

EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF TSITSI DANGEREMBA'S *NERVOUS CONDITION*.

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Abstract

Education is a vital tool for a woman's physical, moral, mental, social and emotional well being. It is through this knowledge that new skills, habits and values are imbibed to enlighten the intellect. Education is a means to life's intimate objectives, for the greater society. This paper will examine women's education as a tool for women empowerment to balance their educational opportunities to produce manpower for development and refine the human character. Some characters in the novel will be discussed, in order to bring out the influence of education on these women for self realization and actualization.

Introduction

Education has been described by various writers in various ways. Adedeji (undated: 6) defines education as "... a sum total of the development of individual's physical, moral, mental, social and emotional well-being". So, education is important in bringing up a person intellectually, morally and physically to improve the quality of life. According to Suara (1996), education is an important tool for the achievement of social prestige and mobility, prospects of better job and living. Education broadens the mind and understanding of a person to his immediate environment and world at large. For a better empowerment of the woman, she needs a formal education because women are homemakers, centers of family and custodian of cultural and fundamental values of the society. Since women constitute almost half of the nation's population, so the importance of women education cannot be over-emphasized. Education is the most important legacy a parent can leave for his children.

History has shown that women have always been considered inferior to men and most people hold women in low regard. Women are discriminated against in most societies, forgetting that though nature hath differed man-kind into sexes, yet she never intended any great difference in the intellect. African women like their western counterparts have suffered oppression at the hands of men in various areas of life. The women were given only domestic roles, that is to eat the humble pie by confining themselves to the domestic chores.

Men believe that nothing worth-while could come from a woman. If a woman produces a work of art of excellence, it was given unjust criticism. Apart from the area of education, oppression of women is also manifested in their marriage. If a woman gives birth to a female child, she is castigated and the girl will not be trained. Forgetting that, "if you train a woman, you are training a nation." So the women have been possessions, voiceless and often rightless in their husband's family except for what accrues to her through her children.

In the last decades of the 20th century, life had witnessed the beginning of an unprecedented feminist movement for women Liberation and female Emancipation. For instance women are granted like their male counterparts, equal opportunities to enable them use their talents to contribute positively in the society and nation as a whole. Though there are some obstacles, women However, empowerment drive is facing, like traditions, customs norms, attitudes and beliefs. Many married women find it difficult to cope with the multiple complex problems of family responsibilities and occupational pressures.

The Purpose of Women Education

In this paper, we are going to address these atrocities and redeem the battered image of women portrayed so far in the society. Women have become conscious of their position more than ever before, leaving no stone unturned to make themselves known, to give a long term improvement in the ability to help themselves religiously, economically, socially, educationally and politically. So training a woman makes a big difference because her education will make her a good mother, take control of her life and that of her family and also participate fully in the affairs of the state. Education gives the African woman the ability to effectively discharge her responsibilities, earn money independently, improve her relationship with her husband, resulting in better understanding, in solving some

family problems for a healthy family.

The woman's social status, prestige and cultural values will be enhanced because education will help to broaden her knowledge and acquisition of skills for profession, so as to contribute to the progress of her society intellectually. In the society today, women are also expected to contribute meaningfully as citizens of their community, nation and world at large. So they need education to equip them for this new role. So a woman's education sensitizes her to participate more effectively in the development of a nation. She no longer regards herself as just a housewife, without rights. An old Chinese proverb says "give a man a fish, and he will eat at once, teach him to fish and he will eat for a life-time." Her education will help her to organize her business activities well, to yield better profits. She understands the trend in world business market for the advancement of her family and nation as a whole.

Indispensably, women have certain roles to perform, so they should not be used, squeezed dry and then thrown into the garbage. We have some female writers like Zynab Alkali, *Stillborn*; Bode Sowande's Farewell to Babylon; Femis' Morountodun etc who have portrayed women's image in a militant manner in their writings. Education has been very beneficial to women, because many of the problems before were due to logical and socio-cultural constraints, access to resources to sustain and increase their income generating capacities, for example access to land or job opportunities.

The Feminist Trend In Tsitsi Danrarembe's *Nervous Conditions*

The feminist trend deals with the problems of women, marriage and the chances they have in life to be fulfilled and take jobs that will benefit the society. So what are their chances? African fiction is primarily African in the theme, style and sensibility. The African society practices communalism as against individualism. The novel was written to decry the oppression and injustices meted out to people by the colonial masters. The novel makes Africans more sensitive to the happenings around them. These writers were the fore runners for revolutionary changes in African countries.

Nervous Condition by Tsitsi Dangeremba is a novel that has brought out the many problems facing the African women. Such problems are patriarchy, tradition, racism, class and gender imbalance. She deviated from other writers by creating a new tradition by defining the image of the African heroine and she presents women agitating for change. Her characters are radical feminists, and she presents them as bold, assertive and revolutionary which is alien to African society. She rejects in totality (the position given to women by men and holds them responsible for the problems of women. Women were believed to be less intelligent and creative than men and were believed to be inferior to men.

Feminism as defined by *The Longman Encyclopedia* is a movement and set of ideas committed to the achievement for women of full legal, political, social, economic and educational equality with men. So Feminism is a kind of school of thought that agitates for the freedom of women and girls in the society regardless of age, class and culture.

Characterization

The novel begins with an innocent young girl, Tambu, who is growing into adulthood. Her struggles from childhood in the village, her effort to improve her life is disrupted by her brother and father who constitute an obstacle on her way to progress.

The novel exposes the problems of gender in the society of Rhodesia in 1960. In this society, men are placed above their women counterpart. So the author tries to use this novel to agitate for the freedom of women from men and culture.

Nhamo, a character in the novel represents gender and class bigotry as presented in the beginning of the novel. He does not like traveling by bus because of irritation of other passengers that he may be traveling with. He feels that, "women smelt of unhealthy reproductive odours, the children...relieve their upset bowels on the floor and men gave off strong aroma of productive labour. He did not like sharing vehicle with various kinds of produce" (p 3-5). He has a lot of gender pride in himself, as an educated person. It is because of Nhamo, that Tambu's education is stopped with the belief that, women do not need education before they are married to perform their duties. Her

father believes that Nhamo needs education more than Tanibu, and he cannot cater for the two of them at the same time. So the boy has to go at the expense of the girl. It is after the death of Nhamo that Tambu is able to assert some kind of freedom for herself. She hates poverty because of her experience in the village, with her brother and father, who are obstacles to her progress.

She is restless, determined, rebellious and daring to achieve her aims. The author speaks through her to other characters and women to be determined and resist all forms of oppression and never be satisfied with their position. So the author nurtures her from the beginning of the novel to the end to suit her plan. Tambu learns one thing or the other from the other woman in the novel. For example Maiguru, her uncle Baba Mukuru's wife. She is a role model, highly educated and yet disciplined. Tambu sees her education as a way of self actualization and realization. She feels that through education, she will change the position occupied by women in the African society. At the end of the novel, she is transformed into a different person, who has recognized her freedom through education. But her revolutionary changes is made possible by her contact and interaction with her cousin Nyasha.

Nyasha, the daughter of Baba Mukuru has travelled with her parents to Europe. She learns rebellion to be able to handle some stubborn situations, so she is exposed to Western civilization. She is aware of gender complexity in her society and she is determined to emancipate herself from the cultural beliefs. She feels what is good for the boys, is also good for the girls. All these attributes helped to mould her into the perfect young woman needs to fulfil her roles. She wants to be free in her dressing, expression and movement. There should be no preferential treatment for boys or girls. It is because of these, she is able to disobey her father, Baba Mukuru, who is greatly respected and feared by everybody in the family, because of his education. But she believes that she has to confront Baba Mukuru to check his excessive powers. Her mind is confused with foreign culture, she does not want to be controlled by anybody. Even at school, she is hated by her mates because she is too "English" for them.

On one occasion, she attends a party with her brother and cousin and stays out late, and her father deals with her seriously. She goes against the tradition and norms of the society. For example she smokes cigarettes and even speaks rudely to her father. It is this action that really stimulates Tambu.

As for Tambu's mother, she sees education as her problem because of her son's death. She is very passive and subservient. She has no power over her life, but always at the mercy of traditional convention of the society. She sees womanhood as a curse added to society.

Maiguru is another character in the novel who joins in the struggle for women freedom. At the beginning, in spite of her education she still holds on to tradition. She cannot initiate radical change, she is too weak and obedient to revolt. But she later revolts against the autocratic nature of her husband, to get some kind of freedom. She abandons her matrimonial home to stay with a relation, to make her husband realize, that she has the same right he has over the family, since her own money too, is added to maintain the extended family. She points out,

"but when it come to taking my money so that you can feed her and her family and your whole family...."

After her protest she is able to spend her money independently and even cook alone during Christmas celebration. The action pleases Nyasha, so much that she embraces her mother and bids her farewell. She sees it as a giant step towards her freedom.

Lucia on her own part believes in hardwork. She feels she needs education for self actualization and economic freedom. She dislikes the men folk and their weakened attitudes towards the women. She breaks the silence of women in Jeremiah's house, during his extended family meeting. The meeting is supposed to be for the men of the clan, while women stay away or keep quiet wherever they are, even in issues that concern them. She has been staying in Baba Munini's house with her sister, Tambu's mother. As they try to blame her for not packing out, even when the head of the family has asked her to move out before Christmas, she comes out in full anger to counter the allegations raised against her. She accuses Jeremiah and Thomas her relatives, of sleeping with her, while Baba Munini is also planning to take her as a second wife. Her confrontation with the men gives her a kind of freedom and frees her of the blame. She is able to go back to school and also got a get to fend for herself at the end of the novel.

Recommendations

The government should set up committees known as *women's right committee* to enlighten other women on the importance of women education, thereby creating awareness in all citizens of the need for equal educational opportunities.

- > Women development issues should be highlighted in the teaching of related courses.
- > NICEF should endeavour to fund researchers by the academia geared towards improving the situation of women.
- > There should be workshops, and the participants should be motivated to form associations to promote women rights.
- > Annual conferences should be organized whereby studies from the academia will be presented and ideas exchanged to further the interest of women.
- > More employment opportunities should be given to female graduates in strategic places in the government so as to influence government policy implementation and decision making as they affect the development of issues of women.

- > There should also be a re-orientation of the attitude of women of all ages towards education.

Conclusion

The author groups all these characters to represent some various levels of gender conception. So at the end, we see most of them awakening in their self consciousness and pulling up some kind of resistance to give some hope. She advocates women education as an escape from poverty. She portrays her men characters as being retrogressive, selfish, holding on to tradition and refusing every tendency of modernization and they are afraid of change. She feels that the portrayal of women as housewives, mothers, not visible, relegated to the background and not recognized should be discontinued. She feels that women should be allowed to make their meaningful contributions to their societies. The women in the novel detest their oppressions and are ready to fight for their freedom through the education and any other method.

Since women constitute half our nations human resources, women should be properly educated to achieve dignity, self-reliance so that they can contribute positively towards nation building. So given the right education, incentives and opportunity, women will have good quality of life, creating awareness through critical judgement as well as constructive, effective, dependent and mature thinking. Emancipation and empowerment of women through proper education is a task that must be accomplished. The educated women must be a light to the uneducated one, to change herself of all those pettiness for which women are usually denied. We need the cooperation of the men to support and change their attitudes towards women education.

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