

A thematic study of Role of Women in Chinua Achebe's "Anthills of the Savannah"

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Abstract:

The present paper entitled Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah: A study of Role of Women* deals with the political role of women in the Igbo society, particularly with Achebe's female protagonist Beatrice who is anxious to know about the pitiable condition of the people of Kangan and steps forward to change the situation. The novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. "When the British came to Igbo land, for instance, at the beginning of the twentieth century, and defeated the men in pitched battles in different places, and setup their administrations, the men surrendered. And it was the women who led the first revolt" – Chinua Achebe.

Key Words: Education, Strength of women, Struggles, Identity.

Women in traditional societies were more suppressed than in Western industrialized societies. Beatrice, Achebe's female protagonist is anxious to know about the poisoned history of the people and the leaders. Beatrice is one of Achebe's most fully developed female characters. She works for Sam and is an old friend of Ikem's, so through her

relationship with Chris, Ikem, and Sam, she plays a significant role in the action of the novel. She was born as a fifth daughter to her parents. Her father had been hoping for a son, so she was named Nwanyibuife, which means “A female is also something” (AOS 82). She does not like that, because she thinks that there should be equality between women and men. This is represented throughout the novel through the theme of the strength of women. Her father always tells her to “Sit like a female!” or Female solider” (82). So she acted very boldly in every situation.

As an adult, Beatrice is well educated, having earned a degree with honors in English from the Queen Mary College, University of London, and she holds an important civil service position as an administrator in a state office. She also enjoys writing short fiction, which Ikem reads and appreciates. The image of women has minor variations in many of the Holy Scriptures which represent different religions. Manu’s version of woman is needed to be protected all along her life from childhood to old age under the care of a father, a husband and a son at 26 different ages. The system of polygamy legitimized by the tradition of Africa and the Islamic religion considers woman as a child bearing machine.

While describing the childhood days she used to talk about her church and school. She used to spend most of their time there. The Anglican Church compound is a remarkable place and apart from the church building there were two school buildings, the church house, the catechism house, the long house in which the school teachers are staying according to their rank. Through the female teachers are asked to stay in a small room but she stayed in the catechism room for her protection. From her childhood onward she has experienced the gender difference in her own community so she wants to wipe it out completely.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, when Beatrice learns that Elewa’s mother is not interested in the naming ceremony of Elewa’s baby, she voluntarily decides to conduct

the naming ceremony for Elewa's daughter in her flat. The father is supposed to do it according to the tradition. But here Beatrice herself takes the role of the father and chooses a boy's name for the girl child. The name chosen is "AMACHINA; May-the-path-never-close" (AOS 213). The naming ceremony symbolizes the hope of the Kangan people who think that all their suffering will come to an end. In the naming ceremony Beatrice serves as a source of inspiration and passion to rewrite as well as adapt her culture for a better future. Though she is a woman, she confidently conducts the ceremony and does not worry about the society. This is Achebe's version of women's liberation with Beatrice rising to the occasion to discharge the responsibilities assigned to men by tradition.

The political role of the women have been documented and found to vary from society to society. In western societies the standard dictum is that politics is a male sphere. But in many African societies this is not the case. Igbo women look on political rule and actively participated in the public affairs, religion and political matters. They claimed political rights that were normally reserved for men.

Beatrice represents the new awakened woman who is a reservoir of great strength. She tries to trace her own weakness and the people of Kangan see her as woman who is equal to men in power. This shows that in the patriarchal society, where women are denied of their rights, women will be able to achieve their goal if they are given chance equal to men.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. Penguin Book, 1987.