

“Education” is the instrument to reach the Pinnacle in the life of Adah in the novel “Second Class Citizen” by Buchi Emecheta

“Woman is not even independent possession of her own body”
– Louisa Lawson (3) 1890.

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ABSTRACT:

The novel “*Second Class Citizen*” by Buchi Emecheta portrays how the protagonist Adha has attained freedom through education. Buchi Emecheta completely rejects the idea about woman who is treated as symbol of sexual pleasures and a factory of production of children. The novel describes the growth of Adha from the starting status of ignorance to her final stage of self-realization and independence through the means of education. At the end of the novel, she attains her own freedom from all bonds in and outside the society. She has got her full freedom in spite of the repeated pregnancies from Francis, by not getting financial support, failure of examinations continuously by Francis, by not accepting the children, by burning the manuscript of Adha etc. She starts fighting right from the beginning. She knows that through education, she can achieve what she dreams. She realizes that education is the only tool to reach her goal. She wants to get education not just for its sake but to reach the zenith of her life.

KEY WORDS:

Discrimination, Benefits of Education, Economic Inequality, Determination, Economically Independent Woman, Education, Self-Realization, Self Sufficient, Self-Achievement.

The main theme of Emecheta’s second novel “*Second Class Citizen*” is one of the intense acrimony at the gender favoritism, which is often seen in the culture of the people. It is due to the gender discrimination, Adah is pulled down and this gender discrimination has become the foundation of her marriage as she is treated as the property of her husband. She is forced to support the family and is responsible for the children whereas Francis goes to school, studies and fails the examinations continuously. Adah is constantly trying to win the battle to preserve her womanhood but when she leaves Francis, she feels a sense of relief for some time. Later she experiences some loneliness and despair ultimately comes out triumphantly because of her will power.

To Adah in “*Second Class Citizen*” her children are the inspiration and the means to write. She didn’t treat her children as an obstacle to become the writer. She integrated them into her project.

Her novel, “Second Class Citizen” (1974) draws the attention of the reader to experience the childhood days of her life. She recollects when she was in graduate school; her husband was also in the same but next to her studies. She remembers the abusive nature of him towards her.

The exploitation and suppression of women in African society is the major themes of the writer. On the whole, one can notice that the position of women in African and even in Europe is very critical and completely non pessimistic. But there is strong and stable place is given in Emecheta’s novels for her feelings of African culture, tradition and respect, to her sentiments in her motherland. These strong views made her a widely readable novelist of the age. Her fiction is blended with reality re-presenting socio-historical elements of the prevailing society and its environment.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah can be seen as a young protagonist. When she becomes house wife in London, she finds herself as a second class citizen, owing to her race and gender. She leaves her husband in order to secure her identity. *Second Class Citizen* and *Double Yoke* explore modernized, yet is still unable recuperate its image of women as sexually subservient and intellectually inferior. Modern women are caught between contradictory values as their education encourages self-determination while their culture preaches patriarchal domination. It is Emecheta’s intention to demonstrate the abilities that the African women can possess once she is educated along with her brothers. As an educated African, she can work for a better future for her people.

Second Class Citizen is the second novel of the Buchi Emecheta. Adah is the protagonist comes out triumphantly from male domination through her education. The suppression of woman is a global phenomenon. Modern women are caught between contradictory values as their education encourages self-determination while their culture preaches patriarchal domination. So, Emecheta tries to eradicate male suppression, subjugation and over dominance, over women. She aspires for a new society where women can have self-assertion, self-reliance and self-determination through her writings.

In *Second Class Citizen* (1974) Adah has a job, and a part time student nurtures a dream of becoming a successful writer. But she has five children, all under the age of six, no husband and with black skin. Land lords will not give her, house. Child care is highly expensive and her physically and psychologically abusive husband delights in withholding even the merest crumbs of child support. Adah soon finds herself caught in the quicksand of social service agencies whose assistance can be had only at the cost of abandoning all attempts at self-sufficiency. To receive even marginal public assistance, she must give up her job, move into garbage strewn rat-infested public housing and struggle against the pull to resign herself to the inevitability of years of life on the dole.

Lloyd Wellesly Brown has commented that:

“The emphasis on individual growth and self-reliance is more fully developed in *Second Class Citizen* than in Emecheta’s first novel, “*In the Ditch*” (Lloyd Wellesly Brown, 1981: 35).

The interesting thing is that the novel begins with the Adah’s Dream of voyage to England and it ends with the preparation of starting a new life by the heroin. Actually the heroin seized her independence for herself and her children. Personally, “*Second Class Citizen*” is quite successful one. It describes the growth of Adah from the starting status of ignorance to her final stage of self-realization and independence. At the end of the novel, she realizes her own freedom from all the bonds in and outside the society. She also realizes Francis’s lack of love. These two things turned the novel into a different direction. At this juncture, she was supported by some other characters that helped her to realize her own strength and knowledge.

“Buchi Emecheta’s novels remain more on the level of individual experience and social custom with less attention to spiritual questions and implications” (Nancy Topping Bazin, March 1986, 34-40)

The character Adah sometimes show her immature and ignorant qualities reflected among the main characters of the novels. This novel describes a young African Woman’s evolution of potential status. In general feminists add the themes of love, marriage and education in their novels. In the novel, Adah is described as highly intelligent and ambitious girl. She is ready to fight against the hurdles in passing over the problems, in acquiring her education in Logos. The fate is also not in favour of her. Her liberal father dies soon after she joins in the school. Then she went to her relative’s house where she was tortured like anything as a slave. Coming over all the problems like life of misery, exploitation by own people and harassment at school, Adah was able to get scholarship for high standard of results and winning over the competition at the school exams.

In spite of all her troubles in and outside her life, she secured Librarian job at American Consulate at Lagos. She meets Francis Obi during her stay at Library. Their friendship glorified towards marriage. She thought that Francis would assure the protection of her life and support after marriage in Logos. But Francis attracted to the salary of Adah and expected her financial support to his education at Britain.

“It provides an avenue for her to fulfill her own childhood dream of going to study in England. Significantly, the novel starts with a reference to Adah’s “dream” of going to England. But towards the end of the novel, Adah fully recognizes Francis’s absolute lack of love for her as well as the need for her own freedom. At the end, she got self-reliance with self-motivation and there is a gradual development in her character in the narrator’s comment “Bill was the first real friend (Adah) had had outside her family” (p.167).

In the novels of Buchi Emecheta, the feminist perspective is basically personal and social. Her personal experiences are foundations of her feminist outlook. She declares that in one interview the experiences of Adah in *Second Class Citizen* are her own. Educating a girl child is viewed as wasting money. In order to get money, she has to pretend to lose the money which was given to her by her teacher to buy meat. But at last, she is permitted to stay back at school because education will bring more money as bride price for her to her uncle. When Adah's father dies, her mother is inherited by her father's brother because of the custom. For supporting her in return, the daughter, a relative will have her as a servant and receives her bride price finally. She is finally gets married to just get away from home. Her husband makes so many rules for her she has to obey abuses her physically and refuses to allow her to use any birth control. Like Emecheta's, Adah's marriage is also broken because of her husband's reaction to her writing of her first novel. He refuses to read it instead, he burns it. He insists her that she should never be writer because she is black and that to she is woman.

“In the fiction of Bessie and Emecheta, personal experiences breed rebellious female protagonists. But the female protagonist's struggle often leads to a victory that is the courage to survive. This is so in Bessie's *A Question of Power* and in Emecheta's three novels, *In the Ditch*, *Second Class Citizen*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*. Sometimes the strong female protagonist ultimately succumbs to male power as in Head's *Maru* or in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* or the *Bride Price*”.(Nancy Topping Bazin 1986).

Emecheta's "*Second Class Citizen*" deals with Adah's life experiences and her endless courage to survive as a woman, a wife and a writer. Adah, the protagonist of the novel is portrayed as an intelligent, a young girl with ambitions, who has to fight against considerable odds to gain an education (Abioseh Michael Porter, Drexel University).

The basic theme of *Second Class Citizen* is one of the intense acrimony (Animosity), at the gender discrimination that is often found in culture of people. Adah is forced to support the family and is responsible for the children. Whereas Francis goes to school, studies and fails exams continuously. Adah is in constant battle to try to preserve her womanhood, and when she leaves Francis finally, she experiences a strong sense of relief. But she later feels loneliness and despair when she leaves Francis and at the end she comes out triumphantly because of her will power.

There is gender discrimination for getting education to Adah. Gender discrimination is the foundation of her marriage. Adah is in constant battle to preserve her womanhood. She feels loneliness and despair when she leaves Francis, though she experiences a strong sense of relief. She overcomes the problem of loneliness and despair with will power. Though she is a typical African modern mother, she tries to retain her motherhood by taking the responsibility of her children. She proves herself as a good mother when Francis

escapes his duty as a father in the court at the end of the novel. Even though she has many problems like economical and social, she has fulfilled her mission of becoming a good writer. She has proved herself as a typical African modern woman by getting divorce from Francis. She has proved that she is the symbol for woman Empowerment.

In spite of her second class status, Adah does not give up her ambition to continue her education in England. Her quest for knowledge is part of the struggle for self-sufficient, self-achievement and freedom from social constraints'. It is because of her education, Adah is able to improve her condition. In spite of her second class condition, Adah is characterized by her sense of initiative and determination. Her family devotes all the money for her brother's education. And Adah is finally allowed to have meager education only to make her a better marriageable commodity. To Adah, marriage means the fulfillment of her childhood dream to immigrate to England. At last she comes to know that her childhood vision of England as the land of opportunity is clearly the result of the cultural domination of the colonizers. Adah's ability to rise above her unhappy marriage is paralleled by Emecheta's own progress as a writer.

Adah is described as a symbol of female problems and damnation of male in the society. Even the social and cultural norms of the society are also in favour of them so Emecheta questions the culture for degrading the women. They are treated as second in education, health and even in proper respect. Every one imagines that the things might be changed after the marriage. But Adah after marrying Francis Obi, the things turned to worst. She realized that the whole love and affection showered on her so far is born of financial assistance. The main objective behind the keeping family together is the only financial matters.

Helen Chukwuma acclaims this in an article "Voices and Choices: Feminist Dilemma in Four African Novels".

"The single most competing factor of female subjugation was her economic dependence on the female, and the social demands that made a woman give all her earnings to the home because her identity lies there" (p.132).

Chukwuma states that:

"Through the maze of self-assertion the female individualism and personality shows, she appears in another light as a person capable of taking and affecting decision" (p.4).

She knows that through education, she can achieve what she dreams.

She realized that education is the only tool to reach her goal. She wants to get education not just for its sake but to reach the zenith of her life.

She encourages women to come out from oppression, over dominance by taking courageous steps to free themselves by making use of the tool that is education and get freedom from slavery and bondage. Women should be given equal educational opportunities along with men. Society should be made to know the importance of girl education. Men should be encouraged to encourage women and their efforts for the contribution of societal growth. Women should not be deprived of property, education and legal status.

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