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The Journey from Self-Submission to Self-Realization of Female Characters in *Everything Good Will Come*

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Abstract:

This research paper discusses about the detailed analyses of the behaviour of the main female characters in the novel *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) written by Sefi Atta. African literature lies in their strong devotion to the demonstration of the life stories of African women. Through writings of African writers, they show how in African culture, women have been subjected to oppression, depression, suppression, rejection, isolation, economical marginalization and unfair victimization. The main female characters have been observed in terms of representing the strong characteristics of female behaviour and changing the boundaries with the changing of generations. Central character of the novel Enitan and Sheri are close childhood friends and face the hustle behaviour in their home and outside the home still they both choose to keep fighting with the problems and prove their dignity by ignoring the criticism and achieving the success in the field they choose to work. Atta's mirrors her concern about the status of women and their commitment to free women from all modes of oppression.

Key words:- Submissive females, Gender discrimination, Polygamy, Exploitation of women, female assertiveness, Self realization. New African Women.

With the rise of the Black women writers, there has been a radical change in the African literary picture. They wrote about the issues that concern the traditional and contemporary African women. Education, Marriage, Motherhood, emotional and economic independence, political and economic marginalization of the women, domestic violence, the women's resistance to oppression, etc are the major themes of their works. The whole world has been announced with the feminism and it is commonly seen in the British, American and African literature. The Nigerian literature present it the different way they present the feminism by taking role of the females in the normal and routine life. They describes the character of the

lady with presenting their bold and strong decision in the normal life while presenting them fighting on the borders with enemies holding arms and ambitions.

Nigerien feminism literature presents the decision taking skills and fighting against the unusual behaviour of men towards them with in their home and the society. It describes the real of feminism as it should be needed to. Nigerian literature suggests the actual path to enacted feminism in real and routine life.

Literature of Africa, particularly Nigeria is the literature of human experiences while living in Nigeria. After independence, the social situations were not much improved. The situations for women were more critical. In Nigerian literature, many feminist writers have written about those adverse situations but they present their female character not as a whole self submissive and given up in all prevailed society but they has been presented as fighter against all. Writers in their works like *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Gwendolen* by Buchi Emecheta, *Efuru* , *Idu* and *One is enough* by Flora Nwapa, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Everything Good Will Come* by Sefi Atta, *Waiting for an Angel* by Helen Habila, *Sky High Flames* by Unoma Azuah etc. These novels are women centred and they explore women's experiences in traditional as well as contemporary societies. Most of these novels are written by third generation Nigerian Literature writers distinctively deal with the psychological growth of protagonists via experiencing life in prevailed atmosphere.

Therefore, the primary theme of *Everything Good Will Come* reflects Atta's desire to project the woman as a survivor of the hardest conditions, vicissitudes and hurdles which characterise post-independence existence, and the wearisome atmosphere in contemporary Nigeria. Atta is a writer who speaks boldly and expressively for the empowerment of women and other deprived sections of society. She takes a position as a "cultural traveller" as she is a contemporary writer of Nigeria but in her novels, she travels from traditional culture to present modern time. She gives preference to the attempts to demonstrate cultural practices and socio-economic policies which affect women, in particular, and all Nigerians, in general. Her writings are extremely affecting observation of the society in which traditional and the social context tend to lessen women and conservative feminine attributes where the women are forced to end up bearing a lopsided burden of intimidation and exploitation. Her novel focuses on things that really matter for women's self assertion and realization and project showing things realistic way. *Everything Good Will Come* is basically a socio-political novel

during military dictatorship but it is rooted in humanitarian themes exploring issues of gender bias, marriage, motherhood, barrenness, polygamy, social injustice and sexual exploitation. As Sefi Atta, unrevealed the story of the two female characters Enitan and Sheri who are common faces of the society and have usual life like other women's of the society have. She has represented the upbringing of them and how boldly they fight with the problems comes in their life.

Other characters of the novel as Grace Ameh and Ariola they both were determinant and good decision taker women. Grace was independent woman who pursue the challenging job in her life. The motive of Sefi Atta is presenting the feminism through her novel *Everything Good Will Come* which undoubtedly catches the eyes.

The present novel which has taken for this study, *Everything Good Will Come*, is a novel of life journey which is divided in four parts, 1971, 1975, 1985, 1995 in the novel. The pursuit of writing this paper is to find the ways of self assertion and self realization for women in Nigerian society so that the stereotype image of female can be changes which have considered women subjugated, suppressed and oppressed. There are four major female characters, Enitan, protagonist and narrator; Ariola, Enitan's mother; Sheri, Enitan's childhood friend, Grace Ameh, a journalist. They all are presented as docile and submissive characters in beginning but later they prove themselves strong, choose profession of their own will, and take stand for fighting against stereotype image of women in society.

The opening chapter of the novel present the dominating behaviour of the man in the home as scolding and avoiding her wife. The man, father of Enitan, Bandele Sunday Taiwo has been presented as an ignorant man towards her wife who always keep demanding care and attention from her wife while he keep remained ignorant towards her wife's desires and demands from him. Mr. Taiwo is a popular man between his friends for his ideologies and got a nick name Sunny from his closer ones. On the other side, Arin, Enitan's mother is surviving in her life in such violent atmosphere at home. The domestic violence has been presented there as quarrel between Enitan's father and her mother on a trifle as differences of point on political believes and religious believes. Mother of the Enitan, Arin has been bullied by her father since they get married. Ariola was a charter secretary, the best dancer of her college before her marriage. She was the as beautiful lady as the most of the boys of her class wanted to marry her. Sunny used his cunning mind and put the blame of his son's death on her wife. When the story begins, Enitan is only a child of eleven years. She has been nurtured

by her patriarchal father who showers her with affection, love and presents her mother as evil to her. From early of her life, she has seen the submissive behaviour of her mother. Ironically, she has learnt about female liberation from her father. As her father tells her; “if she asks where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father and he’s for the liberation of women”. (*Everything Good Will Come*, 24) Ariola was not agreed to go for another baby while they have their first child as girl she was forced to go for by Sunny and his family without even having proper difference between children because he wanted a boy child. So, he was considered as the wicked person seen by Ariola in her life. She had a realisation of the position of man in the society, that men’s are never considered wrong in the society if she will seek for an another man for her than she will be considered in wrong manner. May be she would be addressed as whore or understood as the bad character of lady in the society. Men have rights to have two or three wives simultaneously in the same home and nobody will degrade them in the society while women are not allowed to take such decisions. She did know about the family next to her house Mr. Baraka who lives with his two wives and a daughter from an another English woman who has been died when the girl Sheri was so young. All these reasons, the death of her son and she has a young girl child of eleven years old and the position of women in the society turned her towards the church in search of peace. The Time Literary Supplement observes that the novel “depicts the struggle women face in a conservative society”. Through the character Ariola, we learn about the failures of domestic life in Nigerian society. But Ariola is left no more a given up character. The African woman is no more docile type but is assertive and at the same time acknowledges the importance of her male counterpart.

Through this all, fact is known about the beginning of life of novel’s narrator Enitan an eleven year’s old girl lives under the shadow of her parents Ariola and Sunny. Her behaviour and observation towards the things developed as her parents have. She was closed and frank with her father more than her mother. She was living under the circumstance where quarrel between her parents on trifle things was usual and they were increasing every day. This makes her feel that well groomed image in the society and the money is not sources of the salvation. Throughout the novel, we have seen change in her behaviour. In beginning she is no more than a victim of society. But her education plays an important role in making her a rational and reasonable person who believes in to fight back, she not only becomes a survivor but she becomes fighter. She discusses about women plight in Nigerian society. She says: A woman was used to humiliation by the time she reached adulthood. She could wear it like a

crown, tilt for effect even, and dare anyone to question her. A man would wear his like an oversized cloak. (168)

She further says that women here are just to carry forward the tears they have got in legacy....

I only remember calling out to my voice. In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest. In the end they may die with nothing but selflessness to pass on to their daughters; a startling legacy, like tears down a parched throat. (179)

Her story is so much similar to Kambili, protagonist and narrator of *Purple Hibiscus* by Adichie. The naive narrator traces Eugene Achike's brutality to his family in *Purple Hibiscus*, where the priest "...asked me to boil water for tea. He poured the water in a bowl and soaked my hands in it" (Adichie, 13) She is witness of her father's violence at home. Adichie presents a realistic picture of domestic violence through Kambili and Jaja in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. But at last when they return from their aunt Ifeoma's home, they have quest of freedom:

Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do (*Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie, 16)

Enitan father teach her about the women liberation time to time and give her lesson to survive in the adverse condition. These nurture and lessons built her as a fearless woman as she getting older. These statements of her father build her to take stand against the wrong which built her as a hopeful fighter for the right. Enitan was presented as quite intelligent girl with high grades in the exam as she found admission at Royal College, one of the popular schools for her higher studies. Eintan came in the contact of Sheri Bakara the girl next to her house in her childhood and they become fast friends as they have shared their thoughts with each other about the school where they were going for higher studies. They have shared with each other what they want to be once they will finish their studies. Sheri wanted to be an actress where Enitan wanted to be a president.

This study analyses how their behaviour changes. There are so many incidents Enitan has seen around her which show her women as subjugated. Taiwo's misbehaviour with Ariola, his father has son outside marriage, no space for girls to choose their career etc. She sees polygamy as a worst part of native law. She says: "I don't know why we continue to follow native law anyway when civil law is in existence. It has no moral grounding, no design, except to oppress women"(141). This novel depicts the polygamy has become a normal way to let down women in society. They have no rights and they can't demand for them as "Human right were never an issue till the right of men is threatened. There's nothing in our constitution for kindness at home. And even if army goes, we still have our men to answer to. So, what is it you want women to say"(193).

The structure of *Everything Good Will Come* reflects the various stages in the life of females. The incident of rape with Sheri, Enitan's friend changes her views all of sudden. She starts to hate male counterpart of life. Keyinde and Mbipon in *Discovery, Assertion and Self-realization in Recent Nigerian Migrant Feminist fiction: The Example of Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come*, point out that this incident, "attests to a particular phase in the journey for Enitan to self discovery"(67). Sheri is a child who was living under freelance condition. She was free to live as she wants she get up late and sleep whenever she want read the love story novels. She visit places around her home and she was free to wear whatever she want to wear. She was ignorant towards the critics who tease her. She has kind of challenging attitude towards life. This makes her good and quick decision taker later which results her in Miss Nigeria, a well running restaurant owner, good at relationships, responsible person towards her family and friends. The incident of the rape of the Sheri filled Enitan with pain and she doesn't get frighten with the view she has seen that night and she took her to home and give her primary treatment. She washed her wound with hot water and did what was the essential to do at the primary level. This singular event changes lives of both Enitan and Sheri. It sharpened Enitan's horizon for a better perception of the world. However, all the realities that Enitan faces in her journey of adulthood, though they very revealing and harsh but this confirms the aim of the novel which aims at exposing the social realities which women encounter in their routine life.

Sheri after rape becomes pregnant and she gets abortion with the help of hanger, making barren in the process. To a Nigerian woman being barren is the worst thing ever to be happening with her. Because being able to have children is the major value for a woman. The

society in which Enitan and Sheri find each other is one in which it is “better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren”(105). This issue of barrenness is also discussed as major in some other Nigerian novels. Flora Nwapa’s novel, *Idu*, is a successful Igbo novel in which she deals with the theme of barrenness in marriage, which is of great concern to the Igbo woman. The novel examines and revises the prevalent notions of marriage, barrenness, motherhood, social responsibility, self sacrifice, humanity and above all, wifeness. Nwapa presents her protagonist as an assertive, individualistic and non conforming woman who, with her awakening confirms the arrival of the truly heroic woman character in African literary world.

After that incident, Sheri and Enitan choose their own life ahead. Sheri from a victim tries to become a survivor. Though, she does so many compromises in her life. When she fails in her life, she becomes mistress of Hassan, military General, in lack of job. When Enitan asks Sheri if Hassan is treating her well she replies, “Which of our men really treats women well”. But after listening Enitan’s motivational words she decides to leave that man and ready to take stand for self respect and starts a new journey by doing cooking business. She opened a restaurant in her old house her father left to her family next to the house of Enitan. She ran the restaurant passively and successfully with the help of her stepmothers. She ran the restaurant as successfully as she was able to buy second hand car, which people say a well maintained second hand car just in the one week of the starting of the business and in the second week of the opening of the restaurant she could rent her own house. This shows the high efficiency of working of the women in the novel. All after that when her restaurant was successfully earning the good amount while the whole country was facing recession and dictatorship. She come through another problem as her uncle has filed a case against them for using the property of her in inappropriate way. She fight against his uncle and won the case from him.

The struggle of her life from her childhood to adulthood helps to become a strong and determinant person as she never gave up and never bend against the wrong. These things present the strong feminine character of her and it continuous throughout her life. She is the child of a black man and a white girl, who is even considered as bad in the society and she was bullied by her classmates for this. She was called yellow banana to tease by her classmates. She has lost her mother earlier she hardly found someone to guide her except her grandmother who to nurture her till the age of eleven. This novel tries to remind the fact that

gender bias, meaningless traditions, and harassments of all sorts are to be fully removed from the society. It is long run to usher in an era of real women empowerment. Through well crafted stories with effect of the 'Awakening' of the heroines of novels, the Nigerian writers motivate the African women to derive encouragement from them, achieve their individuality, and ascertain themselves as 'New African Women'.

Enitan encounters series of unhappy situations during her journey of life. The changes take place in her life is so much similar to the heroine Nnu Ego, in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. She clearly shows that women in the city, whether married or not, are able to assert themselves better on account of freedom. Similarly, Enitan's education in London opens the close doors of her assertiveness. Study of law also exposes the realities of political circumstances of nation. She blames corruption and military dictatorship. Back to Nigeria and equipped with knowledge which education has offered her, Enitan becomes a rationalistic person. She is ready to make choices and accept the consequences of her assertiveness. She denies her father to join his office due to the low paid salary than others. She is more careful about her dignity and pride. The issue of women economic emancipation also dwells with self realization in the novel.

Later she joins her father's office when her father asks who will carry on his empire after him. She takes stand for employees. Her argument with her father on the very first day about the meal bills of the staff and the house which he should transferred on her mother's name after the divorce etc show her liberalism attitude towards woman.

Through the heroine, Atta uses events in the novel to depict her total commitment to the realization of women self. When she takes the stand against the betrayal of the Mike as she scold on him and broke one of the art pieces of his made by him suggested by her. Mike's landlord sees her surprisingly as a woman is not expected to this in the society but she was doing and she didn't care about what people do think about her.

She gets words with the police on the check post when she was going to office the attitude which she has shown and argued with the policeman was fearless...

Nowhere is notice on the path that she shouldn't stop

I can arrest you

Don't you know how to treat a pregnant lady? (189)

Atta demonstrates another phase of Enitan with beginning married life. Her husband, Niyi is a typical African man who is governed by ego rather than reason. Atta creates the issue of male domination with the words of Niyi, "better watch what you're saying. Next thing they'll be calling me woman wrapper. Woman wrapper was a weak man, controlled by his woman"(182). This makes her remember her mother's words, "never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say 'look what I have done for you', it's too late. They never remember"(173). She becomes enlightened, more assertive and imbued with revolutionary spirit. Respect, she believes should be reciprocal...

In my 29 years, no man ever told me to show respect. No man ever needed to. I had seen how women respected men and ended up shouldering burdens... and the expectation of subordination bothered me most. How could I defer to a man whose naked buttocks I'd seen? Touched? Obey him without choking on my humility like a fish bone down my throat. (184)

Atta reveals the character of Enitan as an alarm to bring change in society. Enitan grown up as she had been became a woman of zero tolerance against anything happening within her sight or with her. Her consciousness was on its peak level as take the decision of leaving Niyi, her husband and decided to do what she really wanted to do.

When Enitan's father got arrested, she didn't allow his business to fall. She wants to get his father free from detention. At this point Grace Ameh, who fully changes the personality of Enitan. From her journey, from victim she becomes survivor but after meeting Grace, she is ready to be a fighter. Grace Ameh writes for Oracle Newspaper. For societal rejuvenation, she joins her. For Enitan, the fight to save her father and others would not come from kitchen, "how can I decide what to do about my father from the kitchen"(245). Grace Ameh is a character Atta presents for Enitan's new incarnation as a fighter against all problems. She inspires Enitan continuously about what next step they need to take, she encourages Enitan to continue her fighting without minding what society is saying. Grace Ameh believes that women must be prepared against injustice and oppression because "silence is not a female virtue, but rather a covert way of destroying humanity"(Intersection of Gender Voices, Emenyi,117). Atta describes the problems before women who become activist by the incident of imprisonment of Enitan and Grace. Presenting her never given up and fighting attitude

towards the people, who have wrong and villainous attitude even in the adverse conditions as she has already faced a miscarriage and doctors have warn her if she will went through another miscarriage then she wouldn't be mother again. Doctors have suggested her to take rest still she goes for attending the meeting organized by Grace Ameh who was already warned by the police... "Nothing good will come to you driver said, Tell him, everything good will come to me"(274).

In spite of her prolonged pregnancy, which she doesn't want to lose, she is ready to give up her life and determined to fight on. When she got imprisoned, she meets other women, Mother of the Prison.

Though, they release from prison the following day. Enitan becomes stronger. She fought until her father transferred the estate to her mother. She determined for her father's release from detention. She fights... "I've always said, men fight for land and women fight for family"(288).

She joins the Human Right Group, becomes the campaigner for the well being of nation as well as women. In this way, she completes her journey to adulthood and selfhood. Florance Orabueze in an article opines that "At the tender age, she sees events and, people, situations and action naively but as she grows up, she interprets them and puts them in their proper prospective"(86).

The story of the fiction satisfies the title of the novel *Everything Good will Come* by Sefi Atta in its appropriate manner. The female characters of the novel Ariola, Enitan, Sheri and Grace Ameh encounter a lot of trouble throughout their life they have faced criticism on their character and living style but later they prove themselves as a fighter. Through this novel Atta expresses her deep concern for the agonies of women in Nigerian society. While trying to register her aversion at male chauvinism and the domineering patriarchal system, she reminds the women that the social condition of a society or a nation can be improved by liberation of women. They all got filled with extreme joy and keeping sing and saying people 'everything good will come'

Therefore, "freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was responsibility from the onset, for a people, a person, to fight for, and hold unto"(307). This seems to be the main thrust of Atta's message. This journey of finding self comes with motivation for self-assertion and,

optimally, self-realisation. Her novel exhibits those potent qualities that Kaytrak's (1996) uses in the description of women writers:

Women writers share specific gender concerns in terms of how social and Cultural factors appear from a female point of view. Their literary works imaginatively explore several conflicts between tradition (Social, custom, religion) and modernisation.(232)

As the novel ends and Enitan becomes even more determined, her father is released from detention and other prisoners also. Enitan has encountered in life also stand a chance of being freed from chains of society. Her victory is articulated in the dance she does to the chagrin of road users. Enitan's dance typifies the exciting and liberating effect of freedom. Consequently, this novel ends on the optimistic note that 'everything good will come'. This research paper depicts that in journey of their life from submissive nature to self realization they have achieved their targets towards life. They have attained assertion and discovery of self through their endless efforts.

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