



Available online at [www.jlls.org](http://www.jlls.org)

---

## JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

---

ISSN: 1305-578X

*Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2636-2640; 2021

# The Trajectory of Rape in A Man's World of Dominion and The Steadying Force of A Black Woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Family*

S. Selvakumar<sup>a1</sup>, Dr. S. Joseph Arul Jayraj<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Ph.D Research Scholar, Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>b</sup> Head & Associate Professor (Retd), Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India

### APA Citation:

Selvakumar, S., & Joseph Arul Jayraj, S. (2021). The Trajectory of Rape in A Man's World of Dominion and The Steadying Force of A Black Woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Family*. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2636-2640.

Submission Date: 08/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 22/12/2021

---

### Abstract

Violence unleashed on women by the patriarchy in all realms of life is beyond anyone's comprehension. The harassment that women undergo for ages has been either not registered in literature or concealed conveniently to present a picture that all is well with women. Feminism as a political and philosophical theory delves in detail into issues that really matter as far as women's growth and empowerment is concerned. It paves the way for constructing strategies, establishing movements for women's emancipation, dismantling myths and prejudices construed on women, unmasking the double standard attitude of male chauvinism and auguring heyday for women in social, cultural, educational and political sphere. It does not call for a construction of society where women would dictate and decide, rather aims to build up an inclusive society where both men and women can enjoy rights and privileges in equity, work together and celebrate life respecting and safeguarding every individual's freedom.

*Keywords: Education, Patriarchy, Racism, Rape, and Violence.*

---

## 1. Introduction

Buchi Emecheta is a renowned novelist of 20<sup>th</sup> century, hailing from Nigeria, of Igbo tribe, whose contribution to the world of literature is praiseworthy. Nigeria gave birth to several stalwarts whose literary works captured the attention of the world and while explicating their contribution to the English literature in Nigeria, Joseph McLaren in an article entitled "The Nigerian Novel in English: Trends and Prospects" offers accolades to Buchi Emecheta for her strenuous effort in playing a decisive role for the improvement of English novels along with writers like Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri, and their contribution has been recognised by the West (234). As a reputed author, playwright, and dramatist, Buchi Emecheta remained focussed on exploring the ordeals of black women, the hypocrisy of patriarchy and envisaging a bright future for women. She authored more than twenty novels, and each of them has

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [selvakumarcmf@gmail.com](mailto:selvakumarcmf@gmail.com)

won numerous readers across the world and having realized the impact it has caused among the literary scholars, she made her novels available in fourteen languages, which include Dutch, French, German and Swedish (Marie Umeh, xxiii).

The author ensures that her writings play a pivotal role in changing the destiny of women as her writings and reflections are not born out of fantasy and imagination but grounded on her own personal experience. While confirming her statement, Ernest N Emenyonu in an article entitled “Technique and Language in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*” reiterates that “Many of the reflections in Emecheta’s novels are of her own life and the lives of the people close to and around her. She asserts that the events that found her “in the ditch” and submerged her humiliatingly as a “second-class citizen” is “90% autobiographical” (252). The events that had happened to her personally, her family and community transformed her to come out with such resounding articulation of impeccable novels and the mechanisms she had identified as useful had been employed to rise above from the gutter of poverty and exploitation. Therefore, the celebrated novelist’s writings are beautifully articulated in order that womenfolk, who have been deprived of their basic rights, discriminated, harassed and labelled as weaker and feeble sex may breathe the air of freedom.

A literary reader who skims through her novels would certainly draw inspiration from Buchi Emecheta, especially from her daring attitude and passion to become prodigious writer and her survival instinct amidst catastrophic conditions. She stands as a role model for the budding African writers and the rest of the world as her journey to success was always a herculean task. Despite encountering depraving conditions, which include sexual molestation, rape, battering, desolation, and humiliation, she determined to climb high to the peak of glory and fame. Her indomitable spirit to study and be educated thrived her to win several awards and secure honorary Doctor of Literature degree in 1992. She was a gifted and talented lass and her childhood dream of becoming a storyteller was very dear to her heart. She nurtured it meticulously without allowing that spark of fire to become extinguished and she transformed it into a reality. Having imbibed the art of storytelling from Nwakwaluzo Ogbueyin, her paternal aunt, she desired to become a raconteur and a writer herself. What makes more interesting is that she as a little girl while doing her studies in The Methodist Girls’ High School candidly confessed to her school teacher Miss Humble that she “would like to be a writer.” (*Head Above Water*, 23) This is what makes Buchi Emecheta a remarkable writer.

As an ambitious writer, she was preoccupied with the thought of exposing to the world the hypocrisy of the patriarchy and the reality of the predicaments of the womenfolk. She firmly believed that as a writer she could do something extraordinary to alter the destiny of women and that’s what made her to agree with the thought of Ngugi wa Thiongo’, who said that, “the product of a writer’s pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude of that reality” (7). It is essential to have conceptual clarity on ‘patriarchy’ as its role remains detrimental to the advancement of women’s growth. Sara Gamble in her book entitled *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* quotes Chris Weedon’s definition on patriarchy from “Feminist Practice and Post structural Theory” (1987) where it is said: The term “Patriarchal” refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interest of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference (3).

Feminism as a political theory and social movement revolves around two core principles fundamentally. First and foremost, it is concerned with “equality and justice for all women and it seeks to eliminate systems of inequality and injustice in all aspects of women’s lives” and secondly, it “is inclusive and affirming of women; it celebrates women’s achievements and struggles and works to provide a positive and affirming stance toward women and womanhood” (Janet Lee, 10). Buchi Emecheta, whose concerns were devoted to the wellbeing of women ensures that her novels be permeated with feminist ideas and thoughts. However, she neither identifies herself with radicals nor she subscribes to hardcore feminism. Olawale Taju Ajayi while explaining the author’s standpoint on feminism quotes Marie Umeh’s interview with Buchi Emecheta through an article entitled “Buchi Emecheta: Beyond the Task and the Mask”, where she said, “I am a feminist with a small ‘f’. I love men

and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital ‘F’ (Feminist) women who say women should live together and all that. I say No. Personally I’d like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn’t work, for goodness sake, call it off” (370). The author’s intention to write novels for the cause of women becomes paramount in the context of women being trivialized, misrepresented in literary arena and relegated to play a secondary position in family and society by being deprived of power and authority. The novelist’s commitment to articulate her ideas is to ensure that the transformation takes place in individual and society level in order that women are treated with dignity and honour in equity with men.

Buchi Emecheta’s *The Family* revolves around the story of Gwendolen Brillianton, a little Jamaican girl, who having been born in penury in Granville, deserted by her parents on account of their emigration to United Kingdom, and was ravaged at the age of nine by Uncle Johnny, who was in very old age to be called as grandfather. The constant sexual harassment left her in fear and shock. However, the pitiable tale of rape of the protagonist does not end with an elderly man pushing her into ravishment but bewilders everyone when she is raped by her own father. The author reveals through the novel the constant threat and fear enforced upon women in the form of rape to intimidate and subjugate them. It reveals the sick mentality of the community as a whole and how familial disintegration too causes women to be thrown into such position. Mackinnon states, “Rape is ... the enshrinement of male power in the control of women through fear. So it is the spring board of male power” (132). Using rape as a weapon, a method of punishing woman, men want to show their heroism and prowess. It is an act of the assertion of male domination, whereby he takes pleasure in manipulating the female body and female sexuality. Monique Plaza while culling out the relationship between rape, phobia and female body says, “Rape is an oppressive act exercised by a (social) man against a (social) woman...the trauma of rape and the further trauma incurred in the lifetime of the lady who has experienced it psycho-somatically, is more frightening than death. Female body is a location where the tenets of a sexually hierarchical culture are written” (Biswas, 130).

Africa as a continent having gone through colonization by the West bears in her the scar of its effects even in the postcolonial period. Tuzyline Jita Allan while explaining the trajectory of rape in Buchi Emecheta’s novels and the torments that the continent suffered in the hands of foreign powers equates them with defilement by referring to Chinweizu’s *Admonition to the Black World*:

Ah, this land  
This black whore  
This manacled bitch  
Tied to a post and raped  
By every passing white dog...  
Listen! Listen to the pack  
Of scavenger dogs from white heartlands  
Snarling in their gang rape of Africa. (qtd. In Allan 207)

Buchi Emecheta registers a series of rape inflicted upon Gwendolen, the protagonist. The author while explaining the sexual molestation the little girl underwent in the hands of a cruel old man said:

He was kneeling on the bamboo bed. He was now touching her face and mouth, telling her not to cry, that he was here to take care of her... The hand Uncle Johnny kept on her mouth was firm, but his other hand touched all her body, as if Uncle Johnny had four hands instead of two... He put his hand under the bedclothes and tickled her with his fingers... He was on top of her. She almost suffocated... her inside burned and she felt sore... ‘Mammy, why you no take me with you?’ (*The Family*, 21-22).

In an effort to offer critical evaluation on the consequence of sexual molestation that Gwendolen underwent, Sengupta in an article entitled “Desire and The Politics of Control in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Family*” states, “The dominating feeling in this passage are fear and confusion, mixed with

physical pain and a tremendous sense of child's insecurity whose parents have left her... Gwendolen's insides burnt with rape. Outside, she was numb with fear" (241). Gwendolen having suffered the scar of rape under an old man in the native land is being coerced into sexual assault by Winston Brillianton, her father in a foreign land. It is deplorable that a girl who longs for security outside her native place on account of sexual torture in her village, does not find safety even in a foreign land under her father, who is morally duty bound to ensure her that all is well for her. It is appalling to believe that there is no safe haven for women at all anywhere. She has been called back to London to assist her parents in catering the needs of her younger siblings. It is a pity and a contradiction that the little girl, who had desired to change her destiny and to standardize her life in the hands of her father, is victimized sexually by him.

Buchi Emecheta exposes clearly the corrupted mindset of Winston Brillianton, who instead of guarantying the welfare of his own daughter, manifests the role of a colonizer in victimizing his own daughter sexually. Having filled with lustful and narcissistic tendency turns blind eyes to the pleading of his eldest daughter. It is an act of acrimony that a father indulges in ravaging one's own daughter. It speaks volumes about his values, way of life and the cultural set up that was insensitive to women. Winston Brillianton did not know that incest is never allowed in Nigerian culture and even when Ilochina, a Nigerian friend, nullified his assumption, he did not exercise restraint. The novelist while revealing the brutal rape that a father executed on his daughter states:

He was not drunk. He just went in to her, hoping she would fight him off like any other woman. Because she was like any other woman to him... She looked so much like her mother, the bow legs, the bias gait, leaning to one side of her. She was like another person, yet the type of woman he favoured, small, vulnerable, just like his Sonia. And like this other woman he expected her to fight him off. After all women were expected to do that- ward men off... he was overcome by desire he had begged her to give him herself... But Gwendolen remembered Uncle Johnny. He had said to her, 'Every gal done done it. Dat's why they are girls.' She remembered too that you got into trouble with the old women, if you should tell them. But she wished her father would not ask her to do this. She could not scream, because though he begged, he covered her mouth with that strong hand of his. It was soon over. (*The Family*, 144-145)

The protagonist being filled with the thought of not sending her father behind the bar for impregnating her, and being anxious to save his name, she came in contact with Emmanuel, a Greek white boy and befriended him. Winston was obviously joyful as Gwendolen found a boyfriend (151), because he felt that his guilt can be washed away and others may not hold him responsible if his daughter were to be pregnant (152). Their friendship with each other moved to next stage as they indulged in sexual intimacy. Through this relationship, Gwendolen wanted to forget her past and be in a world of imagination as she did not want to remember her pregnancy, her worries about education, and the racial discrimination she experienced in England. She was very prudent that in their personal relationship, she prevented him from asking questions about her past sex life and she concealed her affair with Uncle Johnny and her Daddy (156). Winston, who was ashamed of his sexual act with his daughter expressed his gratitude to God for salvaging him through Emmanuel, his daughter's boyfriend, and sought out God's forgiveness (157).

## 2. Conclusion

This story records a trajectory of rape experienced by Gwendolen Brillianton, who underwent excruciating pain and agony personally and humiliation publicly. She did not want to avenge the perpetrators of such heinous crime nor want to put an end to her life out of shame. She with the help of her friend Emmanuel learned the art of reading and developed passion for education. After delivering her child in the hospital, she sought the suggestion for naming her little new born girl from Ama, her friend, and the intention was very clear that the child would be everything to her on earth. Then Ama suggested "Iyamide," a Yoruba name, which meant 'my mother, my female friend, my female savior,

my anything-nice-you-can-think-of-in-a-woman's form' (210). A reader would marvel at the way the protagonist faced life amidst encircling gloom and how she overcame such hazards which remain impediment for her growth and development. Emmanuel believed that the child Gwendolen bore was his and therefore, he wanted to take responsibility. But she knew who the father of the child is and how his fate brought him to a disastrous end. Gwendolen said, 'No, Emmanuel, I would not have. And don't turn nasty. I can't say that I wouldn't have been tempted to do that when I was living with my parents. But now I have learned that I can work for my salvation by myself...' (212).'

Emmanuel wonders at the way Gwendolen handled such issues of sexual harassment boldly and how she is roaring to go in her life journey further. Emmanuel facilitated her to improve her reading skill and presented a book entitled *A Black Person's Story* (213). Gwendolen became joyful as she was able to complete reading a book and Emmanuel was reminded of what his stepmother had told him – 'Black girls are sometimes so ambitious, they can be a great steadying force to the men in their life (214).

## References

- Ajayi, Olawale Taju, "Buchi Emecheta: Beyond the Task and the Mask." *UJAH:Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities XII* (2011):370-376.
- Allan, Tuzyline Jita. "Trajectories of Rape in Buchi Emecheta's Novels." *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Ed. Marie Umeh. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1996. 207- 225.
- Biswas, Praggnaparamita. "Fear, Female Body and Fornication: an Exegesis of Three Indian Play-texts." Bhesaniya, Mukesh G. *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Jaipur: Prism Books (India), 2015. 129 – 143.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Head Above Water*. London: Fontana Paperback, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Family*. New York: George Braziller, 1990.
- Emenyonu, Ernest N. "Technique and Language in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, and The Joys of Motherhood*." *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Ed. Marie Umeh. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1996. 251- 265.
- Gamble, Sarah, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Selvakumar, S. and S. Joseph Arul Jayraj. "A Beacon for the Bright Future: An Identification and Application of Emancipatory Strategies for Women in Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke*." *Think India (Quarterly Journal)* xxii.3 (2019): 1052-1062.
- Lee, Susan M Shaw. Janet. *Women's Voices Feminist Visions Classic and Contemporary Readings*. 5<sup>th</sup>. New York: McGraw- Hill, 2012.
- McLaren, Joseph. "The Nigerian Novel in English: Trends and Prospects." *African Visions: Literary Images, Political Change, and Social Struggle in Contemporary Africa*. Ed. Silvia Federici, and Joseph McLaren Cheryl B. Mwaria. Westport: Praeger, 2000. 233- 244.
- Sengupta, Shivaji. "Desire and The Politics of Control in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Family*." *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Ed. Marie Umeh. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1996. 227- 246.
- Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981.