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“A Woman Killed With Kindness”: The [Inter]play of Women Physiology and Psychology in African Women Literature

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Modern African writing emerged out of the contact between Africa and the West, a contact which was both “historical” and “experiential” in dimension. The purpose of this literature is to comprehend and challenge the states of consciousness induced by an experience which had modified not only physical realities of life but also perspectivization of the African psyche. And within this dialectal praxis lies the unique experience of African women whose political and sociological spheres of independence have been transgressed both on account of being colonized denizens by the dominant colonial narratives as well as due to the skewed mental structures of pro-sexist discourse finding its takers in neo-capitalist nation state. The dual inequity is something which is categorical to every black women narrative whether it is the Black American or the Caribbean one and of course, the original one that of the Africa. But what makes the African poetics different is the socio-political repression couched in the grammar of honor and valorization of women as life-bearer and giver on which the African male discourse breeds and rests. Brushing aside the sociology and talking literarily, the behavioral trauma of the ill-fated African contemporaneity and history’s compelling reality finds its articulation in almost all the African literary narratives in all its genres – novel, drama, poetry, autobiography, historical fiction, etc by the male authors like Ngugi wa Thiongo’, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe who have centered the arguments on the colonial excesses, postcolonial expectations and neo-colonial consternations shaping the superstructures of modern Africa. There are male leads in their narratives whose standpoints define the pervasive African attitudes of the times but have not, satisfactorily, entered the female psychological territory notwithstanding numerous ideologically robust delineated women characters. While attaining immunity for themselves from the masochistic labeling destructive for a universal intellectual appeal, the canons of African literature have not (unwittingly) persuasively rendered the women centric discourse categorical in case of African women probably only due to conception lack of physiological women attributes. Hence the male writers like the mentioned above are to be absolved of any prejudice of calculated mismanagement of the African gender continuum.

The title of the present paper mimics the title of an early 17th century Jacobean age play titled *A Woman Killed With Kindness* by a Shakespearean contemporary Thomas Heywood. Herein one Anne Frankford married to Master Frankford enters into adultery with Mr. Wendoll and is nabbed by her husband who rather than punishing her with death ostracizes her in the form of a mild sentence. Anne embraces self-starvation as penitence, very common in the age for women as repentance contrary to which is gluttony and hunger symbolic of sexuality. Anne dies gradually after reuniting with her husband which restores the social and patriarchal order at the end of the play. It this exercise of women which, as believed would make them better wives and mothers rather than being demanding. Here the woman attains the male endorsement only after following austerity and getting deified, in short, is dealt with kindness in demand for something disciplinarian which would be a legend for the posterity to emulate. Any deviation would meet severity of conduct. The title of this paper bears the title of the said play just for its perennial appeal to the study of patriarchy and women’s situation in Africa and restricts its application to just reference. Coming on to African women’s literature, it is perched on an

inimitable pedestal which exposes the patriarchy idolizing as well as maligning its subjects only to shirk from its own ideological debacles.

Here I shall move ahead with the familiar tenets of feminism which urge the women writers to practice their own literary discourse as distinct from the males in order to claim a balanced equation. Also, the hardcore feminist advocates of France and Europe enunciate the logic of better understanding for women by women, as stated earlier and which shall also stand as an expose of the masculine predisposition. Language is perhaps the most important strand in this exceptionality discourse since the French feminists of 60s and 70s revived the polemics of Virginia Woolf who in *A Room of One's Own* called for a distinct women articulation and a medium different from the medium (prose writing) used as male apparatus for the male motives. Hence the question arose whether there existed a style unique for the women oriented towards addressing the cause. *Écriture féminine* coined by Helene Cixous fired the debate “associated with the feminine, and facilitating the free play of meanings within the framework of loosened grammatical structures” (Barry 127) The riddle gets further complicated as Cixous remarks:

“It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded...it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric [male-dominated] system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophic-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.” (Marks & de Courtivron 256)

Hence, a new kind of discourse and linguistic articulation is sought for women which as Cixous suggests ought to be rule-bending acting as a veritable foil to the phallogentric practices of the times. This *écriture féminine*, thus, must be fastidious and rebellious engaged in free play of meanings contrary to staying tied to specifications and rigid laws of semantics. Hence linguistic frivolity would become symbolic of transcendence from restricted rubrics of speech and writing. For Cixous, *écriture féminine*, could be the produce only of women physiology rendering a leeway for the free play of psychological conflicts.

“Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, cut beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’...Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord.” (Marks & de Courtivron 256)

This dominion of the body, is what is celebrated by the African women writers who have tried to transgress the rhetoric of patriarchy and authority by writing predominantly about the female attributes like motherhood, puberty, premarital sex, adultery in consequent to husband's indifference or impotency, abortions, diaphragm, menses, etc. The literary works selected here to be taken as evidence of these thoughts have women characters who indulge in the above exercises which they claim to be their sole domain without getting subdued in front of any normative reasoning. Writing about these physiological attributes, makes the writers impervious to ‘the gender as the social construct’ thesis and other codes of male authority. *Écriture féminine* is a European postulate but is more apt and reasonable for African women writers since the African women have been a socially, culturally and politically lesser lot as

compared to that of the French or the American or the English women folk who could surpass the normative classico-psychological-tending discourse with the political and economic affluence of their nations as well as taking leads from the concerted movements starting from 18th century England and France. The ostensible insufficiency and mono-dimensionality of the African culture and literature has been contrasted (and not contested) by the African women writers in their writings which penetrate into the realm of female psyche with the aid of physiology dynamics unavailable to males or male writers, for that matter. It is this ‘interior knowledge’ which makes the African women writing precious literarily discarding any allegations of masking sexist agenda tilted in the favor of “fairer sex” (which is ironical too in case of African literature). So, though the African writing of women may not be an exercise of female African bourgeoisie to battle out against male writing fraternity for sundry egalitarian trophies yet certainly it is a genre of exposure of the male hegemony relegating the women into oblivion and that too, as said above, giving the airs of honor and mythical reverence.

The archetypal patterning of the African women has been that of a macho-woman whom the males turn to for protection as a doting mother and nurturing like a fertile land whenever there is struggle for survival. Achebe, the representative voice of the African culture, writes about about this stature of woman constructed in the African dialectics in his most valued novel: “ (mother is) to whom one turns, of whom one speaks of when nostalgia grips...when distress clouds the vision of the moment...when there is sorrow and bitterness...the mother is there to protect you and that is why we say Mother is Supreme” (Achebe 123) Michele Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman* writes about this aggressive and assertive female species generated by the African cultural archives:

“From the intricate web of mythology which surrounds the black woman, a fundamental image emerges. It is of a woman of inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. Less of a woman in that she is less “feminine” and helpless, she is really *more* of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, nurturing reserves....

Through the years this image has remained basically intact, unquestioned even by the occasional black woman writer or politician.” (Wallace 107)

Here lies the irony that even such a revered figure whose construction of idealism is accepted in all the areas of a nation’s or continent’s modes of cultural operation gets deconstructed in the face of patriarchal authority whenever there is a perceived inconvenience with its own ideology. This dissent may be the outcome of a political and economic downturn in the wake of colonial impact wresting the autonomy from the natives which, for that matter, has been a widespread African national phenomenon. Hence, the African woman’s relegation is continued with the important endorsement of the society (including the women themselves) as is suggested by Michele Wallace above (“through the years this image has remained basically intact, unquestioned even by the occasional black woman writer or politician”) Accordingly, ‘the woman had been killed with kindness’ in this complex idealistic network of codes. But the select literary works taken up for the study seem to defy the ‘deify’ and African women writers through the various characters try to illustrate this change in the attitude whereby the physiology intervenes to explicate the reformed psychology. And then, the subtlety of

maneuvering the female body is seen through and is rather turned upon the African patriarchy in reverse.

In Bessie Head's *Maru*, the socio-political situation of women in Botswana is depicted where, again, the African women's infinite repressed discursive practices are paramount and the protagonist of the novel Margaret Cadmore tries to surpass the discourse standardized by the phallo-centric systems through her artistic ambitions. In this way Margaret becomes the mouthpiece of the African woman novelist who tries to be an iconoclast, a demolisher of the 'women centered' automatism and fixity of language owned by male African writers by choosing to make inroads into the areas (education, politics and arts) which hitherto remained alluded to the philosophic-theoretical domination. Margaret in the novel belongs to Masarwa community dominated by Leseding society economically and socially with the latter derogating the former by referrals as 'bushmen'.

“It is only when she started going to the mission school that she realized that something was wrong with her relationship to the world. She was a kind of child who was slyly pinched under the seat, next to whom no one wanted to sit..what did it really mean when another child walked up to her and looking so angry said, you are just a bushman.” (Head 17)

The internal discriminations and marginalizations of certain African women represented by Margaret triplicates the problematic of the feminine movement in the Dark Continent. The third world woman syndrome pushes the folk to the periphery from where the African women writers like Bessie Head have weaved their discursive yarn. It is thus, through education and political will to rise above the predefined signification codes of the patriarchy is evident in each writer's argumentative sphere and this will has a linear propagation to the physiology whose attributes translate into marriage and sex and other community affairs. Margaret's decision to accept the proposal of marriage and subsequent wedding to Maru, the Leseding society major is an effort to break the mold which had been sickening her since her maturity and marriage for her, which again involves physiology, is her way of retaliating against the centralized powers of community and patriarchy both. She chooses to marry Maru because he is expected to be the guardian of the cultural values which Margaret values so much. Thus, her marriage to a man of higher caste and artistic practice (her paintings impress Maru) liberate her from the mechanical existence bridging the gap between the estranged communities establishing the capability of knowledge and art in altering the perception of the society and which also, coincides with the aims of African female writers too. Margaret's friendship with Moleka is another evidence of Head's attempt through writing to practice discretion in the matters of sex and body and transgender relationships which bind African community. Here, the language employed by Bessie Head might not feature any deviations in the syntax or semantic paradigms of language but the in depth analysis of Margaret's psyche and her eventual choices pertaining to her body is the politically correct manifestation of *écriture féminine* plausibly as it brings the peripheral figures into the centre by virtue of, again, the physiological constant.

Here another expression of the *écriture féminine* needs a worthwhile mention, the one suggested by Julia Kristeva who suggests two aspects of the feminine language – the symbolic and the semiotic. She attaches the symbolic to order, authority, patriarchy/fathers, oppression, restrictions, etc as in “ the family, normalcy, normative classic-psychological-tending discourse, all of which are just so many characteristics of fascist ideology” (Krsiteva qtd. Barry 128). In contrast, semiotic refers to gaps, fissures, inconsistencies, slippage and random acts of association which bears association to the Lacanian notions of unconscious aspect of the language. The African women literary discourse carries the load of these two binaries in which

‘the given’, the traditional paradigm of writing including the grammar available for literary consumption for women could be identified as the symbolic and the one which is hidden, the angst coupled with the political assignment for the liberation and reveling in the possibilities of anatomy to maneuver the African masculinity is the semiotic. And as evident, the latter unconscious one seems to haunt the conscious or the orderly, the one which indicates patriarchy, the language with a foreclosed subject with a fixed and unified self. Hence, all the woman protagonists of the female African writers become the playing field of the overt and covert forces, the overt being the commonplace prosaic linguistic expression of reality shared with the male writers and covert being the mission to tumble the existing hegemonies. In *Maru*, Margaret’s responsiveness to the communal discrimination to her lot and belief to vanquish it through education and marriage with Maru is more or less the semiotic or the unconscious haunting the will of the author Bessie Head for justice. It is this unconscious desire that guides every move of the protagonist in the novel and is manifest in the conscious or the literary paradigm in the form of novel.

Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria is one of the foremost representative novelists of Africa who has, through her novel after novel, made a relevant commentary upon the African feminine situation. Her novels abound with numerous female characters who sum up the culturally coded female set of attitudes delegated by the patriarchal authority. Here, as discussed above, the woman’s procreative power is her benchmark of womanhood with muffled voices. Her body is the male citadel and the relationships crumble or flourish only on the basis of that. Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* is ironical in its stance when polarized with its title containing the feeling of ‘joy’ since the chief character in the novel Nnu Ego from the Yoruba society of Nigeria longs for the ever-eluding joy. Deserted by her first husband on account of infertility she seeks fulfillment in her second marriage with Nnaife bearing 9 children from him. Nnaife is a domestic help in a British household and the sole earner since in Lagos there are few opportunities for women to work. Nnu dies a wretched death of starvation and penury despite having been equated with mother earth who feeds her children. Nnu’s husband belongs to the working class who bows before the colonizers living with eternal consternation of being a slave in his own country, totally emasculated of the machismo. He loves his wife but his ideological failure is transferred to Nnu translating into a metaphysical fury. Nnu is told:

“You want a husband who has time to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey? Forget it. Men are too busy being white man’s servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not our husbands. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don’t know it. All they see is the money, shining white man’s money...They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us. The only difference is that they are given some pay for their work, instead of having been bought. But the pay is just enough for us to rent an old man like this.” (Emechata 51)

The contrast between the woman as life-giver and an eternal drudge is clear here and the author has highlighted this deconstruction of idealism labeled upon women. There are vivid scenes of Nnu’s plight in both her households followed by the sequences of her sexual indulgences (willful and disinclined), conceiving the child, giving birth, feeding them, etc. which bear a testimony to the African woman novelist writing about woman physiology and the psychological anguish eventually. Her language, *écriture féminine*, while describing the exclusive female situation transcends the banality of language in so far as the description of motherhood in the novel is clinical and claims to be the reserve only of a woman as it hinges

around female anatomy wrecking codes and phallo-centric attributed language regulations and stiffness. It is loosely then, the unconscious or the semiotic aspect of the language.

The locale of Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning* is Zimbabwe whose rural segments accounted for numerous incidents of rapes, tortures, forced pregnancies and abortions, etc by, ironically, the freedom fighters of the land whose frustrations in consequent to political failures led them see women as sitting ducks. Vera's *Without a Name* features the rural and urban attitudes towards women issues in totality and establishes the possibility of regaining of the female consciousness through the body. Mazvita, the heroine, is raped during the war and fails to derive emotional consolation from her relations with Nyenezadi, who only doesn't violate her physically. He is obsessed with his land and its security: "it is inescapable...it is everything and without it there is no day and night...the land defines our destinies" (Vera, *Without a Name* 39). On the contrary, Mazvita relates land to her rapist: "she connected him only to the land. It was the land that had come towards her. He had grown from the land. She saw him grow from the land, from the mist from the river. The land had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body" (Vera, *Without a Name* 36) For African men then, reverence and protection of the land is a masochistic practice which defines them while its human equivalent is not. Mazvita migrates to Harare in the hope of liberty and moves in with Joel, gets pregnant from him and is denounced for her duplicity. Anguished by the men's evaluation of her only for her body, she, in frenzy, kills her infant without even naming it. She does it to jolt this masculine attitude towards her body where opting for infanticide and returning to her roots shall be an act of reclaiming her consciousness and power over her body.

In *Butterfly Burning*, Vera traverses the similar terrain of decolonization of female physiology through the characters of Phephelaphi and Deliwe who turn to the autonomy of body as the way to reclaim the identity (Phephelaphi) and manipulate the male authority to achieve its own ends (Deliwe). Disillusioned in love with Fumbatha who, like Nyenezadi in *Without a Name*, is preoccupied with his land considering Phephelaphi at par with his tracts, Phephelaphi decides to sever the ties: "Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet from which birth had severed him..." (Vera, *Butterfly Burning* 28-29). Phephelaphi is impressed by Deliwe who lives a bohemian life defying all social laws and shattering the idols, merging the margins with the centre by engaging herself in prostitution and liquor selling unabashedly. She chums up with Phephelaphi but refuses to stay tied to her which again breaks her heart. Her pregnancy denies her career advancement which she, after a long thought, decides to abort as a symbol of taking charge of herself which culminates in suicide after a second time revenge pregnancy through Fumbatha. Opting to end her life is thus, not a defeat, but a victory which liberates her true self: "A touch, her own genuine touch, to love her own body now, after he has loved and left it, to love her won eyebrows and her own knees, finally she has done so, embracing each part of herself with flame, deeply and specially" (Vera, *Butterfly Burning* 129-130). Through the socially viable idealism of Mazvita and Phephelaphi, Vera situates the caliber of physiology in buying psychological stability for African women. Abortion and suicide may be considered as extreme nuances of traumatic mind, but Vera seems to suggest them as the tools of womanly assertion forging their own discourse. Vera's characters' suicide and abortion misadventures may appear to be an ideological victory of the patriarchy and authority on the surface but that is not it since underneath it runs the strand of unconscious of the author which rebels against the logic and grammar, making random connections with the unforeseen and the unpredictable, going against the grain. Death in the form of abortion and suicide are celebrated. The character delineation of Deliwe is the unconscious slippage in the mind of Vera since the virago Deliwe becomes virtuous Phephelaphi's favorite person (and ostensibly author's too) owing to her

blatant exhibition and manipulation of sexuality to disempower African masculinity. Deliwe employs it to rise above her social castration through abusive means but emerges as an ideological winner all the way. Breakage of barriers is always at the back of the mind of the African female writer which is manifest in the audacious bravado of her characters and the language which tries to breach into the African male bastion. The language here, again, exhibits the semiotic dimension or the unconscious playing its game, bringing to the fore the repressed desire of the writer.

Doreen Baingana's *Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe* is set in Uganda, another African hotbed of corruption and political unrest eclipsing the humanitarian attitudes of the society towards those at the periphery. The book by Baingana is an assortment of stories chronicling the post-dictatorial political situation of Uganda after Idi Amin and the status of women in this new socio-cultural scenario. The book documents the experiences and evolution of three sisters Patti, Rosa and Christine from childhood to youth concomitant with woman specific experiences, physical and mental, in the various stages of biological growth. The decisions taken by the three sisters vis-à-vis their lives, relationships, careers, etc seems to be the focus of the author whose vocation of writing herself in the tumultuous country is apparently a step towards asserting her autonomy in the matter of choices for women. In an interview she averred:

“My final major inspiration is that I want to record the variety that exists of the African experience, especially the African female experience...For instance, I grew up under the Idi Amin regime, but I had a happy childhood...So I wanted to show that there are multiplicities of experience in Africa, including urban middle class lives and I wanted to focus on personal, individual journeys rather than the usual generalized disasters. This is what fiction does well.” (Musoke qtd. Primlyn 43-44)

Baingana's fiction, thus aims at multifarious women experiences in language which might be the its symbolic dimension signifying masculine and patriarchy but the unconscious desire to unravel the womanly mysteries of body and soul is the semiotic aspect (as concluded by Julia Kristeva) which is more relevant for her and startling or sensational for the readers.

Out of the three girls in the fiction, Christine's experiences and life-trajectory from childhood innocence to pubic fantasies culminating in pregnancy and abortion finally settling down in life (but everything in self-dictatorial passion) is what the author suggests as more adventurous and an ideal one for the modern African woman. Christine leads a freewheeling life dabbling in exercises for looking gorgeous all the time, indulging in casual sex, live-in relationships, moving to America, entrepreneurship, etc which Baingana celebrates despite the censure these entail. Christine is out to explore the possibilities of her body through sex notwithstanding her mother's didactic instructions and Patti's platonic ways: “Sex was like school, something I just did. I mean, of course I wanted to do. I took myself there, no one forced me.” (Baingana 97) She moves to Los Angeles for brighter opportunities and gets intimate with her white American boyfriend Peter with whom she is disenchanted due to the black-white dichotomy evident in his actions:

“Los Angeles. I'm trying to put my feet firmly on the ground. I'm trying to be here...But despite her Americanness, I could see home in her; she shared her family's sharp wit and rather mocking smile...I find myself searching for signs of home, as if recognizing the palm trees, heat, hibiscus flowers

will reassure me that I'm still on the same planet...this is where I have chosen to be now. I cannot, will not take the next plane home." (115)

But she returns kicking the American dream down to make peace with herself. This assertiveness of Christine is relevant to the *écriture féminine* cult of Baingana as she pens such characters who reveal the fortitude to break the molds. Christine is assured about what her mind and body want and possibilities enshrined therein to please her. Sex for her, unlike in the traditional women characters and authors' presentation is no more a taboo and a passive prerogative for other's pleasure but something which could provide Christine with a feeling of prized possession and object of control. She asks herself during a gynecological procedure: "Why did I always seem to have my legs spread open before kind men poking things into me?". Pat comes the gallant reply: "I let them." (109) This rewarding relief of having or doing something big according to own whims and fancies is the celebration of physiology which Baingana and other modern African woman writers seem to stand for blurring the dialectics of chastity and debauchery. While chastity is explicit and desirable in the social sphere, debauchery or moral vacation is a hidden desire which the female writer seems to embody in the character of fiction.

The Algerian novelist Assia Djébar's *A Sister to Scheherazade* traverses a different terrain in which the religious fundamentalism (Islamic mores) and neo-colonialism effect the repression of the African woman and which is to be shaken through a far-out gutsy action defying the authority-logic. The practice of polygamy for men is sanctioned and compulsion of veil or *hijab* for the Muslim women is validated by the religious and social diktats. Isma and Hajila, married to the same man, try to unshackle themselves out of their miseries by uniting together and counter the oppression and socially vindicated discrimination against them. Hajila rebels by relinquishing the veil sanctioned by the Islamic dogma and slaps the authority asserting: "You tell yourself that no one takes notice of you, once you have dropped your veil: you are a stranger whom no one knows, moving freely about, with open eyes" (Djébar, *A Sister to Scheherazade* 41). Similarly, Djébar, through her mutinous language in *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, renders the regret of the women folk for having participating in the autonomy struggle to the extent of guerilla wars, because the country might have achieved it politically, but stuck to the same chauvinism which castrated women socially. In one of the stories titled "There is No Exile" in the collection the woman character laments:

"Just so I could have worries that never change whether it's peace or wartime, so I could wake up in the middle of the night and question myself on what it is that sleeps in the depths of the heart of the man sharing my bed. Just so I could give birth and weep, for life never comes unaccompanied to a woman, death is always right behind, furtive, quick, and smiling at the mothers." (Djébar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* 106)

Assia Djébar's fiction, thus amplifies the discourse of *écriture féminine* by bringing into frame the Islamic bigotry hampering the African female evolution. Being a Muslim herself, her act of writing about this politics makes her a perennial freedom fighter trying to foray into the African male territory with pro-feminine agendas. It is this desire which always seems to preoccupy her psyche wanting to get a discursive vent through writing.

Not only African fiction but other genres like drama in which the African woman have experimented contain the similar strain of African woman's discursive repression from which she is exhorted to liberate. And Drama and music are integral to African culture born out of the

rituals and myths which lay the patterns of culture and society. Angela Davis remarks: “Black people were able to create with their music and aesthetic community of resistance which in turn encouraged and nurtured a political community of active struggle for freedom.” (Davis 201) Folk-drama and folk-music dominated by drum beats has influenced the African women playwrights as “African drumming set the foundation (of drama) through its complex, phonetic reproductions of words and its polyphonic and contrapuntal rhythmic structures...” (Hart 62) Nigerian playwright Zulu Soffola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* has Ogwama, who denies obeisance to the social mores for her own happiness when she unites with her lover Uloko shortly after her husband’s death without practicing the formal mourning and following the tradition of levitation. Her defiance besmirches her social stand leading to her and Uloko’s death engineered by her spiteful mother-in-law. Similarly, in the play *The Marriage of Anansewa* by Efua Sutherland from Ghana the lamentable position of women is depicted through Anansewa, a girl whose deceptive father Ananse contrives her marriage to the highest bidder in the marriage market robbing the girl of her right to choose a husband. Consequently, she is wedded to an inhuman man making her life miserable. Both the protagonists in the plays have women denied their free will to choose their spouses and meet socially contrived tragedies. Through these plays the women dramatists, like the fictionists, have called for an awakening for the African women for taking charge of their selves and destinies through the language characterized by symbolic patterns of drama and semiotic pattern of desire to cut loose.

To conclude, the African woman literature exhibits the feminist interpretation of *écriture féminine* whereby the writer chooses to externalize the visible woman situation in the language best suited for the same, the capability of the body. African woman writers discussed above too try to maneuver the linguistic medium to further the cause of women advancement in the Dark Continent by trying to reach an exclusivity of language reserved for them. This language enshrines the distinct experiences of the African women in the postcolonial societies of Africa aiming to buy an ideological stance for the women in Africa. Here the role of writer’s unconscious also can’t be negated which plays upon her mind while etching a particular character or situation so much so that any untoward action or morose and macabre fate of the character is read as a celebration of womanhood. The chief characters in all the literary artifacts discussed above thus become an attempt of the authors to decolonize the woman and the body by decolonizing the language.

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BIO-NOTE

Rohit Phutela has to his credit numerous research papers in various famed national and international journals and has presented over dozen research papers in various National and International Conferences with a Chaired Session. He also has, in his scholastic repertoire, books viz. *Communication Skills-II*, *Indian Contours*, *Postcolonial Deliberations*, *Modern European Drama* and *Indian Diaspora*. He is working as an Assistant Professor of English at DAV College, Chandigarh.

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