was tired and was feeling sick because of her fifth pregnancy. It is very much crucial that she tried to resist but Francis forced her to bend down to her knee. She had to give her body to Francis to be toyed with. She stood in the market and heard a familiar voice of a male calling her by her Igbo name ‘Nne nna’. The voice was of her friend. He said:

“So you married Francis?” (Emecheta, Second-Class Citizen 186)

Then this man paid for the taxi and took her home thinking that she still lived with Francis because she is married to him. Adah had been taken to the same well from which she was trying to come out. Her friend thought on his own about Adah’s relation with her husband that she lived with him. Being an Igbo man he was unable to think out of Igbo context. He could not see cuts on Adah’s face and if he had shown them he ignored. Through this Emecheta has shown a man’s failure to feel a woman’s pain.

4.6: Sublime Self:

Emecheta’s discourse are revolutionary as she undeniably emphasis on the need for change. In The Joys of Motherhood published in 1979 Emecheta present a strong female point of view against male chauvinism and patriarchy’s satisfaction with an unfair and oppressive system towards women. Emecheta strongly opposes the passive role given to women due to patriarchal sexual bias. The Joys of Motherhood is the realistic portrayal of womanhood which is not at all joyful as childbearing and motherhood make a woman weak. The title of the novel and the subtitle given here are ironic as in patriarchal structure a woman’s sublimity is seen when she becomes a mother.

Buchi Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood is in actual sense a very critical and ironical critique on the joys of fatherhood. It is about how an image of a father is constructed at the cost of a woman’s body. Nnu-Ego has to bear children for her husband. Emecheta has use ‘motherhood’ in the title but the novel is structure of ‘fatherhood’. Nnu-Ego has to accept the joys of motherhood as an act of servitude for her husband. She has given her ‘body’ or her ‘self’ to her husband and has allowed him to enter in her body to prove himself a man. The circle of
the novel reveals that a man needs a woman to define himself as a man or to prove his masculinity. In *The Joys of Motherhood* the novelist constantly re-interprets Nnu Ego’s life and brings out Nnu Ego’s failure as a mother and woman. She constantly struggles to reshape the meanings and connotations of the words. The story of Nnu Ego’s mother, Ona, inscribes a contrasting context in which a woman exercises considerable control over her body. The narration of it excites an eroticism that challenges a purely functional definition of women’s bodies solely in terms of their reproductive functions.

“Ona’s belief that Nnu Ego can be a woman, and at the same time ‘have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one’, suggests the fluidity in definitions of womanhood that contradict any sense of a fixed and homogenous value system.”

(Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* 17)

This displays new aggressive values at the expense of women’s possibilities. The traditional world of the novel appears natural and coherent because it suppresses alternative perspectives. By introducing conceptual language Emecheta resists and reinterprets patriarchal values. Nnu-Ego’s mother Ona wanted her to be a ‘free’ woman. Perhaps her wish for her daughter is the result of her suppression by Agbadi. Ona tried to have control over body but had to play a subordinate role before Agbadi’s suppressive role. Agunwa, Agbadi’s senior wife is also an example of lost identity. She never uttered a word against her husband. She is a very submissive woman and her voice is silenced. She falls ill and dies. People believe that the reason of her illness is that she had to share her husband with Ona. Women of Nigeria have accepted the idea of patriarchal ideology of sharing husband. Agunwa got hurt because Agbadi slept with Ona in the same hut where she once slept. She was standing beside the window and saw how her husband reduced Ona to himself. For her, her place was given to Ona or in another sense Agunwa has been displaced from her place. Agbadi enjoys rights because he is a man and Agunwa silently dies. Death is the only option left for her. It is an example that how men and women are polar opposites and cannot be treated equally in society. Agunwa’s cry remains unheard. The slave woman is a very strong example of women as an ‘other’. The slave woman is Agbadi’s senior wife Agunwa’s slave. She is entrapped in the circles of patriarchy and slavery. She is a slave to her fellow Nigerian woman. She is forced to die for her mistress when she died.
The final stroke was given by Agbadi’s son but before death she promised Agbadi that she would come back. She became Nnu-Ego’s chi. In African context chi means personal god. She becomes a spirit. Buchi Emecheta has freed her from the cage of a woman’s body. Gender politics is the result of body. Once the soul leaves the body it gets freedom from gender difference. So as a spirit the slave woman becomes more powerful than man. It is believed that the slave girl is reborn as Nnu Ego and as her chi. As written in National Healths: Gender, Sexuality and Health in a Cross-Cultural Context:

“The psychological potential of this doubling goes beyond what Florence Stratton sees as ‘a female schizophrenic response to male oppression.’” (Michael Worton)

As a spirit the slave woman has the power to control and manipulate masculinity. She refuses to bless Nnu Ego with motherhood. Nnu Ego prayed to her chi:

“O my chi, why do you have to bring me so low? Why must I be so punished? I am sorry for what my father did and I am sure he is sorry too. But try to forgive us.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 32)

By doing this she puts the dominant tradition of motherhood into question and also brings out the elements of gender biases. By her refusal to give children to Nnu-Ego she wants to deconstruct a conventional identity of a woman by creating new woman, a woman who is just a woman, not the mother of any children.

The slave girl in the form of chi is more powerful than men. By challenging patriarchal system she puts Nnu Ego in a situation in which Nnu Ego experiences woman’s loneliness and isolation in childbirth and motherhood. Nnu Ego’s first marriage was about to end because she could not give children to her husband. She was alone and lonely, craving for love and support. She faces humiliation from her first husband Amatolwu. She asked him:

“Amatokwu, remember when I first came to your house? Remember how you used to want me here with only the sky for our shelter? What happened to us,
Amatokwu? Is it my fault that I did not have a child for you? Do you think I do not suffer too?” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 32)

Nnu Ego was losing her position as a senior wife. She had to help her husband in the farming as the younger wife was expecting child. To Nnu Ego’s questions Amatokwu said:

“What do you want me to do?” Amatokwu asked. “I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you do not appeal to me any more. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman he wants to be cooked, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 32)

Emecheta shows that a woman is respected in society if she can give children, especially male children to her husband. Her condition was so worst that her father said for her, “she is as barren as a desert.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 39) Nnu Ego is of forty when her last child is born dead. Symbolically it shows the depletion of a woman’s body. Nnu Ego’s bewildered behavior reflects haunting experiences of birthing. This moment reflects Nnu Ego’s unconscious desire as she is caught in a muddle of feelings. The fluctuations of her thoughts reveal the semantics of a childbearing culture and call it into question:

“Nnu Ego knelt in the middle of her room, holding on to the bed post, and, with her teeth dug right into her lower lip to prevent herself from screaming, she gave birth to a baby not bigger than a kitten. She had only lain there for what she thought was a few seconds...but when she woke up, she saw the baby and herself in the pool of blood. The child, the girl, was lifeless. She was dead.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 194)

The narrative signals intersections of critique and alternative meanings of only in this horrific picture but also in the conflicting pulls of Nnu Ego’s own thoughts, her movement from
horror to self-satisfied exultation in her fertility and to the lurking sense that she has actually willed the baby’s death:

“She felt like crying, but at the same time she did not want to. She felt the loss of this little humanity, this unfortunate little thing she had carried while climbing up to Zebo market, this thing she knew was probably being hurt as she had bent defiantly down to wash clothes for her sons. ‘Oh, poor baby [...] I am sorry you are not staying; I am also glad that God has seen fit to take you back. My own reward, the joy of knowing that at this age I can still have children for my husband [...]’ Then she started to feel guilty. Had she wanted the child to die – was that the interpretation of the slight relief she had experienced when she crawled to the dead child to check what sex it was? That it was a girl that lessened her sense of loss.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 194)

The above paragraph shows that death of child was Nnu Ego’s subconscious wish. Unconsciously it is the rejection of traditional assumptions that sanction childbearing even in impoverished condition. Being a woman Nnu Ego is allowed to enjoy the rejection only in her unconscious because in patriarchal system language is not sufficient or rather enough to give wings to a woman’s imagination. This dramatizes the struggle between unconscious desire and conscious self-sanctioning that continuously stalls her ability to take control of her body. When the novel ends Nnu-Ego is also in the same situation. She is made a “canonized mother” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood). Her sons made a shrine for her. People worshiped her and appealed to her to make women fertile but she never did it. Even after death Nnu-Ego could not rest. People called her a wicked spirit because she did not listen to any of the prayer. Throughout her life she was busy in building up her joys as a mother and after death she denies that joy to other women. Nnu-Ego herself desired unconsciously for the death of her child. The slave woman also refused to give her the joys of motherhood and Nnu-Ego follows her chi. In symbolic way it is Nnu-Ego’s wish to make women free from the patriarchal clutches which she was unable to do alive. After death she becomes a spirit and uses her power as if she wants to break the tradition of motherhood and childbearing. She was unable to break the irons of patriarchal ideology when she alive because her spirit was imprisoned in a female body and
society never allows a woman to cross the boundary. She has no right to reject the tradition as her only duty is to bring joys to her husband. The joys of motherhood are actually the joys of fatherhood is shown when the novel ends. Nnu-Ego dies alone and quietly near by a roadside with no child to hold her.

Nnu-Ego gained nothing in her life. Nnu Ego also misinterprets the refusal. It is a hint that the changing world of Lagos, not rural Ibuza, would offer a fertile context for rethinking notions of motherhood. With its colonial power structure and urban context, Lagos has become a centre.

“As a new context, Lagos anticipates several of the novel’s own questions: how do the normative concepts of manhood, womanhood and motherhood change in situations where men have lost their power base? How do men and women reconstitute identities and shape new language of legitimation? How do characters, particularly Nnu Ego, negotiate such contexts?” (Michael Worton)

In, Lagos Nnu Ego struggles to re-think and give new cultural meanings of her experiences. There she faces new conditions of life. When she met Nnaife for the first time she was disappointed as she was used to tall and strong African men and Nnaife was very short with a belly in look. Moreover he was a slave of white men. Nnu Ego could not accept him but she was helpless. But her anger gets reflected in her behavior. When she served food to Nnaife she set there staring at him. Nnaife looked up and said:

“You stare at me as if you do not want me to eat the food you cooked. You know a wife is not allowed to do that.”

“That applies in Ibuza, not here,” Nnu Ego said.

“Well, whether we’re in Ibuza or not, I am still your husband and still a man. You should not sit there staring at me.”

“A man, huh? Some man.”
“What did you say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? You know, the airs you put on are getting rather boring. I know you are the daughter of Agbadi. Pity he did not marry you himself and keep you by his side forever. If you are going to be my wife, you must accept my work, my way of life. I will not have it any other way. You must understand that. So go out and gossip with Cordelia, and let me finish my food in peace.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 48-49)

Nnu Ego struggles with the new and changing culture of Lagos. Lagos is a city which represents modernity. In the dialogues between husband and wife the woman is told how to behave before her husband. Even in the changing city women were in the clutches of patriarchal power. The conversation also reflects the limited access given to wife by the husband. The husband is the man so he has all rights to own his wife. Apart from that he has paid bride price which gives him right to own a woman legally. Nnu Ego finds herself in pitiful situation. Her life is a catalogue of disasters.

In this struggle, she imagines her father’s admonition as a force putting her, stronger than her will. Nnu Ego is a kind of woman who could not afford food and clothes to her child. ‘Could she have so deteriorated into a kind of woman who would not want her own child because she could not afford to feed and clothe her?’ However, the ambiguity of this self-approach suggests an even deeper struggle and repression that threaten a permanent split within her. The hidden depths of Nnu Ego’s unconscious are the regions of the slave girl from where she transmits dream messages to Nnu Ego.

“It is not inconceivable then to perceive this struggle as a contest between Nnu Ego’s acquiescence in normative values and the slave girl’s more radical interrogations of their meanings. This struggle between self and chi reflects the constant alternation of radical and regressive thinking that characterizes the pattern of Nnu Ego’s response to Lagos, for, in spite of new skills and responsibilities that encourage her to interpret old concepts like ‘wife’ and ‘senior wife,’ she seems constantly anchored to epistemological base of traditional
culture, especially in its conceptions of childbearing and motherhood.” (Daymond)

Margret Daymond makes an important point about Nnu Ego:

“Her tribal view of motherhood and the importance of male children had been the means of accepting life in Lagos with her potbellied little laundryman husband.” (Daymond)

The crucial point is that the motherhood has become an institution for dominant culture to interpret and constitute its world though language. Rituals, symbols and the very language of social intercourse are saturated with assumptions put forth as normative truths. Infertility puts a woman in an area of aberration as she puts a man’s manhood into question. A woman has to produce sons to as they will carry her husband’s name. It is her duty. If she fails to give heirs to her husband, she fails to immortalize her husband’s name. Moreover a woman without children is a failed and incomplete woman. In Lagos Nnu Ego faces the trouble in recognizing and reformulating old concepts. Nnu Ego is a member of traditionally noble culture which involves blindness and contradiction to an understanding of the connection between power and language. Nnu Ego is caught up in class and gender values.

“The process of interrogation is almost always inspired by personal trauma, as happens for instance, on the occasion when Nnu Ego recognizes how the very notion of woman’s responsibility either as wife or mother could be an avenue for her enslavement.”

Nnu Ego’s thoughts are symbolic of her chi as they come from the impregnable force of her unconscious wish. Her husband does not return home for three years which puts her into different and challengeable position. In Nnu Ego’s life birth of daughters caused regret and crisis. The slave girl, Nnu Ego’s chi sends her daughters only. By doing this she reformulates the values around motherhood:
“Men – all they were interested in were male babies to keep their name going. But did not a woman to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons? God, when will you create a woman who would be fulfilled on herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage? [...] Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life.” (Emecheta, The Joys of Motherhood 186)

Nnu Ego views the importance of children as a process, continuity of community. She also thinks of them as security in old age. It is for the first time she revises epistemological ground of the symbolic. Her imagined life and her experiential knowledge differ. In Structural Anthropology Levi Strauss views:

“Language is a condition of culture because the material out of which [it] is built is the same material out of which culture is built: logical relations, opposition, correlations and the like.” (Strauss)

The language of culture is never static. It is always used in logical relations and correlations.

Writing of woman’s relation to language, Nelly Ferman in The Study of Women and Language argues,

“It is through the medium of language that we define and categorize areas of difference and similarity, which in turn allows us to comprehend the world around us.” (Furman 182)

It is not the creation of separate language. For Nnu Ego, it involves critical assessment and re-invention of old concepts on the basis of experience. Such formulations are intangible and abstract as they only occur in Nnu Ego’s mind and are never translated into action. In the end Nnu Ego is deliberately muted. Her silence is powerful as she dies alone on the footpath: neither with her community people nor with her children. It is her refusal to give her soul to her children because she has given her body to them. Throughout the life she served her family. After her death she is canonized. Women of her community pray to her to get children but she refuses to
give them children. By doing this she denies motherhood to these women also. She becomes like her *chi* (an African word for individual god). She goes against the entire patriarchal system and the very notion of motherhood. Nnu Ego never speaks because the language is constructed by the dominant group and in her community men are dominant group. Nnu Ego has sacrificed her human potential for patriarchal order. Nnu Ego’s contradictions and failure reveal the psychodynamics of women’s relation to culture.

The dynamics of women’s reconstitution of language becomes a part of a wider exploration of their potential and a redefinition of a national and cultural space. Julia Kristeva, in Women’s Writing, sums up the new feminist perspectives in these terms:

> “Essentially interested in the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations, these women seek to give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past. Either as artists or writers, they have undertaken a variable exploration of dynamics of sings.” (Kristeva, Women's Time)

Pregnancy and motherhood became synonyms of womanhood. Though defeated Nnu Ego attempts to recreate her own language of culture and she tries to seek new ways of being in the world. Nnu Ego’s *chi*, the slave girl is also defeated because she is also a victim of male dominated society. She refuses to give children to Nnu Ego as if she is trying to recreate Nnu Ego’s new image, free from child bearing. For Nnu Ego, her father Agbadi has to pray the slave girl. This is an irony. The slave girl won her defeated battle. Pregnancy and childbirth is a cultural implication and Nnu Ego struggles with the various notions of womanhood and motherhood. A woman has to bear child because it is her man’s wish. Through Nnu Ego’s character Emecheta recognizes that how a woman is trapped in her own body. She is alone. Nnu Ego’s personal affirmation of her personal destiny:

> “God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage?” She prayed desperately. “After all, I was born alone and I shall die alone.” (Emecheata, The Joys of Motherhood 186)
The above sentence reflects Nnu Ego’s awareness of her situation and the larger patriarchal force which prevents a woman from being fulfilled in herself. She is denied to become a full human being. Nnu Ego symbolically transcends these obstacles in her death and distances herself from the child bearing culture of her community. When she is made the canonized woman she refuses to grant children to barren women of her community. Her death mixes her up with her *chi* (an African word for individual god). She becomes a wicked spirit as she understands the ability to give and withhold children. Death allows her to enter in the powerful territory in a symbolic order. Nnu Ego, after death, rejects childbearing and motherhood and as her rejection is the mark of independence of which she was fearful of speaking of it when she was alive. She asserts a woman’s right above the social obligation of her womanhood. It affirms the freedom to reject both the imposition of motherhood and the social stigma attached to its rejection. In this context a woman’s wish to die or leave her husband’s home is symbolically to decolonize herself from the egos and dreams of the dominant male-centred discourse. All the women characters gather courage to speak and act as an individual and as a woman. They have right to sing their song. But it should be notices that the deaths of these protagonists do not change the circumstances in the novels. Dominic La Capra argues:

“A novel may have transformative effects more through its style and mode of narration than in the concrete image or representation of any desirable society or polity.” (Capra 4)

Here women search for a new language of agency; it is because women’s struggles for self-realization have the potential to destabilize and recognize the cultural foundations of entire community. The exposure of the unsaid and repressed thing reveals a community to itself in new unprecedented way. Buchi Emecheta has put a step further in the direction of exposing gaps between apparently normative language of culture and the contradictory experiences of women. Language is a social phenomenon and constructs meaning and relationship of power within the symbolic, and in tackling the social order through language Emecheta employs different but complementary strategies.

In her fictions Buchi Emecheta tries to explore new meanings in gender, identity and subjectivity. “Because such meanings are always shaped by specific locations and histories.”
(Michael Worton). Her novels are set in transitional period of African colonial history. In her works the characters straddle the village of Ibuza in Eastern Nigeria and the evolving city of colonial Lagos. They move between village and city and negotiate new relations to norms of gender in changing world.

The narratives of Emecheta work to explore the new ways of being in the world and a new language for imagining gender and womanhood in the changed world. In *The Joys of Motherhood* Nnu-Ego’s struggle is a struggle of an ordinary woman as she tries to contest dominant values and reshape her lives in changing worlds.

“The Joys of Motherhood, for instance, appears to structure a world in which everyday life is dominated by dominant values of a patriarchal world in which women are defined solely in terms of their functions as wives and mothers, yet the semiotic world of the novel is shot through with other languages that undermine such a perspective.” (Michael Worton)

In this novel Emecheta furiously criticizes the so called traditions of masculine culture as men are always privileged due to masculine gender. She has made Nnu Ego immortal and sublime as through Nnu Ego Emecheta is asking for the creation of the space where women can become a full human being without men.
Works Cited:


