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Self-realization of Protagonist in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*

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Abstract:

Buchi Emecheta is one of the prolific women writers from Nigeria. She belongs to second-generation Nigerian authors. Her works form a bridge between first generation and third generation women authors. Her novels show the lives of Nigerian women trapped between African traditions, culture and heritage as well as the western culture introduced by British colonizers in Africa. In her every novel, she deals with female protagonists who are confined to strong African patriarchal structure. She portrays African women following Igbo culture under burden. At the same time, Emecheta tries to highlight her own struggles by some of her characters like Adah and Kehinde. These female protagonists face exploitation under two cultures, which are totally opposite to each other. First, one is an African Igbo culture and second is modern that treats women with equality. This article presents the plight of female protagonists in the last novel by Buchi Emecheta named *Kehinde*. In this story, she introduces her one of the best character Kehinde to her readers. She is bold, mature, courageous and unordinary Igbo woman living in London from last sixteen years with her family. However, her husband's second marriage in Nigeria without her consent disturbs her totally. A story shows how Kehinde

undergoes the mental exploitation because of Nigerian practice of polygamy. However, at the end of the novel, Kehinde dares to choose an unconventional path for her instead of accepting her husband's decision or blaming him. She decides to complete her education and empowers herself through education and achieves her self-realization.

Keywords: Self-realization, polygamy, patriarchy, individuality, independence, empowerment.

Introduction:

Buchi Emecheta (nee Florence Onyebuchi Emecheta), a Britain-based Nigerian novelist, was born on 21 July 1944 in Yaba near Lagos, Nigeria, to Igbo parents. Her father Jeremy Nwabudinke and mother Alice (nee Okwuekwuhe) Emecheta, both were Igbo and natives of Umuezeokolo Odanta village in Ibuza, Delta State. The Igbo community is the main ethnic group of West Africa. Her parents were partly educated. They followed the Church Missionary Society as their way of life because Nigeria was under the British rule from 1906 to 1960. They moved to Lagos, which was the then capital city of Nigeria, to get better work opportunities. There her father joined the British railway as a molder.

Her family settled in Lagos but their spiritual home was in the village of Ibuza, where Emecheta used to travel back often. Though her parents accepted Christian way of life, they emphasized on their traditional village life and they urged that their kids also follow the village life.

Due to gender discrimination, Emecheta was not admitted in the school while her younger brother, Adolphus, was allowed to go to school. Like an ordinary African girl, she was growing up by listening to the stories of her grandmothers and aunts in her family. The stories of

her big mothers instilled in Emecheta a desire to write her own stories. This story telling aspect of African culture was called 'Ifo'. Girls used to obtain this type of education along with household work. However, she wished to take formal western education. Thus, her struggle for equality started from her home. Even though her parents kept her away from school, she refused to accept this discrimination and secondary position. Thus, she admitted to Ladilak School and later Reagan Memorial Baptist School. Marie Umeh, one of her major critics reports in her introductory essay (*En*) *Gendering African Womanhood: Locating Sexual Politics in Igbo Society and Across Boundaries* as,

One afternoon, acting on impulse she paired a visit to the Methodist School where a Sierra Leonian neighbor, Mr. Cole, taught. This action, which signified her desire for a Western education, made her parents realize that she was unwilling to be treated as a non-entity, to be consigned to marginality. They felt they had no choice but to enroll her in her brother's school. (Umeh, *Emerging perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 26)

In 1952, her father was serving for Lord Louise Mountbatten, a supreme allied commander of south East Asia command, to fight for the British army in Burma. During this time, her father got some complications in a wound, which he contracted in the swamps of Burma. This led to his death. He died in a war to which he had no direct relation, as he was a molder. His dead body was also not sent home for his final rituals. Emecheta's mother was unable to support her family so the family was separated. Little Emecheta was sent to live with her mother's cousin in Lagos where she received servant like treatment than a little innocent girl. Her younger brother was sent to live with his father's brother in another area of Lagos.

According to Igbo culture, Emecheta's paternal uncle inherited her mother. Thus, she remarried to him.

On this tragic situation Emecheta's elder son, Sylvester Onwardi writes, in an article *Remembering my mother Buchi Emecheta, 1944-2017*, published in *New Statesman* as, "Buchi's life was always overshadowed by the poverty and deprivation of her early years. She was sick, poorly and undernourished child but with a ravenous desire to survive against all odds. She lost her father, who doted on her, when she was eight years old. With his passing she and her elder brother were left at mercy of a mother who, due to lack of education, was unable to appreciate the talent in the young girl".

According to Sylvester, some benefactors discovered the hidden talent in the young girl and gave her the necessary help and encouragement to continue her further education rather than selling oranges in the market as per her mother's wish.

Buchi Emecheta's childhood was hard. She was not living with her family but she had an urge of further education. She collected some money and filled the entrance examination form for high school. In 1954, Buchi Emecheta won a state scholarship for four years of the reputed school named Methodist Girls' High school, in Yaba, Lagos. During these days, she lived with different relatives as a needy child. She was aware of her desire to pursue her education and become a writer. She worked hard to fulfill her dreams to be an author. In this school, she accompanied with most talented students of the country and best Nigerian teachers. There she lived until she was sixteen years old. At that time, she passed West African School Certificate Examination with honors. She was dreaming to attend the University of Ibadan, which was not possible for her. To fulfill this dream she found an option of marriage with Nduka Sylvester

Onwardi, a young student to whom she met at school and she engaged from the age of eleven. Emecheta found Sylvester a capable, passionate and responsible life partner for her. His family was unable to pay 500 pounds as bride price to Emecheta's family, as per the demand of her mother and other family members. Thus, Emecheta and Sylvester eloped and got married in 1960. After marriage, in Lagos the couple was happy and blessed with first daughter and then a son. Her husband moved to London to study accountancy at the London University. Emecheta remained in Lagos and worked for the American embassy for two years to collect money for her departure to London.

In February 1962, Emecheta travelled by boat and joined her husband to London with their two young children. The couple lived in one-room flat with no facilities. This situation was very hard to her and opposite to Nigerian lifestyle. In London, she had three more children. Emecheta, at the age of twenty-two, had five children in all. They are Florence, Sylvester, Jake, Christy and Alice.

Her economic condition in England was not favorable than that of Nigeria. Emecheta was aware of her weak English language skills but she was strongly determined to improve them and started writing. However, the upbringing responsibilities of five children and her husband's lack of ambitious nature, forced her to work outside home rather than focusing on full time writing. In 1972-1974, she got a job as a librarian in the British Museum, which she found quite satisfying. There she realized that her dream of becoming an author would come true, as many books surrounded the place. She began to write her first novel in her spare time. When she finished her first novel, *The Bride Price*, she was very happy, excited and proud. She gave the manuscript to her husband, Sylvester, to read. Instead of reading, he burned it with jealousy, rage, anger and disappointment. He was very suspicious of her writing. Her abusive husband objected her

writings because he thought that she was disclosing Igbo cultural facts and bringing shame on his family. Emecheta shocked by this incident. While reporting her feelings about this incidence, in an interview given to BBC World News Service, she says:

the first book I wrote was *The Bride Price* which was a romantic book, but my husband burnt the book when he saw it. I was the typical African woman, I'd done this privately, I wanted him to look at it, approve it, and he said he wouldn't read it. And later he burnt the book and I think by that time this urge to write had become more important to me than he realized, and that was the day I said, 'I'm going to leave this marriage' and he said "What for, that stupid book' and I said, "I just feel you just burned my child." (Buchi Emecheta Interview, BBC World Service)

This depressing incident finally led to their separation in 1969. After their separation, she moved with her children to a slum area in London. There she faced many problems and experienced the passive nature of British welfare system. These experiences provided materials for her first two novels, which are autobiographical.

In her autobiography *Head above Water*, Emecheta writes about her hardships in London. She says, "As for my survival for the past twenty years in England, from when I was a little over twenty, dragging four cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with a fifth one – that is a miracle"(Emecheta, *Head above Water* 5).

In 1972, she began to write regular articles named, 'Observations of the London Poor', in the magazine called, *The New Statesman*, a British left-wing magazine, about her experiences of unsuccessful marriage, racism and poverty in London and her struggle for survival as a single

Black immigrant-working mother of five children. These, experiences described by her as, “charting my social reality” in an interview with Julie Holmes (Holmes). They are collected into her first book, *In the Ditch*, which launched her Black author. It is an autobiographical novel where in, Adah Ofilu, is the female protagonist and Emecheta’s mouthpiece, who is strong, determined and violent young African woman struggling to survive in London. She aggressively fights against the adverse situations and relegates herself and her five children from a welfare system of a “problem family” by obtaining Western education and standing firm in spite of sexual, racial and class oppression.

Emecheta realized that her writing might help her to be more stable economically. She writes it in *Criticism and Ideology* that, “I thought I would wait to be as old as Big Mother with a string of degrees before writing. But I had to earn my living and the only thing I could do was to write”. (Peterson 174)

From 1969 to 1976, she worked as a youth worker and a sociologist with the Inner London Education Authority. Until this time, she launched her career as a social worker and author. Her knowledge in sociology helped her analyzing the social structures of British society in her first two novels.

Emecheta’s passion for education took her to several places to impart her knowledge. From 1972, she began lecturing as a visiting professor at several universities throughout the United States including Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University, Yale University, University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign. She was senior resident fellow and visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar in

Nigeria in 1980 to 1981. In 1974, she earned honors degree in sociology and later master's degree in philosophy from London University.

Emecheta's second novel, *Second-Class Citizen* published in 1974, is the prequel to her first novel *In the Ditch*. To these novels, she calls "Documentary Novels" because they are highly based on her life as Black emigrant struggling in London in 1960s. Here, she gives an account of her early days in London when her husband was in graduation but not serious about his studies and was giving harsh, abusive and inhuman treatment to her that caused their separation. The same protagonist, Adah Ofilu, is a Nigerian young woman, moved to London with her husband Francis Obi, struggling to bring up her children. Gradually, she feels rejected in the British society and neglected by her husband. Thus, this story depicts Adah's separation with Francis and her struggle to reject a second-class identity in London as a Black immigrant woman. The story also throws some light on the events happened in Emecheta's life for example, her husband burnt her first novel, their separation and her dream to be an author. She won the Daughter of Mark Twain Award in 1975 for this novel.

After this novel, she came up with plays named *The Juju Landlord* (1975), *A Kind of Marriage* (1976), *Family Bargain* (1987). Her plays, *The Juju Landlord* and *A Kind of Marriage*, performed at the London Theatre, which highlights the problems of inequality faced by African women in their day-to-day life. In 1976 to 1978, she worked as a social worker in Camden, North London.

Her third novel, *Bride Price*, published in 1976. It is her first work to be set in early 1950 in Lagos and Ibusa. From this novel, she departs herself from her protagonist and creates new characters in central role. The story moves around a young female protagonist, Aku-nna,

struggling with cultural values, which destroy her life in a tragic way. After her father's death, her uncle inherits her and she permitted to obtain her further education, which will increase her bride prize. In African culture, bride prize is the sum that bride's parents get from groom in a marriage. Aku-nna falls in love with a teacher who belongs to lower cast. She elopes with him. She dies in childbirth. Her death is prophesized by superstitious Nigerian people. This novel shows Emecheta's drastic change in the selection of the subject matter and mental growth as a writer.

In 1976, she produced her first screenplay; *A Kind of Marriage*, telecasted on BBC. In 1977, Emecheta was a social worker in London. At that time, she came with her new fiction *The Slave Girl*. This book talks about a poor Igbo girl Ojebeta, who is sell as a slave by her brother to a rich African woman. It is a story of Ojebeta as a slave. Eventually she gets married to a man but at the end of the novel, she realizes that there is no difference between the role of a slave and a wife. Here, Emecheta attacks on both of the institutions, marriage and slavery. For this novel, she won The New Statesman Jock Campbell Award for Commonwealth Writers in 1979. In the same year, the novel got widely recommendation for the Best Third World Writer for 1976-1979. She was a member of British Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race in 1979. In the same year, she lectured various universities in the United States. Emecheta contributed to various foundations throughout her life.

The theme of slave like treatment to woman in marriage is continuing her next novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, her magnum opus, arrived in 1979. It highlights the joy of motherhood, which comes with pain, anxiety, obligations, responsibilities and burden. Its ironical title was highly appreciated by her critics and readers as the story talks about the tribal African notion of the necessity for woman to be fertile and above all, she should give birth to a male child, which

decides her fate. For this novel, she received the Best Black Writer in Britain prize in 1980. In the same year, she worked in Nigeria as a Senior Research Fellow and visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar. *The Joys of Motherhood* has translated into French and German. After this novel, Emecheta shifted her focus to children fiction, which includes *Titch the Cat* (1979), *Nowhere to Play* (1980), *The Moonlight Bride* (1980) and *The Wrestling Match* (1981).

In 1981, Emecheta along with Maggie Murray published a book, *Our Own Freedom*, a photographic exploration based on the lives of women from Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Azania, who are active and at the center of their societies and performing important role as teachers, farmers and traders. Emecheta has written introduction and commentary to this unique book, which tries to reflect the struggles, dilemma and realities of African women. The title of this book comes from Buchi Emecheta's introduction where she speaks about women's freedom and their value. Next year, she wrote a novelette named *Naira Power* especially for Nigerian readers.

After an interval of four pleasurable children's books and one novelette, Emecheta's pen turned towards a new theme with *Destination Biafra- A Novel* in 1982. It is a story of Nigerian Civil War. This novel got mixed critical response of readers. *Destination Biafra*, which was her sixth novel and she was quite excited and ambitious for this project. It is about the separation of Biafra from Federal Nigeria to the Republic of Biafra. This war lasted for 30 months in between 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970. Emecheta wanted to write a novel on the issue of Nigerian civil war. Therefore, she decided to research this topic and went to Nigeria but she felt that the higher authorities of Sandhurst, the Royal Military Academy, would not allow her to do research which was quite essential for the book. Hence, she accepted a job of a cleaner at this academy. She completed this novel based on the Nigerian Civil War research. After publishing the novel, she

looked over it and observed that a chapter of eighty-six pages, entirely based on Sandhurst research, omitted from the novel. This omission not discussed earlier with her, either by British publisher Alice and Busby or by an agent. Over this incident, she was highly disappointed which lead to her breakup with publisher, who later clarified that the chapter was lost by them. She also fired her agent and decided to start her own publishing house .In 1983; she established her own publishing house, Ogwugwu Afor Company that had a presence in London as well as in Nigeria. When she completed the book, she changed her strategy by selling out the paperback rights. Behind establishing her own press, her intention was very pious. She wanted to provide good platform and financial help to emerging Black writers.

Emecheta wrote her next fiction *Double Yoke*, a campus novel published by her newly formed publishing company, in 1983, immediately after her return to England from the University of Calabar, where she spent some time lecturing on creative writings. This novel is set in the same Calabar University campus. It is the story of a young student Nko, struggling to fulfill social demands, traditional female role and her own wish to be an independent woman. Her male professor Ekot and her boyfriend physically exploit Nko.

Emecheta gave a good share of credit to her children because they spent their school holidays working as a salesperson in the dealers stores across Britain. Later, both the novels, *Double Yoke* and *The Joys of Motherhood* have made into films.

She worked, as a member of the Arts Council of Great Britain from 1982 to 1983. She was also a regular contributor to *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, and *Times Literary Supplement* and University of Wollongong Australia's *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.

In 1983, Emecheta awarded as one of the twenty-best young British writers from The Book Marketing Council. In the same year, she become a well-known author, when she was listed among the 20 best young British novelists in the literary journal named *Granta*, along with some great British authors like Martin Amis, Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie.

In 1983, she wrote another novel, *The Rape of Shavi*, set in an imaginative African land named Shavi, which is pure and untouched before western civilization. After the European colonization, the Shavians adopt European way of life and ideology. This novel has different theme. It is a product of her keen observation and sharp thinking. In the same year, she combined her first novel, *In the Ditch* and second novel, *Second-Class Citizen* in one book named *Adah's Story: A Novel*.

In 1986, she published a volume of autobiography, *Head above Water*, which describes her continuous struggle to bring up her five children in a foreign land as a single Black immigrant mother, to obtain further education, her search for jobs and her strong wish to become an author. The book also explores diasporic life and the social status of Black people in London. It also shades some interesting light on Emecheta's personal growth as an author. The book gives a faithful account of her emotional involvement with her novels.

She delivered a lecture in 1986 on feminism under the title *Feminism with small 'f'* in Second African Writers' Conference held in Stockholm, Sweden. Later this lecture was published in a book *Criticism and Ideology: African Writers Conference* edited by Kristen Holst Petersen in 1988. After publishing her lecture via book, it gained popularity and became very famous.

In 1987, Emecheta shows her concern towards African emigrants to London and Western countries in her 11th novel, *Gwendolen*, appeared in 1989, which also published in the United States with the title *The Family*. Here she chooses a West Indian girl as protagonist rather a Nigerian. Like her previous works, *Gwendolen*, also presents the theme of woman's oppression by men. However, this time she seems to be very conscious and particular in thematic application as she uses the concept of incest as a central idea of this novel. This is a new angle to her creativity. The story gets started in Jamaica, where Gwendolen, a little girl, is left behind with her Granny by her father first and then by her mother who left Jamaica for "Modern Kontry" and settled down in London. Though Gwendolen is in her Granny's custody and care, an old family friend Uncle Johnny sexually harasses her for multiple times. The community blames to an innocent girl. After that horrible incident, she goes to London to live with her parents. Here, Emecheta skillfully grabs an opportunity to describe the poor condition of immigrant's slum area in London once again through the innocent eyes of Gwendolen, who is unaware of this type of social structure. In London, her family is living at the bottom level of the social scale. Her family is poor, illiterate and trying to cope up with the complex life in London. However, with the help of a primitive church community they are trying to survive. When Gwendolen's mother attends Granny's final rituals in Jamaica, Gwendolen's father also sexually harasses her. At this time; she also develops sexual relationship with her white boyfriend. To this novel, Emecheta gives modern, optimistic and slightly confusing ending where Gwendolen lives happily in a council flat with her baby. At the end of the novel, her father dies in an accident, her boyfriend remains as a boyfriend and her mother recognizes the biological father of the baby who was Gwendolen's father. Gwendolen as a matured protagonist of Buchi Emecheta handles the complex situation and family relationships with a great ease.

Since 1990, Emecheta was a member of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists), and association of international women writers. In 1992, she received an honorary doctor of literature degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. She completed her M. Phil degree in social education and she achieved her Ph.D. in 1991. In 1994, Buchi Emecheta came up with her new work named *Kehinde*.

In *The New Tribe*, published in 2000, Emecheta first time employs a male protagonist who is a Nigerian boy, adopted by a British family. When he becomes adult, he gets curious about his original identity. He travels to Nigeria to search his own roots and ethnic origins. He starts searching for his self-identity but he gets disappointed with the violence, corruption and greed in Nigeria. He contracts malaria because of an unhealthy environment and filth. His Black English girlfriend goes to Nigeria and takes him back to England. At the end of the story, she accepts England as his home.

In 2001, she served as a judge for the Caine Prize along with J. M Coetzee. In 2005, Emecheta honored, by the Queen Elizabeth II, with the Order of British Empire (OBE) award for her service to literature. The British Government gives this award to the recognized scholars for their brilliant achievements in the field of sciences, public services, arts and charitable works. Emecheta was fluent in five African languages like Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Hausa and Urhobo.

She has also written some important articles in the periodicals like *The Black Scholar*, *Essence*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Publishers Weekly* and *World Literature Today*.

In 2010, Buchi Emecheta suffered from a stroke. On January 25, 2017, she passed away at her home in London at the age of 72. She is been distinguished by Ashley Dawson in *Mongrel Nation* as, "The first successful black woman novelist living in Britain after 1948" (Dawson

117). Her books are translated into 14 languages such as French, German, Dutch, Italian, Korean and Swedish languages. On 21 July 2019 Google, internet's widely preferred search engine, celebrated Emecheta's 75th birthday by flashing her pictures on Google Doodle.

Above detailed discussion on Buchi Emecheta's life is very significant here because her life was full of struggle. But without blaming the situation, she laid her life by taking education. She realized the need and place of education in her life. In her novels she creates complicated situations in front of her female protagonists and at the same time shows them a beautiful path of self-empowerment through education and self-realization as she chose the same.

Discussion:

Kehinde explores the story of Kehinde Okolo, a 35 years old Nigerian immigrant woman living in London from last sixteen years with her husband, Albert. They both earn their living in foreign country. They both possess recognized position and high-income jobs. Albert works as a storekeeper where as Kehinde acquires a post of manager in a renowned bank. They possess a house and car. They have two children named Bimpe and Joshua. In short, Kehinde and Albert are enjoying well-settled life in London.

The twist comes in Kehinde's life when Albert's sister Selina and Marry disturb him by asking to return to Nigeria. They constantly demand it and he too urges to go back to his land. Before returning to Nigeria, they realize that Kehinde is pregnant. She wants this child but without considering Kehinde, Albert decides to abort the child. In a hurry to go to Nigeria, he justifies that having third child in London is not convenient to them and it would become obstacle in the way to home. He says, "this is not right time for another one, I know abortion is wrong, but we are in a strange land, where you do things contrary to your culture" (Kehinde, 15).

He convinces Kehinde by saying that they cannot afford one more child in London rather she can have as many children as she wants but in Lagos where according to Albert, "...children are the necessity. They mean a good old age with plenty to eat. And with grandchildren, people respect you" (Kehinde, 16). Albert is being selfish. He forces Kehinde to accept his own decision for his own happiness. According to Kehinde, "our people believe that people are more valuable than money" (Kehinde, 7). For Albert third child in London is unaffordable. He says, "I know all that. But our people never live in London where parents have to pay a great part of their wages to nannies to look after their babies" (Kehinde, 7).

After Kehinde's abortion, Albert returns to Nigeria with his two children and she lives in London to sell their house. Albert does not even think to sell the house by himself and then leave for Nigeria. He gives this responsibility to his wife. It is noted that Albert is very eager to go to Nigeria. According to him, "But I want to go back to the way of life my father had, a life of comparative ease for men, where men were men and women were women, and one was respected as somebody. Here, I am nobody, just a storekeeper. I'm fed up with just listening to my wife and indulging her. The only alternative is to go to the pub, but going to stand among all those drunken whites is no solution. No, to be at home is better" (Kehinde 35).

According to him, in London, men and women are treated equally unlike Nigeria. He is a typical African man for whom women are subordinate. However, in London, Kehinde possesses equal position in their relationship. He wants to live as his father lived. In England, he is possessing an alien identity and urges to live with his own identity. Thus, the reason of Albert's hurry is to live like an original Nigerian man with his patriarchal power and birthright. In short, he is missing his male centric authority, which lacks in London.

In these two years of departure, Albert keeps calling Kehinde to enquire about house selling deal. She tries to sell but fails because other Nigerians living in London become suspicious towards Kehinde as she is living alone in London. She is tagged of separated and husbandless single woman. When she starts missing her husband and children, she too decides to go to Nigeria without selling the house. Her inner voice forces her to meet her husband as soon as possible. Her inner voice asks, “Why don’t you go to Nigeria and find out what is happening, before it’s too late? Have you forgotten that in Nigeria it has considered manly for men to be unfaithful? Even if he didn’t want women they would come to him” (Kehinde, 46). However, Kehinde has a strong faith in her husband. She believes him because she feels he is a man of principles and different from others. He would never cheat her. She is confused and afraid. Her dilemma makes her restless and she resigns the job. When she tells Albert about her decision to return to Nigeria, he tries to persuade her decision to leave London without selling their house. Here, Kehinde starts observing transformation in his behavior. She senses that her husband has totally changed in these two years. Now she is determined to go to Nigeria.

When Kehinde returns to Albert’s house in Nigeria, there she encounters to shocking news that in these two years Albert is married to a woman named Rike, young, beautiful, Ph.D. holder university professor. Albert and Rike have a son and she is pregnant again. So Kehinde feels deceived and frustrated because without giving any hint Albert has married to Rike. Because of polygamy, Kehinde’s exploitation starts. Few days she lives in Nigeria with this mental trauma of husband’s second marriage without her consent. However, she cannot convince herself to accept Rike as her co-wife. She feels guilty to live in Nigeria and for leaving her job in London. Very important scene is created by Emecheta in this novel is, when Kehinde comes in Albert’s house in Nigeria, immediately the secret of Albert’s marriage is revealed in front of

Kehinde by her elder sister Ifeyinwa. It is very interesting to read their conversation in which Ifeyinwa tries to convince Kehinde to accept it and compares her own life with Kehinde's because she lives with her co-wives in two rooms in Nigeria. Ifeyinwa is Nigerian woman. She is a victim of polygamous relationships, which is very common there.

Kehinde, Rike, Ifeyinwa and her co-wives are the victims of polygamy. They are now living in a shared identity. However, Kehinde though a Nigerian by birth refuses to accept this rather shared identity because she has spent sixteen years in London and influenced by western lifestyle. Polygamy is not practiced in west. For people in west, polygamy is a backward and uncivilized practice. Whereas the practice of divorce is against Nigerian culture. These cultural differences are observed in the novel

Kehinde is influenced by western ideology where women are respected so she is comfortable living in London but Albert is suffocated by his fake and uncomfortable life in London. Therefore, he prefers to shift. For Kehinde it is very difficult to accept polygamous relationship and live in Lagos because she has spent half of her life in London. They logged for their own identities. Albert clarifies his decision by taking support of traditions. He says, "I know you're angry. But look back, Kehinde. My father had two wives, yours had three, so what sin did I commit that is so abominable?" Albert's voice grated..." (Kehinde, 86).

Now, Kehinde has understood that she is cheated, undervalued and the reason why Albert was trying to persuade her decision to come to Nigeria without selling their house. After meeting Albert in Nigeria, she discovers a new confidence in Albert by his behavior and the way he talks to her. She also observes her own confidence level has tremendously fallen down. She feels betrayed, confused and alone. She realizes that henceforth she would be recognized as a

senior wife of a London returned and well settled Nigerian man. Her inner sense is not ready to accept this new identity. She is a victim of polygamy, which is quite common in Nigeria, but to Kehinde it is foreign idea because Kehinde is influenced by western ideology and she believes that polygamy is a social evil. Nigerian traditional values, related to polygamy, appears useless and absurd to her. She feels an absurdity in even the custom of not calling her own husband by his name rather she should call him as “our husband or Joshua’s father” (Kehinde, 71). This unequal position and awkwardness in their relationship make her more restless. Kehinde understands that this place and this relationship is not suitable for her. She finds herself alienated, marginalized and foreign in Albert’s house. She does not even tries to adjust in this polygamous relationship rather she decides to go away from it as, “the circle had closed in her absence, and she did not have the strength to fight her way back in” (Kehinde, 91). In this stressful condition Kehinde, “had a feeling of wanting to die” (Kehinde, 87).

In this helpless situation, she reminds her friend in London to whom she writes a letter, telling her what has happened in Nigeria. She expresses her anger and feelings to her by writing,

“Things are happening here which, as I said earlier, I would never have believed could happen. Albert - oh, I forgot, I’m not allowed to call him that-o, because I didn’t give the name to him. (He didn’t give me the name Kehinde, yet he is free to shout my name even in the open marketplace.) I have to say ‘Joshua’s father’ or ‘our father’ or ‘our husband’. He didn’t come to my room until three days after my arrival, when he came in the middle of the night, and half-heartedly made as if to demand his marital rights. Of course, I refused, as I think he expected. He only came to my room to do his duty, not to be intimate or loving. He left all that in England. (Kehinde, 93)

This letter shows her pain. By this letter, it is clear that she has decided to go back to London. She tells her friend to enquire about Mary Elikwu who is separated from her husband and completed her education in London. She feels Rike has Ph.D. in English literature and good job in University so that she could marry Albert and supported him when he was jobless immediately after coming to Lagos from London. Now she decides to start her education again because when on Albert's demand Kehinde starts searching a job in Nigeria, she is rejected because in Nigeria people need young employees. Therefore, she has to be dependent on Albert for money. She decides to return for her identity, her dignity and money. Emecheta writes, "She longed to return to London, but was too proud to admit it, even to herself. Nonetheless, she trusted Moriammo to read between the lines." (Kehinde, 99). Her friend, Moriammo, understands her situation and sends her money for ticket, writing that, "This is a long loan, payable when able." (Kehinde, 100).

Kehinde leaves Lagos without telling anybody. She meets her sister Ifeyinwa who tries to prevent her from going London but Kehinde is already determined to be away from this situation. Here readers can see maturity of Kehinde. She has realized her own situation and without informing any one, she leaves for London, in her unsold home to live with dignity.

After returning London, she faces multiple difficulties in finding jobs. However, she has decided to take care of herself, as there is no one to in this situation. She studies hard and gets degree in sociology, which results in acquiring a job in the Department of Social Service.

Kehinde's house in London plays very important in this novel. She returns to her house and keeps a tenant for extra income. When her son comes to London, he shows his possession on the house, at that time she shows her authority by telling him that the house belongs to her now

and it may belongs to him in future. Her son represents the tendency of men who cannot accept female authority and possession on any valuables.

Emecheta has developed Rike's character with a skill. She plays a role of competitor in Kehinde's life. She is bold enough to accept sixteen years senior, London returned married man as her husband. She is educated, rich and civilized woman still close to her traditions, who indirectly forces Kehinde to follow her path of education.

Kehinde cleverly understands her situation. She rejects it silently. She moves out of it tactfully. She realizes her need to save her own identity rather merging it with her husband's identity. This kind of self-realization and self-determination are observed in Buchi Emecheta when her husband mentally harassed her. She too like Kehinde left her husband for the betterment of her life. Emecheta had Ph.D. in sociology. She wants her protagonists to study sociology, the societies, their norms, culture and people especially the position of women in society, which ever it may be Nigerian or Western. She prefers to refer this subject symbolically because sociology is the study of society. The society in which women are not treated equally to men, she wants them to know this fact and to change themselves.

Through Rike's character, Emecheta tries to give a message to Nigerian woman to be educated and independent. Then only they would be valued in their society. Kehinde prefers to continue her education in mid age. Kehinde empowers herself by studying further. Kehinde achieves self-realization and self-empowerment through education and gets freedom from exploitation.

Because of this unique and memorable female protagonist, Emecheta possesses special position in African literature. Emecheta correctly says that she is not the feminist. She only

writes about the reality of Nigerian culture, customs and patriarchy and its effects on Nigerian women's lives. She just exposes the truth in front of the world. She never demands freedom, equality, high status, respect and dignity for African woman instead, she, by her own example, sets a golden rule for women's freedom that is their self-realization, self-improvement and empowerment through education. She does not blame patriarchal attitudes but teaches to ignore it by only concentrating on self-development.

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