

Illuminating Darkness: The Crucial Role of Literacy in Amma Darko's Faceless

Ms. Stella Bodra

Research Scholar University Department of English Ranchi University, Ranchi

Abstract

This study investigates the role of literacy as a crucial instrument for empowering the girl-child, contributing to sustainable development within the family and the broader community. Literacy, defined as the ability to read and write, is generally attained through formal education. Education serves as a valuable investment; when effectively harnessed, it has the potential to empower, liberate, and embolden individuals. Conversely, a lack of education leaves individuals vulnerable to exploitation, oppression, ignorance, and poverty. Utilizing Amma Darko's novel Faceless, this study reveals that an uneducated girl-child faces significant risks of poverty and prostitution. However, the efforts of an educated group of women known as MUTE bring hope and a promising future to these vulnerable girls. By employing feminist theory, which champions the liberation and self-determination of women from ignorance, oppression, and exploitation, this paper concludes that the rehabilitation of street-involved girl-children by literate women allows them to become providers for their families. This, in turn, promotes economic development and helps decrease the rate of petty crime prevalent among youth due to illiteracy.

Keywords: Literacy, Girl-Child, Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Feminism

Introduction

Education serves as the foundation for human development, ultimately fostering societal advancement. It represents an investment in individuals, with the outcome being their contributions to the socio-economic progress of the community. Education enhances awareness among citizens, enabling them to engage actively in the political, social, economic, and democratic activities of their nation. Ozidi & Canham (1975) assert that "the common purpose of education is the transmission of accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and skills from one generation to another, and the preparation of the youth for future membership and participation in the life of the society, in its maintenance, growth and development" (191). Similarly, Dauda (2001) contends that 'education as a productive investment in human capital contributes to the socio-economic development of a nation' (30). In Amma Darko's Faceless, the girl-child Fofu is empowered by a group of educated women who rehabilitate her from streetwise to a meaningful lifestyle through a profession (catering) which will enable her contribute to the wellbeing of her family in particular and the development of the society in general.

This is discussed using the feminist theory that advocates for the freedom of the female gender from oppression; and self-assertion of the woman in all spheres of the society by fostering social positive change. Chukwuma (1994) defines feminism as 'a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity' (9).

Main Thrust: -

Literacy for Girl-Child Empowerment in Faceless

The ability to acquire education opens ample opportunities for the development of the individual socially, economically and politically. Education is an investment in human development, and lack of it exposes one to depravity, subservience, dependence and inferiority. The education and empowerment of the girl-child is paramount to the overall development of the society. Kabir (2016) notes that 'educating girls will have a multiplier effect on the economy and society at large leading to sustainable development' (287). The education of the parents or guardian goes a long way to determine the level of literacy of the children. Anyachonkeya & Anyachonkeya (2012) argue that:

Dina, the founder of MUTE, a non-governmental organization that is into documentation and information build up, is able to establish the organization because she is educated. MUTE is made up of women who have in one way or the other experienced betrayal, abandonment and lack of care from men in particular and the society at large. By divine arrangement, one of her members, Kabria, encounters a street girl-child in an unfortunate situation whose lack of education and parental care pushes her to the streets. Kabria is robbed by Fofo who disguises herself as a boy at the market; she saves her from being mobbed by the angry crowd. Kabria feigns knowing “him” because she reckons that Fofo is pushed to the streets because of lack of education and adequate parental care. In her internal monologue, she reasons:

“But in the midst of it a ray of reasoning hit Kabria. If anything happened to the boy, it would be on her conscience. Time was flying. He could have been her son. He looked to be about Obea’s age. He should have been in the classroom learning.” (70)

Through Kabria’s encounter with Fofo, MUTE takes her case up and also conducts research into what pushes children to street life. Kabria who encountered Fofo first hand on the street suggests that ‘Ultimately, her rehabilitation. While simultaneously getting to know what pushes her onto the streets’ (106). Through Kabria’s suggestion, MUTE rehabilitates Fofo for a better life. Dina, the founder of MUTE takes her home and gives her a roof over her head, she tells her colleagues; “Eventually, we will have to talk with reputable organizations like ‘Children-In-Need’ or ‘Street-Girl Aid’. But before we release her, we must be certain she will be safe. We can do our bit by adopting and sponsoring her training and all, but we must tie up all the loose ends first.” (123-124)

MUTE at this point becomes the foster parent of Fofo, having known the value of education, it is their desire to equip her with literacy empowerment that will reduce poverty and hopelessness in her family. Fofo willingly accepts the offer and decides to go into catering school. She said excitedly ‘I like catering’ (207). MUTE’s decision to rehabilitate Fofo and take her out of the street is a form of education which is geared towards sustainable development. Onwuka (2008) notes that:

“It has to be emphasized that education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge or cognitive enrichment. It involves the training of the mind in morals and in acts that will make an individual socially efficient. Socially efficient individuals should be able to use their head, heart and hands not only for themselves, but also for the well-being of their society. Such form of education must serve as an instrument for raising society to a higher moral level”. (55)

MUTE’s basic interest is to rehabilitate and empower Fofo, in addition to investigating what or who killed Baby T, her elder sister. They intend to take her out of the street and unite her with her family which will foster familial love, affinity, growth and development of the family and the society at large. This is imperative because after having seen the benefits of leaving the streets, she will be an ambassador for MUTE as she will be in a better position to convince her friends to also leave the streets. Dina tells her ‘Probably. But maybe after you have settled into your new life, you can convince her to also leave the streets’ (206). MUTE’s plans for Fofo are in line with the Sustainable Development Goal No. 1 which is to end poverty, for it has been observed that ‘more than one billion people still live on less than \$1.25/day’.

The aim is to ‘eradicate extreme poverty’. One of the approaches to eradicate poverty is through vocational trade skills training. Catering which Fofo chooses amongst other vocational training skills is an aspect of education and empowerment. MUTE rehabilitates Fofo and takes her out of the streets, thereby giving her a new lease of life. In her effort to empower Fofo and investigate into what killed Baby T, MUTE collaborates with the media, because the press has a significant role to play in the fight against ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and voicelessness. Rothman (2000) notes that ‘By virtue of their growing accessibility and increasingly interactive nature, mass media in all its forms assumes an increasing influence on the construction of a person’s reality’ (354).

MUTE collaborates with Harvest FM station through its presenter Sylv Po to unravel the mystery behind Baby T’s death. Poison, the street lord who is an accomplice in the saga feels threatened, and as a ploy to stop them, he sends a feaces parcel to MUTE. To Poison, MUTE was the cause of most of his headaches about the increasing public interest in Baby T’s death. They brought it to the attention of the media through Sylv Po, and the shit parcel was a message to them not to meddle in other people’s business. (200) Apart from rehabilitating Fofo, it is also the wish of MUTE that she lives a healthy life, after having been exposed to unprotected active sex life on the street. They achieve this by ensuring that she goes for a comprehensive check-up. ‘Fofo, you are expected to go for a comprehensive check up at the Korle-Bu Hospital’ (207).

Lack of Literacy and its Negative Effects

In Faceless, Kabria, the working class wife and mother of three children is underpaid because she lacks a higher education like her husband, Adade. The luxuries of life she desires like driving a good car eludes her because she cannot afford it. She is dependent on her husband who torments her due to her lack; even before he agrees to spray the old car which she calls ‘creamy’, after much embarrassment and humiliation. She vents her anger on her husband thus:

Don’t get sarcastic with me. Kabria retorted, if I had had the time to study further like you did, I would also have been reaping the benefits today in terms of a better salary. But I was busy making babies then. Remember? (39).

Lack of education exposes a woman to social ridicule, molestation and abandonment. Maa Tsuru’s lack of education exposes her to all kinds of exploitation by different men. They impregnate her without proper marriage, after which they abandon her. She is encumbered with many children that she cannot cater for; she therefore drives them to the streets for

menial jobs, begging, stealing and prostitution. Baby T is the unfortunate girl-child who is sold to prostitution by her mother, Maa Tsuru to Maami Broni, the commercial sex merchant. Maami Broni remits peanuts from Baby T's sweat to her mother. Fofo flashed her mind back to when Baby T was forcefully sold to prostitution thus: In her mind's eye, all she saw was a recollection of the last time she ever laid eyes on her sister. Baby T's reddish and swollen eyes from too much crying, with her belongings tied up in an old headscarf and held loosely in her right hand as she followed Maami Broni out of the compound house. (48)

Conclusion

The title of the text is symbolic as Baby T, the victim of sexual and physical oppression, exploitation and subsequent death is disfigured by the accomplices. Her facelessness makes her not to have an identity and personality because, after all, she belongs to the streets. A street girl is owned by the street and whatever happens to her is not any one's business. 'The facial mutilations were to confuse identification. That way, she could pass for a kayayoo from the north. The shaven hairs were to lend weight to the theory of her death being punishment for adultery' (230). The street child is a faceless child, without an identity or personality, no family, no relation. That is why MUTE rehabilitates Fofo and takes her out of the streets and unites her with her family. Another aspect of style is irony. It is an ironical twist that MUTE, a non-governmental organization whose name represents silence, is the same group that champions the rehabilitation and empowerment of the girl-child and takes her away from the street. Their impact is felt and appreciated by well-meaning individuals who commend them as attested to by Odarley, Fofo's friend. 'Everybody is talking about you and this organization' (209). Egbung (2011) notes that:

It is ironical that the non-governmental organization which has MUTE as its name, and not an acronym, but silence, turns out to be the organization that speaks loudest in the search for the killers of Baby T.... MUTE, therefore, becomes the voice for the voiceless (Maa Tsuru, Baby T and Fofo) and exposes the circumstances that led to the death of Baby T (15-16).

This paper examined the positive impact of literacy and the negative effects of lack of it; it has done so using Amma Darko's *Faceless*. In the text, MUTE the organization that represents literacy makes positive impact in the life of Fofo in particular, and in the society in general. If MUTE is able to empower all the street children, the society will be the better for it, as there would be no more street children who indulge in petty stealing. Fofo's rehabilitation and empowerment gives her a sense of belonging as she bounces back to normal life again. She is no more the street child who lived in fear of the street lord who brutalizes her at will;

"Fofo by then had reported to the organization to begin her rehabilitation. Her test results for Korle Bu were still not in, but she knew that MUTE would be there for her. That was consoling. She could also mourn her sister openly, that felt good." (229)

Fofo now becomes an individual who can contribute meaningfully to the development of her society because she has been educated and empowered. Egbung & Okereke (2009) argue that: 'Education is the bedrock for human development of the society. It creates awareness among the citizenry and this allows them to participate actively in the political and democratic process of their country'. (48) Fofo's empowerment in the catering business will eventually make her an active contributor to the economic development of her family in particular and the society at large thereby being an agent for sustainable development.

Works Cited: -

- Anyachonkeya, N., & Anyachonkeya, C. (2012). Literacy for Cultural Identity and Ideology. In O. Emejulu, & I. Isiugo-Abanihe (Eds.) *Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Literacy and Language Studies: Essays in Honour of Chukwuemeka Eze Onukaogu*. (Pp. 179-193). Owerri: Afrika-Link Books.
- Chukwuma, H. (1994). *Feminism in African Literature: Essays on Criticism*. Enugu: New Generation.
- Darko, A. (2003). *Faceless*. Accra: Sub-saharan Publishers.
- Dauda, R. (2001). Integration of Women into the Mainstream of the Nigerian Economy: Obstacles, Challenges and Prospects. *The Paragon: A Journal of National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS)*, 1.1, 24-41.
- Egbung, I., & Okereke, G. (2009). Education as an Equalizer: A Study of Bessie Head's *Maru* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. *CALEL: Currents in African Literature and the English Language*, vi, 47-56.

- Egbung, I. (2011). Female Solidarity as a Tool for Female Vocality in Amma Darko's Faceless. NDUNODE: Calabar Journal of the Humanities, 9. 2, 1-20.
- Etim, S., & Jarigbe, R. (2016). The Role of Literacy and the Media in Good Governance. Literacy and reading in Nigeria: Journal of the Reading Association of Nigeria, 16.1, 85-97.
- Etuk, G. (2003). Violence Against Women. Calabar: Baye Communications.
- Kabir, G. (2016). Girl-Child Education for Power and Employment for Changing Communities in Northern Nigeria. Journal of Assertiveness. 1.1, 285-293.
- Ogbeide, V. (2016). Functional Literacy as an Imperative for Good Governance in Chinua Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah. Literacy and reading in Nigeria: Journal of Reading Association of Nigeria, 16.1, 135-143.
- Onwuka, U. (2008). Igbo Women in Education. In E.J. Otagburuagu, & A. E. Afigbo (Eds.) New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio- Economic Change. (Pp. 49-63). Nsukka: Institute of African Studies.
- Ozidi, A., & Canham, P. (1975). An Introduction to the Foundation of Education. Lagos: Macmillan.
- Rothman, S. (2000). The Media, Identity and Personality. In M. Kaplan (Ed.) Character & Identity: The Sociological Foundation of Literary and Historical Perspectives. (Pp. 333- 360).
- Minnesota: Paragon House Publications. www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/what-is-sustainable-development.html.

