

INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND GENDER IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *SECOND CLASS CITIZEN*

¹Ms. K.R. Vidhya, ² Dr. P. Santhosh

¹(Ph.D.) Research Scholar/ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai, India.

²Associate Professor, Research Supervisor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai, India.

Email – ¹vidhyaruthirakottoi@gmail.com, ²santhosh.sl@velsuniv.ac.in

Abstract: *Intersectionality highlights that social identities do not exist in isolation but interact and intersect with each other, creating unique and complex experiences that cannot be fully understood by considering one identity category in isolation. It recognizes that individuals experience multiple forms of privilege or marginalization due to the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination they face. The concept of intersectionality aims to shed light on the ways in which power structures and social inequalities operate on multiple axes. It emphasizes the importance of considering how different forms of discrimination and privilege intersect to create distinct experiences and social dynamics. Intersectionality seeks to challenge the tendency to view identity categories as separate and instead calls for an understanding of the interconnections and interplay of various social identities. In "Second-Class Citizen" by Buchi Emecheta, the intersectionality of race and gender is a central theme that informs the experiences of the protagonist, Adah, as she navigates her life as a Nigerian woman in 1960s London.*

Keywords: *race, gender, discrimination, identity crisis, oppression.*

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more, and how they intersect to shape an individual's experiences and societal inequalities. It recognizes that individuals can face multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage that are influenced by the intersection of various social identities. The intersectionality of race and gender acknowledges that the experiences of individuals are shaped not only by their gender but also by their racial or ethnic background. This perspective recognizes that the challenges and privileges experienced by individuals are not solely determined by gender or race alone, but rather by the unique combination of both.

For instance, a black woman may face specific forms of discrimination and marginalization that are distinct from those faced by white women or black men. She may encounter racism, sexism, and the intersection of these two forms of discrimination, which can create unique barriers and challenges in various aspects of life, such as education, employment, healthcare, and access to resources.

Understanding intersectionality is crucial because it helps to highlight the complexities of individual's experiences and provides a framework for analyzing and addressing systemic inequalities. By recognizing the intersectionality of race and gender, society can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable systems that consider the unique experiences and needs of individuals who navigate multiple social identities.

Buchi Emecheta's works often delve into the intersectionality of race and gender, exploring the unique challenges faced by African women in both their cultural contexts and in Western societies. Through her novels, Emecheta sheds light

on the experiences of African women as they navigate the complexities of gender inequality, racial discrimination, and cultural expectations.

Emecheta's exploration of intersectionality begins with the depiction of her female characters, who often grapple with the constraints imposed by their gender within their own communities. They confront traditional norms and cultural expectations that limit their opportunities and reinforce patriarchal structures. Emecheta portrays the struggles of African women who strive to assert their agency, challenge societal expectations, and pursue their own dreams and ambitions.

At the same time, Emecheta's works highlight the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of African women living in Western societies. Her characters often face racism, prejudice, and marginalization, which compound the challenges they already face as women. Emecheta addresses the complexities of identity, belonging, and cultural assimilation as her characters confront the realities of being "othered" in predominantly white societies.

In works such as "*Second-Class Citizen*," "*The Bride Price*," and "*The Joys of Motherhood*," Emecheta explores the unique struggles faced by her female characters as they navigate the intersections of race and gender. These novels depict the ways in which African women encounter various forms of discrimination and prejudice, and the resilience they display in overcoming these barriers.

By examining the intersectionality of race and gender, Emecheta's works challenge societal norms, raise awareness about the complexities of African women's experiences, and contribute to discussions on social justice and equality. Her narratives provide a platform for marginalized voices and offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between race and gender in shaping individual identities and societal structures.

In "*Second-Class Citizen*" by Buchi Emecheta, the intersectionality of race and gender is a central theme that informs the experiences of the protagonist, Adah, as she navigates her life as a Nigerian woman in 1960s London. Adah's experiences as a woman are shaped by the gender inequalities, she faces both within her own Nigerian community and in the wider British society. She confronts traditional gender roles and expectations that limit her opportunities for education, career advancement, and personal fulfillment. Adah struggles against the patriarchal norms that relegate women to subordinate positions, and she strives to assert her agency and pursue her dreams.

At the same time, Adah's experiences are also profoundly influenced by her racial identity. As a black woman in a predominantly white society, she encounters racism and discrimination that compound the challenges she faces as a woman. Adah confronts racial prejudices, experiences micro aggressions, and encounters barriers in her pursuit of education, employment, and social acceptance.

The intersection of race and gender in Adah's life creates a unique set of challenges and limitations. She grapples with the intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization that arise from being a black woman in a society where white male dominance is the norm. Adah's experiences highlight the ways in which the intersection of race and gender can exacerbate systemic inequalities, shaping her opportunities, access to resources, and overall life chances.

Emecheta's portrayal of Adah's experiences in "*Second-Class Citizen*" underscores the need to understand the complexities of intersectionality and its impact on individuals' lives. The novel brings attention to the unique struggles faced by African women living in Western societies, shedding light on the ways in which the intersectionality of race and gender shapes their identities, aspirations, and social interactions. Through Adah's story, Emecheta highlights the need for greater recognition and dismantling of the intersecting forms of oppression and inequality faced by marginalized individuals.

REFERENCES:

1. Emecheta, Buchi. *Second-Class Citizen*. London UK: Allison and Busby. 1974.
2. Nwapa, Flora. *One is Enough*. Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1981. Print.
3. Soyinka, Wole., introd. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976.