

Breaking the Myth in Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come

K. Ramya Lakshmi ¹

¹ II M.A English Literature, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi.

Abstract- Liberal Feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions. Sefi Atta's debut novel Everything Good Will Come addresses the diplomacy of the contemporary female identity. The novel examines the growth of the protagonist physically as well as psychologically. Through these various forms of growth the protagonist Enitan becomes conscious of her surroundings and how it makes impact on her life. This paper discuss about the importance of liberalism in shaping the vision of the woman. The female characters in this novel are bold and courageous who utilize their chances to prove their individuality. The paper also examines the political landscape in Nigeria and how impact on the life of women. The paper submits that the women should come out of their spaces in family and they should actively participate in the social matters. They should work for the upliftment of the women's freedom. She must fight for her space in the society. She should break out the unwanted norms in the society.

Sefi Atta is a Nigerian novelist, playwright, and short story writer. She learnt creative writing in Antioch University. Her Debut novel Everything Good Will Come (2005) brings her a permanent place in Nigerian Literature. Atta's novel Everything Good Will Come has awarded the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa. This novel is translated into Dutch language entitled *Detuin van gebroken geluk: een jeugd in Lagos*. African Literature has gained world-wide recognition with important classics such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*.

Sefi Atta's novel, *Everything Good Will Come*, is a fresh story that explores life in Africa after the Biafran War through the eyes and ears of the main character, Enitan. She comes across many types of women and with each one; she tries to further her cause for female empowerment. Each relationship changes or affects her and contributes to the enthusiastic, dancing Enitan seen at the end of the novel when her father sunny is released from prison. Atta shows the level of independence and strength of the each character to highlights their importance in the main plot. It seems to be sending the message that the fight at large is not about sex roles in society but rather a fight for human empowerment.

Liberal feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own deeds and choices. Liberal feminists argues that society holds the false belief that, men and women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus it tends to discriminate against women in public places and institutions.

Atta's novel seems to question the inaccurate aspects of traditionalism that are oppressing the womanhood. She also questions about the role of traditional norms in the lives of women. The novel is sectionalized into four parts, which

describes the protagonist's life from childhood till adulthood. As the novel progress the heroine became aware of her surroundings and it produces a great impact on her life. These sections reveal the importance of self-identity, freedom and fulfillment. The female characters in this novel are firm and assertive in their decisions. They struggle for their rights and gains victory.

The new feminist novels explore new perspective that would help the women's cause. The relationship between Enitan and her best friend, Sheri, is an intimate one and provokes interest to read the novel. As children, Sheri and Enitan were opposites. They came from different backgrounds and have different family structures. Sheri was a Moslem girl and she didn't know much about Christianity. She thinks that there was a holy text named Bible in Christian religion and people whoever reads it, will become mad. Their friendship begins early in the novel and continues until the very end, but, like any relationship, it has its ups and downs. After Sheri gets raped, Enitan feels less sympathetic for her best friend. Enitan actually feels that it's Sheri's fault. As the rape occurred, it was Enitan who didn't understand what was happening. She felt that it was "a silent moment; a peaceful moment. A funny moment too" (Atta 62). At this part of the novel, Enitan was still too naive and immature to understand what had happened to her friend and, possibly, the thought of sex still embarrassed her, which is why she wasn't sure if she should laugh and be comfortable with it or be silent and horrified.

Later, Sheri settles down with a married man, and Enitan feels pathetic for her friend's decision. Enitan has different perspective upon marriage; she reflects that, "Marriage could immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child" (102). Upon further reflection, Enitan feels that "Sheri was the Nigerian man's ideal: pretty shapely, yellow to boot, with some regard for a woman's station. Now she was a kitchen martyr, and may well have

forgotten how to flaunt her mind" (105). Enitan is looking down on her friend, yet again. She feels that she is better than her because she is living a seemingly blameless, more worthy lifestyle. She sees a woman in the kitchen and immediately assumes they are succumbing to their role in society. Later in the novel, she goes as far as "likening a handful of kitchen martyrs to people confined in Nigerian prisons" (327).

Enitan's mother and father have very different approaches to raising her. When they find a romance book in Enitan's suitcase, they have different points of view. The mother demands that Enitan should stop speaking to Sheri because she's a bad influence and the father feels that the mother is over-reacting. Her father says, "You're her mother, not her juror" (38). In Enitan's childhood, her parents were constantly fought for petty reasons, and Sheri was an escape for her. Enitan says, "Sheri had led me to the gap between parental consent and disapproval" (43). As the novel proceeds, Enitan basically turns her back on her mother and follows entirely in her father's footsteps. Enitan says "I no long believed her; hurt one moment, hurtful the next. She could recall what my father said ten years ago, and yet she misconstrued my entire childhood" (93). This is a turning point in Enitan's life, who was raised by her mother's strict rules and is now decides to live an unrestricted life. In a way, Enitan is not only turning her back on her mother's ways but, also, she's acknowledging a denial of her female role in society. Now that Enitan is well educated and has seen the world through her own eyes, she can turn her back on her mother's beliefs. It shows a generational change. Her mother is still stuck, perhaps, in the old view of women's roles, while Enitan is trying to find her own place in society. She doesn't want her mother's perception of men and women to affect her outlook. Her mother is so focused on her husband and how he treated her that she was blind to see how it affected Enitan. All mothers could acknowledge their role as a wife. But Arin couldn't see herself as a mother, as a friend, or as a mentor, and how it affected Enitan's childhood is conveyed. Because of the loss of her son and her disappointment in her marriage, Arin appears so absent and empty of herself, that the young Enitan describes her mother as hollow. Enitan also says that "my mother never had a conversation with me" (19). But what's interesting is that Enitan in a way ends up very much like her mother for awhile. It takes years for Enitan to come to see her father's true face. This moment of awareness comes when she discovers the existence of Debayo, the son of her through illegal relationship. Enitan marries Niyi and argues with him. And just as the father's mother came at Enitan's mother, "started threatening that he would take another wife" (173), Niyi's mother confronts Enitan to remind her "He is the head of the house" (302).

Enitan's relationship with Niyi portrays the societal expectations of men and women. "Niyi Franco. He was a lawyer, though he was now a manager in an insurance company. His grandfather was a lawyer. His father and four brothers were lawyers. His mother retired from nursing the year he was born." (163). Niyi and his family represent the ideal roles of the society. All the men in the family are lawyers, and the women stay at home and attend to the house

and family needs. When Enitan wants to get involved in the protest for her father's sake, Niyi had a bad opinion towards the movement that Enitan is so deeply passionate about. He's not willing to support it or speak out for it, and instead, he only looks out for himself. He doesn't realize the feelings of Enitan. He gives importance to his egos rather than her choices. Contrastingly, Mother-of-Prison is only looking out for her family's best interests. She killed a man because she was harassed after her husband's death but even in prison she speaks out against the tyrannical dictatorship. She won't be quiet.

Enitan's first boyfriend, Mike, was quite a different man. Mike was an artist and though his career wasn't attractive, Enitan still dated him. She says "Mike was wrong. Most women I knew would sprint from an artist. It meant that they might have to dabble with poverty and poverty always cleared people's eyes in Lagos" (83). Enitan was never seeking a career-driven man but caring and kind-hearted man. Enitan has peace in her relationship with Mike until she walks in on Mike in the middle of an affair. She wanted someone to share her passions, but Mike is not truthful to Enitan. After a broken relationship with Mike, Enitan thinks that Niyi was the better option for her. But Enitan was never fulfilled with Niyi, she says "never once expected him to tell me I was beautiful," (214) which is why she decided to leave him by the end of the novel. Niyi was holding Enitan back from what truly mattered to her, and she wasn't the kind of woman he wanted. He told her, "You are not a domesticated woman. You just don't have that...that loving quality" (214). When Enitan disobeys his words and attend the meeting; Niyi stops talking to her. Enitan wasn't what Niyi wanted because she didn't fit the mold. He wants Enitan to blindly obey his words.

Atta depicts the expectations of the society, which affects Enitan's life. "In my 29 years no man ever told me to show respect. No man ever needed to. I had seen how women respected men. . Too many woman, I thought, ended up treating domestic frustrations like mild cases of indigestion: shift-shift, prod-prod and then nothing" (186). Enitan learned about the pathetic condition of women by watching other woman's struggles. It stresses the idea that society has been like this a long time. Men come before women, and women know it. Women are expected to cook, clean, and take care of their house. Shortly after Enitan's reflections and realization that society instills into her head somehow, she goes through a mental battle. She divides women into three categories: "strong and silent, chatterbox but cheerful, weak and kindhearted. All the rest were known as horrible women" (200). Enitan isn't content fitting into these groupings. She wants to change every notion they had about women and create a new perception that she could happily fit into. She decides to live an independent life without any strict rules and regulations.

It took a long time for Enitan to come to the understanding struggle faced by African women in the society. Enitan says, "So cynical was I about the core of strength an African woman was meant to possess, untouchable, impenetrable, because I didn't possess one myself." (252). Enitan realizes that she's

been wrong in her view of African women. She once thought they were weak and easily influenced, but now she can see the silent strength. African women take on a lot more than they appear to. Most of the things they do go unnoticed and are internal. Moreover the things they contribute are expected, but the battle and the way they fight is by sacrificing something of themselves for the better of their families. Mother-of-Prisons is the main example of this kind. Her husband couldn't hold a job and she paid for everything in their home and then told people "that it was my husband who was providing" (278). And her husband ran with it. She didn't marry him for love; she married him because it's what women do. Sheri did the same thing. Enitan sees Mother-of-Prisons as a role model because she won't stop using her voice. Even though it won't change anything, it still means something to her. Similarly, the reporter Grace Ameh, who was imprisoned with Enitan, acknowledges that "you can't kill a testimony of a country and of a people. That's what we're fighting for, a chance to be heard. And the second thing is, I love my country" (298). The only other strong role model Atta gave of an independent, strong woman working all on her own was Sheri's grandmother, Alhaja whom the reader barely got introduced. "Alhaja headed a market women's union and earned enough to educate her children overseas." (158) Sheri took the path of her grandmother because she started her own catering business to give herself more freedom. But the bottom line is that everybody's role is what they make of it. Married or single, working or not, vocal or silent – each woman gets to make their own impact, and it all still matters in the end.

While Grace Ameh decided to be a reporter to speak out, Mother-of-Prisons chose to fight silently. Sheri and her grandmother Alhaja chose to start their own businesses as their way of go up against the societal expectations that women remain in the home. Alkaja owned a fabric store and lived a happy life. Niyi's mother and Enitan's mother remained in the societal traditional roles. Mike used female goddesses in his art as if to make his case against society, but morally, his actions cancelled out his opportunity to make a strong statement in the novel. Niyi was supportive of Enitan as a typical husband would be but he didn't support her passions at all because he wasn't personally affected by it. This was "a country struggling with foreign family structures" (247). Enitan rejected her role and chose to take her own path when she left her husband. Her enthusiastic dancing at the end, when her father is released, is the end of her psychological tensions. The novel itself is a fight for human rights as a whole. While women in particular still have to go to great lengths to be equal with men, the overall battle is for human empowerment and the release of her father is one small step in the right direction.

The women characters in this novel were confident, and economically empowered. They proved that women can lead a successful life without the help of men. They liberate from the traditional norms to prove their self-identity. They break the unwanted traditional norms and liberate themselves from the oppressing patriarchal society.

REFERENCES

- [1] Akung, Joans E. "Feminist Dimensions in Everything Good Will Come." *Studies in Language and Literature* 4.1 (2012): 114-122. Print.
- [2] Atta, Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Gloucestershire : Arris Books, 2005.print.
- [3] Chegwe, Emeke. "A Gender Critique Of liberal Feminism and its impact on Nigerian Law." *International Journal of Discrimination and the law* (2013): 66-78. print.
- [4] Kehinde, Ayo and Mbipom, Joy Ebong. "Discovery, Assertion and Self-Realisation in Recent Nigerian Migrant Feminist Fiction: The Example of Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*." *African Nebula* (2011): 62-77. Print.
- [5] Owonibi, Sola and Gaji, Olufunmilayo. "Identity and the absent mother in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (2017): 112-121.print.