

Representation of Women and Sexuality in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: A Study

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Abstract

Women have typically had less legal privileges and career opportunities throughout history than men. The most important occupations for women historically have been those of wife and mother, and they have long been seen as being inherently weaker than men. Their existence and rights are assumed by patriarchal society. Women often view silence as a virtue, but with education, the silence is broken.

Many cultural traditions in Africa discriminate women. Husbands frequently beat their wives and place the blame for infertility squarely on their shoulders. Even if it is not proven that they are to blame for the marital issues, they still endure those sufferings. Because culture encourages men to marry multiple women, married women are susceptible to being replaced at any time by their husbands.

Female characters in African literature typically experience discrimination as an afterthought to male protagonists. Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to examine how women were treated in the chosen text – Buchi Emecheta's "The Slave Girl" and J.M. Coetzee's "Disgrace".

Keywords: Disgrace, Sex, African women, Slave Girl, Coetzee

1. Introduction

Women have always been represented as an object in literature. In English literature from Chaucer to the present women are described and represented as sexual objects, who are never allowed to speak. Writers provided a space in literature where women can only remain passive. Representation of women varies from the early period to the present. Poets like Browning in his works kept women in high pedestal and made men to run behind her. Some other poets were keen in representing women's physical beauty in their poem. Poets like Spenser, Marvell and others represented women's physical beauty in their works and represented women as an object of sexuality. Marvell in his poem "To His Coy Mistress" describes women's physical beauty as;

An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred years to adore each
breast, But thirty thousand years to
the rest;

An age at least to every part... (13-17)

Most of the writers represented women's sexuality as a taboo subject and made people to believe that the reason for the social and moral decline is women's immorality. Some writers created a fantasy that men have the right to express his sexual desire/feelings but not the women. If a woman expresses her sexual desire then she is considered as immoral. A few writers represented the theme of sexuality in their works. The writers represented women's sexuality in their novels but then they represented women as an object of sexuality.

This paper takes up Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) with an aim to show how the writers represented women and women sexuality of their society and time in their works.

Position of women across cultures and nations remains the same but the representation of their status and position varies. For her portrayal of the female experience in African society, notably in her home Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta, a prominent female author in contemporary African literature, has garnered notice on a global scale. Commenting on Emecheta's contribution in male-dominated literature of modern Africa, Eustace Palmer says "Scarcely any other African novelist has succeeded in probing the female mind and displaying the female personality with such precision." (CLC: 128 54) Though Buchi is often acclaimed as a feminist writer, she differentiates her

Self-centric perspective from that of her Western counterparts by describing herself as “an African feminist with small f” (CLC: 128 75). Impressive storytelling skills, psychologically nuanced female protagonists, and a potent societal critique of traditional African culture are all strengths of Emecheta's work. They are largely unencumbered by ideology or polemics. She has presented the male domination and oppressions against women in her novels. In her novel *The Slave Girl* she similarly depicts the limited opportunities and experiences of women of her Nigerian society.

2. Representation of Women

In the history of English literature women are represented as object of sex. Women are always portrayed as passive, pastoral, sentimental and emotional. The women's issues are addressed from a male viewpoint. Some of the women writers [Bronte sisters] in Victorian period addressed women's issues in their poems, and the male dominated patriarchal society looked down upon them. From the early period to the present, women are represented as an object. Only a few writers represented woman as woman and addressed women's issues from female point of view. Among the few writers who voiced their views for women, Buchi Emecheta and J.M. Coetzee [contemporary African writers] are important for representing women in their works. Buchi Emecheta's women do not simply lie down and die. There is always resistance but their own patriarchal setup made them to accept the customs and norms. J.M. Coetzee is a deft and intricate author whose writings consistently contain more than meets the eye. He established his fame with works that focused on the ill effects of apartheid and highlighted the psychological turmoil caused in the minds of white Africans in general while his female characters represented the position of women in contemporary South Africa.

Emecheta has garnered notice on a global scale for her captivating portrayal of the plight of women in African society, particularly in her native Nigeria. Emecheta, along with fellow Nigerian Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, and Ama Ato Aidoo, is recognized for establishing a significant female presence in the once male-dominated literature of contemporary Africa. Emecheta's clear style and moving depiction of her heroine's struggles have received appreciation from critics. Women were portrayed as a group rather than as individuals by Buchi Emecheta in her writings. She portrays females as African females. She has presented the male domination and oppressions against women in her novels.

Buchi Emecheta is sometimes described as a protest writer. Though she protests against the devaluing of women's humanity and potential, she also protests against injustice and exposes the very roots of oppression. She protests against the social, economic and cultural forces that lead to the exploitation of Black women. Emecheta's fiction is not simply rooted in the contrasting senses of place and displacement, but is located within the contradictions in modern African Society. Many of her characters struggle to establish or rebuild a meaningful connection with the communities in which they were raised or who they are today. John Updike commented her works as, “Her works especially concerned with the situation of women in a society where their role though crucial was firmly subordinate and where the forces of potential liberation have arrived with bewildering speed.” (BLC: II 707)

2.1 Women in Colonial Nigeria

Today's Nigeria is a considerably better place for women than it was during colonial and pre-colonial times. The situation of women in colonial Africa is the same—they are oppressed by men, society, and the colonizers—but throughout Africa's pre-colonial era, it varied depending on the ethnic group. According to the post-colonial perspective, women in Africa were colonised three times: initially by society, later by husbands, and finally by the colonisers. The colonial era saw the sale of women into slavery. Domestic slaves were sexually tormented and are left powerless to resist their male masters. The colonists rap about women in various regions. Slaves were mistreated horribly and were put in long hours.

In pre-colonial Africa, women maintained a position that was complementary to men. The patriarchal kinship system let women to make independent decisions regarding domestic matters, and the status of women varied based on the kinship system within an ethnic group and the economic makeup of the community/family. When polygamy was still in use, the "First" wife was given some freedom and allowed to make her own decisions regarding home matters. Women were oppressed on all fronts by the patriarchal kinship system prevalent in Africa. Women are viewed as highly procreative beings. Tribal societies in Nigeria perceived women's status as inferior to men. The unwritten law of the tribal group states that once a woman marries, neither her parents nor her community claim her as their own. She belongs to her husband's community as soon as she marries and becomes his property. Emecheta in her novel *The Slave Girl* describes the condition of the married woman in the tribal society as:

If a good wife was in trouble of any kind, instead of calling on God to help her she could call out either the name of her husband or of the god of her husband's people; certainly not the gods in the huts of her own father, for they should cease to exist for her, the day her bride price is paid. From that day she should be loyal to her husband, his gods and his people, in body and in spirit. (Emecheta, 1995, p3-4)

The presumptions of European patriarchy were brought into Nigerian society by colonial officials and Christian missionaries. The traditional position of women in indigenous Nigerian societies was very different from their conception of what a woman should play in society. Women are considered as subordinate to men and meant only for procreation. Women at the home were left to perform the role of child rearing (an exclusive female responsibility). The majority of the women's position was marginalized by the creation of colonial economy. Besides these, the restrictions of the colonial government placed on women changed the position of women. (Anderson)

After the settlement of colonizers, few white women held a supportive role in improving the existing condition of the African society.

They mostly helped the people to get 'civilized' by teaching English language to them. This is evident from Emecheta's novel. In the novel *The Slave Girl*, Mrs. Simpson, the white woman asks the slave masters to send their slaves to attend English classes and to participate in the church ceremonies during Sunday. Ma Palagada, the slave owner sent her 'girls' to attend the English classes. This is evident in the text when she says,

The new UAC chief and his wife are church people. I must make all our servants enroll in their Sunday school. They teach them to read the Bible and to sing hymns. I want them to see how our girls are treated. (Emecheta, 1995, p 92)

Following Ma Palagada the other slave masters 'obeyed' her (Mrs. Simpson) to get some favour from the colonizers. After attending the English classes the slave girls became "elite slaves" (Emecheta, 1995, p 105).

Mostly the colonizers constructed churches and started missionaries in Africa. They taught English language to the native people and made them to forget their native Language. The new English language 'changed' the tribal women's life. Many people converted to Christianity out of the fantasy attached to the new religion. After attending church ceremonies once, every woman in Onitsha wishes to go to church. They considered not going to church and not wearing the gown as a pagan. The narrator explains this state/condition of women as, "It seemed that every woman wanted to be able to say, 'I am not a pagan, I go to church,'" (Emecheta, 1995, p 105).

In the novel *The Slave Girl*, Buchi Emecheta presents the changing role of women in Nigerian society. Emecheta's novel is set at the time when colonialism was at its peak. In the early twentieth century when it was considered glorious to be an Englishman, the enslavement of the protagonist literally and figuratively coincides with the expansion of European 'master' culture and colonized Nigerian society. Emecheta creates the story of Ojebeta, the slave girl, who is continuously at the mercy of her male masters, to represent the position of women in Nigeria who are oppressed by the male dominated society. The story of Ojebeta is not her story alone it is the story of a woman who is caught in a complicated traditional cycle of oppression.

2.2 Representation of Women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*

Women in Africa from the early period to the present are considered as subordinates to men. They are always meant to help men in all the ways. A woman has to fulfill her husband's urges in her lifetime. And the social set-up has always made women to depend on men for everything. Buchi Emecheta wrote her novels in the period when women writings are not widely accepted. Being a woman, she keenly and consciously represents women of her society and tribe. In her novel *The Slave Girl* Emecheta depicts the position of women and her status in the Nigerian society. The novel was set in the early twentieth century when colonialism was at its peak. And the narrator of the novel explains the status of women in her lifetime as:

All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grew up your new master who had paid something for you would control you. (Emecheta, 1995, p 113)

In the Nigerian society it was a known fact that a woman always belongs to some male- her parents, husband or the children. She can never escape her position as a dependent in her lifetime. A woman after her marriage becomes her husband's property according to the tribal community law. In case if her husband dies after sometime, she was not allowed to marry anybody. She must be a mistress or concubine to her husband's brother or she can be a mistress to anyone who belongs to her husband's community.

Emecheta in her novel has not only represented the enslavement of African people by the Colonizers but also represents the position of woman in Nigerian society. She presents how women are sexually abused and also presents a woman who is capable of controlling her husband. The tribal community law accepts such relationships because she still belongs to her husband's community.

Emecheta presents the changing role of women in the Nigerian society. The protagonist of her novel *The Slave Girl* Ojebeta was sold into domestic slavery at the age of six by her own brother Okolie merely for eight pounds. The novel centers on the protagonist sufferings and her encounters in the society. Ojebeta cannot escape her position as a female object that is figuratively and literally exchanged with in a patriarchal society.

Ojebeta chooses her husband of her own will. At the end of the novel Ojebeta thinks of herself as being "free" in her husband's home. This makes her to say; "now I am free in your house" (184) but the narrator's voice reiterates to the reader that Ojebeta "a woman of thirty five" is not free but "changing masters" (184). Emecheta has presented Ojebeta as a woman who is dependent on others (male) throughout her life and at the same time presented a woman Ma Palagada who is capable of controlling her husband and maintains her business and household. Ma Palagada has never consulted her husband for doing anything. She acts on her own will and she readily accepts his advice if he gives. Ma Palagada has never expected her husband's presence or absence in her business. She never gets his opinion on any matter regarding business or anything else. She is a woman who expects very little from men in terms of companionship, personal care and fidelity. Her relationships exist without emotional elements. She accompanies her husband to any function or parties for the sake of convention but not out of interest. The interesting thing to note in their relationship is that even though she does not expect his presence in everything she never insulted her husband on any occasion. At times she accepts his decision. She agrees with his choice of not sending her children along with the slaves to learn English language during Sunday. This is evident from the lines;

You can send the slave girls if you like, but I would not advise you to do the same with your flesh and blood daughters.' 'No, of course not,' his wife had readily agreed heartily. Ma Palagada pretended to let her present husband make the rules. (Emecheta, 1995, p 92)

She is very kind and generous to her slaves. She treated her slave girls as her “own daughters”. She buys the girls from the parents, who cannot afford the child. Ojebeta is not of that kind. Okolie sells Ojebeta because he cannot afford her proper food but the real reason is not that he needs money to spend for the forthcoming festival and to buy yam seeds. Palagada has the doubt while buying Ojebeta and raises the question, “... ‘Is that why you are selling her to me – just for your silly dance? (65). But her brother Okolie hides the truth and sells her for a mere eight English pounds. Ojebeta’s parents and Ma Palagada’s parents are from the same land and this makes her to treat Ojebeta kindly and accept her son’s (Clifford) love for Ojebeta and promises him to make arrangement for their marriage and personally she does not want to marry one of the modern, lazy, good-for-nothing women, to her son Clifford. This is evident from her words;

Your father is not going to like it, but I personally feel very happy inside myself. I don’t want to marry one of these modern, lazy, good-for-nothing women, who have grown up in luxury and want to be waited on hand and food. (Emecheta, 1995, p 131-132).

Except for those who had committed the sin of prostitution or those who had been fully abandoned or rejected by their people for violating one or more customs, no woman or girl in Nigerian society was free in her life. Otherwise, a woman is always someone else’s property. In the setting of early 20th-century Onitsha society, where buying and selling individuals was normal, Buchi Emecheta portrays the lives of slave girls. On the one hand, slavery offered labour in exchange for a roof over one’s head and food on the other. Anita Keren, one of Emecheta’s critics shares her thoughts about Emecheta’s novel as:

The Slave Girl is her most accomplished work so far. It is coherent, compact and convincing. It also represents a considerable achievement for a writer who ... has undergone very difficult conditions. (CLC: 48 159)

The novel, *The Slave Girl* can be read as a study of the oppression of women by men. Emecheta, throughout the novel shows and states the position of women as, a woman is never free, and she always belongs to others. The novel ends with Jacob’s formal purchase of his wife from Clifford the son Ma Palagada her previous owner.

3. Women in Contemporary South Africa

Everything is getting changed in the present-day world but the oppression of women still continues in one or another way. The South African novelist J.M. Coetzee in his novel *Disgrace* presents the position of women in present day South Africa. One of the most significant authors who has examined the consequences of Western imperialism on native culture is largely regarded as being Coetzee. Many commenters have complimented Coetzee for his dedication to providing voice to underprivileged individuals in his fiction as opposed to writing his novels from the point of view that is typically anticipated. According to G. Scoot Bishop;

J.M. Coetzee’s novels offer the privileged, predominantly white world an illuminating if not disconcerting picture of the political moral entanglements in the complex post-colonial world. (CLC: 117 47)

The white people have done so many atrocities to the black people during the colonial period for which they are paying the price today. Racism was a major problem in South Africa. It continues still in the post-apartheid period. Coetzee in his novel presents the existing condition of White South African woman who lives in the farmhouse and the status of women in general. *Disgrace* was created following the adoption of a new constitution in 1995 that guaranteed equality for all sexual orientations and gender categories. And Coetzee presents the Lucy, Lurie’s daughter, who accepts the existing condition of the society.

In many ways, life in South Africa is still shaped by the institutionalized racial discrimination/segregation –apartheid. Apartheid created a system of inequality where Africans were subjected to poor living condition while whites lived in posh suburbs with access to everything, which segregated education and a monopoly over political power.

In *Women Studies Encyclopedia* the condition of “African” people in apartheid South Africa is stated as:

Africans were officially permitted access to “white” South Africa only to provide labour and their mobility was regulated by a system of ‘influx control’ that required them to carry passes. Political activity for “nonwhites” was severely circumscribed into powerless “official” channels, and broader protest efforts were met with harsh responses from the state. (35)

In South Africa white women have privileged access to education and economic resources, including access to the domestic labour of ‘African’ women, while many African women do not have access to those economic or educational resources. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* paints a tense portrait of South Africa after apartheid. Coetzee’s novel demonstrates how white South Africans continue to hold onto certain stereotypes of Africans. The book accepts his interpretation of South Africa’s past and examines the suffering caused by balancing the past and present. According to Jenifer Wenzel;

Coetzee’s fiction, in terms of his desire to prevent the appropriation of the novel by the discourses of history, represents an engagement with history on his own terms, terms that can blur the distinctions between self and other, between Oppressor and Oppressed. (CLC: 117 101)

Similarly the white South African writer J.M. Coetzee in his novels presents the condition of women and the current plights in the post-apartheid South Africa.

J.M. Coetzee is a writer who is heavily influenced by his own history as a South African native and child. Coetzee, a white author who resided in South Africa during the apartheid era, developed a strong anti-imperialist viewpoint. His writing was mostly influenced by

American and European postmodernist authors. In many of his writings, Coetzee expresses his own experiences and convictions. Coetzee's autobiography, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, explains his feeling of estrangement from other Africans. In both his life and his fiction, Coetzee discusses the laws that divided. In his debut book, *Dusklands*, Coetzee concentrates on two locations: first, the US State Department during the Vietnam War, and second, tales of a man named Jacobus Coetzee's exploration and conquering of Southern Africa in the 1760s.

These two vastly different locations work together to bring out the alarm and paranoia of aggressors no matter what the location and to show the unthinkable ways in which dominant groups impose their ways upon other cultures. (CLC: 117 40)

His novel, *The Life and Times of Michael K* won him the first Booker price for fiction, is set in Cape Town. The novel centers on a gardener Michael K, who attempts to transport his dying mother to the farm of her youth. Although she dies during the journey, Michael K continues on to her farm with her ashes. He lives quite happily in solitude on her old farm until he is captured and accused for aiding guerillas. "The great weight of the novel relies on the fact that it does not focus in on racial separations but is more concerned with saving humanity as a whole." (CLC: 117 42)

Coetzee discusses South Africa's contemporary woes in his book *Disgrace*, which earned him a second Booker prize. Themes of the book include racial prejudice, land, crime, rape, and a lack of police protection. These issues are present in contemporary South Africa.

3.1 Representation of Women in *Disgrace*

Coetzee, in his novel *Disgrace* represents the contemporary women's position in South Africa and presents the women who learned to live independently. Coetzee's women Soraya, Melanie, Bev Shaw and Lucy are represented differently. The characters in the novel are a prostitute, a student and a social worker respectively. Through these characters Coetzee represents women from different position and presents how they are oppressed in the male dominated society. These women are not the women who depend on father, husband and children in their lifetime. Coetzee's women are left free. They take decisions of their own. By presenting these characters Coetzee represents the contemporary women's paradoxical position.

In the novel the protagonist David Lurie, who was brought up in the patriarchal apartheid period, feels free to exploit women sexually. Lurie has sexual relationship with all the women characters in the novel. He has sexual relationship with Soraya; the prostitute by an arrangement through the agency. Soraya was forced to indulge in prostitution by her poor economical condition. Though she is a loose woman, Lurie trust her, within limits. He speaks to her with a certain freedom. He unburdens himself on times to her. She knows about the story of his two marriages, and about the ups and downs of his daughter. She knows many of his plans and opinions. But Lurie reveals nothing about her out side the room. Once, his relationship with her comes to an end, he forces himself on Melanie Issacs one of his student and even brings a great pressure on her to accept him as her sexual partner. But in case of Bev Shaw it is different. She expresses her desire first. Stephen Watson in his article "Colonialism and the novels of J.M. Coetzee" comments about *Disgrace* as;

In Coetzee's most recent, and substantially realist novel, *Disgrace*, the silence of people who have traditionally gone unheard is also an issue. The Moslem woman Soraya, who services as a prostitute David Lurie uses at the beginning of the novel, can not explain to him why he has intruded in her family life; she will not continue to serve him. Melanie Issacs, the young "colored" student on whom he forces himself, can not tell him how unwelcome his attentions are. Both, as non-members of the white group and as women, have been led to believe that they have less right to voice than the white male protagonist. (CLC: 161 237)

Lurie falls in to disgrace when Melanie complaints about him in the University. Then he resigns his post and moves towards his daughter Lucy. Lucy lives in Salem where she was gang raped by three black men and Lucy resists herself by not complaining about her rape to the police. By presenting the character like Lucy, Coetzee represents the position of white woman who lives alone in the farmhouse in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Position of women remains the same across cultures. The patriarchal setup treated women as subordinate to men. At present the male dominated society oppresses women in all grounds. Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* depicts the limited opportunities of women in the colonial Nigerian society and highlights how women are oppressed both by the colonizers and by their own community people (Patriarchal society). Coetzee's *Disgrace*, which is set in the end of the twentieth century, shows the position of women in the White nation. In the early period the Whites dominated the world. At present, particularly women are oppressed by the male dominated society. The mode/way of oppression may change but the oppression is there in all the countries.

4. Theme of Sexuality

In the history of literature sexuality is normally seen as the theme and domain of male writer anticipating male reader. The writers like Spencer, Donne, and Marvell presented male as the desiring subject and woman as desiring object. These writers always take upper hand in presenting male viewpoint of sex rather than presenting female viewpoint of sex.

Only a few writers started writing about women's desire and their sexual choices. Men are allowed to sleep with any woman when he is not satisfied sexually with his wife however; Women are not allowed to do so. If she does then the society brands her as prostitute.

4.1 Theme of Sexuality in *The Slave Girl*

The condition of woman in the African society is really pathetic. In her novel *The Slave Girl* Emecheta presents how slavery was

followed in Africa and how the masters treated the slaves. Only the rich people had slaves and they used them to work in the plantations, and household needs. The rich people thought that the slaves were meant for such things and the narrator explains it as: "For, they told themselves, if they had to bother to tie their own shoe laces and cut their fingernails themselves, what were the slaves and servants for?"

(Emecheta 101) The male slaves were treated cruelly and they tend to work hard whereas in the case of female slaves it was different. The female slaves are not only tending to work hard but at the same time their masters sexually abuse them. A female slave cannot say 'no' to her master.

The novel's protagonist Ojebeta was sold into domestic slavery at the age of six, by her own brother. There are some six to seven slaves including the male slave, in her master's home. She witnesses the atrocities done to the slaves in her master's home. Slave girls were treated very badly in the household and made to work hard. And their male masters sexually abused the girls. The most important thing was that a slave who made an unsuccessful attempt to runaway was better off dead. Such slaves are tortured much and even used for burial. Chiago, the senior slave girl in Ma Palagada's house has witnessed one such event in her life when she was living with her parents:

On the eve of the burial she [the slave who made an unsuccessful attempt to runaway from the master's home] was brought and ordered to lie down in the shallow grave. As might be expected, she resisted, but there was no pity on the faces of the men who stood by watching, amused by her cries. She made appeals to the gods of her people to save her; she begged some of the mourners to spare her life, saying that her father the chief of another village would repay them, but to no avail. (Emecheta, 1995, p 58)

The male masters use the girls to gratify their sexual needs. Her (Ojebeta) male master Pa Palagada and his son Clifford sexually abuse Chiago, the female slave in the house. Whenever Chiago goes to clean Clifford's room he mistreats her and she herself says it to her fellow slaves as:

I was foolish in those days. I was bending down sweeping the floor when he came up behind me and jumped on me. He pulled at the small breast I had then... I was not all developed. It hurt so, and I screamed. Do you know what he did? He slapped me hard on both sides of my face. I cried and told his mother and was ordered to shut up. (Emecheta, 1995, p 92)

Chiago has no one to complain about this and when she was grown up, Clifford's father, Pa Palagada used her to gratify his sexual needs. Whenever he calls her she has to go to his room and fulfill his sexual desire. Chiago hides this from her fellow slaves because Pa Palagada once promised her to make his mistress after sometime. The narrator aptly explains Chiago's thought as:

What she could not bring herself to tell friend was that she had given in completely to the man's gross appetite. That each time their mistress had gone to another village to sell her abada cloth; Pa Palagada would call her to his room on any pretext, many a time she had come out feeling physically ill and sick at heart. (Emecheta, 1995, p 92)

Though Buchi Emecheta presented Chiago as the slave girl who gratifies her master's sexual desire, she did not fail to present Chiago's own desire while she was talking to one of her fellow slaves she expresses her grief as: "Yes, I certainly don't want the father to feel that I like hisson better than him. I don't like either of them, but what can I do..." (93) And both Chiago and the male slave feel sorry for Ojebeta because their masters planned to send Ojebeta to serve Clifford once he comes back (he stayed away from his native for his studies). Chiago expresses her grief as;

... but she's very young, only ten.' Nwayin Uzo (another slave) turned round and laughed too. 'Don't you know that if men start fiddling with a young girl it hastens her growth? That one is already going to be very tall too. But if both father and son want you, there'll be trouble in this house hold (Emecheta, 1995, p 93).

The slave girls are aware of what is happening to them but they cannot do anything against the injustice done to them. At the same time they do not simply lie down and die. They fight for their life and challenge the fate. Emecheta depicts the women's experiences in the colonial period. The story of the slave girls is the story of women in Africa in the colonial period.

4.2 Theme of Sexuality in Disgrace

Writers have talked about women and their sexual desires from the early period. Some writers created a fantasy that only male has the right to express the desire and only male has to propose it and satisfy his sexual needs. If a woman does the same then she is considered as a whore. Even at present if a woman expresses her sexual desire towards some male then she will be considered as a whore and the society will look down upon her. Knowing all these things Coetzee carefully presents his characters. Coetzee by presenting three different characters Soraya, Melanie and Bev Shaw who has sexual relationship with David Lurie the protagonist, represents women's sexual desire and how they turn as the sexual subject instead of sexual object.

David Lurie (52), Professor of Communication, doubly divorced meets Soraya on every Thursday at 2 p.m. to have sexual relationship with her. They meet on an arrangement by the agency, which guides Soraya. Lurie is old enough to be her father but he never feels guilty to have sexual relationship with Soraya. And Soraya too never thought of that, instead by her company she made Lurie to think that there is no one else than her to give him that much pleasure in sex. Though Lurie stays with her for ninety minutes he feels satisfied with her company. Once he goes to bed with her "He strokes her honey brown body, unmarked by the sun: he stretches her out. Kisses her breast: they make love" (Coetzee 1). The narrator describes Lurie's sexual temperament with Soraya as;

In the field of sex his temperament, though intense, has never been passionate. Were he to a totem, it would be the snake. Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snake; lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at it's hottest. (Coetzee, 2000, p2-3)

Lurie likes Soraya's company and his likeness started from their very first meeting. When he meets Soraya for the first time by the arrangement of the agency she worn "vermilion lipstick" and "heavy eye shadow" (Coetzee, 2000, p 5), he asked her to wipe out all and she does that. From that day she never wore it again when she has appointment with him. Lurie presents her gifts to express his affection towards her. To Lurie "Soraya is tall and slim, with black hair and dark, liquid eyes. His temperament is in fact quiet, quite and docile." To him "In bed Soraya is not effusive" (Coetzee, 2000, p 1). Lurie had had sexual relationship not only with Soraya but also with "the wives of his colleagues" (Coetzee, 2000, p 5) and also with some of the whores. At times when he was in bed with Soraya he "surprises at one thing" that "if ninety minutes a week of a woman's company are enough to make him happy, who use to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage" (Coetzee, 2000, p 5). Though there was no problem between him and Soraya their relationship comes to an end when Soraya's mother falls sick and then Soraya cuts Lurie's appointment and she command /demand him not to phone her ever, when he calls her to the telephone number which he collected from a private detective agency. Then their relationship comes to an end. Though Coetzee's Soraya works as a "part time" prostitute, she was forced to that because of her economical condition. Ever since she expressed her desire towards Lurie and made him satisfy with her company, she made Lurie as an object of sex in bed.

When Lurie's relationship with Soraya comes to an end, he forces himself on Melanie Issacs, one of his students from Romantics course for his sexual needs. Melanie was not a clever student in the class, at the same time she was not bad also but some how she attracted Lurie. Their first meeting outside the class takes place in the college garden. He says a formal hello to her and keenly looks at her physical structure. The narrator describes her appearance as;

She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost striking. Today she wears a maroon miniskirt with a mustard coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match with the gold balls of her earrings. (Coetzee, 2000, p 11)

Once, he takes her to his home and starts seducing her through his power of language. He asks her to do something reckless when she did not understand it properly he "touches her cheek" and says, "Stay with me! Spend the night with me." And he gives a 'wonderful' explanation for his invitation that "... woman's beauty does not belong to her alone ... she has a duty to share it." (Coetzee, 2000, p 17) While talking to her all these things "His hands are still rest against her cheek. She does not withdraw but does not yield either." When Melanie goes out of his home he accompanies her up to the entrance and enfolds her "for a moment he can feel her little breast against him." (Coetzee, 2000, p 17) Her silence stands as a key point to him and on another day he again picks her up to his home when it was raining and makes love to her. The narrator describes the scene as; "He takes her back to his house. On the living room floor, to the sound of rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her." After making love Lurie looks into Melanie body, "Her body is clear, simple, in its way perfect though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable" (Disgrace, 19). Again her silence after the lovemaking gives him hope to continue his relationship with her. Graham a critic of Coetzee comments about Lurie as:

Lurie has a history of desiring 'exotic' woman and assumes that he has the right to purchase and possess; their bodies without being responsible for them or respecting the lives they live (Graham, p437).

Lurie does all the favourable things to Melanie, to continue his relationship with her. He helps her academically by giving high marks for her when she did not take her exam. When he did not see her in the class he straightly goes to Melanie room lustfully (with lust) and immediately takes her to bed to have sex. And for the first time the narrator describes Melanie's involvement in the sexual act. The narrator describes Lurie's action as; "nothing will stop him, he carried her to the bed room, brushes off the absurd slippers, kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she evokes..." (Coetzee, 2000, p 25) when he did all these things she rest passive and she did not say no to him. Instead, "All she does is avert herself; avert her lips, avert her eyes, she lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him raising her arms and then her hips". Once they make love, she instructs him "Pauline (her cousin with whom she shares her room) will be back any minute," (Coetzee, 2000, p 25) and asks him to go. He obeys her and leaves her room but then he feels bad for having such a relationship. But the narrator reiterates us about his inner mind that "if not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (Coetzee, 2000, p 25).

After that Melanie feels free to come and stay with Lurie in his home when she separates from her cousin. During her stay they make love in his daughter's room and the author describes about the sexual act as:

He makes love to her one more time, on the bed in his daughter's room. It is good, as good as the first time: he is beginning to learn the way her body moves. She is quick, and greedy for experience. If he does not sense in her a fully sexual appetite, that is only because she is still young. One moment stands out in recollection, when she hooks a leg behind his buttocks to draw him, incloser: as the tendon of her inner thigh tightens against him, he feels a surge of joy and desire. (Coetzee, 2000, p 29)

Lurie's relationship with Melanie comes to an end when she charged him with sexual harassment. Lurie knows well that she is not responsible for the charge, because she too liked him. It's Melanie's boy friend who stands behind all these things and Lurie resigns his post in the University, when he falls in to disgrace and moves to his daughter Lucy's home, who lives alone in the farmhouse in Salem, in Eastern Cape Town.

Bev Shaw, one of Lucy's friends in Salem, runs a animal refugee clinic with her husband and Lucy asks Lurie to help her (Bev Shaw) if he wish and that is how their relationship starts and Lurie started spending his time in helping Bev Shaw in her clinic. And when his daughter Lucy was gang raped, he used to seek Bev Shaw's help to look after his daughter and feels bad for his daughter. Bev Shaw slowly developed her love towards him and one day she expresses it by the way of asking him to come to clinic on a holiday. He too develops his 'love' for her this is evident from the lines;

He tries to imagine her twenty years younger, when the upturned face on its short neck must have seemed pert and the freckled skin homely, healthy on an impulse he reaches out and runs a finger on her lips. She lowers her eyes but does not flinch. On the contrary, she responds, brushing her lips against his hand – even, it might be said, kissing it – while blushing furiously all the time. (Coetzee, 2000, p 148)

And in the next afternoon Lurie receives a phone call from Bev Shaw, "Can we meet at the clinic at four," she says. For Lurie it seems not like a question but like an "announcement, made in a high, strained voice" (149) that she is ready. He goes to the clinic without asking anything to her. The clinic is not open on Mondays. He lets himself in, turns the key behind him in the lock. There Bev Shaw stands facing her back to him in the surgery room.

He folds her in his arms; she nuzzles her ear against his chin: his lips brush the tight little curls of her. There are blankets she says and then Lurie switches off the light and leaves the room to check whether the back door is locked. (Coetzee, 2000, p 149)

By the time he "hears the rustle of the clothes as she undresses". They make love, though Bev Shaw is not as fresh and young as Melanie. For Lurie he satisfied her wish. "Let me not forget this day, he tells himself lying beside her when they are spent. After the sweet young flesh of Melanie Issacs, this is what I have come to" (Coetzee, 2000, p 150). He feels 'bad', because when he "slipping off his underpants, he gets beside her, runs his hands down her body. She has no breasts to speak of, Sturdy, almost waist less, like a squat little tub." (Coetzee, 2000, p 149)

Coetzee's women are self-dependent. All the characters except Lucy are portrayed like that only. Though women at present are aware of everything, they still depend on men and society for something. Soraya obeyed Lurie when he asks her to wipe out the lipstick and never worn it again. Melanie obeys her father and boyfriend and charges against Lurie in the University though she too liked Lurie and his sexual relationship. Coetzee presents Soraya, Melanie and Bev Shaw as the women who has their own sexual desire and plays the role of sexual subject instead of object. Coetzee presents Lucy, the daughter of David Lurie as the desiring object and the one who silences her rape and accepts the injustice or 'reality' of her life to lead her life. Lucy is something different in Coetzee's representation of women.

David Lurie goes to Lucy, who is living alone in her house in the farmland. At first he could not recognize her since he has seen her a year back. Where as the narrator describes Lurie's attitude to every women body when he sees his daughter:

From the shades of the steps Lucy emerges into the sunlight. For a moment he does not recognize her. A year passed. She has put on weight. Her lips and breast are now (he searches for the best word) ample. Comfortably bare foot, she comes out and greets him, holding her arms wide, embracing him, kissing him on the cheek ... kissing her, what a nice welcome at the end of a long trip. (Coetzee, 2000, p 59)

As a father Lurie failed to recognize his daughter. But once he sees her, he examines her tip to toe of her whole body and the narrator describes it. Pamela Cooper comments narrator's attitude as "Coetzee articulates change through sexuality which becomes a kind of flexible but ambiguous trope for the wider historical changes he registers" (Cooper, 2005, p 23).

Lurie starts assisting Lucy in growing up vegetables and in dog kennels and assists her and Petrus on Saturdays to the market stalls. As things go smoothly one day three black men interludes in Lucy and Lurie's life. The three men rob their house and rapes Lucy and they pour alcohol on Lurie's body and set him on fire. Lurie saves his life but not his daughter. As a Professor who is aware of everything he advices his daughter to go for a check up to avoid the "...risk of pregnancy; he presses on, there is the risk of venereal infection, there is the risk of HIV" (Coetzee, 2000, p 106). Lucy registers complaint to police about the material things, which are robbed including Lurie's car and about his condition, but not about her, particularly her rape. She silences it. When Lurie asks her why she has done so she says;

What happens to me is purely private matter. As far as I am concerned, in another time, another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business; mine alone (Coetzee, 2000, p 112).

Though Lucy hides about her rape to police, she cannot hide it to the society. She becomes pregnant and despite the disgrace involved in it she wishes to give birth to the child.

Lurie sees the boy Pollux, in Petrus home and goes to Petrus and report about Pollux who is involved in his daughter's rape and seeks justice from Petrus. But Petrus was firm in saving the boy and makes a proposal of marrying Lucy. When Lurie reports about this to Lucy, she accepts it. And she is ready to give up her land but not the house if Petrus marries her. She knows well that Petrus won't give her Church wedding. She is ready to be his third wife or a concubine, what she needs is a shelter under Petrus wing so that the others will not interlude in her life.

Lucy's attitude clearly explains one truth, that violence involved in sex and both sex and violence helps one to live the life happily in society. In Disgrace, sex plays an authoritative role. Sex was used as a weapon to control one. Sex plays its vital role in all existing

disciplines. When we talk about sex and authority in the social level, it will be easily understandable (in Lucy's matter) how sex turned as a weapon to silence a woman. As Graham says:

In *Disgrace*, Lucy is adamant that what happened is (hers) alone, insisting that David Lurie and by default, the reader- was not their. Lucy's refusal to speak about her experience certainly does not empower her and means that her story belongs to her rapists: not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. (Graham, p 442)

In man-woman relationship, it's always the man who plays the authoritative role. Even in *Disgrace*, it is David Lurie who has control over Soraya, Melanie and Bev Shaw, though he fell in to disgrace. He was charged of sexual harassment, the board, which is set to inquire the matter, is in favour of Lurie. The committee shows keen interest in retaining Lurie's job, so they ask him to make an apology for the matter to retain his job. But it is Lurie, who resigns the job and never the board forces him to do so. Margaret Lenta comments it as:

Disgrace contains a more complex awareness of the oppression of women: the scene in which Lurie is examined by a committee on his breach of rules in sexually harassing Melanie shows that his female colleagues are complacently righteous. (CLC: 161 239)

Lucy's life does not represent her life alone. Her 'story' is common to all and whoever is subjected like Lucy; they have to restart their life from the ground level. In their life they have "No weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity." Nothing their life will be "like a dog." (Coetzee, 2000, p 205)

5. Conclusion

'Theme of Sexuality', if a woman writer talks about this, then there is no limitations and restrictions for her, because as a woman she can talk about the issues of women from a female point of view. Audre Lorde in her autobiography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* created her own world of fantasy and talked about issues of sexuality. If a male writer talks about the same then, the writer should be aware of his limitations, because a male writer cannot express the nature of woman's sexuality and her world of fantasy.

Buchi Emecheta, the contemporary women novelist in her novel *The Slave Girl* (1977) states the condition of women in the colonial Nigeria. By way of talking about the colonial Nigeria she hints about the present-day Nigeria. Even at present, the condition of women is same as in the colonial period

It is through our bodies that we make sense of the world; as it is through the representation of the body that novelist most frequently make sense of their own novelist world. (J.B. Bullen)

Disgrace deals with the issues of current plights of South Africa. The novel addresses the problem of violence in the 1990's. The novel focuses on the ways in which violence permeates through a society and affects the members of the society. The novel particularly focuses on violence against women. Violence against women is a virtually universal phenomenon, and it is widespread, entrenched in most societies. Rape, one of the most conspicuous forms of this violence, has reached its peak in South Africa. It occurs in all spheres of society and all women are subjected to it. Women's fear of rape has begun to affect their basic day-to-day life. Another major problem, which the novel addresses, is racism. In South Africa from the early period to the present there is racial discrimination. During colonial period White dominated the Blacks. At present, new constitution implemented in 1995 gives equal rights to both (White and Black) and for both gender groups. The new constitution helps to abolish the gender inequalities. But still racial discrimination was there in post-apartheid South Africa.

In the novel *Disgrace* Lucy was raped by three black men. Lurie, the White, who was brought up in apartheid South Africa feels free to exploit women sexually. It shows that there still exist certain stereotypes. Lurie is dismissed (resigns) from his post for sexual harassment of one of his female student Melanie, a charge that would not be possible in the Patriarchal period, yet his daughter Lucy (was raped and she silences it) feels that she must accept the protection of a black husband if she wishes to continue to live in her land. This problem, which is focused in the novel remain unresolved and unfinished. The ending is left open for the readers.

The wish to dominate may be expressed through rape. Rape like all forms of male violence against women is connected to the broad socio-cultural milieu.

In the colonial period, the colonizers oppressed women in many ways and rape was a predominant mode of oppression. Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Slave Girl* shows how the female slaves were treated in the colonial period and how the male masters sexually harassed them. The male masters sexually abused/ harassed even the small girls. The novel begins with a prologue that gives a synoptic history of the founding of the area where the story takes place. Along with the historical backdrop, the prologue describes the area's prominent cultural institutions and assumptions. The protagonist story was not her own but she represents her (slave) community. By presenting Ojebeta, Emecheta states the position of women in the male dominated society. She depicts her limited opportunities and makes use of the metaphor of slavery to represent the status of women in Nigeria.

Buchi Emecheta presented the colonial women and Coetzee represented the contemporary women. In all the novels women are dominated by the patriarchal society but there is always a resistance, a challenge to fate, a need to renegotiate the terms of the uneasy peace that existed between them and the tradition.

This research can further be extended in some other aspects, study of class distinction in Victorian society, the position of women in

tribal, colonial, and post-colonial Nigeria, and the position of women in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. A detailed study of the modes of violence against women can be taken for further research across cultures.

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