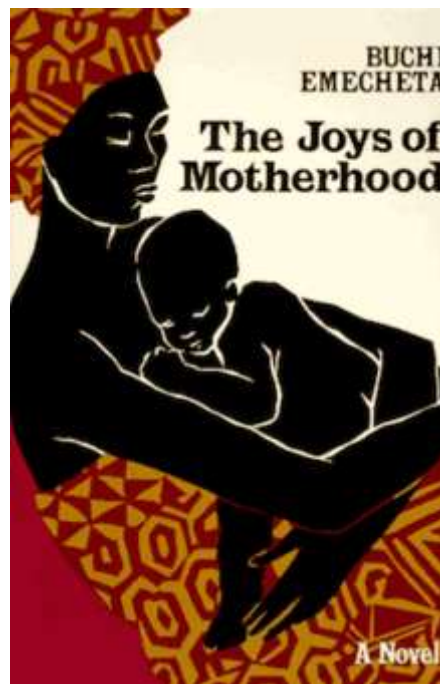


**A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by
Buchi Emecheta**

**Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar
Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A. (Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.**



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Joys_of_Motherhood

Abstract

The Joys of Motherhood is a Nigerian novel written by Buchi Emecheta. She is one of the leading writers, who took the literary wealth of Nigeria to the entire world. The title of any work is very important. The book's title has an important role in making the reader to select it. It is also known as a heading. A Headless person is not considered as a human being, or any creature without the head is incomplete. In this way the title or the heading of the work bears an important role in giving completeness to the work. The title "The Joys of Motherhood" taken for study has an ironic content to the title. 'Joy' is the word associated with happiness and 'motherhood' is also a blessing in the life of any woman that gives happiness for being born as a woman. The reader who selects the novel with these views in mind may have a reversal of opinion after reading the novel. It portrays the suffering of a mother Nnu Ego, who from the attaining of the motherhood to till the end of her life undergoes no joy but only troubles. The research paper aims to bring out the irony, how the content contrasts with the title.

Keywords: *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta, child, contrast, Irony, Joy, Motherhood, Suffering, Pain.

Abbreviation: TJOM- The Joys of Motherhood



Buchi Emecheta 1944-2017

Courtesy: <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/buchi-emecheta/>

Buchi Emecheta and Her Novels

Buchi Emecheta was born on 21st July 1944, in Lagos in Igbo family and died on 25th January 2017 in London. She is a Nigerian novelist settled in London. Emecheta was a contemporary of Chinua Achebe, Chris Abani, Elechi Amadi, Seffi Atta, Flora Nwapa, Gabriel Okara, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka etc. were some of the famous African writers. The oral tradition was the primary source of literature in Africa. The result of colonisation brought them the knowledge of English. It is very well used by the natives as a tool to bring out their voice and tradition spread to the entire world. Africa is a continent known for its uniqueness in culture and tradition. This attracts the readers to focus much on African Literature.

Buchi Emecheta's novels focus on the West African, Nigerian, Igbo society. Chinua Achebe too had presented Igbo society in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*. He had presented the political aspects of the society and how it slowly falls apart from the traditional to the modern way of life, especially in the hands of the British people. Emecheta portrayed the domestic life of the Igbo society in her novels.

<http://www.enotes.com/buchi-emecheta-criticism/emecheta-buchi.>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Nigerian-women-writers.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Nigerian-women-writers)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/postcolonial-literature.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/postcolonial-literature)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta

126

Focus on Women Characters

Emecheta's novels primarily focus on the women characters, their struggle, failure and success. The novel 'The Joys of Motherhood' is also one such work focuses on the woman and mother Nnu Ego. She was the protagonist of the novel. She was a blessed daughter of the unwedded couple Agbadi and Ona. The word 'Joy' means a feeling of great happiness and 'motherhood' means being a mother to the child, and a kind of blessing for women. It is also an identity or recognition given by the society for women. In the novel's title it contrasts with the above meaning. There are many mother characters found in the novel. The study focuses on the protagonist Nnu Ego and her mother Ona.

Ona's Motherhood

Ona, the word means 'a priceless jewel'. It was the name given to his daughter by the chief Obi Umunna. He had no son, so he considered Ona as boy, with boldness and courage. Male child had importance in the society than female child. He had decided to get male child through Ona, with her own selection of man. Until then, he decided to have Ona as her daughter. "She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made". (TJOM 12)

Ona was nursing Agbadi, another chief who recently met with an accident. He was thrown by the elephant nearing his end. So, Ona was allowed to visit Agbadi and she nursed him and later became his lover. As her father's wish she was not ready to marry him and made an agreement with Agbadi, if she begot a boy that would be given to her father and if it is a girl it would be theirs. Here, the role of a mother begins for Ona without marriage. She delivered a daughter and Agbadi won the agreement. The painful joy of Ona, being a complete woman had come:

"It was on such a night that she came into labour. She cried quietly as she agonised alone through the long hours of darkness". "Her baby daughter was very merciful to her". "Ona was dazed with happiness. Agbadi had won, she thought to herself, at the same time feeling pity for her poor father". (TJOM 25)

Joy and Sorrow of Motherhood

The motherhood gave her happiness from Agbadi's side and sadness from her father's side that her inability to bear a son. The girl was named as Nnu Ego.

Ona lived in her father's place with her daughter. The child Nnu Ego, the daughter of Ona and Agbadi was affected by a lump on her head. Agbadi forced Ona to come and stay with him for the welfare of the child. The joyful life of Ona and her own freedom was affected there because of her role as a mother. She was forced to give importance to the child than to her father. She felt worried about her daughter's state and moved with Agbadi. There the motherhood instead of giving joy brought her the sadness.

Once again Ona became pregnant and very sick, it resulted in premature delivery. She delivered a son and both of them died. Now, the state of mother is more pathetic. The delivery brought the fatal end to the mother. So, the motherhood instead of bringing joy, brought only sorrow to Ona and her family. Especially, to her father who was expecting a son at least through his daughter was more disappointed and worried for the death of his only daughter Ona. Now, the chief Obi Umunna lost his priceless jewel.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta

127

Continuing Irony of Motherhood – Problem Faced by Nnu Ego

The irony of motherhood did not end here. It continued to the daughter of Ona. Agbadi gave enough freedom to Nnu Ego as her mother wished. She had a happy life as a daughter. But, the happiness was interrupted by the marriage. Nnu Ego married Amatokwu. After her marriage, people around her expected a child from Nnu Ego. Here, the trouble began for Nnu Ego. “Nnu Ego was surprised that, as the months passed, she was failing everybody. There was no child. “What am I going to do, Amatokwu?” she cried to her husband, after the disappointment of another month.” (TJOM 31)

The childlessness of Nnu Ego resulted in her husband’s next marriage. The second wife became pregnant very soon and delivered a son. It brought less importance for Ego as a senior wife in Amatokwu’s family. The longing for motherhood in Nnu Ego had raised high. She asked her husband, “Why did you not come to me? I cried in the night and longed for a childlike you – why did you not come to me?” (TJOM 34) She assumed herself as a mother to the child born to her husband and his new wife. She became a foster mother to the child. She started to breast feed the child due to her earnestness for motherhood. It was found later, and she was beaten by her husband and sent to her father’s home. Thus, the more she longed to be a mother the more she suffered.

Nnu Ego married another man called Nnaife, who was working as a washer man to the white Dr.Meers at Lagos. The second marriage was also a part of her suffering. She did not like Nnaife. But, she lived with him. She wanted to satisfy her father and to fulfil her desire to become a mother. So, she accepted the marriage though she did not like Nnaife. She was successful in her married life and delivered a boy. Owerri, the cook’s wife praised Nnu Ego and said, “I see you have given your husband a son. It’s not very common for people to have sons for the first baby. You are very lucky.” (TJOM 53)

Short-lived Joy of Motherhood

Ego felt very happy and considered it as her success. The happiness was not remained for a long time. The boy named Ngozi, died after few weeks. The short-lived happiness as a mother disappointed her a lot and led her to commit suicide and rescued by a stranger. The joy of being a mother was denied for her at several times. At last, she had attained it and once again that resulted in bringing suffering rather than joy.

Nnu Ego Became a Mother Again

Nnu Ego’s longing to gain the joy of being a mother had not calmed. She became pregnant again and performed so many rituals for the protection of the child. “And as her father had predicted, all went well. Even the birth of the boy was painless. She was rejoiced.” (TJOM 79) She had named the child as Oshia. Ego attained the joy of being a mother by undergoing a great trouble.

The joy gave its’ second visit to Nnu Ego. She became a mother again and delivered a boy again. The second child was named as Adim. The mother wanted to give the best to her children. She dreamt of putting Oshia in a good school. She had decided to give a better future for her children. Mean while, Nnaife’s brother died and the family’s responsibility befell on Nnaife. He had taken Adaku as his second wife after the death of his brother. The family was facing a difficult financial struggle.

The denied motherhood now, became very close with Nnu Ego and she delivered twin girls. The responsibility of the mother increased in Nnu Ego that she had to feed more and more mouths. “I

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta

128

doubt if our husband will like them very much. One can hardly afford to have one girl in a town like this, to say nothing of two.” (TJOM 127) The twins were named as Taiwo and Kehinde.

Mother’s Role a Protector of her Children

The mother’s role did not end in giving birth to a child, but also in giving protection to them. Oshia the eldest living son of Ego was affected by some health problem and he was taken to the medicine man for cure. The medicine man told that it was the jealousy of Adaku brought him the sickness. He had performed some ceremonies for his cure. He also said “You must protect your children against the jealousy of the younger wife.” (TJOM 129)

The life of Nnu Ego as a mother was filled with lot of troubles and responsibilities with less happiness. Nnaife was forced to join in the army. His job location was unknown to her. In that situation, she was carrying the next child and had to look after the other children’s education. The money sent by Nnaife was shared by his wives and the sufferings of being a mother for many children continued. Her father also died by that time. After few weeks of his death she delivered a boy, who possessed some of the physical features of her dead father Agbadi. So, the child was named as Nnamdio.

Now a Mother of Many Children – Increasing Responsibilities

Once a barren woman now became the mother for five children. She had three boys and two girls. The longed motherhood gave her happiness. But, the turmoil to fulfil their needs continued. Nnaife’s absence increased her responsibility. She lost hope in her husband. The lost hope was shifted on the children. She struggled a lot to bring them up with good education. Being a single parent, she was unable to provide proper education to her children.

Oshia, the eldest son in Ego’s family was raising question regarding his break in his school education. “Oshia looked the image of dejection and cried: “But I love school, Mother. All my friends are there. Why do I have to stop so many times?” (TJOM 173) She was unable to answer the child. The motherhood which gave the joy was slowly fading away, when she was unable to provide the needs for her children. One day, Nnaife had visited them. She was very happy and expecting that all her problems would end after his arrival. But, he enjoyed the time with his friends by giving drink parties to them.

Nnu Ego became pregnant again and delivered twin girls. They were named as Obiageli and Malchi. The girl children were not that much glorified by the Igbo society. She had a question “Men – all they were interested in were male babies to keep their names going. But did not a woman have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons?” (TJOM 186) It showed the dislike that the society had towards the girls and it’s expectation from woman as a giver of male child. Though she was a woman, she will not be praised for producing the child of her gender.

Mother’s Hope towards her Children

The hope of ‘what you sow, so you reap’ was there in Nnu Ego. All her sufferings and strains will bring her at least a happy and peaceful last days was her hope. She was the mother of seven children and hoped that they will look after the family after a certain age. But, the children had proved that only the mother need to be selfless and the children are always selfish. She gave importance to the education of Oshia and Adim. Oshia and Adim were competing with each other to make their dream of higher education to come true. They were less bothered about the family. The

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta

129

mother was fooled again by her children. Already her husband was not caring her and her children. Then, the children too had the same thought. It had disappointed her very much.

Relief instead of Joy

Ego was around the age of forty, she delivered her ninth child, a girl. Unfortunately, the child was dead after few hours. “Then she started to feel guilty. Had she wanted the child to die – was that the interpretation of the slight relief she had experienced when she crawled to the dead child to check what sex it was? That it was a girl had lessened the loss.” (TJOM 195) The eagerness for motherhood had turned to a kind of relief though the child was dead. Especially, she felt relieved that she came to know it was a girl. Though she did not have any hatred towards a girl child and as a mother, the society made her to pity less towards the dead child when she came to know it was a girl. Now, the motherhood which gave joy to her once had changed.

Shattered Hopes

Oshia decided to go to United States. The old parents Nnaife and Nnu Ego’s hope that the eldest son, Oshia will take the responsibility of the family was shattered. Nnaife was unable to control his anger. Nnaife said, “I wish you had died instead of my first son Ngozi.” Adim also said, “Nobody thinks at all about me. It’s only Oshia, Oshia every time.” (TJOM 201) The children in the family expected their parents to care them. But, they were not ready to do the same for them can be understood through his words. So, the joyfulness of motherhood was not found in the mother because of her children’s behaviour.

Mother considered the child as precious. Taiwo said that she will take care of Obiageli. But Ego said, “Taking the children from me is like taking away the life I always known, the life I am used to.” (TJOM 222) It shows that only the children desert their parents for their personal reasons. But, the parents especially the mother always gives her care to the child at any age and in any situation. She showered her love and care for the children as a true mother, though she did not receive the same from them. It is one of the noblest qualities of motherhood.

Tragic Death of Nnu Ego

The death of Nnu Ego was the very pathetic part of the novel. A mother of seven living children, died on the road side like an orphan.

“Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother. Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace! Still, many agreed that she had given all to her children.” (TJOM 224)

It brought tragic end to the mother Nnu Ego. It was not only for Nnu Ego, even for many mothers throughout the world. She gave the maximum love and care for all her children. But, none of them had returned her.

To Conclude

Motherhood was the main theme of the novel. The story began with the motherhood of Ona. She wanted to give a male child to her father. It was not fulfilled by her. So, the motherhood did not give her joy. She also died soon. Her role as a mother was less in the novel. Nnu Ego was the protagonist of the novel. She longed for motherhood in the beginning. Later, she became mother for

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta

seven children. The joy that she experienced during her first child birth was not found in her later delivery. She felt relieved especially, when a girl child died soon after it's birth. Thus, the joy of motherhood becomes ironic. The happiness was turned a relief after some time.

The title of the novel "The Joys of Motherhood" was ironic. The experiences of the mothers in the story Ona and Nnu Ego proved that though motherhood is a blessing and joyful experience, it is not giving the same joy and happiness for the mothers throughout the novel. She considered motherhood as joy. She felt that when she delivered her first son after so much treatment and shame. The joy of being a mother was not long lasting. The joy she earned as a mother was less, while comparing to the turmoil she had faced in her life. The motherhood attainment itself was a great challenge for her. The challenge prevailed in bringing up the children. She was expecting a return in her old age from her children's side. But, that was not offered by her children till her death. After her death, they had given her a grand burial. It showed the more sorrow ridden motherhood of Nnu Ego and not the joys as it found in the title. So, the title of the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* is considered as ironic.

Works Cited

Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood*. George Braziller, United States, 1979.

Emecheta-buchi. Enote. Web. 01 Dec.2011.

<<http://www.enotes.com/buchi-emecheta-criticism/emecheta-buchi>>.

Nigerian-women-writer. Wiki, 11 Jan. 2008. Web. 28 Nov. 2011.

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ctegory:Nigerian-women-writers>>.

Postcolonial-literature. Wiki, 10 Dec. 2010. Web. 28 Dec. 2011.

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/postcolonial-literature>>.

Author:

Ms. K.S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar
Government Arts College
Coimbatore
nithyakani@gmail.com

Co Author:

Dr. Kannayya Kanchana
M.A.(Eng.), M.A.(Yoga), B.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D., D.Litt.
Assistant Professor of English (Retd.)
Government Arts College
Coimbatore

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:6 June 2018

Ms. K. S. Nithiyaa, M.A., B.Ed., Research Scholar and
Dr. Kannayya Kanchana, M.A.(Eng.), Ph.D., D.Litt.

A Study on the Irony of the Title: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta