

LOVE, WEALTH, POWER AND AMBITION IN *FORGIVE ME MARYAM* OF MOHMED TUKUR GARBA

SHUAIBU RAMAT SULE

*Department of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic Bali, Taraba State.***ABSTRACT**

Garba's novel, *Forgive Me Maryam* belongs to the genre of popular literature. It is endowed with core temples of literature. It exudes literary sublimity as well as capturing important issues of humanity. The theme of the novel centres on love, wealth, power and ambition. This essay articulates the frailty of man in handling the issues of love, wealth, power and ambition and the troubles therein as depicted in the novel.

Keywords: love, wealth, marriage, power, ambition, tragedy **Area of Study:** Literature

Information.

I**Theoretical Framework**

The novel is analysed within the framework of social realism. Social realism is concerned with human society. This school believes that literature is about individuals and groups. Literature should actually portray problems and realities of our existence. However, the social realist writer can be creative even as he is reproducing nature. The goal of social

Introduction:

Love, wealth, power and ambition are examples of passions and forces that shape man's psyche and psychology. They have savoury and unsavoury characteristics in the affairs of man. Man's full consciousness of this is critical in his handling of them. Man can be in the realm of success, admiration, happiness and honour or thrown into a territory of failure, condemnation and tragedy depending on how he handles these forces. *Forgive Me Maryam* is a piteous narrative of a complex interplay of love, wealth, power and ambition. Garba uses first person narrative technique. The narrator of the story is a character in the novel. The reader is made to believe that he is being given authentic

realism is to expose the weaknesses of the society and offering prescriptions for development. The researcher believes that *Forgive Me Maryam* portrays the ideals of social realism. Using the intrinsic and extrinsic methods, the issues of love, wealth, power and ambition in the novel have been analysed. Thus, the researcher has used the content of the text as well as its relationship with its socio political factors shaping it. The approach is used to give a comprehensive picture of the novel.

Humanity and Influence of Love, Wealth, Power and Ambition

The meeting of love and wealth is dramatized in Khaleel and Bilkisu's relationship and subsequent marriage of the latter to Dauda. Khaleel and Bilkisu who are both from humble family backgrounds have intense love relationship with each other from their childhood and it is dreamt that this relationship will translate into marriage. Khaleel explains the distinctive intense love relationship between them in the following way:

Everybody in our village has agreed it was just Godly for Bilkisu and myself to marry. If it weren't the wish of God, our elders often said, God wouldn't have paired us and poured in us such intense love for each other. Even the most senior elders of the village could not remember any couple in the village who had been as inseparable and intimate as we were. (P.11)

Because of the rarity of the intensity of love between Khaleel and Bilkisu, their parents are forced to give their blessing so that the relationship can transform into an outstanding example of matrimony. The depth of love between Khaleel and Bilkisu also makes the community to conclude comfortably that their matrimony is *fait accompli*. It is in this situation that the reader is forced to identify with Khaleel in his emotional devastation when his love relationship and dream of marriage with Bilkisu is truncated as Bilkisu marries Dauda who though is a student in a university like Khaleel, comes from a wealthy and politically powerful family. Love then comes under heavy assault of wealth. Khaleel laments:

I could never love again, not after Bilkisu has discarded me. The price of love was too high; I didn't think I could ever hope to pay it during my life time. No girl would want to love and marry a poor man. I had just got to learn to live alone; by myself. (P25)

In the tale of Khaleel and Bilkisu's love and dreamt matrimony, the writer underpins the power of love relationship between man and woman. At the same time, he gives the message that the allure and influence of money in life is so great. Bilkisu's poor parents force her to marry Dauda from a wealthy family. Her feelings and views are ignored in the issue of her marriage. We are shown a society where there is a commoditization of the girl-child in marriage. In capturing an aspect of women deprivation in his novel, the writer demonstrates possession of feminist binoculars.

Nevertheless, Bilkisu and Dauda's marriage cannot endure. It is a marriage famished of love and fulfillment. After seven years of marriage and upon the death of her father, Bilkisu divorces Dauda and goes back to re-unite with Khaleel who is now married to Maryam. The collapse of Bilkisu and Dauda's marriage draws our attention to the fact that money alone cannot guarantee enduring marriage. Love is unassailable. Bilkisu tells of her experience in marriage with Dauda.

For seven years I did not have any peace of mind. My parents sold me to a man I did not love. If I had refused him, they would have disowned me and closed the door of their house on me. I am a girl, Khaleel. I was at a disadvantage. A girl cannot desert her parents as easily as a boy could do. (P.16)

Garba's narrative style is effective. His capacity to explain situations in a simple and clear language is enormous. From the beginning to the end, the narrative is strewn with emotional language. The story is socially realistic. The writer uses flashback to shed light on the reader's understanding of certain issues. He equally uses suspense to keep the reader in anxious expectation of what happens next. This makes a reader glued to the novel. Herein lays the aesthetics of his novel. The marriage between Khaleel and Maryam is a paradox but a celebration of the audacity of love. This marriage is yet another site of rendezvous between love and wealth in the novel. Khaleel comes from a family where 'three meals in a day was a luxury' and his parents lived in a 'thatched house with corn stack walls that swayed in the wind' (P.27). However, he seems cut for greatness. His going to university (courtesy of Government scholarship) to study law and remarkable academic performance are sparks of greatness in him. Moreover; he is humble and helpful to fellow students who need his academic assistance. These are the qualities that draw Maryam to Khaleel.

Maryam is the heiress to Alhaji Modibbo's wealth being his only child. Alhaji Modibbo is a multi-millionaire businessman who is the Managing Director of Samaniya Air Charter. As a diploma student in law at a university, Maryam is one of the female students that come to Khaleel for academic assistance but ostensibly for establishing love relationship with him. Although Maryam is from a rich family, she cuts for herself a picture of humility, moderation, decency and innocence. This is demonstrated in her way of dressing, use of wealth and relation with people. Khaleel is attracted to Maryam by these qualities. Love relationship that eventually leads to marriage between the two is born.

Maryam is assertive, clever, self-willed and loves freedom. Against the plan of her parents to marry her to Gana Mati, her cousin, who is the Secretary General of the Samaniya Air Charter, she manipulates the love of her parents for her as their only child to force them to accept and finance her wedding with Khaleel, the man she loves. In a society where people's consciousness and actions are mainly influenced by money, where a girl-child hardly rejects parents' decision on her marriage, Maryam presents herself as a rare woman and new consciousness. In Maryam's marriage with Khaleel, the writer gives the message that love can abrogate social boundaries. Love has the tendency to overcome wealth.

Unfortunately, Khaleel's relationship with Maryam's parents is adversarial. Modibbo and his wife's view of life are perverted by their wealth. Wealth undermines their ability to see goodness and worthiness in human beings other than possession of money. They have class consciousness and intolerance towards Khaleel. Khaleel explains his denigration by Maryam's parents:

*Her family so disapproved of me, so Maryam told me, that her father told her that my type was only fit to become a helping hand, an errand boy. It would shame the family, her father warned sternly, if she married such a man, she would regret it..... Maryam's mother was not happy either.
(PP. 27-28)*

Modibbo is callous and selfish. His fraternity with members of his extended family who are poor is poor. Ado, Modibbo's family relation who assisted him to make money but was later dumped tells Khaleel of Modibbo in the following way, 'we have the same great-grand parents! But he got rich, see? When you are rich only those members of your family who are rich are your brothers and sisters.' (P.80)

To avoid the scorn and humiliation of Modibbo and his wife, Khaleel tries to distance himself from their wealth. Maryam proves to be a faithful and loyal wife. After their wedding, they stayed in 'one bed-room Federal Low-cost' having rejected a mansion offered to them by Alhaji Modibbo. They also reject his 'fat monthly allowance which he gives occasionally.' With love, understanding and confidence, the couple cast their family as a responsible and respectable one.

Khaleel is hard-working. Barely after two years of their wedding, he becomes a 'member of the management of the legal firm' in which he works. After experiencing some challenges, Maryam becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby-girl named Binta. This happens after the death of Alhaji Modibbo in a plane crash. His enormous shares and powerful position as Managing Director of Samaniya Air Charter is to be inherited by Maryam. Meanwhile Maryam remains a full-time house-wife as her late father had wished. The post of Managing Director of the Air Charter fatefully falls on Khaleel, a man who tries to distance himself from the wealth of hateful in-laws. On her bed while in labour at Parklane Hospital, Maryam asks Khaleel to take up the position of Managing Director of the company on her behalf. This is how she tells Khaleel:

I may not come out of this alive. Even before anything... happens... and Allah knows best. I want you please take up father's position in the company. As from today, Khaleel. This is a personal request from own wife. (P.36)

On becoming the Managing Director of the Air Charter, Khaleel finds himself in monumental wealth, splendour and influence. His mobility to this station is *midwifed* by his love and marriage with Maryam. To appreciate the magnitude of Khaleel's dramatic prosperity, it is imperative to give a detailed quotation of his explanation of it:

I was the Managing Director of one of Nigeria's most successful charter airlines with annual salary that would have been the envy of the Governor. I lived in a sprawling, six bed-roomed detached bungalow-mansion, really - in the low residence, high class quarters of Sultan Road, with twenty five years old wife, Maryam and four- year daughter, Binta. I had a choice of cars to drive, was president of the flying club and a member of a host of other

exclusive clubs which only accepted the most prominent citizens of the town. (p.5)

Khaleel relocates his parents from the realm of poverty to that of wealth. He buys a car for them. He secures for his father the sole distributorship of Funtua Textiles in Funtua: He relocates them from Nasarawa to Funtua after building a modern house in Funtua (PP 57 & 136).

But life is not a bed of roses. Every garden of flower, it is said, has its own thorns. Although Khaleel's marriage with Maryam has brought for him material prosperity, it is in the throes of acute strains that eventually lead to a tragedy. One of such crises is the diminishing love and attention between Khaleel and Maryam after the birth of Binta. Maryam's love for her daughter drains her love and intimacy with her husband. They are emotionally apart, yet they live in the same house as husband and wife. Khaleel tells of the crack in their relationship in the following words:

We had been happily married until Binta was born. From then on Binta had completely dominated Maryam's life.... Gradually, I had been passed to the background, I was being eased out of Maryam's life. (P. 8)

Yet, Maryam occasionally complains to her parents about her husband. The implication of this strain is that the hatred of Maryam's parents for Khaleel which Maryam has always tamed even before the death of her father but sustained by her mother becomes validated and accentuated. Although Khaleel is aware of extremity of women's love and attention for their babies at the expense of their husband (P.8), he does not develop the equanimity and tact in handling the emotional strain that is growing in the marriage. He presents himself as a poor operator of matrimony.

Gana's undying enmity towards Khaleel for truncating his ambition to marry Maryam and taking ownership of her inherited principality exerts some pressure on Khaleel's matrimony and office. Although Gana holds the post of Secretary General, 'the second highest position' in Samaniya Air Charter, he begrudges Khaleel as the Managing Director. Similarly, Gana uses his position as Chairman of workers union in the company to sabotage Khaleel's policies. Gana is Machiavellian. Ambition for prosperity and power is legitimate in humanity but one must not destroy his fellow human being to attain it. Gana's sense of morality

is dominated by his ambition. The view of John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), 'Ambition is the grand enemy of peace' is at no time relevant than here. The height of Gana's hatred for Khaleel and battle to take over the company comes after the death of Maryam.

The major factor that puts Maryam and Khaleel's marriage on the precipice is the re-emergence of Bilkisu in Khaleel's life at a time of dwindling love and affection in their marriage. In their meeting, Khaleel and Bilkisu's truncated love comes back with the intensity of the past. Bilkisu does not mince words on her undying love and determination to marry Khaleel after divorcing her husband:

I knew you would still love me and take me back. To be honest I wouldn't want to share you with any woman. I want you to be mine, mine and mine alone. But I am paying for my parents' mistake. I am taking the second position because - I love you.
(P.16)

Khaleel himself admits to the reader, 'Bilkisu had always been residing in the innermost part of my being', 'whenever I was with her I would feel as though I was living in my paradise on earth' (P.118). The coming of Bilkisu therefore provides a relief for Khaleel who is undergoing the pain of dearth of love in his matrimony. Their love develops with vigour and Khaleel gets her a separate accommodation in the town and goes to her for frolicking until he is compelled to talk to Maryam about his plan to marry Bilkisu.

Maryam is enraged about Khaleel's plan and her rejection is comprehensively sarcastic and lamentable. Her words:

When you marry your free woman, don't bother to come here! I want to keep a home, not a brother!! Never step into this house again. It does not belong to you, it's mine... don't ask the driver to take you or drive in any one of the cars yourself. They don't belong to you! Don't bother to go to Samaniya Air Charter either you will be kicked out if you do. Oh Allah, if only I had listened to Father! (P.118)

Maryam is bold and out-spoken. No woman easily accepts the idea of a co-wife. Polygamy has on its entourage jealousy and rivalry, thus preventing happiness in the family. Maryam loved Khaleel and has made heroic sacrifice to have him as a loyal and faithful husband. As a person from a rich family, Maryam's choice of

marrying Khaleel from a poor family deconstructs the perception that the value of a man is in the money he has. Her opposition to Khaleel's proposition to marry another wife can be said to be legitimate. Self-preservation, it is said, is the first law of nature.

However, her rejection is laden with anger, pride, and insult and this weighs heavily on Khaleel's mind. It provokes an uncontrollable turmoil and rage in him as he decides to kill Maryam so that he and Binta will become the possessors of Maryam's wealth and he having the liberty to marry Bilkisu, a woman in whom he believes he could have eternity of happiness.

The door of tragedy is opened. Khaleel uses the period of Juma'at prayer while he is in Abuja to have a meeting with officials of Pilgrims Board on behalf of the Samaniya Air Charter and flies back home and secretly and gruesomely murders Maryam. Maryam is killed on the altar of crude and insane love of Khaleel for Bilkisu. Khaleel lacks depth and insight. His emotional enslavement makes him depraved. The burden of reason, matrimony and moral principles of his society and the sacrifices of love that Maryam has made cannot restrain him from embarking on his murderous mission.

Maryam's mother and Gana believe that Khaleel is the killer of Maryam. They form a cartel against him. Khaleel's claims *alibi* during police inquest into Maryam's death and in the court trial. Gana is the counsel to Maryam's mother in the court case. His alliance with Maryam's mother does not emanate from shared sadness and pains in Maryam's death but his enmity with Khaleel and his veiled, selfish and constant ambition to take ownership of Samaniya Air Charter. Maryam's mother's hatred for Khaleel makes her uncritical of Gana's alliance with her in Maryam's death case and her own fate in the business empire that stands to be taken over by an intensely ambitious Gana.

The act of deception and lies cannot be run for too long. The Bible says, '...for whatsoever a man sowed, that shall he also reap' (Galatians 6: 7). Khaleel cannot run away from the consequences of his evil act. His claim of *alibi* in the murder of his wife during police investigation and tenacious argument in the court that Gana killed Maryam in order to take over the Samaniya Air Charter since he could not marry Maryam is not acceptable. Khaleel realizes he will not win the case. An insane emotion of love has driven him to sin against God and his wife. Endlessly, he will receive the condemnation and hatred of the society. While in detention, he takes poisonous cyanide to kill himself quickly. His words:

I won't be in God's favour if I die after drinking from the bottle. But may be that is the punishment I deserve for killing Maryam. May be she will forgive me if she knows that, for her sake, I am committing suicide. (P.139)

Khaleel kills himself! Maryam has gone. How will the life of Bilkisu be? What of Binta? The reader is flooded with emotions of sadness, pity, confusion, pain and thought of the futility of life.

Conclusion

The writer explores the ideas of love, wealth, power and ambition as pertinent issues of existence. They are sweet and powerful. They are ennobling if we deploy them to usher in happiness and development for humanity. However, they can be sources of psychological traumas that can set the fire of depression, anger, pain, suffering, evil and tragedy on humanity. Man must therefore handle them with reason. Garba's *Forgive Me Maryam* is a psychological novel offering critical social advice.

Reference

- Garba, T. Mohamed. *Forgive Me Maryam*. Malaysia: Macmillan Education. 1986.
Meyer, Joyce. *Conflict Free Living*. Florida: Charisma House. 2008.
The Holy Bible: New King James Version. Colombia: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1982.