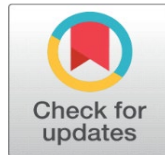


EXPLOITED ADAMS' EVE: ACHAKKA AND EKWEFI

Anjali Sharma ¹✉

¹ Research Scholar, Barkatullah University, Bhopal, India



Received 14 April 2025
Accepted 15 May 2025
Published 30 June 2025

Corresponding Author

Anjali Sharma, anju43435@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i6.2025.6202](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i6.2025.6202)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2025 The Author(s).
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

"One is not born a woman, rather becomes one". This 'becoming' was a consequence, the end result of centuries long 'process' that was a careful, cautious, planned, romantic exercise; a mental, social, biological, cultural, political conditioning enforced subtly yet sternly on the female gender. The web of 'constructs', hierarchical order instructed, ensured and perpetuated her to be the 'object' of meekness, docility and rendered her to be a powerless creature. The praxis included withholding, defining, limiting, and controlling her in the bounds as 'ghar ki lakshmi', 'angel in the house', 'Gruen e mban ndera e jo buka', half doll-half angel', 'Ç'e do mallnë eç'e do gjenë, and so forth, which got embedded as truths universally perpetuated. Slightest demurrals were pronounced blasphemous that were satanic, devilish in nature and hence, were 'made', witches and whores. Hence, 'She' has always been a sobriquet, an identity that was constructed, approved, appreciated, scrutinised and eroticised all by man, while women were mere acquiescing puppets.

Keywords: Achakka, Cultural, Ekwe fi, Social

1. INTRODUCTION

"One is not born a woman, rather becomes one". This 'becoming' was a consequence, the end result of centuries long 'process' that was a careful, cautious, planned, romantic exercise; a mental, social, biological, cultural, political conditioning enforced subtly yet sternly on the female gender. The web of 'constructs', hierarchical order instructed, ensured and perpetuated her to be the 'object' of meekness, docility and rendered her to be a powerless creature. The praxis included withholding, defining, limiting, and controlling her in the bounds as 'ghar ki lakshmi', 'angel in the house', 'Gruen e mban ndera e jo buka', half doll-half angel', 'Ç'e do mallnë eç'e do gjenë, and so forth, which got embedded as truths universally perpetuated. Slightest demurrals were pronounced blasphemous that

were satanic, devilish in nature and hence, were 'made', witches and whores. Hence, 'She' has always been a sobriquet, an identity that was constructed, approved, appreciated, scrutinised and eroticised all by man, while women were mere acquiescing puppets.

World knows the name of the first man as Adam and the first woman as Eve, however, in the light of aforementioned, it raises certain questions. Is she really known for being 'Eve', or did the world celebrate the fact of her being 'Adam's Eve' more. Was her being 'Eve' really romanticised in society and literature by 'Adams' who wrote her or did she become a victim of 'romantic abuse' as 'Adam's Eve' because she arose from Adam's rib bone. Was she ever a "woman" or was she "invented as a woman"? Indeed, how was a man's woman made? This paper, I'd answer these looming questions that robbed her of 'herself' and who robbed her of herself. [Oluyemi \(2006\)](#) defines gender as "socially constructed based on the assumed power and position that a group of humans should possess...." Interestingly the critic adds that, "power in the context of gender means the ability or freedom of individuals to make decisions and behave the way they choose" (Kusa, 2008). Over the time, the unfair proportion of power or weighing down of power more towards one side or assuming to exercise much greater power in one section of human population as opposed to the other section leads to the birth of structures of power- an order, and eventually, a power dynamics start operating on its own, which typically has an osmotic nature- flowing from a region of greater power exercising section to the lesser power exercising section. However, during its course of flow towards the lesser power exercising section, the dynamic and flow of power assumes an exploitative form and nature which then begins to dominate, suppress, oppress, reject, undermine the other section's existence and being.

In the course of history, the roles being performed by women and men got gendered and specific roles were ascribed to specific gender. Feminine roles were rendered weak, inferior, unacknowledged, and in the 'process', women got pushed to the margins of the household, to the fringes of the society and were bound in the shackles of home and its domesticity. The woman, hence, 'became' a domestic creature, an object, while man assumed the position of the so-called, "worldly man", as he dealt with worldly affairs- the outside world, which needed strength and might. Hence, the complete transference of power happened on its own and a large proportion of it, or nearly all of it, got centered in the fist of man. Dark and grave irony lied in the fact that man was still a 'man' while woman had 'become' a passive creature, a feigned existence, an unacknowledged presence, an unheard voice- a mute object, tout court. This play of power-centering that served to strengthen these shackles was 'patriarchy', a dynamic whose reigns are always, have been and had been controlled by men.

[Tyson \(1999\)](#) defines "patriarchy as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles" (Tyson, 83). The critic also states that traditional gender roles include norms and values that cast men as rational, strong, protective, superior, decisive, but delineate women as inferior, emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. Tyson further describes "patriarchy as sexist, arguing that it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men". For Tyson, patriarchal ideology works to keep men and women under traditional gender roles in order to promote the ideology of male dominance. The underlying suggestion is that social norms, values or cultural perceptions that mark one sex (the male) as superior and distinct from the other (the female, who it casts as inferior), become gender markers and the foundation on which patriarchy thrives.

In the first book of the Holy Bible, Genesis 1, God stated that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. But, as aforementioned, people began to react in a stereotypical manner towards women and placed them at a much lower level than men and so is the piteous portrayal of women in ‘Things Fall Apart’; “it was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. While the titled men and elders sat on their stools, there were many women, but they looked on from the fringes like outsiders’; (Achebe, 79). The daring use of words- ‘fringes’, and ‘outsiders’ by Achebe reveals the societal, communal position of women in the clan of Umuofia. Thus, the power dynamics between the two sexes has clearly driven out the women to the parameters of Igbo community and society where they are mute spectators watching patriarchy play in the center. This hegemony of patriarchy is engraved in the cultural tradition of Igbo community, encoded in the form of firm proverbs, stories, folktales, myths, and replicated throughout the clan via cultural and gendered practices. Thus, the oral tradition of the Igbo community ensures a perpetual survival of this patriarchal hegemony where these practices are ‘normalised’ and contribute to the oppressed gendered identity of women as a gender ‘norm’. Achebe’s characterisation also becomes crucial as it becomes a critical tool in analysing the wider divide that exists between men and women in Umuofia’s social structure. Thus, these biased and partial gendered identities give rise to power structures and power relations that are not only unfair but also oppressive and domineering (on the female gender). Lois Tyson refers to this as “cultural programming”, which is again feminine or masculine, and “are categories created by society rather than by nature” (Tyson, 84). Cultural programming or patriarchal programming as Tyson variously calls it, refers to traditional gender roles, norms, values that society dictates and expects of the sexes to follow, thereby constructing their identities and existence as strictly ‘male’ or ‘female’.

Sexual prowess and sexual dominance by men is as much celebrated as it is revered in the Umuofia clan. They perceive consummating as an act to subdue and conquer women in bed, just like ‘wrestling’ matches where winning over is a competitive spirit to subdue the other. This valorisation of men is extremely problematic, as it renders women passive in the sexual relationship as well as in the marital relationship and in the society, at large. Hence, the Igbo community has assimilated and amalgamated the idea of sexual dominance and masculinity in one and this is the idea, that protagonist of the story, Okonkwo, picks up during his childhood and leads a pre-decided yet decided life which is driven by the pursuit and frenzy of ‘manliness’ in his adulthood. As Ifeoma Onyemelukwe argues, Okonkwo’s need to refute his father’s failures lead him to become an extremist in his beliefs, rejecting any sort of femininity and treating the women in his life as objects that he must “possess, admire, desire, dominate, despise, reject and possibly destroy at will” (Onyemelukwe, 351). Okonkwo’s actions are what Onyemelukwe calls “a device” that forces the women into subjugation as a response to Okonkwo’s fear of “being perceived as weak and not able to control his household” (Onyemelukwe, 353) Ekewfi, Okonkwo’s second wife, ‘wrestles’ away from her marriage, remarries him and bears a daughter to him. The audacity of Ekewfi to run away from her marriage, her being the ‘village beauty’, her love for wrestling, her courage to cross and breach the boundaries and break the shackles are commendable heroic virtues that are not only extraordinary but also stand out in a society, that is seeped in patriarchy. Given the brute, cruel demeanor of Okonkwo, she deserves to be attributed the title of the female protagonist in the novel because of her merits; however, this characterisation remains unfilled and is lost in complete vacuum by the conclusion of the narrative. It is not very clearly dwelled upon by

Achebe as well, further, it seems as if none of the women in the story qualify themselves or are capable of being deemed fit to fulfill being a leading female voice, in the merits of Achebe. Hence, Achebe very blatantly sides with the men in the novel. Reading between the lines, thus alludes that Okonkwo who was habitual to 'conquer' everyone and everything might have felt a feminine challenge by Ekwefi to his masculine might, so he deploys every possible measure to silence her voice which is usually physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Apart from caning, firing a gun, he must have 'gone on top of her', out of fear to protect his phallus power. Like Spivak's subaltern who cannot speak, the married women in Umuofia also suffer from colonization. Marriage becomes a form of domestic colonization, for like a colony on which the colonizer imposes his rule, forcing the natives into subordination, the patriarchs of Umuofia must impose patriarchal domination on women. So, leadership, especially in marriage, is solely a male prerogative.

Some critics have pointed out that Achebe is not a misogynist as feminists have accused him of, by referring to Chielo, Goddess Ani, agadi-nwayi and the 'harmony' that exists between the women of the Umuofia clan. However, this is dubious, problematic and contradictory per se. This portrayal of women feels very 'romantic' and is 'romanticised' by Achebe as well, but it is highly misleading.

Achebe attempts to make these happy, gleeful, harmonious times and women when they are surviving a toxic relationship with their husbands. In order to colour the monochromatic patriarchal environs of the Umuofia clan he pictures these 'happy' moments, however, this can't sustain itself for longer and we see 'things falling apart' for real when Okonkwo disturbs the peace of the Igbo community by beating his third wife when the whole clan was observing the "week of peace". But Okonkwo will not join in the jovial celebratory atmosphere, for it is celebrating the female, and the directly precipitous correlation between the violence and his mounting attitude in both the days preceding the festivities. Hence, the 'celebratory' nature of the week of peace, its 'romanticisation' by Achebe by focusing on women, their activities and then, the ultimate reality are all a paradox.

This romanticizing is therefore toxic in the pool of larger grim reality. Some critics have also cited and emphasized the role of Chielo as a woman who exercises considerable power and whose agency supersedes that of the men of the whole clan, (when she repudiates Okonkwo, whom no one dared to because of his might). However, its juxtaposition lies in the fact that she's the 'only woman', the 'sole woman' in the whole community to exercise some power. Moreover, it should be no wonder why she is revered in that way, because she's a priestess. Had she been an ordinary woman the consequences to this daring might have been completely different. Her being the spokesperson of the god- she holds the incumbency and exercises power. She represents the divine, the force that mediates between the people of clan and their goddess and given the superstitions the people of this clan believe in, she could in no manner be crossed or subjected to violence ordinary women faced. Hence, via referring to Chielo and commenting about the condition of other women is highly unfair. Also, nowhere in the text, we find Chielo reprimanding men for abusing women which reveals her utter hypocrisy and the one instance when she does, is drung a "specific" period of the year. Thus, violence on women, has to have a 'peculiar' timing or happening on a 'special occasion' to be rebuked by her. She doesn't ask Okonkwo to apologise to his wife, instead, to make some propitiations to the goddess and the belief system- practices that are quite debatable per se. Under this line of reasoning, even the priestess Chielo, voice to the Oracle of the Hills, is regarded as an example of the despotic and cruel character of women in a society that offers the women of her clan no regard and hence, can be viewed as

another subjugation of feminine power to male authority. Ironically, repeated foregrounding of Ani, Cheilo, Achebe creates a notion of the feminine that is mitigated by its masculine elements. Hence, violence on women finds no voice of 'register' and 'acknowledge'. Patriarchal might is thus multiplied at numerous levels in multiple ways.

Okonkwo's extreme obsession with appearing manly is deeply rooted, and he refuses to yield to ideas that go against his beliefs. He rather works towards conforming to his notions of societal approval of the man. To him, these are qualities and actions that are capable of securing a place for him in the masculine circle. These are part of what it takes to be a real man for a clansman. For [Spender \(1980\)](#), men have intentionally, "formulated a semantic rule [of language] which posits them central and positive as the norm, and they have classified the world from that standpoint, constructing a symbolic system which represents the patriarchal order" (Spencer, 58). Achebe's documentation of women shows his biases aligned with the phallus that to a certain extent fails at providing a verbal space to women. Thus, the narrative of women of the Igbo community in the larger Nigerian discourse is left unsaid. Therefore, this marginalised position of women becomes a completely unsaid narrative, and hence, questions such as-Who speaks, Who perceives and Whose voice, thoughts and perceptions are being represented, and by whom become fundamental and central concerns of both narratology and gender theories. The patriarchal narrative in *Things Fall Apart* signals the power dynamics between the sexes. This masculine discourse embeds a collective/communal voice/perspective: a situation where a single voice is mutually authorized to speak for, or on behalf of a given group or a community.

By this occlusion of gender difference, Okonkwo's mother, his wives and daughters recede into the ground which enables the figure of Okonkwo and his father and son to achieve their representational prominence. Hence, Achebe's voice-the communal voice of this clan is heard through the tongue of patriarchal Okonkwo. Achebe as a literary figure and Okonkwo as a patriarchal figure, thus, assume the power of speaking on behalf of everyone, thereby emerging as the sole representative voices. "We, too, should organize such a corps, but the boys will not come...Since the arrest of Moorthy they are all afraid." (Seenu/Vasudev, p.107) Patriarchy makes it clear that women cannot win, for if they are passionately involved in the nationalist struggle they are bad wives and mothers, but if not them, then who? women's contributions are crucial, but such recognition of them is not always easy when society expects them to take care of men's needs first. Mahadevi Verma in *The meaning of woman - the question of freedom*, pointed down "The Indian man found woman either as a means of pleasure or as a burden, as a result of which he could not respect her as a companion. After colonialism, when there was a need for renaissance. Then the consciousness of women power was risen again. Raja Rao is the writer of independent India, who tried to re-establish women power through his writing. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* portrayed how an illiterate woman, Achakka tied the whole village in a thread of religion to spread a Gandhian thought. And Nose-scratching Nanjamma said, "Why, I am not a man to fight, sister!" Rangamma said, "Why sister, you need not to be a man to fight. Do you know the story of Rani Lakshmi Bai, and do you know how she fought for India?" (Rao 107) This shows that Indian women characters are still tied to their special position. Sex is biological, but the values and meanings associated with the female and male are socially ascribed. If sex and biology is nature, then gender is about the social and, therefore, culture. Women education has been a headache for the patriarchal since time immemorial.

In 1876 Rassundri Devi published her autobiography *My Life*, where she narrated the pain she went through to steal a word from the book. Rangamma and Ratna are doubly challenged in *Kanthapura* (1938). Alongside being women, they are also widows. Hence, the widow becomes the symbol of strength and progress. Ratna refuses to rid herself of her jewelry after her husband's death, and both Rangamma and Ratna read sacred Vedas. "We are all one....equal in shape and hue and all" (Rao,118)

To conclude, the women are made to learn a specific language, gradually, ironically, this language is that of silence, suffering and sustaining the structures of power. Hence, the women are trained to 'speak' and 'learn' the language of patriarchy. Being made a woman or becoming one is a process of learning; of acquiring certain cultural qualities, and a major medium by which such gender constructions take place is Language. The reflections on community have surely been romanticised by Achebe but those instances are violent romantic abuses heralded on the female gender. The story is therefore not just about the downfall of a man but also a very powerful yet subtle account of the 'becoming' of Umuofian women but that takes a backseat, in the Igbo community and in Achebe's portrayal, as well. Hence, the reigning authority in theory and on page is that of men only: Okonkwo and Achebe respectively. Thus, a man's woman was 'made', Okonkwo's Ekwefi was 'made', Rangamma and Ratna were 'made', and hence, were 'made' numerous Eves of Adams.

This paper can generate an understanding of nature v/s nurture axioms. Our sex-female is natural, our gender -woman- is a social construct. If one wants to enjoy true harmony of human relationships, one will have to get rid of this internalized patriarchal thinking. All it means is having a "conditioned" decision or what satisfies her. She can retain her independence and her individuality. Feminism is all about creating an alternative culture, which is not about transforming female into male, this is about finding out what is good in both male and female ways of being and doing.

If one wants to progress ahead, one should return back to its Roots: roots of harmony, roots of subjugation. God may have created Adam and Eve to enjoy and witness a strong face of social and cultural change together. God must have empowered them to work towards the collective good of society. Equality is the most important element for harmony and progress in society. A strong building depends on the appropriate mixture of each component, similarly a sense of equality and unity is required in society. A changing social landscape brings about changes in the issues and forms of oppression but an idea cannot be confined within national or geographic boundaries.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1991). *Things Fall Apart*. Fawcett Crest.
Barry, P. (1995). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press.

- Bhasin, K. (2002). Some Questions on Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia. Pauls Press.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1988). The Second Sex (Original Work Published 1949). Pan.
- Kgafela, N. A. (2006). Heroines and Subalterns? The Representation of Women in Raja Rao's Kanthapura. Marang: Journal of Language and Literature, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.4314/marang.v16i1.39319>
- Lanser, S. S. (1986). Toward a Feminist Narratology. Style, 20(3), 341–363.
- Nayar, P. K. (2019). Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory. Pearson.
- Oluyemi-Kusa, D. (2006). Gender, Peace and Conflict in Africa. In S. G. Best (Ed.), Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa (pp. xx–xx). Spectrum Books. (Page Numbers Would be Ideal here if Available.)
- Onyemelukwe, I. (n.d.). Search for Lost Identity in Achebe's Things Fall Apart.
- Rao, R. (1938). Kanthapura. Oxford University Press.
- Spender, D. (1980). Man Made Language. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Tyson, L. (1999). Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide. Garland Publishing.