

**NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND THE IMAGE OF AN EMANCIPATED  
SOMALI WOMAN IN NURUDDIN FARAH'S *FROM A CROOKED RIB***

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the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature, University of Nairobi.**

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## DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been presented for examination or the award of a degree in any other university

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This research project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as the university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research project report to:

My mother, Dahabo Sheikh Abdullahi, who leads me through the valley of darkness with

light of hope and support

My darling family, the source of my happiness and inspiration

You all you have successfully made me the person I am becoming

And you will always be remembered.

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***“Thanking others is part of gratitude to Allah”***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the novel *From a Crooked Rib* by Nuruddin Farah. The main task is to look at how the picture of an emancipated Somali woman is drawn literarily by the author. To this end, I interrogate the author's use of specific literary elements such as plot, characterization, and point of view to show the journey of women characters from disempowerment to empowerment. Further, the study employs Feminist theory to examine the theme of female emancipation as it is brought out in the novel, as a source of conflict for one woman's quest for self-determination against great odds. The study, therefore, analyzes several literary variables in search of an understanding of how the main character, Ebla, is presented within the context of the broader African literature.





## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

The foundation of my study is pegged to the view that dominant forces in society often serve to conceal the real nature of the exploitative relations of production which then leads to the formation of false consciousness mostly among the exploited proletariat, causing further exploitation. However, with time consciousness often dawns and the journey to change the status quo becomes inevitable. My study hinges on the presentation of women characters that come to an awareness of their condition through experience and embark on a liberation journey.

*From a Crooked Rib* by Nuruddin Farah, presents us with more developed literary variables that make it a proper text for such analysis. Besides this novel, Nuruddin Farah has authored other ten novels, a book of nonfiction and numerous critical articles. The principle works of Nuruddin Farah include: *Why Die Soon* (1965), *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), *A Naked Needle* (1976), *Territories* (2000) and *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2015). Farah is also the writer of two trilogies namely, *Blood in the Sun and Return to Somalia*. Therefore, in selecting his title I am also evaluating a venerable writer's contribution to some of the themes that have dogged African literature over a period of time.

My interest in *From a Crooked Rib* is to investigate how Nuruddin Farah creates and presents Ebla as a woman protagonist who moves away from the false consciousness of traditional society to empowerment through space and time. The character can be taken to symbolically represent the ordinary Somali woman. However, it is outside the scope of this study to make a case for the Somali woman's social liberation in general. That is why

this literary study looks at the movement of Ebla with regards to narrative elements which her creator, Farah, adopts to tell her story. These elements are: plot development, characterization and point of view. It is these literary tools that enabled me to unmask the false consciousness that form the world of Ebla at one stage of her life and how she progresses towards empowerment at another point.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study investigates how Nuruddin Farah has manipulated the literary plot, characterization and point of view towards the creation of an emancipated Somali woman character in his novel, *From the Crooked Rib*.

## **1.3 Objectives**

This research was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To analyze the novel's plot development, characterization and point of view;
- ii. To evaluate how these narrative variables reflect the author's vision of an emancipated Somali woman.

## **1.4 Hypotheses**

This research project set out to test the following assumptions:

- i. Farah develops the plot, characterization and point of view in the novel with the aim of showing the path of women liberation in the Somali society;
- ii. The author's vision of an emancipated woman in a Somali society can be discerned from a study of the three narrative variables.

## 1.5 Justification

The novel presents the protagonist as becoming aware of her situation as an exploited person. It is worth investigating how Nuruddin Farah develops this idea of exploitation as coming from a false consciousness generated from tradition. This comes out clearly through the study of plot development. Also, it is important to investigate the way Nuruddin Farah conceptualizes the place of the woman in *From a Crooked Rib*. To understand this conceptualization of woman it is important to study the way Farah employs characterization devices to show the conditions that predispose the woman as a subject and how her character changes to that of a woman as an agent of change.

Nuruddin

According to Florence Stratton (1990:98), female characters have been figured in a variety of ways, some of which are gender stereotypes and gender inequality. She further says that female characters are portrayed as mothers who are confined within the home, but have the responsibility of taking care of their household and their husbands. The female's place is seen as the kitchen where they perform other kitchen chores. She also deposits that many male writers have encoded female characters as agents of moral corruption and contamination in their society (Stratton, 1994).

*From a Crooked Rib* was published in 1970. By then there were only a handful of female writers in a society where girl-child education delayed the emergence of the woman writer, at least according to Flora Nwapa in *In their Own Voices*. This leads us to the question of empathy, and the question of point of view. It is imperative to understand the point of view from which the story of Ebla is told. This helps to create an understanding of male writers and how they handle female characters in their works.

Then again, I chose this novel because even though time has changed since it was published in 1970, not much has changed in the Somali society if one goes by the number of literary production coming from the country, such as like *Desert Flower* (2001) and *Desert Dawn* (2004) by Waris Dirie; and *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (2013) by Nadifa Mohammed, to mention but a few. The above mentioned books have 31 to 43 years between them and Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, yet the subject matter that informs the plot of the narratives deal with the subjugation of the woman by tradition. Therefore, studying the text is helpful in highlighting how the author uses artistry to reflect the struggle of women in patriarchal societies.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation**

The study only reads *From a Crooked Rib* by Nuruddin Farah. The study follows a qualitative research approach, involving a critical analysis of the novel, as the primary method. It involves a preliminary descriptive examination of the perceptions and experiences of Somali women and girls as depicted in the novel. It is limited to what the author has presented in his development of the plot and what other authors' literary works have said about Somali women.

## 1.7 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a contextual background for this research. It will also include relevant discourses on women emancipation and empowerment both from literary and sociological settings in order to clearly present a framework upon which analysis would be undertaken to help appreciate how consciousness and empowerment are necessary a tool for women participation in societal transformation. In an essay titled *Nationalism and the Aporia of National Identity in Farah's Maps*, Francis Ngaboh-Smart analyzes the works of Nurrudin Farah and how the identity of the nation is brought out in the repertoire that includes essays by the Somali author. Ngaboh-Smart states:

Farah uses the demeaning roles of women under patriarchy to criticize some codes of culture and pose questions about human agency... (*Research in African Literatures*. 32.3, Fall 200: p86.)

This statement by the writer is important in highlighting the issues which I deal with in my study. The question of human agency is at the core of empowering the woman. It is key to my study. This work has impacted on my research by widening the scope to include other works of Farah which illuminate woman empowerment.

In *From a Crooked Rib* there is the sense a feminist consciousness expressed by the characters. But what Ngaboh-Smart has not looked into is how the narrative devices have been employed in re-imagining a liberated Somali woman. This is the gap that my study shall seek to fill. My study has also improved on the work of Ngaboh-Smart by bringing to the argument the way Farah develops the literary strategies to bring about the idea of a character who is an agent of change as far as the condition of the woman is involved.

Another critic who has evaluated Farah's literary productions is Derek Wright whose body of work on the author is titled *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah* (2004) examines the thematic and stylistic contributions that this venerable Somali-born writer has made to the world of literature. Another critic Michael Eldridge commenting on Wright's output in *Africa Today* (52.1 2005) states that:

A scholar's scholar, Wright is unapologetically old-fashioned: his study is intended as an introductory overview of Farah's fiction, and for the most part he has sidestepped "more arcane and recondite critical territory" (p. 3) for dense but lucid close readings focusing on theme, symbol, and narrative technique. Wright has always taken care to situate Farah's work within its appropriate cultural and political contexts, however, which contexts he deftly and sensitively adumbrates in an introductory chapter. He is at pains to emphasize that in Farah's often elusive texts—grounded equally in Somali oratory, Arabic classicism, and European modernism, and influenced by such diverse contemporaries as Borges, Grass, and Rushdie—"the ancient and the postmodern join hands" (p. 15). Indeed, Wright nimbly surveys Farah's full stylistic range, from the "unadorned" prose of his debut, *From a Crooked Rib*, to the highly wrought figures, convoluted narratives, and cryptic themes of his more mature works. Often, he observes, Farah playfully mixes his stylistic palette: *Sweet and Sour Milk*, for example, is a "conflation of detective novel, political thriller[,] and nouveau roman" (p. 15), passed through the filter of a "surrealist poetics" (p. 45)... (p141).

A critic's critic, Michael Eldridge, looks at how Derek Wright analyzes the various components of Farah's novelistic repertoire. The work by Derek does not specifically dwell on *From a Crooked Rib* in terms of how the image of a liberated Somali woman is brought to bear on the narrative as a result of narrative strategies. Particularly, on my chosen text,

Eldridge states that Wright has looked at it with respect to “immaturity of unadorned prose” putting the focus on only one element of the work: language use. My study will push the critical interest on the novel beyond these shores to illuminate further how the author’s main message is tied to such style as described as ‘unadorned prose’.

Writing in *College Literature*, (Summer of 2010: 84-0\_8), Ines Mzali looks at a stylistic feature that Farah employs in one of the author’s latest works, *Links*. Titled, “Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Farah’s *Links*”, the paper focuses on how the author disavows the West’s representation of his war tone motherland in its media. This he does through the use of metonymy where the reality of violence is obstructed from the audience with the view of showing the development of it and the impact it has on the people, something which Farah finds amiss in the media in the West. Mzali states:

The title of the novel suggests metonymy as a meta-narrative strategy. More than a theme, the noun "links" becomes a trope almost as pervasive in the novel as violence in Mogadishu. Commenting on Farah's narrative style, Alden and Tremarne notice that he uses "special forms of narrative, which are named in the titles of the three novels: *Maps, Gifts, and Secrets*. These special narrative modes serve at the same time as metaphors for the equivocal nature of the power of all narratives of self-invention" (1998, 760). The title of *Links* similarly enunciates the main trope in the novel. Not only do "links" in the title and in the novel signal a connectedness between different points or links in a chain, but they also imply the delay of meaning and action from one to the other.

The title functions metaphorically as a signal of the movement of violence in the Somali society depicted in the novel and contains both principles of displacement and

contiguity. Mzali looks at Farah's strategy of narrating his homeland through metonymic representation. His study has helped me to understand the stylistic features of my chosen novel. It helps to highlight some of the stylistic decisions of Farah and their effect on the overall message.

Furthermore, in the critical write-up titled "The Performance of Madness as Resistance in Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame*" which appeared on *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, October, 2015: 1-35,193), Colson Roberts analyzes how Farah represent the spirit of resistance through the trope of madness. Roberts opines that madness is:

...a performance of resistance against the Somali dictatorship of Mohammed Siyad Barre...Farah presents madness as a performance rather than a manifestation of mental illness in order to protect those who speak and act out against tyranny as well as their associates and families. The novel's presentation of these counter-hegemonic performances has implications for the study of narrative representations of dictatorship in Africa as well as for understanding the linkage between the colonial and neocolonial disciplinary attitudes toward resistance fighters in East Africa (p. 193).

This work contributes to my work by looking at the narrative element of "characterization" and affirms my own argument that indeed Nuruddin Farah uses the narrative elements to bring about a specific message in a way that is unique to his works. He is a master of the meta-metaphor where every phenomenon that is depicted is meant to communicate symbolic representation of a deeper message of his Somali people whom he knows so well. This work by Roberts tells of the theme of resistance to tyranny and is very closely related to my own work which looks at resistance by female characters to male hegemony in patriarchal Somali society.



Further afield, the pioneers of African literature like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Peter Abrahams were men. Women felt that literature mostly written by men did not fully represent the struggle of the woman in the society. But this opinion did not hold for long for there was an interest in male writers to articulate issues across the line of gender. The first novel among these male writers is Ousmane Sembene. In *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Sembene brings out Ramatoulaye as a strong female character who is a crucial element in the success of the Dakar railway strike. Karen Sacks writing in *Women and Class Struggle in Sembene's God's Bits of Wood* argues that women by virtue of their sex are part of the Marxist conception of the proletariat. The issue of fighting for equality of the classes cannot ignore that of the sexes. In this quest of an ideal equal society in Sembene's novel we find its equivalent in *From a Crooked Rib* where the author expresses the same vision. Another critic is Rita Nalumansi, who, while writing in *African News Service*, captures the feminist pith of the text as follows:

The women are portrayed as strong and determined—a force to reckon with. They were not ready to sit and accept what fate put on their plates, these were women who knew what is good for them and they fought for the survival of their children and husbands. To win the struggle, it was important that the people stood together, that is why they needed to do away with their own inward battles of jealousy, envy, uncertainties, fear among others (*Africa News Service*, Nov. 30, 2004).

In *From a Crooked Rib*, Nurrudin Farah brings out strong women characters like Aowralla, Asha, the Widow and Ebla herself. It is important to tap into how male writers represent women by comparing the two novels. Much like Farah, Chinua Achebe's

*Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) presents strong female characters hankering for self-determination. Beatrice Okoh emerges as a strong female character. Annie Sullivan, writing in *The Question of a National Literature for Nigeria*, states that Achebe wants to show the role of women in the formation of nationhood. The character of Beatrice Okoh is a powerful statement that national literature if it is to be truly 'national' it must not overlook any segment of its nation. The character of Beatrice, therefore, presents us with a point of comparison with Ebla.

In *Petals of Blood* (1977) Ngugi presents us with female characters like Munira, Abdalla, Wanja and Karega. Ngugi, like Sembene, captures the struggle of the sexes within the struggle between low class and the high class. A literary critic, Bonnie Roos writing in *Research in African Literature* (Vol.33) in a chapter titled "Re-historicizing the conflicted figure of woman in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", notes that:

Furthermore, Wanja's position as a prostitute is especially fortuitous because she is not only a potential economic and ideological hero, but also a plausible, real historical force of resistance, a political hero of the people, the masses. In the real Mau Mau rebellion—glorified by Ngugi with the "rejuvenation" of the ex-Mau Mau warrior Abdulla (p. 103).

To Ross, the idea of the strong female character resonates with the struggle for independence and the roles of women in it. He sees Ngugi as arguing that the woman is, and was, not a passive agent of history. She was part of the conceptualization of historical events that transformed the societies. This is resonant with the situation that we find with regards to Ebla. It is good to analyze the role of Ebla as an agent in her own history.

Looking at women's literature, the emergence of women writers saw the rise of strong female characters in fiction. One of the celebrated works of fiction is *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba. The character of Ramatoulaye is one that stood out for critics as representative of the situation of the woman in an African society encumbered by both religion and tradition. One critic, Molaria Ongudipe, in her work *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (1994), asserts that she is representative of African feminism as different from Western feminism and then demanding its own structures for achieving gender parity in African societies. The question then is: how is Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter* similar to that of Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib*? And how do the two writers show religion and tradition as the main forces of false consciousness among women.

Another author to have strong female characters in her works is Nawal el Saadawi. The Egyptian writer is probably one of the few African feminists to advocate for radical approaches for women in achieving liberation from patriarchy. In her work *God Dies by the Nile* she uses powerful metaphor of the River Nile to extrapolate the exploitation of the woman and her journey, like the flow of the river, to liberate herself from her condition.

The central character of the story is Zakeya. She and her family are exploited by the Mayor for a long time till she finally decides to take a stand—killing Mayor. This radicalism of violence as a way out of female subjugation shows just how Saadawi views the situation. It appears that to her when the situation gets desperate the woman will liberate herself “by all means necessary”, to use the words of Malcolm X.

The above women writers are important in understanding how women have come to view their subjectivity under patriarchy. They offer interesting points of comparison with Nuruddin Farah who is a man, but writes for the cause of women. Farah, like el Saadawi and Ba, depicts the inferior status of women in Somali society in *From a Crooked Rib*. As most of his other works, this novel shows criticism of the Somali society, especially, the plight of women. The departure point for Farah which differentiates him from el Saadawi with whom he shares religious background, is that for him the society is only as good as her woman. Hence the development and total transformation of society calls for the women's participation.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the feminist theory of literary criticism. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf notes that the woman must achieve a level of independence in her life if she is to produce a work of art. She uses the metaphor of a woman writer having her own room to create fiction as an emphasis on self-determination in the woman. In Woolf's views we see an idea of a woman as a reader and writer. We see the feminist quest in critiquing literary texts in terms of how the woman deals with the prevailing cultural or religious hegemony where she is a reader and how she can manage to become an agent of changing that hegemony, in which case she becomes a writer. Again it helps show contestations between male texts and women texts and the centre position.

In *What Do Feminist Critics Want?*, Sandra Gilbert opens our eyes to some of the issues that involve feminism in literature: At its most ambitious, feminist criticism wants to decide and demystify all that that has always shadowed the connections

between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority.

The ideas of Sandra Gilbert offer a way of looking at the dichotomies that gender politics produces in society and how they can be dealt with. In *From a Crooked Rib* we note many such politics, especially from the interaction between women and male characters, but especially from the discourse that is the product of religio-cultural dictums. Ellaine Showalter in *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981) says,

A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers. These are differences brought about by class, race, nationality, and history, and are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space" (*New*, 260).

In *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, Showalter coined the term gynocriticism, to mean literary criticism based on the female perspective. The ideas of Showalter as concerns looking at female literature as a product purely of female experience are important if one is to understand how Ebla's experience is unique in itself.

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet argues the origins of patriarchy can be traced to a need by the society to control and subjugate the female. She further argues that sex-based oppression is both political and cultural in the wider context. What does Millet advice? She argues that to realize a sexual revolution the traditional family must come undone. The ideologies of Kate Millet touch on the plot of *From a Crooked Rib*. The movement of Ebla from her family home to the urban centre can be seen as the realization of sexual revolution that Kate Millet advocates for.

## **1.9 Methodology**

This study begins with close reading of Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, as well as other secondary texts, journals articles as well as electronic texts. Then I embark on close textual analysis of the primary text as guided by the theory of feminism. The study primarily focuses on textual evidence as well as other extra-textual information for the complementation of the evidence in the primary text.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PLOT DEVELOPMENT IN *FROM A CROOKED RIB*

#### 2.1 Introduction

According to Michael Meyer in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, plot is the author's arrangements of incidents in a story. It is the organizing principle that controls the order of events (37). To Meyer, plot is the backbone on which the events build through time and space.

In *Introduction, Criticism and Theory*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue that a narrative has a double structure: the level of the told (story) and the level of telling (discourse). They further go ahead to say that these two levels influence the way the story develops. The story involves the events or actions which the narrator would like us to believe occurred; the events (explicitly or implicitly) represented. Discourse involves the way in which these events are recounted, how they get told, and the organization of the telling.

Kitata Makau when discussing the plot of the *Interpreters* by Wole Soyinka, in his M.A Thesis "Narrative Techniques in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*", says that in plot causal sequence is indispensable and that Soyinka in his plot conceals purpose but unveils action. The plot banks on suspense to heighten an intelligent purpose and our sense of reality is kept alive so as to foreground plot. Plot is the 'God of these small things', Kitata writes (42). Such analysis draws from E. M. Foster's *Aspects of the Novel* which discusses plot as a chronological view of event and time in narrative sequence.

## 2.2 Plot Development

In *From a Crooked Rib*, Nuruddin Farah develops the plot with the implied aim of showing the path of emancipation of the protagonist. The objective in this chapter is to unravel the movement towards a realization of false consciousness and the unveiling of an empowered woman. I argue that Farah has structured the plot that leads to this goal.

According to Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*, female oppression is tied to the family unit. And that the woman must relinquish ties with the family in her quest for freedom. Therefore, the movement from subjugation to liberation, within the Marxist premise, is similar to Millet's in the sense of experimental knowledge becoming the key catalyst for overthrowing the status quo.

It is within this Feminist-Marx premise that we must observe the development of the plot in *From a Crooked Rib* and how Ebla, the protagonist, moves from subjugation to self determination.

I look at the structure of the plot as organized into movements of progress of Ebla, both biological and physical, which I refer to as "flights." The plot of this novel is organized around three recognizable flights, which raise the consciousness of and empower the protagonist. In evaluating the organization of the plot this way, I am indebted to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which was similarly organized in movements. This organization of plot, according to Aishat Olabusola Aro-Lambo in "Revolutionary Aesthetics in Ngugi and Mugo's the Trial of Dedan Kimathi and Hussein's Kinjekitile", the strategy employed makes the play relevant to contemporary revolutionary movements... (P.33).



The organization into movements is a Marxist mode of representation which shows progress from subjugation to freedom; from colonization to self-determination. Similarly, in *From a Crooked Rib* I detect movements of “flights”, which underpin the development of the plot. This is a coming of age story, a bildungsroman.

The plot is linear and follows a chronological order as the character grows through time and space. The story begins with an epilogue. This epilogue is the position where we are introduced to the prevailing situation. The exposition of the plot introduces us to characters caught up in a conflict that is generational.

In the novel the epilogue presents us with the event that develops the discourse, which the author presents in the novel. This part presents the circumstances of the narrative in terms of the factors that shall shape the events unfolding. The epilogue is the event that unfolds the plot, informing the audience of a conflict about to happen. The image of this old man tells of a tension in the narrative. A tension between generations and within a generation as well, “He could only curse. That was all he could do. Other than that, he could give advice, but now he cursed” (P. 3).

The opening lines are important in setting the tempo and suspense in the narrative. As readers we ask ourselves what makes the old man curse. But as the plot unfolds we get to know that if there is a girl called Ebla whom he intended to marry off to another man according to Somali traditions. This girl has run away from him:

The old man very sitting and quietly said his curse: May the Lord disperse your plans, Ebla. May he make you the mother of many a bastard. May He give you hell on this earth as a reward...? (p.6)

The cursing tells us that there is conflict between the old man and his granddaughter. This is the level the plot introduces the discourse of the story. The conflict between grandfather and granddaughter begins to assume a generational and feminist dimension. I have unravelled the movement to the plot as conflicts in a domino-effect kind of way. The movements of the conflicts are what bring about the progression of the story and the movement from subjugation to liberation of Ebla. The plot then takes us to the event necessitated the curses from the old man. Through description of the place where Ebla lives with her grandfather is shown as part of plot development, “A dwelling, like any other dwelling. In the dark the huts looked more or less like ant-hills... the lives of these people depended upon that of their herds...” (P.7).

This scene helps in developing the plot by showing stasis in the society. The underlying discourse that Farah produces in this scene is that stasis is to be disturbed by the action of a granddaughter—Ebla. The life that Ebla leads is that of a nomad. These are a people who are in constant search of greener pastures. This nomadic attitude impinges the flight progression of the plot, “But would one be justified, in saying that their existence depended on green pasture. Yes: life did depend on green pastures...” (P. 7).

This question by the narrator represents one of the images that would resonate with the life of the main character. Ebla is a nomad on the run. Her life is modelled on the nomad’s psyche; the readiness for flight, the quest for greener pastures, “Giumaleh was an old man of forty – eight: fit to be her father. Two of his sons had alternatively courted her” (P.9).

Here Farah tells us the characters that have contributed to the flight of Ebla. We empathize with her situation. The Somali culture demands that she submits to the dictates

of culture. The culture that withholds her from experiencing fully her potential she must flee, “She desired, more than anything to fly away; like a cock which has unknotted itself from the string tying its leg to the wall.” (P13).

We see Ebla’s desire to free herself from her condition as a young girl tied by culture:

She wanted to fly away from dependence on the seasons, the seasons which determine the life or death of the nomads. And she wanted to fly away from the duty of woman. .. A woman’s duty meant loading and unloading camels and donkeys after the destination had been reached... to her this allotment of assignments denoted the status of a woman, that she was lower in status than a man, and that she was weak. ... (P. 13).

The above quotation provides us with what we can refer to as the main conflict that the unfolding plot aims to reveal, in due time. We are introduced to a woman who has become aware of her lowly status in society, not by outside intervention but by the recognition of internal symbols. Ebla is able to realize the different status of men and women by pondering how responsibility for stock is shared between the sexes. The fact that boys take care of prestigious camels while girls take care of goats is a clear indication of the prevailing discriminatory practices. Therefore, from the above quote two things stand out, which are poised to propel the plot forward – the lowly status of a woman and the desire for flight from that position. It is this discriminatory practice that informs the grandfather’s decision to marry off Ebla to a man called Giumaleh. Ebla rebels and runs from the country.

### **Flight 1 (Beledweyne)**

By running away from her grandfather Ebla launches her life into another space.

Ebla gets to a town called Beledweyne. She is alone, wondering how she would be able to trace the home of her cousin. At this point the plot cools off, so to speak, and we do not see Ebla reminiscing or pondering her condition as a woman like she had done while in the country. It is as if after the flight that she has endured, she now needs to rest and look at this strange urban life that she has found herself in,

...Ebla had never believed what people said about towns. She had listened to too many of them... the market place was not very busy. The sun was very hot. Papers (turned yellow very busy... the sun was very hot. Papers turned yellow for age, flew about and along the roads... to her this was one of the phenomena of a town. ... (24).

The issues that hold her fascination with regards to town is how different life is between the rural and urban Somalia. We are able to understand that the flight from rural to urban Somali will constitute a developmental shift in the mindset. In those reflections, therefore, Farah is developing the mental capacity of the main character.

The reflections also prepare her for the world that her flight has launched her into. If the plot is to move from innocence to experience then we can say that experiencing urban life also makes the central character to be aware of her condition in the changing society.

Ebla manages to trace the house of her cousin called Gheddi. In the house of Gheddi Ebla further develops as a character and her experience into the condition of womanhood is sharpened by the two incidents on her arrival. These two things are crucial in plot development at this state – the cattle when kept by Ebla who tends to them and the birth

of Gheddi's child. This is a period of gestation for man and beast. Ebla becomes a nurturer of both Gheddi's wife and the stock. She uses the condition of the stock to reflect on condition of man:

Cows are beasts, calves are beasts and so are goats. 'But we are beasts, too,' she thought. Isn't my grandfather a beast? If one shows one's bestiality by what one does then we are only better than these beasts by trying to explain our doings. ... (p. 32).

This reflection by Ebla shows how her condition is likened to that of animals. It further shows how much experience she is gaining which not only illuminates the condition of beasts generally, and of human beings specifically. Farah uses the condition of Aowralla to show how experienced Ebla is growing as a character—philosophically, therefore consciously. This is another woman from whom she gains knowledge on what it is to be a woman. It is she who helps Aowralla to bring life into the world: "Ebla, recalling the operation that she had heard about that was done to other women, looked around for what could help her as instruments for operation..." (p. 37).

Ebla becomes very useful to Gheddi's family. She becomes the bust of energy that moves things about as she gains experience in Gheddi's house we see a character who is an agent of change. In this way we can say that the movement from her village Beledweyne to the town has been fulfilling in the sense described by Kate Millet's in *Sexual Politics* where she argues that the further a woman moves from the close family unit, the freer she becomes.

While living with Gheddi Ebla meets the Widow, a woman who does not have a husband. This woman is important in the development of the plot because she initiates Ebla into

womanhood. At one time she tells her the story of her life and the husbands she has married. She then compares her Arabic husband to a monkey and tells Ebla the story of a jealous monkey. The friendship that develops between the widow and Ebla is important in the empowerment of Ebla because it gives her a consciousness with which to approach the subjugation in a woman's life.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf notes that the woman must achieve a level of independence in her life if she is to produce a work of art. She uses the metaphor of a woman writer having her own room to create fiction as an emphasis on self-determination in the woman.

The friendship between the two women can be interpreted to signify the women trying to create a space of their own where they can discuss their lives separate from the patriarchal space. It is a way of affirming their culture within the larger culture. And as Elaine Showalter, in her essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* (1981) says, "...women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space (p.260)."

After a short period of time, Ebla realizes that Gheddi wishes to marry her off to another man. This is the very issue for which she left the village. Could it be that the patriarchal structure is the same in the village and the town? She is told of this information by the widow,

"...have you heard, Ebla?"

'You have not heard? Are you sure?

'I don't know...but what is it anyway?"

"That your cousin has given your hand to a broker?" (p. 78)

This forms the basis of moving the plot to the next course. This is also another incident that further sheds light to Ebla on her fate as a woman, “I don’t like this sort of marriage... I don’t want to be sold like cattle...we are human beings...” (pp. 79; 80).

Ebla then plans to get away from this web of exploitation. To her the cows are like properties which are sold at the market at will. The awakening of consciousness and the realization of status is, according to Engels and Marx in *German Ideology*, is the beginning of movement towards liberation.

### **Flight 2 (Mogadishu)**

Ebla runs away from Beledweyne, she elopes with the widow’s nephew known as Awill. They live in an area called Bondhere. In Mogadishu the plot develops around the fact that this being a more developed urban space it has certain liberties that did not exist in the village of Beledweyne. With such liberties, the characters are presented as partaking in freedoms that would have earned punishment in their previous places, “Ebla always heard that many men in the towns smoke, but women rarely smoke, unless they were harlots...” (p. 92). Here, Ebla is reflecting on the nature of the urban space. The space is full of tension and evokes scenes of conflict. The first one is the conflict between Ebla and Awill, “Awill stood up straight and showered hand blows upon Ebla – in the mouth at her head on her belly...” (p. 96). This fight breaks up between the two when Awill forces himself upon Ebla. An idea that Ebla accepts she intended but which she says has not yet been consummated for Awill to have his way with her. This scene shows the rising tension between the sexes. The fight between the two comes in the wake of a visit that Awill had to Shanganni, where the brothels are. In that instance he was duped by a prostitute who failed to deliver goods already paid for. This shows that the female characters are gaining some power over the males and that they are not afraid to

challenge established patriarchal structures that have dominated and influenced the course of their lives throughout history. The tension between Awill and Ebla which is highly sexual is solved when Ebla finally allows him to have his way with her:

Awill moved towards her slowly, placed his hands on her breasts and touched them ... he succeeded in breaking the virginity of Ebla. She moaned and groaned ... she bled a great deal... (p. 99).

This scene is important in bringing Ebla to the experience of womanhood, which her circumcision as a girl prepared her for. The great deal of bleeding is as a consequence of it. After the experience she moves to the next phase of her life, “She was no longer a virgin; she was a woman now, the wife of Awill” (p. 100). A new space is opened to her. The experiences of the past have opened up the door to this new experience. And the narrator says that Ebla was delighted to think of herself as a wife, “... Looking back at her escapades she did not find them very fruitful. She had made many mistakes from which she learnt things that she ought to have known before” (p. 108).

This new phase in Ebla’s life is accompanied by independence of Somalia from Italian colonial rule. The existence of colonialism also serves to show the subjugation of the woman as subjugation of the nation; thereby assuming that the liberation of the nation is the liberation of the woman.

In this instance Farah has contemporaries like Sembene Ousmane whose *God’s Bits of Wood* ties female struggles with a nation’s struggle and a nation’s liberation with woman’s liberation. As a ‘colonized being’ Ebla cannot understand a language like ‘I will fly.’ This happens when Awill is Italy-bound, “To her, a bird could fly, but nothing



else could” (p 115). After Awill leaves for Italy Ebla becomes lonely she meets and befriends Asha, “... the most interesting character she had met ever since she left the country. (p 121) This character impacts on Ebla in a way that not only makes her aware of her exploitation but also way of liberation out of it, “Asha was the first person who had even considered her equal. She made Ebla aware of what she was...” (p. 121). The awareness of the self is most important for liberation of disempowered. It is what Friedrich Nietzsche calls the beginning of a being releasing his strength to change his situation in *The Will to Power*.

### **Flight 3 (Escape to Tiffow)**

After Awill leaves for Italy, one day, Ebla is visited by Awill’s friend Jama. Jama has brought an envelope carrying a photo of Awill and another woman in Europe. This photo becomes the catalyst for the fourth flight. Things began to dawn on her.... This is a sign of her gaining a new consciousness. After the 3 flights in her life Ebla now decides that she will not run away, “She had run from the country, to a town, and from there to Mogadishu. Now, if she ran from Mogadishu, she would run into the ocean.” (p. 123). When she realizes her captivity as a subjugated and flees from some of her torments, it is the beginning of a resolution to become free.

We are told, “Ebla loved life. To her life was freedom” (p.126). And as someone who loves life, she accepts Asha’s offer to get married to a secret “husband” called Tiffow. This marriage to Tiffow is another flight. Through it is not physical; it represents the detachment from Awill. In the marriage to Tiffow she occupies the position of power. She negotiates the payment for the sex sessions. This is the will to power that Asha had prepared her for.

Even though the engagement between Ebla and her “husband” Tiffow is basically ruled by Wajifur, it is not economic necessities that bring them together. Ebla does not really need the money as much as she needs to get back at Awill. This is the first time that she has decided to ‘pay back’ for the suffering meted out in her. This liaison, to her, is a form of realization of a freedom which she considers the reason for living, “I love life. Everybody loves it from death is nothing but the other side of life, and anyone who loves to die naturally loves to live...” (p. 153).

In this context Ebla is reflecting on her life. The liaison with Tiffow has the effect of driving her to an introspection of the self. This self-analysis becomes the climax of the novel:

Giamaleh, I never saw him. It was only a verbally done between him and my grandfather. Diris made an arrangement with my cousin... Awill was the only husband I married willingly.... (p. 158).

This is the ultimate awareness of the subjugation position she occupies. It is the unmasking of the false consciousness in the plot development. The main character recounts her experiences with men over her entire life and she realizes that she has come a full circle. She ran away from the old Giamaleh only to end up with a man as old as he in the name of Tiffow. Above all also, it is important to note that Ebla takes responsibility for her life and all that has happened: “I am responsible for the death of my grandfather.” (p 159) After sometime, Ebla becomes pregnant. She is confused as to who is responsible. First, she did not know that she was pregnant until Asha called the Sheikh who performed some ceremonies, “But she just wanted to know whose baby it was she had in her womb...” (p. 165).

This opens another phase of dilemma in Ebla's life. It gives her an opportunity to interrogate the relationship between the sexes. This is the final battle that she engages in before she has a peace of mind. After this the marriage to Tiffow ends in divorce. And when Awill returns he finds evidence that Ebla has knowledge of his philandering ways in Europe. The return of Awill from Europe opens another space for final resolution on the conflict of the next:

“You know how you were created? ‘Awill asked smiling

‘Yes I know

Let me tell you that you were created from the crooked rib of Adam...”

“And if anyone tries to straighten it, he will have to break it.” (p 170)

This final showdown shows the resolution of the conflict of the novel. The two sexes finally accept their fate as designed by God. The acceptance of such fate leads to accommodation and forgiveness which is then celebrated by love making, the release of the sexual tension that had existed between the two since they met.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHARACTERIZATION

#### 3.1 Introduction

If to Michael Meyer in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, plot is the organizing principle that controls the order of events in a literary text (P.37); and to Kitata Makau in his M.A Thesis “Narrative Techniques in Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*”, plot is the ‘God of these small things’; but to Henry James in “The Art of Fiction”, the character is the determination of the incident and incident is the illustration of character.

In the foregoing discussion we saw how the plot of the novel unfolds to expose the image of a liberated Somali woman. It is, then, now fitting to turn our attention to the events being ‘ordered’ and the ‘small things’, being created. We now shift into an analysis into characterization in the novel to see how it helps in bringing out the aspect of a liberated woman. To see how it is tied to the plot in shaping the vision of Nuruddin Farah. It is through the action of characters that the plot moves forward.

In *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, Elaine Showalter coined the term, gynocriticism, to mean literary criticism based on the female perspective. It concerns looking at female literature as a product purely of female experience, which is important if one is to understand how characterization of female characters is done around the experience of womanhood.

Here we are looking at the choice of characters in the novel and how they contribute to the presentation of a liberated woman. To look at this helps to understand how Farah has used characters as representatives of the discourse of the novel. The entire

story revolves around the protagonist Ebla. Ebla is a conflicted character. She is presented as the one with an agenda. The plot develops around the three flights that she is involved in and which help to bring out the sense of agency, the sense of movement from false consciousness to empowerment.

### **3.2 The Character of the Grandfather and Traditional Patriarchy**

The first character, whom we need to look at, is Ebla's grandfather. He is not given much voice. Therefore, for most part it is the omniscient narrator who tells us his thoughts. He comes in the epilogue and his active presence in the novel is very short but he haunts the plot of the story to the end.

The character of the grandfather is a conflicted individual who is in need of a resolution to the present predicament he currently faces. He is symbolic of patriarchy. This character is developed around the theme of tradition. He is to show the way tradition subjugates the woman. His decision to marry off his granddaughter in an arrangement marriage shows the nature of tradition in the society. It is this character that represents the family which Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* says the woman should get away from for her to gain control of her life.

The picture that Farah draws of him is comical and laced with dry humour:

He squatted on the ground... His buttocks were resting on his heels. He was an old man – about eighty, or even ninety. He could have been even more than that, and he could have been less ... (p. 3).

This picture tells of a man who has endured much hardship. In drawing him thus, Farah expects us to empathize with him and understand the reason as to why he is such disposed. The character of the grandfather is used to represent the old generation of

Somali men. He is a symbol of the patriarchal order. His condition is presented as very pitiable, highlighting his diminishing masculinity because of age. His skin is said to be pap.... His haunts weak. He is reticent, withdrawn. And only old epics can revise his enthusiasm for life. Otherwise, he has no feelings. Presented thus, the old man symbolizes an old order that is being challenged by new waves. When the strings of the rosary snap and the beads run away into the hot sand, his word order is about to collapse. By opening the story with him, Farah shows us the nature of patriarchy that Ebla has run away from. The author constantly stresses the fact that he is 'old':

He was an old man, and his main duty was to give advice, to refer to the days before the others were born, to talk about the rainy season to come, to say what one should do and what one should not, to before on the worship of the Almighty, to whom, he, an old man, had devoted his life many years ago... (p. 5).

Here Farah is telling us the role of an old man in the Somali society. He is the custodian of mores. And these mores of which he is the custodian are what have made Ebla to run away. Farah uses the symbol of the rosary to characterize the old man as deeply religious. This then brings in the issue of religion in the lives of the characters. It could be one of the factors that have brought about the flight of Ebla. The character of the old man then sets the plot running by issuing a curse to the character of Ebla, "May He make you the mother of many a bastard. May he give you hell on this earth as a reward" (p. 6).

This curse is the last word the old man utters. This is his final action. It shows that he fights using old weapons (curses) and therefore is reticent to new ways. The curse shows the ultimate sense of betrayal that he feels for what Ebla has done. Generally, the old man is representing the patriarchal order that subjugates women to subservient roles. The old man had wanted Giumaleh, his peer, to marry his grandson. It was not about money but

about following custom. He is representative of customs that need to be challenged.

In conclusion, Ebla's grandfather represents the oppressors in the Somali society – men – through the prisms of outmoded traditional attitudes that subjugate females. The author uses his character and actions to illustrate or relate to the reader the behaviour and attitude of male parents or relatives towards their daughters, as opposed to their behaviour towards their sons.

The grandfather's actions are geared towards reducing the value of a female child to that of a mere object that can be sold and bought. Ebla's grandfather makes an arrangement with Giumaleh to give out his grand-daughter in marriage to him in exchange for camels. The grandfather represents the Somali parent, particularly the male parent, who has remained obedient to the culture that suppresses women. His actions eventually lead to Ebla's escape. He later curses Ebla's and dies as a result of the trauma of his grand-daughter's rebellious departure.

### **3.3 The Character of Gheddi and Capitalist Patriarchy**

Another character who is representative of the patriarchal order is Gheddi. He is Ebla's cousin. Gheddi is important in Ebla's movement from subjugation to power because his house becomes the sanctuary when she is running away from forced marriage. Gheddi comes out as a very greedy character. The author makes him a shopkeeper, a role which helps us to see the nature of greed and patriarchy. This role also shows the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. He smuggles goods from outside the country through Kallafo and sells them in his shop. The shop itself is a symbol of the rottenness in his personality. Also, adopting a Marxist mode, the shop is the symbol of capitalism, which then ties in the oppression of women with the economy. So what happens when Ebla comes to his home?

She literally takes over most duties. It is her who feed the cows and takes care of Aowralla during delivery. These actions show the disempowerment of Gheddi in his home. One night when they got to smuggle goods into the country he invites, Ebla. As it turns out the deal goes along and Gheddi loses money. He had a gun but he did not shoot. Farah brought in the gun to show power and cowardice in the character of Gheddi. His wife Aowralla seems braver than him,

“I ran for my life. They almost fired me.”

“You would not fire back I knew.” (p. 64)

In this scene Gheddi is reprimanded by his wife over his behaviour in the smuggling deal, which went wrong. It is as if she is blaming him. When he realizes that Ebla is listening to his 'dress down' from the wife, he turns his anger at her. He tells her to get 'get out of his sight.' From this moment he changes his attitude towards Ebla. He is an escapist who does not want to confront the problem of how his cowardice might have contributed to



the loss he suffered. Instead, he turns to Ebla the innocent passive participant in the deal. He cannot face his wife who is taunting him for the loss so he turns to Ebla.

To sum it up, Gheddi's greed for money climaxes when he wants to marry off Ebla for profit. He gets into an arrangement with a man called Dirir who is a broker so that he marries Ebla. This deal also does not go according to plan. Ebla discovers and runs away with the help of the widow. Ebla runs away to Mogadishu with the widow's cousin, Awill.

Just like Ebla's grandfather, Gheddi (who is Ebla's cousin) represents the Somali husband and male parent. In his character, he is portrayed a guardian. His character and action depict a man with little regard for women. As a husband, he does not care much about his wife. Since the woman is compared to mere goods in the novel, Gheddi prefers taking care of the goods in his shop, rather than loving his wife during her pregnancy. He allows her to milk the cow in her pregnancy, and during one of these occasions, she is kicked in the ribs by one of the cows.

As a guardian and close relative, Gheddi betrays Ebla by marrying her off to his broker friend without the consent of Ebla. This characterization is meant to suggest the similarity in behaviour of Somali men. From the novel, it can therefore be said that subjugation of women is embedded in the Somali culture and community. Furthermore, the author uses the character of Gheddi to elongate the plot of his novel: Gheddi's actions force Ebla to run away with her lover to Mogadishu, thereby taking the story to another level.

### 3.4 Awill and Trans-national Patriarchy (Desire)

Awill is described as a tall man, slim and handsome (p. 67). Awill is a randy character; an individual presented as having loose morals. He is developed around women – his aunt, Ebla and a European woman in Italy. He has a weakness for sex which makes Ebla wield some power over him. When he comes back from Europe he is sex-starved so much so that he could not wait for Ebla to confess to him.

Awill is a more educated male than the other males that we have seen in the story so far. He works with *Publica Istruzione*. His interest in Ebla is not out of genuine love, it is out of an insatiable appetite for sex. When he first meets Ebla in the widow's house we can see that he is interested in her. He throws into the conversation between them his status as a government employee working for *Publica Istruzione*. This is represented by Farah as if to show that Awill is showing off his supposed power to Ebla, who is illiterate and does not understand what an office meant (p. 70). The character of Awill, with such power, becomes another symbol of a sanctuary that Ebla can run to. When they end up together in Mogadishu, Awill forces himself on Ebla, arguing that they are married because she lives with him, "When I have become your wife, I will accept everything. But this is rape" (p. 97).

Here, Ebla is posing a question to the audience on the actions of another character. She is showing us that sometimes rape can occur even in unions such as marriages, "No. You are my wife. We are going to get married. We surely are. So it comes to the same thing" (p. 97).

This scene shows Awill to be representative of the section of patriarchy that would subvert its own laws (mores) so as to suit selfish ends. His randy nature takes him to the brothels of Mogadishu where he is duped by a prostitute and left 'high and dry', without the services. This is another instance where Farah shows men being disempowered. The prostitute takes his money and disappears. This loss reminds us of Gheddi's and even the grandfather's, for they show the diminishing fear of patriarchy by women.

### **3.5 The Character of Tiffo and the Irony of Woman's Quest for Liberation**

Awill goes to Europe and continues his philandering ways with European women. Ebla gets to know this and reciprocates by marrying Tiffo. Tiffo, the man Ebla ends up marrying in a secret liaison is described as a rich man with two daughters of marriageable age who comes from Baidoa (p. 124). Tiffo is presented as a man who is escaping oppression from his wives at home. He is rich and therefore is able to escape from his situation. His money enables him to find sanctuary in his life with Ebla. It is ironical that Ebla, who cannot escape male oppression, ends up with a man who has escaped from the torment of his wives. The main reason for this union is money. Asha needs money so she convinces Ebla to the scheme. Tiffo needs escape so he pays Ebla for it. This brings in an interesting look at economic plane as the area where feminism and patriarchy is played out. After some time Ebla tires of the union and they divorce. Tiffo is married to a woman who beats him. Asha who has knowledge of it, tells Ebla,

... those women always go together and beat their four husbands together. They marry and divorce their men when they like...one of them is married to a nice man... but they beat him inside the bars, streets and in his house.... (pp. 173; 179).

Here we see a picture of emasculated men. The sisters of Tiffo's wife have power or monopoly of violence over their husbands, to which Asha concludes, "... it is just their

men –troubles and men really ought to be beaten” (p. 174). Ebla is the protagonist of *From a Crooked Rib*. The character of Ebla is modelled around that of a figure that moves from innocence to experience. In this movement she meets other women from whom she gains strength, which leads to her empowerment. To arrive at the nature of her characterization, it is important to compare her with other female characters in the novel.

The first woman she meets is Aowralla in Beledweyne. Aowralla is her cousin’s wife. When Ebla first meets her she is expecting a child. Farah uses this condition to sort of ‘disempower’ her so that Ebla’s good qualities can show. At her home we see the qualities of Ebla which we had never been treat to. She appears to be the nurturer of the home. She takes care of the cows and also of Aowralla.

### **3.6 Ebla’s Brother and the Symbolism of an Illiterate Male**

The character of Ebla’s brother stands in complete opposite to Ebla’s in so far as their childhood is concerned. He is the male child with the heritage of the family in his hands, while Ebla, on the other hand, is a ‘property’ of the family, which is eventually given out in marriage. Her brother’s is used to show the status of a male child in contrast to that of a female child in the Somalia community. When he is brought to Mogadishu to visit Ebla, he refuses to stay there with her; he is bent on going back to take care of the family’s property. Ebla also supports this, and she does not talk him out of his decision anyway.

### **3.7 Aowralla and Domestication of Power**

“...Aowralla’s aquiline nose suited her big dark glowing eyes, but her eye sockets were too hollow, and too thin, and the dimples on her cheeks would look better on someone else. Her limbs were long and her height was in proportion to them, Ebla envied her dark lips, quiet soft and bulging forward, as if they smiled teasingly. Her neck was long like a giraffe and there was a scar right on the hollow base of

her throat...” (p. 72)

This description of Aowralla is the most vivid one in the entire novel. She is so poetically constructed that we get a feeling of ‘touch’ of her personality. If she has a long neck, dimples, full dark lips, which the protagonist envies, then we can say that she is a woman of unique beauty.

However, apart from the vivid description not much strikes us about Aowralla as beautiful. Aowralla is also a conflicted character. She is torn between loyalty to her husband and her conscience. However, between her and Gheddi, she comes out the most powerful for her assertive personality. She is very straightforward and does not hide her true feeling from her husband. It is very ironical that in spite of her condition as a mother she is also very determined.

Aowralla is a strong woman who talks to her husband the way she wants when, after the smuggling ordeal, she feels that Gheddi is to blame she tells him straight to his face. She is also the keeper of the gun which was to be used in the smuggling. This shows that she is the keeper of “power” in the household. However, she is not one who entirely supports the vision of a liberated woman. She seems to agree with her husband’s plan to marry off Ebla to Dirie, the broker. This is in spite of the fact that Gheddi had betrayed her by selling the cherished cow, ‘Bafto’, which she had given as a present to her daughter. In this sense she betrays her conscience and also Ebla who had helped her when she was incapacitated with pregnancy. From Aowralla Ebla learns that life in the town was about survival of the fittest. She also learns that men are people who can be faced.

### **3.8 The Widow and Women's Socio-political Consciousness**

While at Gheddi's house Ebla meets the Widow. We are told that she has been married twice and divorced once (p. 54). Her other husband has abandoned her. She lives independently and works her way through life without the help of a man. She is an inspiration to Ebla.

The Widow is an independent-minded woman. The fact that the author portrayed her without a man in her life is significant in showing the independent ideologies that control her life. She is depicted as authoritative. The narrator mentions that she talked authoritatively (p. 55). This character introduces Ebla to the secrets of sex and the woman's body. She tells her of a monkey that covers his wife's "thing" with sticky, wet mud before he leaves her so that it will be able to know whether or not the female has had sex during the male monkey's absence (p. 57). This story is very important in informing the ideology that Ebla forms about the relationship between men and women. After this lesson Ebla marries Awill after the widow informs her of Gheddi's plans to marry her off. The character of the widow is therefore important in introducing Ebla to the next phase of her life.

### **3.9 Asha and Women Dependence**

After the widow we have Asha. Ebla meets her when she has eloped with Awill to Mogadishu. She is a talkative woman who is also single. She has no strings tying her to a man. She is therefore independent in her actions and this independence allows her to do with men as she pleases.

Asha's character is developed around two areas: female biology, the sexuality of a woman, and female psychology, the ability of a woman to understand the psychology of a

fellow woman better than a man. In terms of female biology we see that she is a woman who believes that a woman can, and should, use her body as a weapon against the ravages of life like poverty. When Ebla is in need, she introduces her to the idea of sleeping with a man who has money so that they could get his money.

Then, according to female psychology, Asha is shown to be a woman who understands the condition of women in her society and therefore knows how to deal with them. She knows that Ebla is in need of escape from Awill, and is in need of money so she introduces her to the trade. She also knows how to deal with Tiffo's wives, which shows that she is a woman who uses her mind to win wars. She is very forceful and is able to assert herself. We feel her presence. She gets into a room and she owns it. She is a commander. She commands Tiffo's wives to leave and they do so. She is a fighter. She tells Ebla that she had once fought with Tiffo's wives when they were young and she beat them. This explains why she is able to command them and they obey. This character is developed around the theme of moral decadence in urban set up. It is through her that we are able to see the crook and the hook, as it were, that the woman can employ in fighting against marginalization since she is a woman who is on the margins of the economy. She is the subaltern, as Homi Bhaba would say, yet she speaks to the centre in a way that the centre cannot ignore.

She plays the role of a pimp to Ebla. By playing this role of a pimp she subverts the established notions of prostitution that only men should pay pimps to women prostitutes. As such he brokers the sexual favours of men for profits. This definition shows male ownership of female body. Asha subverts this definition. Farah uses her to show that women are no longer simply allowing men to own their bodies; they are taking ownership

of it.

In *What Do Feminist Critics Want*, Sandra Gilbert opens our eyes to some of the issues that involve feminism in literature: At its most ambitious, feminist criticism wants to decide and demystify all that has always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority. Unlike the other female characters Asha has no conflicted personality. The only conscience she could betray is to forego an opportunity to make money.

### **3.10 Ebla (The Protagonist) and the Symbolism of the Woman's Quest for Liberation**

“...For a woman, she was very tall, but this was not exceptional here. She stood six feet high. She would have been very beautiful, had it not been for the disproportion of her body...” (p. 8).

There is nothing outstanding about the physical description of Farah's protagonist at this point. Her height is common in their dwelling place. The narrator tells us that she has a disproportionate body and so is not particularly beautiful. This is our heroin, from whose life the plot is developed.

In *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, Michael Meyer says that the action of the plot interests us primarily because we care about what happens to people and what they do. We may identify with a character's desires and aspirations, or be disgusted by his or her viciousness and selfishness. To understand our response to a story we must be able to recognize the methods of characterization the author use (p. 72). In this novel, Nuruddin Farah has characterized Ebla in a way that makes the reader to empathize with her struggle from traditional subjugation, ““She was a responsible woman of eighteen, going



on nineteen...” (10).

The narrator emphasizes her age to show her place in time and space. The fact that she is eighteen makes us not pity her on the fact that she is to be married off to an older man, but to empathize with her that she has no voice in the matter. At eighteen going on nineteen she is an adult with the capacity to reason and determine her life. This being the case of subjugation which she faces she is not a passive victim, “To break the ropes society had wrapped around her and to be free and be herself ...” (p. 12). She is a courageous girl. The narrator says of her, “Ordinarily she was not a weak-minded girl...” (p. 10). This shows she had the mettle of character to confront that which life has in store for her. She has the mettle to undertake the flights that propel the plot forward.

Her courage shows in the first flight she initiates from home. She runs away from home and defies a tradition that has been standing for ages. And then there is something to note in the way she executes her escape,

“...she finally reached the entrance to the dwelling. It was a thorn fence, which had just been built. There was a stick put across which served as the gate. Should she go underneath or should she lift the stick? She lifted the stick. The gate creaked. The prickles stood out... her heart pounding rightfully fast...” (p. 17).

This scene, where Ebla is escaping the dwelling has a symbolic significance to her trait as a character and the issue that has set her on the flight. The stick is a symbol of patriarchal authority. In many African traditions the gate is the symbol that shows ownership and also authority. The gate symbolizes tradition. She is defying the tradition. As a ‘criminal’ she has no right to have the ‘honour’ of passing through it normally. She deserves the ‘indignity’ of passing below it to denote her own lowly status as a woman, and as a renegade. But what does she do? She removes the stick and passes through like a normal

person would. This shows the valour in her character. It appears to me that Farah has endowed Ebla with a revolutionary consciousness quite early. At such early stage in life she has discovered the lower status of women in her society. Further, Ebla is a character full of tension within her. Right from the start we are told. "She wished she was not a woman" (11). "This lack of knowledge of what was to happen increased the tension within her" (62).

She is a character who has felt like she does not belong in society. She felt like an outcast:

She thought the widow would deny her the milk of kindness which she was always seeking. She never expected anyone to be grateful to her, neither would she want anyone to be annoyed with her...she had been reticent all her life because it turned out that her opinions were different from what others expected... (p. 65).

This shows that the other fuel that drives her role in the plot is a search for acceptance - to be told that she is not strange. In the village people thought of her as an obstinate child who never understood even simple explanations about the town. It is such attitudes that she wishes to subvert. For her to become liberated she has to come to terms with what others said of her and decide on her own the kind of person she really is. The finding of her own identity, defining the self is important in the empowerment process.

Ebla helps the author to develop the style of soliloquy which helps to show the philosophical maturity of her character. The scene on page 165, where Ebla talks to herself in front of the mirror by assuming another personality, an alter ego, is important in highlighting the tension that exists between men and women, especially married couples.

Throughout the unfolding of the plot Ebla grows from strength to strength. Every experience she passes through brings to her an awareness of the situation of women in her society. The setting that Farah puts her in ensures this growth. The further she moves from the village the more emancipated she becomes.

The author has also made Ebla the carrier of the women voice. She is the spokesperson of the women who have suffered injustices like forced marriage and clitoridectomy. The theme of female genital mutilation and all the other themes with regards to the subservient role of women in society radiate from her life and her flights. She is shown as speaking from experience and that experience enabling her to have the knowledge to challenge and upset the status quo. There is a sense of irony in the way that the places that Ebla thought would offer her refuge become spaces of oppression that continue her subjugation.

The character of Ebla is developed in every aspect of her life. We see her as a granddaughter, a sister, a cousin, a friend and a wife to two men. In all these positions she serves to show the different status that women occupy in society and how those positions often contribute to subjugation. All these contribute in informing the totality of liberative consciousness that is in her spirit.

Above all Ebla is able to transcend many obstacles in her life because she is forgiving. She forgives her grandfather for wanting to marry her off. She also comes to forgive Awill for sleeping with a European woman while in Europe. In this trait of forgiving, Farah uses Ebla to show that the woman has the capacity to redeem man from his situation. The woman is a liberative figure to all humanity. In the last scene in the novel she shows the woman's capacity to redeem society, "Ebla smelt his maleness. She

touched his forehead and as usual, he was not with desire..." poor fellow, he needs me," she thought. 'He is sex-starved....' (p. 179).

This quote shows Ebla as someone who understands men. She understands the sex drive of Awill, "Ebla murmured and welcomed his hot warm world into her cool and calm kingdom..." (p. 179).

The final act of welcoming Awill into her 'kingdom' shows her willingness and capacity to forgive. But above all it shows her resolve – she no longer wants to run away. She has a baby growing inside her and if she runs away the baby will have no father and she would be a mother of a bastard and the curse of the grandfather would have come to pass. So by not taking another flight, the character of Ebla has come full circle and the experience she has gained over time and space has made her a stronger and wiser woman.

Finally, it should not escape us that as Ebla comes into her own, Somalia is also struggling with Italian colonialism, "...When they were inside the widow explained to Ebla in detail all about the Police, Government, the white man, and the Independence of Somalia, which was approaching.... (p. 67).

There are two things that we can deduce from this scene. First is that, Ebla is gaining knowledge and growing in awareness which further gives her the determination to be a free woman. According to Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, this ability of women to occupy their own space is important in creating a room of experiential knowledge where the female sex can come to terms with her condition and grow from subjugation to empowerment. Secondly, in this scene the author wants to use the character of Ebla as an agent of history. She is like Penda in *God's Bits of Wood*, even

though she does not confront the colonial empire directly. She is courageous and clear on her set goal. She is like Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, though she lacks the violence or the calculative streak of the latter. But she is equally determined and strong-willed. In the two novels, Ngugi and Sembene use women as agents of history. They are like the ‘soaps’ of Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995), which alchemize, as it were, the condition of nations from subjugation to freedom. Therefore, in *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah wants to show the growth of Ebla as parallel to the growth of Somalia as a nation. What this does is to point out that the liberation of the woman is the liberation of mankind as a whole.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In this novel, it is important to take into consideration how the experiences of women have been represented as evolving from weak to strong. How the journey changes the personality of the protagonist. Farah uses characterization very successfully to bring out the message of liberation of the women. This is what moves the plot forward in the novel. And Ebla as the protagonist seems to acquire energy from every character she interacts with. And it is this that, for me, disqualifies Aristotle’s earlier argument that characterization is secondary to plot. I agree with Henry James that plot and character must complement each other for the message of the author to be clear.

A look into the characterization of *From a Crooked Rib* reveals a delicate balancing act on the part of the author. It is as if Farah intended for the story to be a battle of sorts, a wrestling of tag teams with equal number of opponents in each tag item.

The main characters of the novel are eight. Out of this number four are male and other four female. The male characters exhibit a kind of diminishing masculinity in their roles,

while the female characters appear to show a growing sense of empowerment and independence. This in a sense is a kind of reciprocal altruism, to borrow from Robert Trivers. Reciprocal altruism, according to the anthropologist, in *The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism* (1971), is a behaviour whereby an organism loses fitness as another, opposing organism gains. It's close to "tit for tat." Organizing the characterization on this way, Farah makes the intention clear on the presentation of a more empowered woman.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### POINT OF VIEW IN *FROM A CROOKED RIB*

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how Nuruddin Farah uses characterization techniques to unravel the image of a Somali woman who is caught up in the struggle to free herself from patriarchy and how it complements the flights in the plot that I had discussed earlier. In this chapter I look into the point of view of the narration and how it sets the ground for a discourse on feminism within a liberative matrix.

In *Studying the Novel: An Introduction* (1992), Jeremy Hawthorn posits that the term ‘point of view’ must not obscure the distinction between ‘perspective’ and ‘voice.’ He further adds that these terms can be summed up in two questions. ‘Who speaks? And ‘Who sees?’ (p. 122). To him it is important that point of view reveals the two stand points in the narrative where the story is being told from.

In the same vein, Michael Meyer, in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (2002), defines point of view as ‘who tells as the story and how it is told.’ What we know and how we feel about the events in a story are shaped by the author’s choice of a point of view,

“The teller of the story, the narrator, inevitably affects our understanding of the characters’ actions by filtering what is told through his or her own perspective. The narrator should not be confused with the author who has created the narrative voice...” (p. 138).

The two views by Hawthorne and Meyer on 'point of view' help in highlighting the importance of point of view in story-telling. They improve understanding of the plot as author's choice of the narrator 'who speaks' and affects how we feel about the events in the story.

#### **4.2 Point of View**

*From a Crooked Rib* is told from the omniscient narrator point of view. In *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* Meyer defines omniscient narrator point of view as allowing the narrator the ability to move from place to place through time, slipping into and out of characters as no human being possibly could in real life. This narrator can report the characters' thoughts and feelings as well as what they say and do (p. 139).

In this novel Farah has adopted the omniscient narrator which allows him objectivity. It allows him to establish the objective distance from which he can let the characters articulate their own thoughts. He uses the third person omniscient point of view and then brings this forward to the clear view of his readers through his main character, Ebla, using the third person pronoun "her." He therefore presents the story, not as a partaker or the affected. In his narrative, Farah uses his key character and protagonist to tell the story; he uses Ebla as the mirror through which the situation and fate of a Somali woman in the society is seen. The story he tells is seen as her story, since it is through Ebla that other characters are brought to bear. All the events and characters in the entire novel are also developed from the cause of her journey in the story. Thus, the reader knows and sees everything through the eyes of Ebla. If Ebla does not know, the reader does not know also. It is through Ebla's journey that the reader comes to know about the men who always travelled in caravans to Beledweyne.



Through her, the reader comes to know of Beledweyne, Gheddi and his wife, the widow and Awill. Her further migration exposes the reader to a more urbanized area (Mogadishu) and the kind of life people there lived - people like Jama, Asha and Tiffo. In addition, through Ebla, other characters in the novel are described; for instance, the author describes one of the characters, Jama, through the eyes of Ebla as follows:

Ebla uncovered her head and she could see Jama clearly. He was thin and short and had his hair parted on the left side. He quite badly needed a shave. But maybe this was the way people did things in Mogadishu, Ebla thought (p.109).

The narrator stands as a being that can see through the thoughts of the characters; he relates to the reader what the people in the narrative are thinking, besides their physical actions. Through this, the reader knows the psychological status of some characters in the story and the psychological factors that leads them to taking a particular line of action. For instance, the author relates the trauma that led to the death of Ebla's grandfather through his omniscient point of view: Ebla's sudden departure had killed many things in him, although he did not know why; the grandfather had witnessed many women of her age running away from their families. Through the third person's omniscient point of view, the reader is also able to understand through the physical actions and through the thoughts of characters in terms of what happens or unfolds in the plot of the story.

The objective distance, created by the third person omniscient narrator, allows the author to let the readers get the story from the characters themselves. This is from the characters' speech, thoughts and action. The author does not impose himself over the narrative. The point of view helps the author to develop his characters without a subjective bias. He lets

the characterization come from the way the characters speak.

Now, the point of view follows the protagonist, Ebla, from the time she plans her escape throughout her experiences and the flights that ensue. If it were a cinematic representation then the camera would follow Ebla and it is through her that the film would unfold. This focus on the main character helps to keep focus on the agent of the story. In so doing Farah makes Ebla his mouthpiece. Ebla encapsulates the vision of Nuruddin Farah.

However, there is an instance where the focus of the camera, as it were, is not on the protagonist when the narrator has a focus on a character other than Ebla is at the “Epilogue” state. At this state the narrator focuses on the character of the grandfather. The focus on the grandfather serves to let us in into the cultural tension from which the conflict of the story is generated. This serves to produce the discourse of generational conflict. It helps us to understand the context of the story that Farah is about to tell us.

In the essay titled *Nationalism and the Aporia of National Identity in Farah's Maps*, Francis Ngaboh-Smart analyzes the works of Nuruddin Farah and how the identity of the nation is brought out in the repertoire that includes essays by the Somali author. Ngaboh-Smart writes that “Farah uses the demeaning roles of women under patriarchy to criticize some codes of culture and pose questions about human agency....”

This statement is important in highlighting the question of human agency. The point of view in the novel is geared towards giving the woman agency. By letting the story to come from the woman point of view, Farah is making sure that the women tell their own story without any one doing so on their behalf.

This is in line with feminist ideology expressed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* where she says that literary texts should be looked at in terms of how the woman deals with the prevailing cultural or religious hegemony where she is a reader and how she can manage to become an agent of changing that hegemony, in which case he becomes a writer.

Elaine Showalter in her essay *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* says:

A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers. These are differences brought about by class; race, nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space" (1981: 260).

Reading *From a Crooked Rib*, one is hit by the empathy that the narrator has for the female characters, especially Ebla. The main intention, it would seem, is to produce an ideology that empathizes with women as an oppressed class. Like Showalter says, any act of literary criticism of this text is bound to look into the culture that subjugate women and the women cultures that are produced as a corollary to the oppression.

Through the omniscient narrator the author is able to let the women speak for themselves in questioning the cultural hegemony. We see the Widow questioning the situation of women in the society and how they live with 'men-troubles.' But even at this stage we get to understand that the narrator has adopted a viewpoint which shows no sympathy for the cultural environment of the old man. The narrator constantly refers to the grandfather as old. This draws the attention of readers to fragility of age-won customs. It is at this

part where Ebla is introduced that we begin to see where the sympathy of the narrator belongs. Through the omniscient narrator the author wants us to share with the struggle of the protagonist,

For a woman, she was very tall, but this was not exceptional here. She stood six feet high. She would have been very beautiful, had it not been for the disproportion of her body. She thought about things and people in her own way, but always respected the old and the dead... (p. 8).

From the above quotation we understand that the narrator is adopting a view point on Ebla which bestows on her character some independence and some sense of self-determination. She is the mouthpiece of the women in her society. The narrator further tells us that Ebla roughly means 'Graceful' and that she always wanted her actions to correspond with her name (p. 8). Here the narrator introduces Ebla to the reader in a light that shows her as a character on a quest for something. Also the omniscient narrator who understands the thoughts of Ebla helps to understand her progress towards empowerment. From the start we are given her thoughts about the escape that she is about to initiate, "Ebla had been toying with the idea of leaving home for quite some time. However, she did not know whether this would be temporary change of air – in a town- or a permanent departure..." (p. 8).

The omniscient narrative perspective helps us to understand the way these characters relate with each other. The way the narrator goes into the minds of the characters is helpful in understanding the motivation for the action that pushes the plot forward and forms part of the characterization process. The story of the novel is best understood in this way and the movement from false conscious to empowerment is best understood.

Farah adopts empathy with the condition of the women characters. This shows that he

intends to have the women move away from their positions of suppression to empowerment.

This can be shown in the way that in any situation that the male characters find themselves with female characters and the latter always seem to come on top. The first instance when he does this is by giving Ebla, a young girl of tender age, run away from the patriarch. In a context pitting Ebla and the grandfather, the former is shown as determined while the latter is portrayed as a weak invalid.

In another instance between Gheddi and Aowralla we see the former being depicted as a man who is under the law of the wife. It is the wife, Aowralla, whose voice is loudest in any conversation between the two. Aowralla, in spite of her condition as woman who has just delivered overshadows Gheddi in strength and knowledge. It is Aowralla who tells Gheddi off over the smuggling deal that went sour. She refers to him as a coward and the husband has no response.

The two independent women of Asha and the widow are shown as able to achieve their potential because of the lack of men in their lives. It is these women that Ebla is drawn to and it is them that inspire her. This point of view which Farah adopts with the characters, male vis-a-vis female, creates a kind of juxtaposition and imbalance of view which reveals to us that Nuruddin Farah empathizes more with the female characters than the male characters. This shows that his intention was to present the woman as moving from attachment to male philosophy of life to claiming their own world-view.

Elaine Showalter, in *Towards a Feminist Poetics* discusses that feminism as directed toward either the woman as reader or the woman as the writer. In *From a Crooked Rib*,

by Farah empathizing with the woman he is trying to bring out woman as both a reader of a societal 'texts' with regards to sexual codes ("woman –as –sign") in a historical and political context. That is why he is able to present Ebla as questioning the fact that tradition, dictates that she should have no say in the choice of the marriage partner. What is more, she can be married at whatever stage in life she is in. In this case, the text, which Ebla is presented as a 'reader' is the corpus of Somali traditions which are supported by religion. She is presented as gaining an awareness of the nature of female subjugation that prevails in society. She reads these "texts" and responds by rebelling against them. We can say that she is a 'rebel reader.'

The scene where Ebla and the widow(s) discuss male jealousy through the story of the monkey that puts a sticky mud on his wife's "thing" is a clear indication of how the women are using their voice to read societal notions. The author lets the women to have their own voice which is louder than that of the males because she intends to present the women as trying to subvert the views that have been underpinning the superstructure of oppression. Of special significance to me on women's' voice as that of a writer of new history is the philosophical questions that Ebla grapples with as concerns the fate of women in society.

Rita Nalumansi analyzing *God's Bits of Wood* in *African News Service* captures the feminist pith of the text,

The women are portrayed as strong and determined a force to reckon with. They were not ready to sit and accept what fate put on their plates, these were women who knew what is good for them and they fought for the survival of their children and husbands. To win the struggle, it was important that the people stood together, that is why they needed to do away with their own inward battles of

jealousy, envy, uncertainties, fear among others (Nov. 30, 2004).

From such an analysis it appears that the point of view of Sembene was one that empathizes with the woman and exalted her place in the society as an agent of change whose presence in the community improves all of us and makes us as humanity liberated from the ills that bedevil society.

In *From a Crooked Rib*, Nuruddin Farah brings out strong women characters like Aowralla, Asha, the Widow and Ebla herself. It is important to reflect on how male writers represent women by comparing the two novels. The final scene, where Ebla starts confronting her image in the mirror while play-acting that she is confronting a man, is a good example of the woman as a reader of society and the woman as a writer. In this scene Ebla becomes a reader of how society has treated women overtime; she also becomes a writer of a new text that presents the woman as writing.

This scene shows Ebla as projecting the point of view of Farah as giving the woman the power to question society. This is a way of asserting the presence of the woman in the society. "Who is more important you or a woman?" the imaginary man replies: "There are no two opinions about that." But Ebla replies "I am the one who is active in bringing about anything in bed and out of bed" (p. 66).

The above scene shows Ebla questioning male chauvinism in society. This shows us that she has attained a consciousness that is not false, that she has gained some power in her life. She is achieving the self for which she set out. To let the characters speak for themselves, Farah is making the woman challenge and overcome prevailing hegemony in society. And there is a special significance to this.

According to Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, it is significant that the woman carves out a space for herself in society. Because this allows a female domain, a social sanctuary within which a woman may realize her potential. In this novel, Farah shows a bias for the female characters so that they may have their own peace within which they can thrive.

Through the characters of the widow and Asha, Farah's point of view shows us that the realization of the potential of the woman is tied to her gaining independence from the man. This view is presented by Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* when she says that for a woman to be free she ought to gain some distance from the family unit.

True enough, the characters of the widow and Asha realize their potential because they do not have men in their lives. They are comfortable and live in their own domains. In *God's Bits of Wood* Ousmane Sembene also presents us with strong women who are able to thrive in their own domains because there is no patriarchal oligarchy. It is quite telling that in the novel the women are only able to rise to the occasion after the men have been emasculated by the colonial machinery. This also shows that female potential can only be felt in a situation where the patriarchal structure leaves the woman with freedom. In Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* the character of Njoki is shown as revolutionary. In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* the character of Beatrice is also presented in the light of a woman with strong assertiveness of presence.

It is the point of view from which she is presented that allows us to fall in love with the protagonist of *From a Crooked Rib*. The angle from which the narrator looks at her we understand that she is assertive and aggressive. When she gets to Gheddi's house she takes charge of the domestic cows without being told to do so. She then goes ahead to



help Aowralla in her time of need. As a reader I am touched by the way Ebla helps Aowralla to deliver the baby yet she had never had any experience in it. It is from such presentation of her character that we get to know that Ebla is a likable character who is both an agent of change and a solver of problems. Everybody falls in love with problem solvers. So the author has chosen to situate this character in positions that would make us see his trait as an agent of change.

Further, the point of view from which the narrator tells the story shows the patriarchal structures as weakening in the society. The narrator looks at the men from a perspective of wielders of a diminishing masculinity, an old and weathered army holding on to challenged attitudes like barnacles to an old ship. The grandfather is a physically weak character who is burdened by age and so he cannot chase after his escaping granddaughter. Gheddi, even though he appears physically strong, lacks the mental acuity and strong-will as his wife Aowralla. He is presented as lacking valour and unable to defend himself during the smuggling deal gone sour. Awill is chosen by Ebla. He would appear to have physical power over her and forces himself on her, but he lacks the mental strength to weigh issues objectively like Ebla. He is driven by an insatiable appetite for sexual gratification. Tiffo, well, he is a man who cannot confront his abusive wife and chooses an escape route through Ebla. Then, Ebla's brother is an uneducated man without knowledge outside herding goats and camels. He is not even in control of his life.

Here, the narrator is showing us the diminishing masculinity of the male characters. By focusing his view on the weakness of the males the narrator is attempting to help the women characters to subvert the hegemony that has subjugated them throughout history. When this view is adopted, the plot of the story progresses towards subversion of the

status quo and exultation of the female character.

A comparison would lend itself between *From a Crooked Rib* and *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba generally, and Ebla and Ramatoulaye specifically. The two characters are seen as struggling with the philosophies of tradition and religion and the place of women in those respects. While Farah uses a young girl who comes of age, growing from innocence to experience, Ba uses a mature woman, a wife and a mother, whose view of life is more retrospective. Further, the two writers show that religion does not contribute to the suppression of the woman in itself, but it is other societal factors such as the nature of the economy which hinders a woman's self-determination in a capitalistic society as depicted in Somali and Senegal.

The issues that the narrator shows us as concerning Ebla are religion and tradition. She does not seem concerned by other matters as economical issues. This is true to Ba's protagonist Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter*. By focusing on these two issues the two writers point out to the kind of feminism that would be produced from the Islamic regions and how it would be different from that experienced in countries that are Christian in orientation.

This same point of view on religion as being subverted by men to oppress women can be seen in other writers too. Egyptian writer Nawal el Saadawi, in her work *God Dies by the Nile*, uses powerful metaphor of the river Nile to extrapolate the exploitation of the woman and her journey, like the flow of the river, to liberate herself from her condition.

In this book, the Mayor is shown as subverting religious dictums so as to exploit Zakeya. Well, the offshoot of such an exploitation which is supported by religion is catastrophic

as Zakeya later kills the Mayor, in cold blood. The above women writers are important in understanding how women have come to view their subjectivity under patriarchy. They offer interesting points of comparison with Nuruddin Farah who is a man but writes for the cause of the women. Farah, like el Saadawi and Ba, depicts the inferior status of women in Somali society in *From a Crooked Rib*. As most of his other works, this novel shows criticism of the Somali society especially the plight of women. The departure point for Farah which differentiates him from el Saadawi is that for him the society is only as good as her woman. Hence the development and total transformation of society calls for the women's participation.

The omniscient narrator point of view allows the author to project an objective outlook which is asserted in the telling of a story about a woman moving from oppression to freedom, subjugation to empowerment. This works because we are able to understand the philosophical convictions that bring about this movement.

However, I feel that in this particular text, the omniscient narrator has shown a bias to only one character. It is evident that it is only Ebla whom the narrator knows everything about. It is only her whom we are shown the thought process. And for that, her character is well-rounded and complete. The issue that I have with this is that we do not get to know the thought – processes of some of the major characters who torment Ebla. Apart from the grandfather, the character of Gheddi, Awill and Tiffo do not seem to have thoughts that interest the narrator. We as readers are left without understanding the convictions from which they act out. This is very unfair. I am of the opinion that for a character like Gheddi it is important to bring out his thought process especially as concerns world – view so that we may understand the role that the pursuit of money plays

in his life. But this does not happen. What we are shown is a shopkeeper who is caught up in a smuggling racket. Even the way the plot to marry off Ebla is organized the narrator does not tell us. It only comes to us through a woman character who overheard the conversation. Showing the reader the entire thought processes of Gheddi would have helped in bringing in an understanding of the conflict between Gheddi and Ebla.

Another character on whom the omniscient narrator does favour is Tiffo. Tiffo is a man who is mentally and physically oppressed by women. It seems that Farah brought him in to try and show that in this society even women can be oppressors. But he does not empathize with his situation. He does not take us into the mind of this character of understand his situation. Instead of the character speaking for himself, we only get to understand that he is oppressed by his wife through the character of Asha. And even at this point Asha does not sympathize with his condition; she says “men really ought to be beaten” (p. 174). The question that arises out of this view that men ought to be beaten is: is there violence that is necessary?

The feminist viewpoint that relegates the men to the periphery while taking the women to the centre can be soon to be correcting a historical imbalance. However, if we interrogate the text we find that it creates a situation where as one gender gains another loses and so while the intention was to bring equality it ends up bringing another disparity. Take the case of Ebla and her brother; we are shown a brother who does not want to go to school. He is ignorant of town life. He, basically, is stuck in a rut of life where it is hard for him to improve his condition. When Ebla tells Awill that he sent him back he responds. “But he will die ignorant.” He will not have learnt anything before the earth eats away his bones” (p. 178).

The society that the novel envisions is one where women are empowered and the men are disempowered. This is not altogether right, but maybe it is the punishment that Nuruddin Farah feels that the men deserve as custodians of a patriarchal structure that has historically oppressed women.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The author has adopted a point of view which enables him to present the issue from the feminist point of view. This shows that his concern is mainly the development of the female characters at the expense of the male ones; this is something that is noticeable in the novel *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogolla of Kenya whose plot revolves around Akoko and her female progenies help drive a feminist agenda. It is important, therefore, that for one to come to grips with Farah's intention of empowering the woman, he considers point of view as one of the tools that the author uses to disavow the superstructure, lifting the false consciousness of the grandfather who sticks to tradition and religion, and contribute towards the emancipation of women and their empowerment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

My analysis in the previous chapters has shown that in this novel *From a Crooked Rib*, Nuruddin Farah develops the plot, characterization and point of view in the novel with an aim of showing the path of women liberation in the Somali society. And that his vision of an emancipated woman in a Somali society can be discerned from a study of the three narrative variables.

Importantly, this study has found out that among other things Nuruddin Farah displays a remarkable sense of artistry in telling the story of a woman seeking self-determination. The author brings out a feminist discourse in the sense of emancipation of the woman in the Somali society which he depicts. The manner in which Farrah employs narrative strategies such as plot development, characterization and point of view are key in getting this agenda to his readers.

The author develops the plot and generates discourse by showing the movement of the protagonist, Ebla, from the village to Beledweyne, and then to Mogadishu. The plot develops along the journey motif and therefore the experiences of the main character are important the emancipation and empowerment that we see in the text. Experience here equals knowledge. And knowledge is the power that liberates. Therefore, these journeys of the central character in plot development can be termed “will to power,” to borrow from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Hence, as the plot unfolds the protagonist becomes liberated.

On characterization, Farah has employed a mathematical sense of symmetry and ensured that there were corresponding numbers of male characters to the number of female characters, to mention the main characters that move the plot forward. The characters being the mouth pieces of the author were given traits that are helpful in the production of a condition conflict and movement towards the resolution of that conflict. Characterization has been done around certain symbols which help to highlight the qualities of the characters.

For instance, the character of Gheddi, representing a capitalist exploitation of women, is identified with the shop; the character of Ebla's brother is identified by the beasts while the character of grandfather is identified by his rosary. The female characters do not have material symbols but they are given much voice in the novel and that is what we identify them with. In this sense, Farah is comparable to Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* where the female characters are portrayed as dispossessed beings who lack material things but are endowed with the powers of imagination, speech and courage. For Farah in this novel characterization has ensured that the more the woman becomes empowered the more the man is disempowered. This is the liberation principle of Nuruddin Farah in this novel which enables the unmasking of the false consciousness and the creation of an empowered consciousness.

When it comes to point of view, we can discern the sympathies of the author lie with the female characters. This is because he adopts an outlook which is feminist even when he uses the omniscient narrator to tell us the story. The voice of the narrator has a tone that is sympathetic to Ebla and condemnatory of the grandfather. It is unsympathetic to male characters like Tiffo whose situation is similar to that of Ebla.



However, the omniscient narrator point of view gives an objective distance between the story and the author that is good for the presentation of the emancipation message that is inherent in the novel. It is the point of view that Farah adopts that can make us see his intention of showing a woman moving from subjugation to empowerment. The point of view allows us as the audience to understand, the way plot develops, how and why the characters are represented the way they are. Therefore, this study has achieved the objectives that it had set out to do on the novel *From a Crooked Rib*. I, therefore, would urge other scholars to research more on this novel so as to increase the body of knowledge regarding it.

For example, the novel ends with an open-ended argument: on the one hand Farah portrays Ebla as an empowered character who is able to understand her exploitation, yet she still submits to the will of Awill in the end. There is need to research further and explain why despite gaining consciousness from exploitation, Somali women – as depicted in *From a Crooked Rib* – are unwilling to escape from traditional attitudes of male dominance.

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