Buchi Emecheta, in her novels, challenges man’s simplistic notion of womanhood and his attempt to relegate woman to a secondary position in society. She portrays her women characters in such a way that instead of passively accepting their subordinate status, they challenge the existing oppressive system and carve out a place for themselves.

Emecheta’s first two novels – *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) are considered as a single novel or two parts of the same novel. *In the Ditch* is a sequel to *Second Class Citizen*. In the novel *Second Class Citizen* the protagonist Adah Obi is introduced as an eager school girl, with a dream of becoming a great person. After her marriage she is subjected to African male power and authority. At the end of the novel she steps towards liberation by her rebellion against this tyranny and in the *In the Ditch* her struggle as a deserted wife, burdened with five children for survival and self assertion in England is portrayed. These two novels which are autobiographical in tone reveal the near heroism of Emecheta in her personal life.

In the novel *Second Class Citizen* Emecheta tries to bring home how deep rooted gender bias is in a male chauvinistic society. Adah, the heroine of the novel resists her fate and offers a challenge to it by fighting against the oppressive customs and traditions. Commenting on Adah, Lloyd W, Brown says, “Emecheta’s heroine is more concerned with issues like
breaking the shackles of poverty and achieving middle class status than highlighting gender bias in a highly patriarchal society”.1

In the traditional African society there is a general notion that women are second class citizens because of their sex and Africans in England are second class citizens because of their skin colour. Adah because of her sex is considered a second class citizen in Africa and so because of her colour in England. Thus she is a victim of both sexual and racial oppression. Katherine Frank remarks, “....the real second class citizenship ...... derives far more from Adah’s anatomy than from the colour of her skin”2

In this novel Emecheta expresses her disgust by protesting against the male oriented society. Adah, the protagonist of the novel, right from her childhood struggles to assert herself against sexual, racial, and colonial oppression. She hails from a male-oriented tribal society which labels women as dependent, inferior, and subordinate. At the opening of the novel Adah is an eager and young school girl, who dreams of going to the United Kingdom. For Adah, England is like an Utopia and remains a promised land to her. Though she is a little girl, she thinks of, “....going to the United Kingdom must surely be like paying God a visit. The United Kingdom, then must be like heaven” (8)3

Adah is born in a male dominated society where people naturally expected their first child to be a boy. Her birth itself is a bitter disappointment to her parents, because her father does not want a girl for his first child. Hence nobody thinks of recording her birth. "She was so
insignificant”. But later she proves to be fortunate to her parents in some ways and they name her ‘Adah Eze’ meaning a ‘Princess’.

Every page and every word of Second Class Citizen stands as evidence to Emecheta’s feminist protest. She focuses on the rules of the dominant Ibo tribe where,

Boys were usually given preference, so even though Adah was about eight, there were still discussions about whether it would be wise to send her to school. Even if she was sent to school, it was very doubtful whether it would be wise to let her stay long. (9)

Though the Ibo knew that one’s saviour from poverty and disease was education, the privilege of being educated is limited to the so called superior sex in a male dominated society. Adah realises that the major obstacle in educating herself is her sex. She had to stay at home while her brother attended the Ladi-Lak school. Whenever she sees the boys going to school, “Adah would stand there, filled with envy” (9). In her heart of hearts she strongly resolves to go to school. The author tries to highlight Adah’s spirit of independence, when she takes courage to go to the Methodist School against the will of her parents. Later when Adah’s father becomes aware of Adah’s education he sends her to the Ladi-Lak school which has its symbolic significance that ‘education makes fortune’. But this luck does not aid her for long. The sudden death of
her father threatens her stay at the school. She becomes afraid that her dream to be highly educated and acquire respectability as a middle class woman may not be fulfilled.

Fortunately, people of her village suggest to her family that the more she is educated, "The bigger the dowry her husband would pay for her" (18). This suggestion helps her to continue her studies. Emecheta draws the attention of the readers towards the discrimination between the boys and the girls with regard to educating them, when she observes that, "It was decided that the money in the family, a hundred pounds or two, would be spent on boy's education. So, boy was cut out for a bright future, with a grammar school education and all that". (18) The girls are regarded as inferior to the boys and moreover it was felt that, "the extra money she would fetch would tide Boy over". (18). Emecheta provides a vivid picture of the fate of the girls by observing that, "Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch" (19). The unheralded death of her father makes her rise above the circumstances and she takes up to hard work, this in fact nurtures a free and strong spirit of independence in her, and she learns,

....very early to be responsible for herself. Nobody was interested in her for her own sake. Only in the money she would fetch, and the house work she could do and Adah, happy at being given the opportunity of survival, did not waste time thinking about its rights or wrongs, she had to survive (18).
Emecheta, in this novel, brings to light yet another aspect of the cruel custom of paying like the Bride price. She shows how these customs impose a burden on women in Ibo society. Through the tactful suggestion of Adah’s mother Adah is brassed off when her ma, regarding her marriage proposal says that older men “would take better care of their wives than the young and over educated ones” (20). Adah actually does not realise that her mother preferred older men “...because only they could afford the high bride price ma was asking.” Adah addresses these old men as ‘baldies’ and whenever they came to ask for her, “....she would burst into native songs about old baldies, if that failed to repel them, she would go to the backyard and burst the bicycle tyres of the suitors” (20).

Later, Adah marries Francis Obi a young clerk in Lagos. Since he is too poor to pay the bride price, her ma demands, Adah thinks that he cannot dominate her and hence she considers her marriage with him as an ideal one. This marriage leads to estrangement between Adah and her family. Her family members regard Lagos as a bad place because “it was a town with laws...” (8). Moreover they get infuriated by Adah’s decision to marry without the bride price and hence do not attend her wedding. But to Adah her marriage to Francis

Helps to ensure the realization of her childhood dreams-a family, comfortable job ... and the daily gratification of coming home to, ... be waited on hand and foot and, in the evening be made love to. (26)
At Lagos, the unemployment of Francis and his failure as a student drags them into poverty and are subjected to humiliation and hence her dream of going to the United Kingdom remains a dream. On the other hand, Adah continues with her independent nature. She hates to play second fiddle to her husband: "She would never, never in her life get married to any man rich or poor, to whom she would have to serve his food on bended knee. She knew all Ibo women did this, but she was not going to." (20)

Francis proposes to go to the United Kingdom for better employment opportunities. This news makes Adah ecstatic, because her long cherished dream was now taking the form of reality. Emecheta’s target in this novel is not merely the injustice done to women but also to expose the racial discrimination and its psychological impact on the minds of the subjects. She provides a glimpse of such a situation where Adah is disappointed at the dawn of her arrival in the United Kingdom. The first shock she receives in the United Kingdom is when Francis takes her to a house resembling a tunnel. She who has all the while dreamt of living in a spacious and large house is utterly disappointed to see such a house in the United Kingdom. In a mood of dismay, she questions him disdainfully, "Are we going to live here?" Francis’ reply to her question is a rude awakening for her "... we are all blacks, all coloureds and the only houses we can get are horrors like these" (41)

Emecheta who is concerned with both the gender bias and racial discrimination voices her disgust through Francis, when he warns her:
"In Lagos you may be earning a million pounds a day, but the day you land in London, you are a second class citizen" (43) Thus Adah’s romantic vision of the United Kingdom begins to crumble gradually.

Bringing up three children, without Francis being employed turns out to be a great ordeal for Adah and she decides to work. One fine morning a letter comes to her telling that she has been accepted as a senior library assistant at the North Finchley Library and her happiness knew no bounds. She whirls round in a kind of Ibo dance and suddenly she feels giddy and is shocked to know that she is pregnant once again. This undesired pregnancy causes mental anguish and physical pain to her. She thinks with fear, “Oh! God! What was she going to do? Francis would say that she had invented the pregnancy to avoid work” (45). Moreover Francis has been accusing her since she stepped on English Soil, that she had been too proud to work.

Adah anyway manages to take up her job as a library assistant, even though it burdens her to a great extent. On the other hand Francis though unemployed bluntly refuses to take care of the new born child, he hates baby sitting and tells her mercilessly. “I can’t go on looking after your children for you”. So, it becomes inevitable for Adah to choose Trudy, a white woman to act as a baby sitter.

As an educated, middle class woman Adah favours a small family. For this she takes steps for birth control without the knowledge of Francis. When Francis becomes aware that she has been fitted with
a diaphragm, he beats her for practicing birth control disturbing the whole neighbourhood. He treats her as a means of satisfying his lust. Moreover, he insists on having sex with her and even accuses her of having become frigid. She realises that a woman was a 'second class human' to be slept with at any time, even during the day and if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in:

They made it up that night forgetting that they were not supposed to have more children for sometime Adah did remember in the confusion that her nickname at home was Touch-not. But how could she protest to a man who was past reasoning? The whole process was an attack, as savage as that of any animal. (43)

Through this frenzied activity of Francis, Emecheta tries to point out the male chauvinist's view of woman as a mere symbol of sex.

Trudy, the childminder is caught by Adah while flirting with her boyfriend and when Adah demands explanation from her, she simply lies and this further degrades the image of the whites, who, she thought, never lied. "As for Adah, she listened to Trudy destroying forever one of the myths she had brought up to believe that the white man never lied" (57)
Yet another issue that Emecheta focuses on is the extra-marital illicit relationship and the consequences of it. The affair between Francis and Trudy make things worse for Adah. Trudy, instead of taking care of Adah’s son, is busy in making love to Francis and consequently due to this negligence, the boy falls sick. Enraged Adah warns Francis fiercely, “If anything happens to my son, I am going to kill you and that prostitute, you sleep with her, do you not?” (69)

Eventually Francis fails as a student, he does not even get through the summer examinations. Moreover he strangely accuses Adah for his failure because he feels that it is she who had saddled him with all the children. But he does not realise that it had taken him five attempts to pass the first part. His pride and reluctant behaviour towards his education have made things worst.

Adah vexed with all such circumstances takes up to writing whenever she found time. Francis who is envious of Adah, does not spare her even this time. He burns her manuscript and ridicules her attempts of becoming a writer. Adah who has been tolerating him all the while, now, determines strongly to get rid of him. It becomes inevitable for her to go to the extent of divorcing him. At the court, Adah fights aggressively for her rights. Francis argues, foolishly but fails lamentably. On the other hand Adah emerges as an autonomous, independent, and self reliant human being.
The Second Class Citizen has a taut structure and reveals Emecheta's insight into the problems of African women. Emecheta's feminist protest can be read virtually in every page of this novel. It is often criticised that Emecheta has put too much of her self into Adah. Right from the opening pages of the novel Adah is depicted as a crusader for equality. As the most striking feature of Emecheta's heroines, in general, is that they never cease to dream about a better life for themselves and do not easily accept their ill fate, even Adah is no exception. Her efforts to gain equality can be noticed throughout the novel.

The only means through which the heroines of Emecheta emancipate themselves is education. Similarly Adah determines strongly to educate herself. On her way to an educated life, though as a second class citizen, she violates a number of Ibo traditions and her motto is "Be as cunning as a snake but as harmless as a dove".

The first and foremost revolutionary step she takes is when she resolves to attend school secretly, even without the consent of her parents. Though Adah's sex stands as an obstacle and disparages her, she overcomes it through her dogged determination of educating herself. It enables her to take the destiny into her own hands. Her ambition to get educated is so strong that in order to get money for the entrance examination fee, Adah pretends to lose the money she is given to buy meat. For losing it, she is beaten one hundred and three times. The
beating makes her happy because it enabled her to feel that she “had earned the two shillings” (22-23)

In pursuit of her dream of getting herself educated, she faces many hurdles which are clearly pictured in the two chapters ‘Childhood’ and ‘Escape into Elitism’. On one occasion while dreaming like this in her school, she slips into a reverie and smiles. The headmaster of her school mistakes her smile and canons her brutally and orders a boy to carry her out of the school. She bites the back of the boy severely to express her agony. She feels proud for winning the sobriquet the ‘Ibo tigress’ for such an incident.

Regarding the marriage, Adah tends to be aggressively independent. She chooses Francis to be her partner thinking that marriage with him would be an ideal one. She violates the Ibo tradition of demanding the customary bride price. She does not pay heed to the decision of her family members even though it leads to estrangement between Adah and her family.

Unlike the other Ibo women, she hates to be submissive to her husband by playing second fiddle to him. She stubbornly refuses to serve her husband on bended knee. When she becomes aware of the affair between Francis and Trudy, she goes to the extent of threatening him that she would end him. Francis burns her manuscript with covetousness and it becomes inevitable for her to get separated from him. At the court she argues for herself as an efficient lawyer.
In the United Kingdom, where the blacks are looked down as an inferior class and considered as second class citizens, she achieves her dream of attaining middle class status by acquiring a job as an Assistant Librarian. By exposing Trudy's lying nature she marks her triumph over the white racists.

Christina Davis rightly says about Adah that,

Adah has a healthy dose of independence and rebelliousness ... she is lucid, especially in terms of her marriage relationship, and ... is adaptable. She gains assurance and literally molds her life by adopting positive outlook. 4

At the end of the novel, Adah, pregnant with her fifth child, packs up her scanty belongings and her four kids, divorces her husband and goes to lead an autonomous existence she had come to find in England. By writing a novel with success, she proves that the male chauvinist view, 'women being inferior are incapable of creative work', is nothing but a myth. This perhaps prompts Lloyd W. Brown comment on Adah's writing: "it is, an act of self affirmation, proclaiming that inner resourcefulness that refuses to accept the status of the second class citizens". 5

Thus Adah emerges triumphant and her triumph symbolises the triumph of all the so called second class citizens.
References


5. Lloyd W. Brown 34.