

Research Paper

POSTCOLONIAL UPRISING OF THE FEMALE WRITERS AGAINST THE AFRICAN INSTITUTION AND COLONIALISM FOR IDENTITY AND EMANCIPATION**Dr. Uttam B. Sonkamble**SMRK BK AK Mahila Mahavidyalaya
College Road
Nasik – 422005.**ABSTRACT**

The world literature witnessed being dominated by the male writers across the world including the African Literature though it barely rooted its impression in the mainstream literature. In the process of gaining ground in the literature, efforts were made by the writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi and the female writers like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta have brought it on to the world platform of literature. Conventionally the male writers being mainly influenced by the African tradition and the colonial culture wherein women were unduly treated which continued even in their works or what the culture held for the women in stock so they treated women as subordinate against the male. As a curse to the female community, colonial power proved an added yoke to their already unending miseries by being shamelessly and mercilessly treated. The native convention coupled with the colonial influences attacked their individualism as women resulting in being rejected their human rights as were endowed upon the male writers. So was largely the representation of male writers' in their works. This is why the African Literature is called to be a depiction of the conflicts and contradictions within the society reflecting the aspiration of humanity for human rights including the fundamental right for freedom. Owing to the colonialism, the Africans confronted new values and habits unsuitable to the African background. They were judged upon the basis of the European values and norms by the colonisers. Still the education they introduced in Africa boosted to raise their identity. At the same time, traditional value structure of the African society was shaken to the very foundation. The relation between individual and society underwent a radical transformation with the arrival of the colonial powers. It directly helped the African women to break the shackles of the African society from the colonial powers.

Following are some of the prominent women writers who really played imperative roles in the African Literature and African milieu in raising the status of women in Africa. In fact, their efforts have been to liberate the women from the clutches of tradition and colonial influences. The works of the writers, Flora Nwapa, Ama Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta are the model paradigms of their efforts in the

movement. Following comment marks Ama Ata Aidoo her strength on her mission- In so many great literatures of the world, women are nearly always around to service the great male heroes. Since I am a woman it is natural that I not only write about women but with women in more central roles, the story which is being told is normally about women. (BBC World Service)

Flora Nwapa: Nwapa is the first female creative writer of West Africa who focused on the predicament of the African woman in the tradition bound African set up. Her novels and short stories are heroine oriented. Her female characters emerge as the models of self assertive and highly individualized African women. She started the feminist movement through her female characters. Her heroines Efurú and Idu represent the emerging New Woman in the African society. She is to emancipate herself from the restrictive norms of conduct imposed by the male dominated society. Along with the survival of the exploitation of colonialism, the Nigerian Literature witnesses capitalism and the devastation of civil war and authoritarianism. Given the turmoil in Nigerian history, it is inevitable that the postcolonial Nigerian artist would fulfill the traditional role of artist as the voice of the people. The expression of protest in the novels, plays and poetry of Nigerian authors in the last 40 years attests to the role of artist as the cry of protest. Since the publication of Flora Nwapa's Efurú in 1966, Nigerian women have been prolific publishers. Although by the Western definitions, these writers are more than feminists; their works offer realistic pictures of gender issues in a patriarchal society. The cries of protest from the Nigerian female authors expose the hegemonic order is a society wrapped in a history of colonialism and patriarchy.

Ama Ata Aidoo: The Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo deals with the problems of hypocrisy, corruption and in particular prostitution and the impacts of imperialism on the people. Her female characters are the mouth-piece in her novels through them Aidoo puts the bitter truth about the neocolonialism; she presents the exploitation of the African woman even during the black native elite

people. The native black followed the conventions of the white masters. In the novel *Something to Talk about on the Way to the Funeral*, Aidoo narrates about Auntie Araba who is sent to town for job where she is impregnated by the lawyer with whom she works. *For Whom Things Did Not Change*, Aidoo deals with the problem of women's exploitation by the native black elite ruling people. In *The Cutting of a Drink*, Mansa a defiant woman comes to town and ends up as a prostitute. Mansa tries to convince her upbraided brother that any kind of work is a work referring to prostitution. Her works reflect a feminist and nationalist consciousness that links Africa's social problems and the decline of its oral tradition to past European colonial rule and Africa's present neocolonial economy. Different aspects of Africa's social history, particularly the legacy of slavery, are often the subject of Aidoo's work, and one of her more controversial recurring motifs is the exploration of the marginalization of educated African women. In the works as *Anowa* (1970) and *Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977), Aidoo presents female protagonists who defy the stereotype of the submissive African woman despite strong male opposition and abuse. *The Dilemma of a Ghost* focuses on a young Ghanaian, Ato Yawson, who was educated in America. He returns home with his African American wife, Eulalie Rush, whom he married without forewarning his family. The cultural conflict, conveyed through the design of the family house, images of food, and distinctive levels of language, is exacerbated by the couple's decision not to have children. When Eulalie shows no sign of becoming pregnant, Ato's family assumes that she is barren. The core of the problem, however, lies in Ato's

inability to bring about any meaningful reconciliation between his ancestral and adopted cultures. Only the strength and wisdom of Ato's mother helps to assuage a bitter confrontation between Ato's Western individual values and his family's traditionally communal African beliefs. In *Anowa*, a beautiful, talented young woman named Anowa rejects all the suitors her parents approve and instead marries Kofi Ako, the man of her choice. Anowa and Kofi quickly discover that they have almost nothing in common, and Kofi tries to drive Anowa away. Refusing to be divorced without reason, Anowa repudiates Kofi's insinuations of barrenness - a common accusation leveled against African women in childless marriages - and instead blames Kofi for the failure of their marriage. Completely deflated by this threat to his manhood, Kofi kills himself, and Anowa also commits suicide, overwhelmed by the futility of attempting to find meaning in life. *Anowa* is set during a significant period in the colonial history of Africa's Gold Coast, and the ethical implications of colonialism and slavery heighten the dramatic action, revealing conflicting attitudes toward such issues as wealth and slavery.

Buchi Emecheta: Among the most important female authors to emerge from postcolonial Africa, Nigerian-born Buchi Emecheta is distinguished for her vibrant descriptions of female subordination and conflicting cultural values in modern Africa. Her best-known novels, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), expose the injustice of traditional, male-oriented African social customs that relegate women to a life of child-bearing, servitude and victimization. Often regarded as a feminist writer, Emecheta illustrates the value of education and self-determination for

aspiring young women who struggle against sexual discrimination, racism and unhappy marital arrangements to achieve individuality and independence. While critical of patriarchal tribal culture, Emecheta's fiction evinces an abiding admiration for African legacy and folklore that reflects the divided loyalties of Africans torn between the competing claims of tradition and modernization. Noted for her realistic characters, conversational prose style, and sociological interest, Emecheta is highly regarded for introducing an authentic female perspective to contemporary African literature. Buchi is more serious to deal with her goal. She has intended to achieve peace through a long term mission; she uses intellect and rationale to achieve the goal. Her heroine Debbie Ogedemgbe though being involved in the flesh trade, attempts to achieve peace by intellectualizing and rationalizing the trade. Buchi is concerned about bringing about peace in women through intellect and rationale. Her fiction focused on sexual politics and racial prejudice and based on her own experiences as both a single parent and a black woman living in Britain. Her first novel, the semi-autobiographical *In the Ditch* published in 1972, together with its sequel, *Second Class Citizen* (1974), provides a fictionalised portrait of a poor young Nigerian woman struggling to bring up her children in London.

The Slave Girl similarly depicts the limited opportunities and property status of women in Nigerian society. The female protagonist is Ojebeta, a young girl who is sold into domestic slavery by her brother after her parents die in an influenza epidemic. Stripped of her rights, Ojebeta is moved from her village to a busy town where she is converted to Christianity and taught to read and write. She is later

married to a man who pays off her owner, drawing attention to the parallel institutions of slavery and marriage as Ojebeta is simply transferred from one master to another. *The Joys of Motherhood* describes the circumscribed existence of protagonist Nnu Ego, a dutiful Nigerian wife and mother who suffers poverty and humiliation in a traditional polygamous marriage. Rejected by her first husband for failing to produce a child, Nnu Ego subsequently marries Naife, a cruel city man she finds unattractive but resigns herself to, and eventually bears several children. Exhausted by years of servitude and domestic conflict with her co-wife, Adaku, Nnu Ego finally returns to her village alone and unappreciated for her sacrifices, reflected in the novel's ironic title. A departure from the limited domestic settings of her previous books, *Destination Biafra* (1982) is a sweeping historical novel about civil unrest in Nigeria during the Biafran secessionist movement of the late 1960s. The central figure is Debbie Ogedemgbe, daughter of a slain businessman who eschews passivity by joining the bloody struggle on the side of a united Nigeria. In *Double Yoke* Emecheta relates the disillusioning experiences of a female college student, Nko, whose personal relationships and educational goals are compromised by sexual politics on a Nigerian campus. Nko is scorned by her boyfriend for permitting premarital sex with him, and then seduced by a manipulative professor with whom she becomes pregnant. The title refers to Nko's double bind as she realizes her equally degrading choice between prostitution as a traditional wife or as a liberated academic woman.

In *The Rape of Shavi* Emecheta presents an allegorical interpretation of European imperialism in Africa. The story

relates the despoliation of the mythical Shavians, an idyllic tribe of African cattle farmers who are uncorrupted by contact with the West until a plane piloted by Englishmen crash lands among them. The white men abuse their trust, exploit their natural resources, and introduce guns and greed to their society, leaving the Shavians devastated by war, drought, and famine. Returning to the English setting of her first two books, *Gwendolyn* (1990) chronicles the difficult life of the title character, a young Jamaican immigrant who endures rape, incest, and racism on the way to independence. Gwendolyn flees Jamaica, where she is molested by a family friend, to live with her parents in a poor London neighborhood. At age sixteen she becomes involved in an incestuous relationship with her father, bears his child, and, after her father's suicide, tentatively reconciles with her mother and boyfriend. *Kehinde* (1994) involves a middle-aged Nigerian woman who relinquishes a professional career in England to return to her native land with her husband. When Kehinde arrives in Nigeria after staying behind to sell their house, she discovers that her husband has taken a second wife, reducing her to insignificance despite her status as an educated woman and senior wife. Kehinde eventually leaves her polygamous marriage, returning to England where she gains new perspective on her life.

Widely recognized as a leading female voice in contemporary African literature, Emecheta has attracted international attention for her compelling depiction of the female experience in African society and, in particular, her native Nigeria. Along with Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, and fellow Nigerian Flora Nwapa, Emecheta is credited with establishing an important female presence in the

previously male-dominated literature of modern Africa. Commenting of Emecheta's contribution, Eustace Palmer writes, "Scarcely any other African novelist has succeeded in probing the female mind and displaying the female personality with such precision." Though often classified as a feminist writer, Emecheta differentiates her own Afrocentric perspective from that of her Western counterparts by describing herself as "an African feminist with a small f." Critics commend Emecheta's impressive narrative abilities, psychologically complex female protagonists, and powerful social critique of traditional African culture that, as reviewers note, is largely unencumbered by ideology or polemics. Every African woman writer is a feminist movement in itself. They are trying their best to bring equality form women in Africa. Today there are thousands of NGOs working for woman's emancipation and identity. And now the male writers are also appreciating and idolizing woman in their works.

REFERENCE:

1. Ama Ata Aidoo life events. BBC World Service. BBC World Service. 10 Dec.. 2011.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/womenwriters/aidoo_life.shtml/
2. Agrawalla, Shyam. Ed (2000). *The Africa Fiction* (New Essays). Prestige.
3. Brown, Lloyd (1981). W. Women Writers in Black Africa. Green Wood Press, Westport.
4. Ebele Chizea. Womanism through the Eyes of Flora Nwapa's, Efuru. African Media Inc. July 2011. African our voices, our vision, our Culture. 19 July 2011
<http://www.africanmag.com/FORUM-1247-design004/>
5. Flora Nwapa. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Jan. 2011. Wikimedia

Foundation, Inc. 19 July 2011

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flora_Nwapa/>

6. Joy, James and Ti (2000). Denean Sharpley- Whiling. *The Black Feminist Reader*.
7. Rixbe, Richard (1988). *Ghanaian Literature*. Green Wood Press, Westport.
8. Sircar, Roopali (1995). *Women in African Literature (The Twice Colonised)*. Creative Books, New Delhi.
9. Liukkonen, Petri. Flora Nwapa 1931-1993. Ari Pesonen. Kuusankosken kaupunginkirjasto 2008. 19 July 2011
<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/nwapa.htm/>