

Nigerian Women and Emancipation: A Focu-feminist Reading of Maryam Bobi's *Bongel*

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Abstract

Relegation of Nigerian women to subordinate positions is one of the major factors that limit their self-actualisation and meaningful participation in the trend of development. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has helped however them to overcome the limitation by presenting them with wider opportunities for self-development and participation in national development. Previous studies on Maryam Bobi's *Bongel* have examined it from the angle of women's victimisation but women's assertiveness for their emancipation is left out. This study examines the role of Nigerian women in gaining freedom from gender-induced oppression through the chances made available to them by technological advancement in the text. Focu-feminism is used as a theoretical framework. The text is subjected to a qualitative literary analysis. *Bongel* is chosen for this study because it depicts victimisation against women as well as the women's emancipatory effort. This study shows that every victimised female character in the text devises and employs a different strategy she considers most appropriate in overcoming her unique oppressive situation. This study contributes to the on-going awareness on bridging the gender gap in Nigeria. It concludes that resorting to inward capabilities is the most veritable strategy for the Nigerian woman's empowerment, self-actualisation, and her necessary contributory roles to national development.

Key Words: Focu-feminism, Fourth industrial revolution, Gender studies, Maryam Bobi

Introduction

Rapid increase in technological development has been facilitated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and

African women are playing vital roles as participants and beneficiaries. The increase has reflected in the awareness on the need to bridge every gender gap in

order to give both men and women equal opportunities for self-development and active involvement in the current waves of advancement in the society.

Through the fourth industrial revolution, innovations have been recorded in digital technology that is now used in education and media industries. These have improved the modes of educational acquisition and have helped to bring education to the door-step of the Nigerian woman. The advancement in the media has also helped to facilitate awareness creation on the existence of these new innovations, and the Nigeria woman can access information on different media platforms in order to align herself with current development trends. Her role is no longer limited to home-making but while playing this role, she can engage in personal development through e-learning and entrepreneurial programmes available on different digital platforms, thus becoming an active participant in the development trends in the local and global communities. Besides, with improved technological gadgets like phones and computers as well as the Internet of Things (IoT), better opportunities are made available for the Nigerian woman, thus improving the quality of her life and participation in national development.

Traditionally, Nigerian women occupy subordinate positions in every aspect of the society – cultural, socio-economic,

political, and religious spheres. They are expected to play only roles that revolve around family life – domestic duties to support their families and procreation to sustain their husband's ancestry. The image of female characters in most northern Nigerian literary texts is a validation of the above view. Their victimised and subjugated image is glaring in Audee Giwa's *Yarinya*, Mohammed Razinat's *The Travails of a First Wife* and *Habiba*, Abubaka Gimba's *Witnesses to Tears*, Sefiya Yero's *Naja*, A'aisha Abdulkareem's *Yar'fari* among others. Most female characters in the texts "suffer discrimination and marginalization ... denial of their rights to choose marital partners, denial of access to education and denial of opportunities to participate in politics and developmental processes. ...they still experience domestic violence and gender stereotype." (Chukwu 36). They are treated as inferior individuals and that confirms the view of Joseph Mayaki and Emmanuel Omobowale that the term, 'woman' in a patriarchal environment socially connotes "a form of inferiority, rather than ... humanity." (72) The reason for such denigration is not unconnected to patriarchy, in which the culture of the northern Nigerian region is ingrained.

Women are victims of gender-induced discrimination and the consequent suppression in patriarchal African

society. It is true that women from every part of Nigeria experience gender discrimination in their day-to-day activities, its weight is heavier on those from the Northern region. Olopade Tokunbo affirms that

The Hausa culture, like most African cultures, is patriarchal and traditionally limits the woman. The northern Nigerian woman is such that is brought up piously with so much discipline. She is told from birth to dress in a certain way, walk in a certain way, when to talk and when to be silent. She learns early in life that she is inferior to her male folk. (285)

African women, from birth to death, are believed to belong to men as fathers, husbands, and lovers, and as a result, are expected to live for the benefits of the men, from meeting their multiple domestic needs to satisfying their sexual cravings, and most importantly, give birth to male heirs for them. This is the experience of northern Nigerian women; their lives revolve around only home-making. This restriction does not give them room for self-development. The men take control of other aspects of life which are considered more important because their orientation towards women is that their duty "... ends in the kitchen and the other rooms" (Ngharen and Christian 206).

Generally, African society is "patriarchal ... [and] promotes gender structures" (Usoro 165). The perception about individuals and its consequent value are determined by gender-based orientation about men and women in Nigerian society. Male children are counted as an advantage, while the opposite view is held about female children. As a result, 'giving birth' to many sons is always the major reason why a woman is given out in marriage and she aspires to fulfil this role. An instance is seen in the wish of the eldest man in the family of Obierika in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. During the marriage ceremony of Akueke, Obierika's daughter, the eldest man of the bride's family tells the in-laws, "[We] are giving you our daughter today. She will be a good wife to you. *She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town*" (Achebe 93), (emphasis mine). The prayer of the eldest man does not only reveal that women are to be good wives but there is also an expectation on them to bear many male children for their husband. The value placed on male children makes them preferred. This is clearly demonstrated by Okonkwo in the same text. He "never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl" (138) because she is so intelligent that "she understood things so perfectly" (139). He would have preferred such a well-coordinated and intelligent child to be a son so that he could take care of his homestead when

he dies. In the same manner, Mallam Jarmai in Sefiya Yero's *Naja* regrets that his smart and intelligent daughter, Naja "should have been a boy. It's a pity that all that intelligence has gone to waste in a girl" (7). The opinion of the aforementioned men unveils that men and women in Nigerian society are expected to behave differently because certain qualities are particularly associated with being a male or a female. For the men, it is counted as a huge loss when a woman is intelligent and brilliant; men are known to be endowed with such qualities. This high regard for men and low regard for women determines how they are treated in social, political, economic, and religious spheres of the society. This is more pronounced in northern Nigeria. While boys are sent to school, girls are never given such an opportunity; they are given out in forced marriages sometimes to men who are old enough to be their grandfathers. Ibrahim Chinade concurs:

African women suffered in silence several degrees of injustices in the form of oppressions, marginalisation and other traumatic experiences associated with being female. Either as a daughter, wife or mother the African woman is not free of man's battering at the slightest provocation. Cases of forced marriages of girls to men

sometimes old enough to be their grandparents are common throughout Africa. (186)

Low regard for women places them at a disadvantaged position. Even when they are sent to school, their education acquisition is in the interest of men. This is reflected in the choice of their educational career. Bosede Afolayan's position is in alignment with the above view when she asserts that:

Male children were given access to education while their female counterparts were left to domestic chores, kept as maids, learnt a trade or made to work to keep their brothers in school. Even when women eventually got education, they were trained as Home-Economists, teachers, and seamstresses. ...The whole idea was to get education in order to be a good wife. (133)

The above excerpt reveals that Nigerian/African women are treated with less value and are given less opportunities for personal development and destiny fulfilment. The reason for this is that the society is patriarchal and has less recognition and value for women. Every decision in any society whose value is entrenched in patriarchy is taken in the best interest of men. It gives men the first and best place in

every aspect of life, while it limits women's live to domesticity and matrimony. Obiora and Ugochukwu note that in patriarchal environment, "males dominate in all social, political, economic, legal, and cultural roles. For instance, in most patriarchal societies, women were very much confined to the domestic sphere, where they were completely cut off from the realities of the society" (21). Nigerian women are victims of preference for male children, domestic violence, forced child-marriage, dowry/bride price system, strife and rivalry associated with polygamy, among others. The experience of Bobi's female protagonist in *Bongel* is an attestation to this observation.

Synopsis of Maryam Bobi's *Bongel*

Bongel is born into a family where her father usually gives his daughters out in marriage between the age of ten and twelve. Bongel is not happy when she becomes twelve years old because she is afraid that what has become her father's ritual must be done and that would result in the truncation of her dream to go to school, and become helpful to the society. This dream is cut short when her father eventually forces her to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather. Her father is happy because Bongel's husband, Alhaji Tanko, has made him richer by giving him many cows as dowry, which is a cultural requirement for marrying a woman in their Fulani

community. She gets pregnant and loses the baby because of prolong labour and finally develops vesicovaginal fistula (VVF). She is admitted to a hospital and surgery is carried out on her. On getting the news that the baby is stillbirth, Bongel's father and her husband sent two divorce letters, one from her husband to her and the other from her father to her mother who is taking care of her in the hospital. Her mother, Jummai along with Bongel, goes back to her father's house. She resolves to take care of her daughter until she is fully recovered. She enrolls her in a school by her earnings from the farming and dairy business. Bongel later gets a scholarship from the state government from secondary school to university. She graduates as a qualified medical doctor, and her dream of becoming an important person and contributing to the development of the society through rendering of service is realised.

Focu-feminism

Over time, most views of critics on oppression against women are that men are the perpetrators. African culture also has been blamed for structuring every belief and practice in favour of men to the detriment of women. The emergence of feminism, both as a theory and as a movement, has equally aligned with this line of thought; it advocates the abolition of policies and practices that breed discrimination and oppression against

women. Its adherents advocate fairness in the treatment of men and women. However, different variants of feminism have different opinions with regard to which strategy is the most effective in tackling oppression against women. This results in diverse opinions about which approach to use in overcoming oppression by women. This means that feminists have not come to a consensus with regard to the most appropriate strategy to bring a lasting solution to oppression against women, hence a gap in scholarship, which Onyeka Iwuchukwu's approach to feminism is targeted at filling.

Iwuchukwu's Focu-feminism posits that "oppression and subjugation of women come in different forms, shapes, and magnitudes predicated by each woman's cultural background and circumstance" (77). It disapproves of the notion of blaming men and culture for women's predicament because that view has been "overstretched and is becoming a dissipation of energy and is no longer very relevant in contemporary society" (77). It, therefore, proposes the need for "each woman to focus on herself, her peculiar circumstances, and cultural background for liberation from perceived oppression, for empowerment and self-actualisation". (77) The dispositions and reactions of female characters to different circumstances of life in literary works are attestations that every

woman's oppression experience differs, and her reaction to situations of life also varies; each woman achieves her real liberation when she employs an approach she considers the best for dismantling any structure that constitutes an impediment to her self-development, self-actualisation and active participation in societal advancement. Female characters in Bobi's *Bongel* get their liberation and attain self-fulfilment by the application of focu-feminist orientation, thus validating the applicability of focu-feminist philosophy to the reading of literary texts.

Subjugation against Women in *Bongel*

The girl-child in northern Nigeria, from her father's house to her husband's home, is not only treated as a second-class citizen, but also lives in bondage. She answers to the call and beckon of the men. She is not allowed to express her opinion on any issue at all; she is only expected to obey and carry out the instructions of the men after they have taken decisions on important matters. The protagonist of the text, Bongel is a victim of this kind of belief and practice. She is not involved in the choice of whom to marry and is cut off from the entire marriage plan. She is informed about the marriage plan only when the decision has been made and the plan has been concluded by her father. She, by cultural demand on the girl-child, is not expected to question the authority of her

father nor object his decision for whatever reason. She is literally bundled into the hellish marriage, and the consequences are too pathetic for her to bear.

Jummai, Bongel's mother, is also a victim of the culture that does not value women beyond procreation. Having heard the information about the prospect of girl-child education for an individual and the society, she attempts to verbally convince her husband to change his decision and allow Bongel to go to school. All her explanations to her husband are futile because every man in their community does not like women's education. When Jummai's father hears that she wants Bongel to go to school, he is not happy for Jummai's unacceptable behaviour for a Fulani woman. He pays her an impromptu visit to caution her to desist from such an attitude with the following words, "I don't have words to waste either. I only came to beg you to stop rubbing my name in the mud. You are a Fulani woman. You better start behaving like one, or I will disown you" (53). The threat from her father reveals the reality about the life of Fulani women. They are not allowed to have a say in any matter at all, including the one that is directly connected to their personal life. The warning is meant to specifically remind her of the implication of not complying with the stipulated docility for Fulani women.

In the Fulani community where Bongel grew up, male children are preferred to female children. It is this belief that is responsible for all the woes that befall Bongel. Just like the eldest man in Oberika's family in *Things Fall Apart*, Bongel's Father, Mallam Buba wishes that she would give birth to many male children for Alhaji Tanko, her husband. He tells her:

... And I am sure that after you have given Alhaji one or two sons, he will take you to see the Ka'abbah and the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah. You will come back home wearing gold teeth and trinkets. People will begin to address you as Hajiya Bongel. Are you not the most favoured of them all? Which of your other sisters came close to your state, my dear Bongel? (57)

Mallam Buba's wish for Bongel reveals how a woman is valued in a patriarchal society; her worth is tied to giving birth to male children, and how she would be treated is dependent on how she plays that role. It is glaring in the expression of Mallam Buba that Bongel would receive a good treatment from her husband only on the condition of giving him sons. What this implies is that failure to meet that expectation would attract a contrary treatment, which later happens when she has a stillbirth. On learning that she has a stillbirth, her father neither shows

sympathy for the irreplaceable loss for Bongel nor concern for her health condition and the emotional pain that the situation must have brought upon her. He is particularly inquisitive about the sex of the dead baby. He asks the doctor, “was it a male or ...?” (77). He does not mention ‘a female’ because for men, a female is a being without identity and therefore does not deserve to be mentioned. He accuses Bongel of killing the baby in the following words: “I knew Bongel would do anything to kill that child. She hated Alhaji! She killed him and ruined my fortune! (77). His attitude towards her in that critical moment reveals the high value placed on males while females are only used as a means of getting other necessary needs of the men. He wishes that Bongel will give birth to a baby boy because that would further help to secure and seal his relationship with Alhaji Tanko, the source of his wealth. The narrator describes him as “a man who craves wealth as a desert craves water. He would do anything to expand his herd of cattle and nothing brought the smile to his face like when one of his daughters’ suitors promised to deliver more cows to his herd.” (38) He is a man who amasses wealth by giving his daughters out in early marriage at the expense of their destinies. Here, the girl-child is used as a means of getting the most important need met.

Early child marriage is another gender-based practice that has a negative implication for the girl-child in northern Nigerian. A Fulani girl is expected to be married off immediately she marks her twelfth birthday. Jummai (Bongel’s mother), Bongel, and all her sisters are victims of this obnoxious culture. Jummai is married off at the age of nine while her daughters were given out in marriage at the age of ten and twelve. Mallam Buba is one of those men who believe that it is a waste of effort and resources to send a girl-child to school since she would end up being married off. He refuses to reconsider his position on this early child marriage when it gets to the turn of Bongel. He clearly expresses his disapproval in the following words: “Nonsense! Some of her sisters were all married at the age of ten. Bongel is twelve already. I married their mother when she was nine. She is still alive and healthy” (50). For him, Bongel is already overdue for marriage at the age of twelve. The child-marriage is hellish for Bongel. She is not emotionally mature enough to handle the strife associated with polygamy. This is why she is so scared of her co-wife that she dodges from being seen by her because she always make negative comments about her any time she sees her. Forced child-marriage also comes with other health challenges like Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF). The most painful aspect of her experience is that Bongel is

abandoned in the hospital by her husband and her father when she develops this health condition after the stillbirth experience. This shows that the two men are never concerned about her individual well-being; they are only interested in her responsibility of giving her husband male children.

Dowry/bride price is another gender-based practice that reduces a woman to one of her husband's possessions. In the case of Bongel, her father uses her as a means of increasing and sustaining his fortune. Alhaji Tanko has given him many cows as dowry in order to marry Bongel. Mallam Buba, her father, points at the cows and tells her, "They are all ours, Bongel. Your dowry paid in full by your generous husband" (55). His reaction, when Bongel verbally expresses her unhappiness about the arranged marriage because she wants to go to school, is a confirmation that the girl-child is regarded as wealth-making possession for her family. He reminds her:

My child ... we are communal people. You don't let your personal ambition jeopardize the family or communal interest. You want to go to school; the family needs cattle to survive. You of all persons should still remember the recent challenges we had. It causes the size of our herd to deplete at an alarming degree. Rather than being

this way, you ought to be proud. You ought to be grateful to Allah that, through you, the family has been able to bounce back to its feet. (56)

The expression of her father in the above excerpt reveals that the future of the girl-child in the fictional Fulani community is used as an alternative forgone in order to get the most important need of the family met. The mood of every member of her family in the day of the marriage ceremony shows they are happy for their dream, which has come true. It is noticed that they "were shouting and singing as far as they were concerned, no better thing could have happened to the family than for it to be linked with the prestigious and wealthy Alhaji Tanko" (54). When she is pregnant, her mother "prayed for a safe delivery, Buba and Alhaji Tanko prayed for a male child" (74), but her father "wanted more cattle, and only Alhaji Tanko could supply those" (74). This reveals the erroneous belief that the marriage of the Fulani's girl-child is believed to be a sure way of getting the family's wealth ambition achieved. Here, the girl-child is treated by men like an object for trade by barter. This reveals why her father, Mallam Buba does not care about the emotional trauma of losing a child after nine months of pregnancy, and the physical pain of a surgical operation to treat the VVF. He is rather worried because he

would not get more cows he hopes to get through the marriage. It is noticed that everybody's interest except hers is represented in the marriage decision. This practice and its pathetic effects on the woman keep Bongel wondering "How could her father just negotiate her off as if she was one of the cattle? Was it her fault she wasn't born a boy?" (36) The destiny of the girl-child is traded in exchange for accrual of more wealth for her father and the entire family to her detriment.

Women in the Fulani community in the text live at the mercy of the men. The men exert control over them. Mallam Buba's autocratic attitude is a confirmation of this view. His wife makes an effort to convince him to allow Bongel to go to school but he cautions her thus, "What is wrong with you, Jummai? Why are you teaching your daughter bad manners? ... As far as I am concerned, this is an already concluded matter. It's a matter of weeks, Bongel will be in her husband's house" (39). Mallam Buba does not seek Bongel's consent about the choice of husband. He only informs her after the choice has been made and the marriage plan has been concluded. It is stated that "her father had married her off at twelve to a very wealthy man whom she did not even know, much less love" (27). This gets Bongel emotionally devastated. It is noticed that:

Though she appeared calm, streaks of tears slid down her cheeks. No sane girl would wish to be married to a man old enough to be her grandfather, a potbellied, charcoal-black, wrinkled man whom she did not know much less like. ... Bongel didn't feel any different from any of her father's animals. They were often chased, caught, bound, and led to the slaughter slab, without the right to defend themselves. She felt as if she had just been killed, and these hungry cannibals were dancing and singing on top of her waiting to savour her bit by bit. (58-59)

Bongel is worried most because the "terrifying prospect of not ever getting to complete her education before becoming betrothed dented [her] self-esteem." (32) The "thought of being sent to the home of a full grown man whom she didn't know was too much for Bongel. She couldn't even work up a mental picture of herself as a married woman – a full house wife" (49). Bongel's marriage is a hellish experience, and the divorce verdict she gets after the death of her baby shows that a Fulani woman is not valued beyond procreation to secure the future of her husband and that of her father. Bongel is surprised that his father who refuses to render any financial help to save her life when she was in the hospital, has "sold off half of his cattle to

marry a new wife” after divorcing her mother. (82) Women are treated like ordinary property by men in the culture that does everything in favour of men. Men acquire women by simply fulfilling the traditional requirement of dowry payment as stipulated by custom. The women could also be disposed of any time by the men who are at liberty to engage in that marital routine in as much as they could afford the cost of dowry payment. Bongel, Jummai, and other wives and daughters of Mallam Buba and Alhaji Tanko are victims of such gender-induced practice against Fulani women.

Women's Emancipation in *Bongel*

The twenty-first century northern Nigerian women, unlike their predecessors who were gullible, subservient, and passive, are resilient, assertive, confident, and audacious to confront and conquer challenges of life. Education and media, which have been greatly advanced by the fourth industrial revolution, are among the most veritable ladders for their rising. The fourth industrial revolution promotes technological advancement; this has been reflected in the media. Through the media, awareness on gender equality is brought to the door step of the Nigerian women, and they become abreast of the trend of development in the global community and align themselves with it. Jummai in *Bongel* hears the information

about girl-child education over the radio and decides to inform her husband about it; she tells him:

The times are changing, my husband. Many people of our stock are now sending their children out to get Western education. Since none of our other children went to school, in that they didn't show much interest or promise, would it not be unfair to deprive Lastborn the opportunity to do so? Besides, *the government is saying that every girl has the right to education. ...They talk about all these on radio.* (40) (italics mine)

Jummai in the above excerpt also uses her position as a woman and homemaker to engage in the campaign targeted at bridging the gender gap through education. The novelist, through her voice as an uneducated character, conveys an important message to African women in general and Nigerian women in particular: the woman, irrespective of her educational status, can decisively become an agent of positive change by utilising any available opportunity to her in her extant space. Jummai gets the information about the attitudinal change towards women's education in her community and decides to persuade her husband to appropriate it in their familial space.

The headmistress, on the other hand and unlike Jummai, is educated. Her involvement in the campaign on gender equality through women's education, is commendable. She is mentally and economically empowered. Her positive disposition is testimonial to the fact that "meaningful women's education should seek to enhance their sense of self-worth and pride in the role they play in society" (Oriaku 130). She is the only woman who has the courage and confidence to look Mallam Buba in the face and discuss the importance of the girl-child education and gives him reasons why he should allow his daughter, Bongel to go to school. She tells him:

I am sure you are not unaware of your daughter's brilliant mind and promising prospect. All of us at school, the teacher and I, were glad that a new generation led by your daughter is shooting up in Bongel. The time is long overdue for our children, especially the girls, to rise up and match their counterparts from the other parts [of the world]. (46)

The headmistress in the above excerpt predicts a time when African/Nigerian women would measure up with the trend of development around the world, hence, the era of the fourth industrial revolution. This prediction is a reality on the continent today. Innovation in the 4IR has been reflected in the advancement in

the education and media industries; this has increased the African/Nigerian women's chances of playing a participatory role in self-actualisation and national development as exemplified by the lives of the headmistress and that of the protagonist after they acquire education. The headmistress having a good understanding of the importance of women's education persuades Mallam Buba further:

Imagine what could happen if Bongel ... goes on to college and beyond. Imagine the good it would do to your family and the country at large. I beg you to reconsider. Just the other day, Farida, Mallam Tanimus's wife, died because he wouldn't permit her to visit the hospital, where a male doctor would examine her even when there were no female doctors at hand. It is only when people like Bongel goes to school that such ugly incident could be averted. (50)

The carriage of the educated headmistress and the tact with which she presents her argument before Mallam Buba confirm that education imbues a woman with positive self-esteem and equips her with the needed wisdom for self-actualisation and global relevance. Her composure and the brilliance with which she expresses her conviction about the prospect of women's education

“reinforced Bongel’s desire to go to school and become a very important woman in society.” (44) Bongel is particularly impressed by the way she “spoke gently but with authority and confidence, unlike her mother who would barely look her father in the face. Bongel was sure only education could arm a woman so, a conviction that left her the more resolved to go to school.” (46) With the above view, Bobi concurs with Oriaku that:

Feminists believe that the restriction of women’s opportunities for formal education conduces to their continued marginalisation since the ability to read and write expands the individual’s horizon and enhances both their capacity to cope with exigencies and their sense of who they are. Education, therefore, is a sine qua non for liberation from imposed values and identities. (132) conduces

The headmistress is cast in the image of the ideal twenty-first century African/Nigerian woman; she is diligent, responsible and multi-tasking. She is able to combine her teaching career with her role as a dutiful wife and mother in the home sphere. Her position on the matter of gender equality with particular emphasis on women’s education reveals her feminist conviction. Feminists all

over the world hinge their agitation on equal opportunities for men and women in every aspect of the society. The agitation is based on the fact that gender-based discrimination hinders societal progress. They, therefore, advocate the termination of every gender-induced act and practice in the society because they are “...capable of truncating women’s involvement in national development” (Daniel et al 330).

The novelist’s focu-feminist posture is glaring in the way she pairs the educated and uneducated female characters who utilize available opportunities to them to achieve desired results. The educated headmistress uses her advantaged position as the head of an educational institution to promote awareness on gender equality. Jummai, on the other hand, is not educated, but she is not conservatively rigid with regard to the trend of change in her environment. She tells Bongel, “You shall go to college, Lastborn! You shall go and study and wipe these tears from my eyes. You shall rid me of this poverty and hardship, which would only get worse as I grow older.” (36) Her dream comes to pass when she engages in entrepreneurial activities, realises money and gets Bongel back to school. When she was divorced by her husband, she does not allow the unexpected negative turn of events to deter her from her decision to send Bongel to school. She achieves that

by employing inward-looking strategy as focu-feminist orientation posits and harnesses her economic enterprising capabilities through farming and dairy business. This avails Bongel the opportunity to win “a scholarship from the state government to complete her studies up to the university level” (78). She graduates as a qualified medical doctor, and her dream of becoming self-reliant in order to positively contribute to societal development becomes a reality.

Conclusion

This study has discussed the predicament and subjugation faced by women in the patriarchal society where males are preferred in Bobi's *Bongel*. Different experiences of women were portrayed, and their unique reactions to oppressive situations were depicted, revealing the novelist's focu-feminist alignment. While she believes that education can equip the woman with the mental and economic strength required for liberation from the claws of an oppressive system, it is her conviction that a woman, irrespective of educational status, is at liberty to employ focu-feminist principle of harnessing inward capabilities to overcome oppression of any kind. While the headmistress has the boldness to challenge gender inequality and its consequent domination over women because of her level of education, Jummai, though not educated, resorts to her endowed resourceful capabilities to

overcome the patriarchal obstacles that attempt to prevent her self-actualisation and that of her daughter. This suggests that African women in general and Nigerian women in particular, rather than blaming men for their predicament, should focus on their inward strength and devise liberation strategies most appropriate to their unique oppressive experiences, thus the validity of focu-feminist principle to the reading of literary texts.

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