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The Joy of Motherhood with All its Complexity” Exposed by Emecheta

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ABSTRACT

The essay delves deeply into the intricate tapestry of maternal roles, challenging the conventional perception of marriage as a sanctified institution while also scrutinizing the multifaceted viewpoints of mothers themselves. Through a distinct feminist lens, the objective is to discern whether the encompassing concept of "motherhood" can empower women with the agency to claim their presence in significant domains of human engagement. Numerous African authors have fervently explored the notion of motherhood, presenting a narrative that diverges from Western feminist discourse. In this context, Catherine Obianuju Acholunu introduced the term "Motherism" as a counterpoint. An embodiment of this perspective can be found in Buchi Emecheta's seminal work, "The Joys of Motherhood," published in 1979. Within its pages, Emecheta vividly portrays maternity within the Ibo society as a intricate interplay of desire and control. The protagonist, Nnu Ego, ardently endeavors to excel as a mother, yet her journey reveals a stark reality – her identity becomes almost entirely synonymous with parenting, leaving little room for self-discovery beyond those boundaries. This exploration exemplifies the complexities of not just the role of mothers, but the broader societal constructs that shape their experiences.

A mother's experience of becoming a mother and the ensuing obligations and roles involved in raising and caring for a child can be described as a transforming and life-altering one. It includes a variety of emotional, psychological, and social changes that transform a woman's identity, priorities, and view on life. It extends beyond the biological act of giving birth. Motherhood represents the shift from a person's self-focus to a focus on the health, development, and growth of a kid. The Joy of Motherhood by Buchi Emecheta, which spans a twenty-five-year period and is one of the most intricate Buildingsroman novels ever written, was published in colonial Nigeria in the early to mid-20th century. The protagonist, Nnu Ego, transitions from a strong, traditionally bound figure to a feminist is highlighted by the author. Sadly, a myriad and intricate set of inconsistencies that she finds herself unable to make a deal with frustrate her attempts to validate the validity of motherhood at every turn. The first chapter of the book, "The Mother," and the final chapter, "The Canonised Mother," are both dedicated to all moms.

Emotional fulfilment has a significant and nuanced role in Buchi Emecheta's "The Joys of Motherhood." The story addresses the idea that while motherhood is frequently portrayed as a source of enormous happiness and fulfilment, it can also bring about significant emotional hardships and obstacles, which makes the title of the book, "The Joys of Motherhood," rather ironic. The primary character, Nnu Ego, is brought up to believe that having children is the ultimate aim for a woman and that her identity and worth are based on this ability. She has high expectations for motherhood, hoping to find fulfilment and meaning in it. But as the story goes on, it becomes obvious that her path is anything but easy or only happy.

Through the experiences of the main character, Nnu Ego, the idea of emotional labour is powerfully presented. The term "emotional labour" describes the time, energy, and emotion that people often invest in managing and resolving the emotions of others. As a mother and wife in the story, Nnu Ego must continually balance her own emotional demands with those of her family members, which involves a lot of emotional work.

A number of emotional difficulties and setbacks confront Nnu Ego. Early in her marriage, she experiences difficulties getting pregnant and giving birth, which makes her feel inadequate and ashamed. When she does have children, she must deal with the harsh reality of parenting in a patriarchal culture where women's efforts are frequently ignored and undervalued. The lack of support from her husband and the financial difficulties she is experiencing make her emotional experience more difficult. Nnu Ego's emotional fulfilment as her kids get older is made more difficult by the shifting dynamics between generations. Her kids are exposed to Western schooling and contemporary attitudes, which might cause generational strife and a sense of disengagement from customs. This calls into question Nnu Ego's assertion that her fulfilment stems only from her function as a mother.

The narrative also examines how Nnu Ego's sacrifices for her kids and family might leave her feeling empty and unsatisfied on the inside. Her identity becomes inextricably linked to her mothering identity, leaving little room for self-reflection and personal development.

It provides a caustic analysis of the patriarchal, colonial restrictions that moms like Nnu Ego have to deal with. In Ibo society, a woman's social value is determined by two factors: first, her capacity to carry children, and second, her readiness to satisfy the needs of men in the community. She said in a conversation with Adeola James that she was a passionate novelist who sought out the challenges faced by Nigerian women and that "in Joys of Motherhood...I created a woman who had eight children and died by the wayside." Women were regarded as "the trees that bear fruits" in the conservative and traditional Ibo society. The development of the concept of motherhood was significantly influenced by the traditions. They thought having children would bring them a prestigious and competitive life. Emecheta uses the mother's introspection technique, and the main character comes to the realisation

that she hasn't made the family happy. Nnu Ego, who was raised as a mother of two colonised children, reveals her sacrifice and pain in a speech she made soon after the birth of her twin daughters. She experienced one such epiphanic moment while entangled in the complex circumstances surrounding childbirth.

The remark that follows captures the psychological makeup and motherly sadness of Nigerian women in response to the pervasive situation. "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anyone's appendage?" she asks in her monologue. I will die alone since I was born alone. What do I stand to gain from all of this? I do have a lot of kids, but how am I going to feed them? about my life. To take care of them, I have to put in endless hours of effort. I must give it my all for them. Even my soul must be given to them if I am fortunate enough to pass away without a fight. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife does not conceive or there is a famine, my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free?" (JOM. p.186)

This is a novel concept in Nigerian literature, where reflective female characters express their emotions. The Joy of Motherhood, a famous work that questions the excessive demands placed on women in the behalf of the ideal mother, contributes to the development of an African women's literary tradition. Emecheta emphasised the fact that women have a communal responsibility to criticise and support the society order while articulating this idea from the traditionalist point of view of Nnu Ego. The title of the book was taken from the last line of Flora Nwapa's well-known novel Efurú. The final line highlights a paradox regarding the revered river goddess Uhamiri, who is childless: "She has never known the bliss of motherhood. Then why did women adore her?" (JOM. p.2)

Nnu Ego's story, told in The Joy of Motherhood, is written with delicacy, force, and a lot of compassion. The New York Times The novel Efurú and the theme are closely related. The same issues are raised in this masterpiece, but Nnu Ego's universe is more sinister than Efurú's. Due to the dual colonial setting, her motherhood fails both at conception and at death. The original Ibo people were oppressed by the western lords, and as a result, they began to dominate their women. When Nnu Ego was confined in independent villages, colonial forces had altered their appearance.

She took values with her and wanted to be a good daughter for her father in the strange city life. She also wanted to be a good mother and wife to Nnaife Owulum, the man her father had chosen for her. Even her father, the haughty Ona and a legendary chief named Agbadi, is no different from the other males. As soon as he learned that Nnu Ego had left for Logos, he consoled himself by saying, "Let her go, she is as barren as a desert." (JOM. p.39) One of Agbadi's oldest wives, who was also Nnu's oldest mother, passes away from the stress of trying to appear like a "complete woman."

It's interesting to see that no particular generation was spared the plight of spouses and mothers. She characterises her spouse as a "pregnant cow" and says that upon seeing him, she was horrified. Her husband assaulted her without giving her the chance to change her mind after asking for his sexual rights on the very first night. Rape is a common theme in Emecheta's books and develops into a symbol of manliness. In the guise of tradition, the male characters kept their women under control. She adamantly maintains that both men and women need to enjoy their sexual activity.

The currently displayed unique work of art examines the disastrous implication of the experiences of an ordinary African female caught between the ordinary Igbo society and the modern industrialised globe. It gives a thorough analysis of how Ibo women are mistreated and dependent. The author challenges the legitimacy of deeply ingrained male social rights and the powerlessness of women. Male authors purposefully ignored the accurate and vivid descriptions found in Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* and Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood*, which serve as a pattern for self-examination and a broad understanding of the feminine psyche.

The protagonist is compelled by the inner voice to change from the group realisation to the personal view. Following her emotional outburst, Nnu Ego transforms into a feminist as she says, "I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood." Is that position really so desirable? The men portray us as having to strive for procreation or perish. Because I didn't live up to the expectations placed on me by the men in my life—my father, my husband, and now my sons—when I lost my first son, I wanted to die. But who enacted the rule forbidding us from having faith in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build." (JOM. p. 187)

Nnu Ego, who worked extremely hard to become a mother, feels empty without being a mother. Emecheta wants to make the point that having more than five or six children does not guarantee a mother's financial security in her senior years. She investigates the institution of motherhood, terrible experiences associated with it, and its impact on Nigerian women's psyche. According to Katherine Frank, "The most heretical and radical aspect of Emecheta's vision of the African Women is the complete futility of motherhood that we find in *The Joys of Motherhood*."

This is how "The Joys of Motherhood" presents an intricate and complex view of emotional fulfilment. It draws attention to the disconnect between societal norms and the complicated reality of women's lives. Nnu Ego's story serves as a sad reminder that although motherhood can occasionally bring forth feelings of joy and closeness, it is not exempt from the difficulties, sacrifices, and unfulfilled goals that are a natural part of life. The emotional setting of the book is a mirror of the more complex issues of gender roles, societal norms, and individual identities in the context of parenting. The difficulties and inconsistencies of traditional gender roles and parenthood are brought to light through Nnu Ego's experiences with emotional labour. She tries to accomplish her motherly duties and find purpose in her sacrifices, but the emotional toll it takes on her highlights the sometimes-unacknowledged difficulties women experience in living up to social standards. Her experience serves as a moving examination of both the challenges of women's positions in patriarchal societies and the emotional labour of motherhood.

The ups and downs of Nnu Ego's destiny are described in the chapter titles "The Mother," "The Mother's Mother," "The Mother's Early Life," "First Shock of Motherhood," "A Mothers Investment," "A Failed Woman," etc. The ironic title "The Canonised Mother" that the author gave the novel's final chapter is a clever literary device. Throughout her life, Nnu Ego was subjected to patriarchal slavery, and she passed away alone. Ona, Akadu, and Nnu

Ego were all victims of the patriarchal and historically powerful Ibo society. However, Emecheta's Nnu Ego questions the traditional belief that having many children will make a woman feel ecstatically happy.

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