

Relationship and the Concept of Marriage in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, and Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

Irene Akumbu Wibedimbom

University of Yaounde 1 {Cameroon} Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences Department Of
African Literature and Civilizations

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000246>

Received: 11 May 2025; Accepted: 21 May 2025; Published: 07 October 2025

ABSTRACT

From the critical perspectives of the New Historicism, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, one can examine the relationship and the concept of marriage in the Nigerian and Indian contexts. In Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Brie Price*, both authors highlight the societal notions of patriarchy, social discriminations, child bearing, bride price, amongst others, which directly affect matrimonial relationships, thus hindering the development of the Indian and Nigerian women. This article equally depicts that the levels of literary similarities and differences are influenced not only by literary trends and cultures, but, most especially, by the authors' life experiences, sensitivities and worldviews.

Indeed, Desai and Emecheta through different socio-historical, political and cultural contexts in their writings share identical broad elements of content on issues such as the castes system, virginity, memory, diaspora life, gender biases, patriarchy and diverse manners toward bride price. Their works equally display divergent in aesthetics and ideology. These novelists transcend time and national boundaries because of the humanistic values of their social message, which holds that prior knowledge of each other, a serene and laudable intimacy ought to precede formal matrimonial relationships, which are sometimes imposed and clouded with hatred, violence and trauma. Both authors also affirm that women, if given a better chance, can also contribute positively in national development.

This article thus focuses on the narratives of Anita Desai and Buchi Emecheta, which portray the ordeals undergone by displaced peoples, especially women, in the diaspora in order to adapt to the diverse cultural practices they encounter in the new environments; and how they also find it difficult to completely discard of their own identities in the face of such cultural clashes and other social conflicts. Caught in this web of incompatible cultural values, some characters opt to renegotiate space. Thus, the article is motivated by the vivid pictures of constant struggle between male and female characters presented by Anita Desai and Buchi Emecheta. The wrench of racial discrimination and stigmatization faced by blacks and particularly women; and their ability to readapt to strange cultures and regain their rightful identity makes the issue interesting and worth examining. Besides, the patriarchal societies had always kept women abase; reducing them to cooks and child bearers. But a wind of change seemingly blew across many communities in the 21st century, giving rise to female uprising against suppression and oppression. It would also be interesting to know how successful the revolutions have been. This article therefore focuses on the methods adopted by female characters to renegotiate their identity and whether they succeed; and also the methods used to renegotiate space for themselves in a context of cultural clashes. As such, the article is based on the hypothesis that as a result of displacement individuals in the novels under study find themselves in cultural contexts in which they are marginalized and are compelled to renegotiate space for themselves and their values; and that the women worldwide are striving to upset the old order in order to gain recognition from their male counterparts. It adopts the post-colonial theory to better evaluate and analyze the texts under study.

Bill Ashcroft et al; in the "General Introduction" to the Post-Colonial Studies Reader posit:

Post-colonial theory involves discussions about experience of various kinds, migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of

imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experience of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (p. 2)

The above definition leads us to the understanding that this theory is based on otherness and resistance. Ashcroft et al further say that this theory rejects the egregious classification of ‘first’ and ‘third’ world and contest the lingering fallacy that the post-colonial is somehow synonymous with the “economically underdeveloped”.

The post-colonial theory also involves concepts such as centre/margin, ethnicity and indigeneity, universalism, hybridity, representation, subalternism and gender. Hybridity refers to the integration of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures. Ashcroft et al in the Post-Colonial Studies, state that ‘... Hybridity occurs in post-colonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control or when settler invaders dispossess indigenous people and force them to “assimilate” to new social patterns. (p.183)

Thus, migrants accumulate two different cultures and from that, they create a new space for themselves, becoming hybrids. This is depicted in Desai *Fasting, Feasting* when Arun creates his own relationship in the West and accepts some of their ways of life, in doing this, he still creates a new space for himself; he prepares a dish which resembles his West Indian taste although not exactly, nor is it a typical dish from the West. In addition to that, Chinua Achebe in an article entitled “Name for Victoria, Queen of England” in the Post-Colonial Studies Reader gives a clear illustration of what hybridity is all about as it is written ‘... We lived at the cross roads of cultures...on one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other, my father’s brother and his family blinded by heathenism offered food to idols. That was how it was supposed to be anyhow. (p.191)

The migrants believe in the tradition of offering sacrifices to their ancestors which show the closeness between the death and the living. The sacrifices offered to idols place a very significant role in the lives of the blacks. Although they have accepted the Whiteman’s Bible, they do not see any closeness between them and the Whiteman’s God. They invoke their ancestors and offered foods to them in a way not to cut off their relationship since time and again, they will consult them when things are not going on well in the society. Thus, ancestral relationships play a very important part in the lives of the blacks.

Key Words: Relationship and marriage

INTRODUCTION

During the Postcolonial era, many writers tussled with social constructs in trying to explore, exploit and satirise some societal traditional laws and customs. It is of important to note that in some societies, relationships and marriages are largely not based on mutual love but on arranged and forced unions. Many societies at that time relied basically on their traditions and customs as Anita Desai portrays in her writing from the geographical zone.

The writers divulge on the issue of patriarchy and gender, as victims which are most of the time women, suffer oppression and discrimination from their male counterparts. Gender plays an important role in that many societies do not give the woman or the girl child that opportunity to choose their life partner or allow them to have a love affair with whoever they consider to be their choice. Anita in her work brings forward instances whereby, privileges are melted to the male sex when it comes to rules on marriage. In her Indian society, she portrays instances that mystify bride prices and manhood, exposing the importance tradition holds on it. In Anita’s *Fasting, Feasting*, the concept of marriage is totally based on parents’ arrangement since according to them, love relationship is a taboo. Bride price in the Indian and the Igbo tradition is paid by the man and this implies that the woman becomes his property.

Anita Desai also examines the Hindu-Indian philosophy of marriage and the ills that women face in marital homes although they are the ones that pay the bride price or dowry. In the novel, suppression, oppression,

discrimination and issue of otherness are at the apex. These authors frown and question the idea of patriarchy and its consequences on the ways of the society.

Looking at the colonial era, the nation-state or its guiding principles are often imagined literally as women. Literature offers one of the important ways where individuals, be they male or female, can be documented on their perception of life and commitment to their origin. Literature is based on viewing and writing various personal or impersonal experiences that take place in a particular environment. Chinweizu et al in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, sees commitment as the ability of a writer to perceive social realities and make those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in the society's norms and values (p. 35). It is in these texts that one can easily express one's view as Jonathan Culler makes us to understand in *Literary Theory A Very Short Introduction* when he says "to understand literature, we may want to analyse it rather than define it" (p.20). It is during the analyses that we may term a work of art as being feminist, patriarchal, autobiographic or fiction incline. From the way the authors write, it is evident that the outstanding victims in their societies remain the female sex who is relegated to the background even if she has the same educational level as the male counterpart. Numerous biases therefore characterize female relationships and the concept of marriage.

Buchi Emecheta in most of her novels exposes and satirizes the extent to which the Igbo society, like most patriarchal societies, limits a woman's scope and talent by restricting her to male dominance and domestic spaces. From birth, the position of the Ibuza woman is well defined following strict traditional roles and customs. The relationship between male and female among the Igbo is largely a love-hate relationship in which the woman who is subservient and respectful to her male kith and kin is barely tolerated.

In *The Bride Price and Fasting, Feasting*, a female childhood experience in terms of their relationships both within and without the family context is that which recognizes them as second class citizens. In *The Bride Price*, for example, Emecheta presents Aku-nna in an extremely cordial relationship with her father Nna. The relationship between Aku-nna and her father is very rare amongst the Igbo people who consider women, especially young girls as properties to their potential husband. In the novel, the author reinforces the love relationship between Aku-nna and her father as he says "...He did not want his daughter to suffer or worry unduly. Aku-nna knew that there was a kind of bond between her and her father, which did not exist between her and her mother. She loved her father... and knew that she held a special place in her father's heart. (p.12). Aku-nna loved her father and her father in turn loved her. It is as a result of the love that Nna has for his daughter that he decides to violate tradition amongst the Ibuza people in particular and Nigerians as a whole. He places much love and affection to his female child which is not very common in their society. Her daughter is given a special treatment and she is much closer to his heart.

When Aku-nna and her mother, Ma Blackie, move to Okonkwo's compound, her relationship with her foster father changes. Okonkwo sees Aku-nna only in terms of the amount of money that her bride price will fetch for him. He is equally not happy with Ma Blackie insistence to send Aku-nna to school because to him, Aku-nna is only a woman. However, Okonkwo allows Aku-nna's mother to educate her because he wants her bride price to increase in order to enable him take the Eze title. As he tells his son Iloba, "Aku-nna and Ogugua will get married at about the same time. Their bride prices will come to me. You see the trend today, that the educated girls fetch more money" (p.75). The relationship between Aku-nna and her step father is therefore one of selfishness and greed. Okonkwo wants to exploit Aku-nna and the mother for his selfish aims. He has no love for the girl, he sees the girl in terms of money. The more money the mother puts in educating the girl, the more money a future husband will pay for her bride price.

Conversely, one of the most controversial relationships in the *Bride Price* involves Aku-nna and Okoboshi. While Okoboshi is deeply in love with Aku-nna and is willing to have her as wife, Aku-nna is rather in love with Chike, the son of a slave. Aku-nna hates Okoboshi to the extent that she is willing to fight to death than have him sleep with her. In the bridal room in Okoboshi's compound, he comes to Aku-nna in his handsome bridegroom's robe, disrupts and begins wrestling with Aku-nna to sleep with her by force. Based on the situation, her anger arises and she insults and brands Okoboshi and his entire family as thieves. Worse still, in order to repulse him, she fabricates a story that Chike had disvirgined her that afternoon and mocks at Okoboshi in bitter laughter, saying:

Look at you, and shame on you. Okoboshi the son of Obidi! You say your father is a chief-dog thief that is what he is, if the best he can manage to steal for his son is a girl who has been taught what men taste like by a slave. Even if you do sleep with me tonight, how are you ever going to be sure that the child I might bear would be your own? I may already be expecting his child, and then you will have to father a slave child. What a come-down for the great and mighty Obidi family! For I should never stop telling my child whose son he was...but you were unclean until two days ago. My mother said so... oh yes that is true, today I passed my examinations. We celebrated my success together... (p.138)

Okoboshi spits on her, curses her, and knocks her out of his bed into unconsciousness for the night. Aku-nna, because of her love for Chike sacrifices her pride and reputation of being a virgin, highly valued in the Ibo culture at the time, and thereby succeeds in keeping the purported marriage from being consummated that night.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, religion has done nothing to fight against male dominations. This explains why Uma joins Mira-Maxi which symbolizes religion, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism and it does absolutely nothing as far as the conditions of women are concern. Uma's parents withdraw her several times when she decides to become a Reverend Sister out of frustration. She makes up her mind never to go there since they are of no help to her or women.

However, Uma gains happiness when she joins the charity of O'Henry and the nuns. She becomes a member of a community which works for women's benefit. Uma's journey of self-discovery portrays that "the possibilities of a woman to escape the suffering in the bonds of patriarchy depend essentially on recognition and her inside chamber condition (Nabar 36). Those who are around her must also recognize her suffering. It is in this connection that Uma is introduced to literature.

In the text, Ella Wheeler Wilcox who is Uma's literary mother also renegotiates the female identity. Wilcox is a woman who has written much and Uma finds her work interesting. Wilcox is the authoress of "poems of pain, poems of cheer. The kingdom of love" (p. 56). Uma locks herself in her room and reads her poems. Mama is now angry because Uma now locks her door, "why have you locked the door, Uma?" (p. 59). By doing this, Uma wants to obtain her identity, freedom and individuality, dignity and self-esteem. Wilcox helps Uma to gain self-realization. She is inspired by Uma's writings to fight back MamaPapa. Desai brings this idea as an allegory to tell us that women also contribute to the downfall of others. Mama tells Uma to put her book away and to prepare coffee for Papa but Uma did not open the door. Uma's revolt helps her to achieve a better status in which MamaPapa have refused from the beginning of the novel.

As the climax of Uma's journey approaches it becomes more and more clear that what Desai considers in her novel as the worst patriarchal imposition on women is the enclosure in the sense of ignorant of "what is on the other side." In Uma's case it is emblematic that she is, for one thing, suffering from eye disease, and, for another, prevented to go and see an ophthalmologist. For the eyes are a primary means of getting to know, read and study in order to get out of the bonds of ignorance. Uma's voyage towards the final realization of "what is on the other side", which coincides with the recognition of the secret chambers of her inner person, is enabled by the escapes contacts with people more or less not infected by the germs of patriarchy or cure them. They are indeed escapist because they take place usually either out of home, or at home when MamaPapa are not there. Arun while in America does not see a resemblance to what he knows. That is, a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who fails to express her outrage against inattention from her parents to her own unique and singular being. She obeys the parents in whatever they ask her to do. Arun symbolizes some men who sympathizes with the conditions of women, the agony that women go through in the society. Arun admires the way the aunt Mrs. Patton children are free and the liberty they have in doing what pleases them. But his own sister, Uma, is in chains as the parents choose a husband for her and remove her from school to cater for the house.

As time passes, renegotiation of female identity becomes part and parcel of both communities (West Indian and the Africa). Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Emecheta's *The Bride Price* principally exploit the experiences of women in these societies. With time, the fundamental assumptions put in place by tradition are

being questioned and the boundary between the history of a place and their literature becomes fluid and open to reality.

Desai, for instance, focuses on male domination in her society through practical retrogressive cultural and traditional norms. She comments on what is beautiful and affirmative in her society as well as exposes what is negative and destructive. This is also glaring in Desai's novel. This duality in their vision renders their works most interesting. They attempt to examine marriage, bride price and historical realities of a people in their respective communities, and not only destroy the myth that surrounds women's contentment with their status quo, but also give insights into women's struggle, under male domination, to work out strategies to fight against the patriarchal norms.

From the above analyses, it is evident that women from time immemorial have been discriminated against by men in all aspects of life. But with the evolution of the world, everything is taking a different turn. Women are becoming more influential in the development of the society although there are still certain traditional norms that women, no matter their educational level, are not tolerated. It is meant for the men and only the men. Patriarchy cannot be completely eradicated in the African and the West Indian communities although women are given certain rights to take part in those things that they were forbidden before now. Thus, to an extent the struggle of women for their identity cannot be ignored.

The relationship between Chike and Aku-nna in *The Bride Price* is full of love, affection and concern. Chike is genuinely in love with Aku-nna and this love is exposed through the love song he sings to Aku-nna when she is kidnapped to Okoboshi's compound as he sings "...Brown Skin gal, stay home and Min'baby, Brown Skin gal, stay home and Min's baby, I'm going away in a sailing boat, And if I don't come back stay home and Min'baby. (p.141)

The above song reinforces the relationship between Aku-nna and Chike and upon hearing Chike's song in the dark at Okoboshi's compound, she takes her decision to marry Chike because to her 'There was a comforting feeling of security in her knowledge that she was being watch by Chike, and that moment clinched her determination. If ever she got out of this alive, there was no man for her but Chike, slave or no slave'(p.136). There is a strong bonds that keep them together no matter their circumstances.

To this extent, one realizes that most relationships in Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, are not cordial as most of them are characterized by patriarchy and gender biases.

On the other hand, the concept of Marriage in *The Bride Price* and *Fasting, Feasting* will be examined from Buchi Emecheta and Anita Desai's perspectives with regard to the Nigerian and Indian communities. We will focus on issues such as gender differences, patriarchy, bride price and child bearing which in one way or the other affect the Ibuza marriage institution.

Talking about gender biases, Pauline Ada Uwakweh in *Becoming A Woman: The Socialization of Gender* states that, starting from birth, through childhood to adulthood, special expectations for the male and female child differ and grow in ever-widening circles, reaching a stage where each child inculcates the roles of their kind. Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* explore the phenomenon of gender bias and cultural imperialism designed to imbue women with a sense of the superiority of men. Also in the same article, Bernice Lott states that '...The behavior we learn as appropriate for women in a particular culture and at a particular time constitute the role identified without sex. Because these behaviours are, in a very large part, unrelated to the reliable biological distinctions between the sexes, the word "gender" is used to identify our learned definitions of women and men (p. 6)

Lott is arguing here that the making of gender identity is a long process that starts at birth. From birth a girl child is considered weak and lesser to the male counterpart. Little or no care at times is given to them. Their only importance comes from the fact that a bride price will be taken when they are given out for marriage. They are income generating figures.

Gender as we noted earlier is an ascribe roles given to being male and female based on societal norms and values. In an introductory essay “Gender and Culture”, Carole Wade and Carole Tavis provide an overview of some of the many ways in which the lives of women and men differ from one culture to another. This implies that:

The anatomy of sex is universal, but the behaviours, rights and responsibilities considered appropriate for males and females are social inventions that vary enormously around the globe. These gender arrangements are not arbitrary, but rather depend on the economic realities and other practical conditions all the duties, rights, and behaviours a culture considers appropriate for males and females, is a social invention. (pp. 5-16)

It is gender, not anatomical sex that gives us a sense of personal identity as male or female. Gender, as far as women are concerned, is stained with injustice. Men and women, whether white or black, follow this paradigm of victimizers and victims in conjugal relationships, and in the society. The whole issue about gender injustice revolves around the imbalance nature of power between men and women. Power is used by men to manipulate, exploit and victimize women. This ensures male determination to preserve their freedom and authority over women. Power brings about critical differences and prejudices against women, who are sometimes treated as children.

These definitions tie with what obtains in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* and Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting*. This is evident in the fact that the Nigerian and the Indian societies in the novels have roles spelt out for the male and female following strict traditional roles and customs.

In the Ibuza society as presented by Emecheta, it is the sole prerogative of the man to decide on which woman to marry and the woman’s opinion has no role to play in her marriage life. For instance, in *The Bride Price*, the marriage between Ugo and Dogo is arranged by Nna without Uzo’s concern. This is noticed when the narrator says that, ‘...When the war was over, Dogo wanted to marry a wife with the army money he had received, and Aku-nna’s father told him: ‘my cousin’s daughter is grown now. She comes from a very tall family too, so why don’t you pay for her? She will give you tall sons, because her father was tall and her mother, who is still alive, is also tall. ‘Dogo liked Uzo, and Nna helped them to get a room in Akinwunmi (p. 18)

The above lines do not only highlight the themes of gender bias but also exposes the Ibuza culture of arranged marriages, a cultural lifestyle which Emecheta satirizes in most of her novels.

Also, in *The Bride Price*, marriage is conceived following the strict traditional laws and customs. According to the Ibuza culture, a freeborn like Aku-nna cannot get married to a slave like Chike. It is considered an abomination and this explains why Okonkwo refuses out rightly to accept Aku-nna’s bride price from Chike. Friendship between a freeborn and a slave is forbidden. It is for this reason that Ogugua warns her cousin Aku-nna to be careful with Chike says ‘... You must be very careful. That man, that teacher- he’s not one of us, you know. No decent girl from a good Ibuza family is allowed to associate with him. My father will rather see his daughter dead than to allow such a friendship. (p.70)

From the above, it is clear that the society we come across in *The Bride Price* is one which does not only encourage gender biases but also social discrimination.

In *The Bride Price* and *Fasting, Feasting*, these gender biases are mostly encouraged by the patriarchal nature of the society. The Ibuza society is a patriarchal one, which gives unlimited rights to the men. It is one of the evils that plague the Nigerian men institution because it limits the rights and potentials of the woman. The word “patriarchy” is sometimes used to refer to the actual power structure built around men’s domination of women. In fact, the domination is not only women but children as well, since the man is the head of the family. The Bible actually tells us this in the book of Genesis. The biblical woman for instance will be wife, daughter or sister, or all of them at once, but she will rarely have a name. Her function is to assume procreation- the propagation of the race. Patriarchy creates social hierarchy where men occupy the top positions.

Kristeva stresses the negative consequences of patriarchal monotheism for women who find themselves reduced to the role of the silent “other” of the symbolic order. She also emphasizes the necessity of upholding

the law and sexual difference as long as one remains within the framework of patrilineal, class-structured capitalist-society.

Also, Peter Blood, Alan Tuttle, and George Lakey in *Understanding and Fighting Sexism: A Call to Men*, argue that patriarchy is not just a power structure “out there”, rather:

---It is mainly enforced by our own acceptance of its character ideals for our lives. The character ideal, which is held up for men to reach toward, is “masculinity”. A masculine man is supposed to be tough---unfeeling, except for anger and sexual desire and habitually taking the initiative. Masculinity exists only in contrast to femininity, the model for women. Feminine characteristics include cooperativeness, emotionality, patience, passivity, nurturance, and sexual appeal. (p.155)

The above quotation gives us a glaring view of what a patriarchal set up looks like. Women are asked in a thousand ways to take sides against themselves. In *Fasting, Feasting* for example Arun is treated by Mama Papa in a special way because he is a male child. Uma and Aruna do not receive similar treatment from their parents. Women are neglected in many spheres of life. Desai thus exposes the patriarchal customs of West Indians through their gender roles. William H. Chafe quoting an anthropologist, Margaret Mead, in an article “Cultural Social Structure and Social Problems” says “Women have two choices to make in life. Either one proclaimed herself a woman and therefore less an achieving individual and therefore less a woman” (p.110). Mead promotes women who fight for their right by suppressing those patriarchy norms which suppress women to lesser human beings. Here the writer tries to renegotiating the female identity. Desai’s heroine, Uma in *Fasting, Feasting*, is an epitome of traditional female subjugation. She strictly follows and obeys the patriarchal and traditional conventions in her diverse roles as daughter. She is an eager, thwarted character who is treated with neglectful impatience by her parents and with some condescension by her smart younger sister Aruna. She is a good, frustrated woman in the Victorian novel, which is unsurprising given this family’s traditional structure. When Arun is born, the family’s resources are poured into his intellectual nourishment. For the girls the sole future is marriage. These arranged marriages produce their own painful comedy when Uma proves difficult to pair off:

Mama worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised...but it was always returned with the comment ‘we are looking for someone more taller/fairer/more educated, for Sanju/Pinku/Dimpu. (p.89)

The family is duped twice into handing over a dowry as part of an unsuccessful engagement-a shame that clings to Uma forever after, though she is blameless in both situations. Inevitably, Aruna’s marriage is a glamorous triumph because it takes her to a new metropolitan life in Bombay.

Patriarchy for years has reduced women to nothing as far as decision making is concerned. Tradition demands subservience and respect from female children. Uma obeys this without questioning from the outset. As prescribed by culture, her father chooses her husbands and she accepts without objection. In that society, arranged marriages guarantee a happy married life. Two attempts at getting her married end in disaster. She has an offer to work in a local hospital but MamaPapa refuse to let her even consider the offer. Desai says this about Papa as it is written, ‘...But papa did not appear to have noticed the honour this time. He was looking his face up into a frown of great degree. The frown was filled with everything he thought of working women, of women who dared presume to step into the world he occupied. (p.143)

Uma’s parents will not allow her to work and make money since MamaPapa believe a female child should rather stay in the house and bring up the younger ones. Uma stops school when her mother gives birth to her younger brother Arun. She nurses this child and prepares food for PapaMama as the time table stipulates. This is a clear example of how MamaPapa want female children to work. As the events unfold, Uma stands against this patriarchal norms and ideas.

Another instance where female characters experience the discrimination of patriarchy concerns Anamika when Desai says that, ‘...not only pretty, and good but an outing student as well...she won a scholarship to Oxford

where only the most favoured and privileged sons could ever hope to go! Naturally her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study-just when she was of age to marry” (p.69)

At this point, it is clear that women can better their lives by working extremely hard as Anamika does. She has the letter because she is intelligent “but letter from Oxford was locked in a steel cupboard” (p.69). Macaulay in the Notion Anthology of African America Literature says “You may judge a nation’s rank in the scale of civilization from the way they treat their women” (p.231). Her parents want her to get marry. She marries and undergoes torture to the extent that she miscarries. She is sacrifice by the parents in getting married to a man who maltreated her. Desai says:

Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved-or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for the family which was large so that meals were eaten in shifts-first the men, then the children, finally the women. (p.70)

As a woman who obeys her parents she has to go as far as her own destruction to satisfy them. After twenty-five years of abusive treatment and enclosure as total as is hard to imagine in the house of her husband she literally has to go through fire. She is burned to death by her husband and mother-in-law. Even nature agrees with the type of treatment given to her. This is glaring during her funeral ceremonies, “the sun is rapidly turning from a small white disc like a shell in the sand to a shimmering blur like a fire in full daylight” (p.155). Women are maltreated by men in matrimony to an extent that they even lost their lives. After Anamika is married off easily and rapidly, Uma is the next target but she is not found beautiful by any of her suitors as to show that the patriarchal order cannot support the “monstrosity” of “ugliness” in women.

Melanie is another character who has been victimized by patriarchal society. Young girls are not allowed by their parents to have any relationship before marriage. They prefer to keep their children and look for a husband for them. The parents do not care about their personal feelings and Melanie has to suffer this fate. She struggles to control her ego since she could not love a man out of marriage. The stress leads to neuroses for which she is taken to a psychiatric hospital. “Melanie has been taken to an institution in Berkshire where they know to deal with neuroses of adolescent girls: bulimia, anorexia, depression, withdrawal, compulsive behaviour and hysteria” (p.226). In psychoanalysis, unsatisfied desires lead to neurosis. Melanie feels neglected and is often misunderstood by her own society. This results to mental disorder since she could not satisfy her sexual desire. The difference between Uma and Melanie is that Uma regains self-awareness. The institution of Berkshires symbolizes a place that will lead Melanie to regain her consciousness, awareness and self-discovery.

Also, the importance of the “business” of marriage is dealt with in traditional Hindu culture which makes it emblematic of the patriarchal order. Staying unmarried literally makes an outcast of Uma, because, ‘...Hindu marriage is a sacrament—for the husband one among many, but for the wife the only one through which she can acquire spiritual gains. ...if a grown up woman dies without this sacrament she roams about after her death as an evil spirit. (Mies p. 50)

It is believed that when a woman gets married, she acquires spiritual gain but if a grown-up woman dies without a child her spirit roams about as a result of evil forces chasing her away. Nevertheless, for the time being and for Uma’s sake, all her marriage-making ordeal has to stop. Uma carries on such a severe and long repentance to gain the heart of her husband that she never gains. Her mother has to stop her by exclaiming repeatedly, “Oh, no!” .She does not see why the daughter should continue in a marriage where there is no affection. According to Desai, Uma is ill-fated by all, and no more attempts at marring her were made. She also says “oh, no!” not only to Uma but for all the women oppressed by the law of patriarchy, including the institution of marriage-making.

Aruna, Uma’s younger sister, chooses her husband and commands him. She makes him work against the wish of PapaMama. Desai portrays here a woman’s greatest strength in the traditional society which lies in her paternal base and Uma exploits these privileges which are conferred on her marriage breakages and her parents refuse to let her work as a means of consoling herself. Aruna rejects all what her parents tell her and does what she deems necessary for her own family. She breaks a tradition that for years has been suppressing women.

Mama is surprised in the way Aruna treats the husband. Desai says, ‘... Mama was astonished at the way Aruna scolded him continuously. ‘Oh, you have again spilt tea in your saucer, now it will drip all over you,’... ‘But this shirt does not go with those trousers...clearly Aruna had a vision of a perfect world for her own family as well as Arvind (husband). (p.109)

Here, Aruna renegotiates the female identity in that at first the female folks could not shout or scold at their husbands or their parents. Aruna does not end at scolding at her husband but she also scolds at Papa. Something no woman has ever done to Papa: Desai says that ‘... Even Papa, not easily shaken in his profound conviction of his status and authority seemed uneasy and sat upright and tried to converse instead of scowling into space as was his habit and one from which no one in the family had ever tried to pry him loose... (p.109)

No matter how hard Papa used to be, Aruna proves to him that as a woman she has the right to express her thoughts and she can decide for the family what is good. She thus tries to free the woman from traditional chains they had borne in silence for too long. Desai dramatizes: “all morning MamaPapa have found things for Uma to do.... Not today, she tells papa loudly. Can’t do it today” (p.134). She gets into her room and locks the door. She protests against the established orders of MamaPapa; she opens a book and starts reading. “She will read a poem or two and find the pleasure they deny her” (p.135).The poems she reads enlightens her on the vision of a real woman as a woman who has the right to contribute for the growth and development of a society. Uma’s rejection of the patriarchal cultural norms affirms her self-awareness and determination to renegotiate the cultural norms. Aruna on her part does not permit her husband to maltreat or rough-handle her. She takes or decides on what is to be done and the husband accepts without questioning. Desai says:

...Aruna scolded him “Don’t you ever get the house painted, Papa look how they are peeling...what happened to the driver’s uniform? He used to wear one, where is it?... the only thing that made them tolerate her behaviour was the evidence that she directed it not only towards them but even at her husband, Arvind, who come to deposit his family there and would collect them later. (p.155)

Moreover, Desai in her novel presents working class women such as Dr Dutt and her daughter, Anamika, the young and older women in Arun class in America. This is also an attempt to counter the belief that women are good only for house work. Dr Dutt’s daughter was still unmarried at fifty, and a working class woman as well; “The frown was filled with everything Papa thought of working women, women who dared presume to step into the world he occupied” (p.143). Papa represents a patriarchal society that stands against the progress of women. Dr Dutt offers a job to Uma but Uma’s parents reject it. Uma secretly communicates with her about the job. She is protesting against Papa “But will the job still be there? If the institution gets someone else...?”(p.145). Uma yearns for a job just as men. Uma keeps on protesting in most parts of the text. She grumbles whenever Mama asks her to go for a candle. But a woman such as Dr Dutt’s daughter joins the working class against the patriarchal norms and Papa frowns at her. Desai suggests that women should be educated and allowed to contribute to the development of their nations. For Desai, women can even become Heads of States if given the opportunity as it is already happening in our contemporary societies.

Both the young girls and the older women in Arun’s class try to prove that women can also be educated up to the university level in a patriarchal society. These educated women are those who renegotiate their identity by working hard to prove to Papa that office work is not only meant for men. Papa also frowns at the boss of his office who recruits his wife as secretary. Women do not only strive to work but also clamour for their rights to health care. Arun runs to one of the older women in his Geology class in the cafeteria and says she missed classes because she went for her medical check-up-as it is written, ‘... I missed today’s class,... Just got back from the med center-had to go for my checkup... ‘Cancer’ she told him, with professional pride, ‘of the cervix. They spotted it on time-I’ve been regular with my pap smear-and I had chemo. That’s when my hair fell out.’ Its growing back...My husband wants me to wear a wig but I say what the hell. (p. 171)

Women have no control of their own in that; a husband decides to the wife’s life is a risk. She waits for her husband to come and take a decision. The society has made in such a way that a woman has no will power of her own. She depends on the husband for everything as seen from the quotation above.

The frustrations and injustices of the patriarchal society are embodied in the stories of Aku-nnah in the *The Bride Price*. Despite their maltreatment, women naturally will not want their men to die because they not only need them as partners but equally as pillars on which they can lean. It is for this reason that Aku-nna considers the death of their father as the loss of their shelter when she says: “Nna-nndo, you have you have got it all wrong; it is not that we have no father anymore, we have no parents anymore. Did not our father rightly call Nna-nndo, meaning “father is the shelter”? So not only have we lost a father, we have lost our life, our shelter!” (p. 25). Aku-nna’s claims above are re-emphasized by the narrator when she says, ‘---today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact non-existing family. (p. 25)

The quotations above re-emphasized the practical nature of the Ibo society and its effects on the marriage institution. It also proves the importance of marriage to women since they consider men not just as a system and a shelter but most importantly as a source of pride to the women. It is for this reason that Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price* tells Nna-nndo that “women weh no get husbad na embarrassment for everybody” (p. 86). For an Ibo woman to command respect, she needs a husband even if that husband does not treat her well.

From the example so far, one realizes that a lot of Nigerian women in particular and African women as a whole, have suffered and are still suffering from the patriarchal nature of their societies. It is for this reason that Eustace Palmer argues that Emecheta’s novels are the first in African Literature to present female point of view in registering its disgust at male chauvinism and patriarchy’s unfair and oppressive system towards mothers. From both texts, it is clear that women are subjugated. In fact, until of recent, women were not sent to school because it was felt that their role was that of housewives and mothers- catering not only for their children, but their husbands as well. This argument is wildly expressed by Roger Mais in *Brother Man* where it is stated that: “woman was made to serve man, dat’s de way it always was at home” (p. 39). Patriarchy therefore, becomes one of the principal issues that affect the Nigerian concept of marriage.

Furthermore, besides patriarchy, child bearing is another important issue that affects the Ibo concept of marriage. As Emecheta makes us to understand in the novels under study, a successful marriage partly depends on the woman’s ability to bear children, especially male children. Child bearing thus becomes a prerequisite for a successful marriage.

In Emecheta’s *The Bride Price*, one of the major problems Ma Blackie faces at the beginning of the novel is her inability to become pregnant. The narrator tells us that:

---Ma Blackie, though always laughing and loudly cheerful, had a family problem. She was very slow in getting herself pregnant again. Since her husband returned from Burma, when the war ended some five years before, she had not been pregnant like other wives whose husbands had gone abroad to fight Hitler. Her husband Ezekiel Odia has sent her to all native doctors he could afford in Lagos, but still no more children. He even encouraged her to join the cherubim and seraphim sect. These people babbled their prayers to God in frenzied kind of way, but to no avail. Ma Blackie was not pregnant. In despair, she decided to go home to her town, Ibo to placate their Oboshi river goddess into giving her some babies. (p. 2)

The lines above expose Ma Blackie’s plight and that of many other Ibo women. Even though Ma Blackie has two children already, she is still not a happy woman especially with the birth of Akun-nna. As the narrator puts it, “Aku-nna knew that she was to insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage” (p.3). Ma Blackie’s marriage is described as unfortunate by the narrator partly because of her inability to give birth to more children. This situation is very similar to that of Adah in *Second Class Citizens* whose birth came at time when everybody was expecting a male child. As a result, her birth is not recorded. The story narrated by the old man to Aku-nna and her friends while at the stream highlights a number of issues relating to the plight of the Nigerian women. As he puts it, “my first wife ran away because I beat her up. My second wife died when she was having a child. My third wife had to go because I fed her for seven years and she bore me no child” (p. 114). This gender discrimination is partly what Emecheta sets out to satirise in her works. From the above, one realizes child bearing plays an important role in the Nigerian’s concept of marriage.

Moreover, besides child bearing, polygamy is equally an important concept in the Nigerian Marriage Institutions. In Nigerian just as in many African countries, a man is free to marry as many wives as he can handle. In Kehinde, one of the reasons why Albert decides to travel back home is to be able to get married to another wife. Kehinde's Taiwo tells her that in Nigeria "it is considered manly for men to be unfaithful even if he didn't want women, they will come to him".(p. 46) Albert's father was married to two wives and despite his childhood experiences with his father's two wives, Albert still ends up getting married to Rike. In Kehinde for example, Emecheta concentrates on the jealousy and not on the sisterhood of polygamy. This is true to a certain extent in Kehinde. Kehinde has always been aware of the sufferings of her elder sister Ifeyinwa in a polygamous marriage, and she thought that Albert agreed with her because he had seen the sufferings of his own father's two wives. When she arrives Nigeria, however, Kehinde finds that the place allotted to a senior wife, even a "been-to madam", is a lot different than she had imagined. She is ushered into a small bedroom with a single bed, not the double bed which she had helped to pay for and had sent to Nigeria. When Kehinde calls to Albert to ask about her room, Ifeyinwa reminds her that it is rude to call her husband by his given name. Kehinde must now call him "Joshua's father" or "our husband" to acknowledge the role of his new wife, Rike. Ifeyinwa's advice is very similar to that of Christine W. Sizemore who in an interview with Buchi Emecheta makes us to understand that:

"In a polygamous society, every woman has a husband whom she shares with a number of other women. This gives her more freedom in some respects: she has the opportunity of pursuing a career as well as having children--- The children belong to an extended family with a number of mothers, and the women, after the initial jealousy, share a kind of sisterhood".(p. 379)

Men are always polygamous and take as many wives as they wished. The feelings of the women are not always considered by these men. Women are always pushed at the background, the society and tradition treat women discriminately and almost all the domains in life.

Similarly, in *The Bride Price*, when Ezekiel Odia dies, his brother Okonkwo inherits her and continues to have children with her. Ma Blackie becomes "his fourth wife" (p. 72). We are equally told by the narrator that "Ofule, a teacher, though retired, had four wives all from nearby towns, and on the whole had led a very enviable life" (p. 85). Okoboshi's father on his part being a chief had six wives. It is as a result of the polygamous nature of the society that makes everyone surprised in Kehinde when Kehinde asked her husband why he had to get another wife. This is because; everybody expects that as a Nigerian woman, she should understand that polygamy is part of the culture to her people. Polygamy thus becomes a typical aspect in African marriages and an issue which Buchi Emecheta's position is open to a lot of debates.

More still, one very important practice that affects the Nigerian Concept of marriage is the payment of bride price. The importance of this practice partly justifies the reason why Emecheta entitles her novel *The Bride Price*. The importance of the bride price is emphasized in the following lines by the narrator:

Aku-nna remembered only scraps of stories about what life in Ibuza would be like. She knew she would have to marry, and that the bride price she would fetch would help to pay the school fees of her brother Nna-nndo. She did not mind that, what she feared was the type of man who would be chosen for her. When it is said: "She would have loved to marry someone living in Lagos, so that she would not have to work on a farm and carry cassava ---"p. (p. 51).

Men take so many wives so that they can serve as commercial workers, cultivating cassava for farms for their husbands. Besides re-emphasizing the importance of the bride price to the Nigerian marriage institution, the above lines equally highlights the culture of arranged marriages and gender inequality. Aku-nna's bride price will be used to send her brother to school. The fact that a husband will have to be chosen for her only proves that the Nigerian woman has no say in her marriage decision.

Also, though girls were supposed to get married while the boys go to school, Okonkwo allows Aku-nna to go to school because as he says "Aku-nna and Ogugua will get married at about the same time. Their bride prices will come to me. You see the trend today, that educated girls fetch more money" (p. 75). Okonkwo therefore wanted to use the bride from his two daughters to become an Obi. The bride price is so important to the

Nigerian marriage institution to the extent that, calamity awaits anybody who dares to evade it. It is for this reason that Aku-nna advises Chike to go and pay her bride price “just give them their bride price in peace for you to know what they say: if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die at child birth (p. 161). Aku-nna dies at the end of the novel because she violates tradition and elopes with Chike it is for this reason that Rebecca Boostrom argues that most readers will read *The Bride Price*’s ending and think that Emecheta is being ambivalent in saying that all good little girls will be told Aku-nna’s story to help them obey their parent’s wishes in marriage.

In addition to the above, cultural practices also plays an important role in shaping the marriage practices amongst the Nigerian people. In the following lines, Aku-nna frowns at a custom that violates individual happiness. As the narrator puts it:

The bitterness Aku-nna was feeling had gone beyond tears. She had heard it said often enough that one’s mother was one’s best friend, but she was beginning to doubt it. Had her mother encouraged her to accept Chike’s friendship in order to just use him like a convenient tool, to ferry them through a difficult period of adjustment? Had she known all along, had she ever had any doubts that they will not be allowed to marry? Or did she really believe that customs had relaxed to such an extent that people would not mind? Aku-nna again studied her mother, who was crying because of the disgrace of her family being associated with the son of a slave striking down the son of a free man, or because her daughter first, perhaps only, love was being shattered and taken away from her. She knew Ma Blackie liked Chike; she had seen them sit and talked for hours when he had come visiting as she was busily preparing the evening meal. Oh, what kind of savage customs was it that could be so heartless and make so many people unhappy. (p. 126)

The above lines emphasize the place of cultural norms in the Ibo marriage practice. The marriage institution is an eye sore for feminist struggle. In marriage, the female searches for understanding and love but needlessly to say that the reverse is true as she is neglected and abandoned. This is a situation that prevails in *The Bride Price* and the fact that women comply with this is the conclusion that Patricia Dunkar arrives at when she argues that:

Women’s love has always meant giving way, giving up, giving in –in fiction and in our lives. We need a new vision of love which involves saying and living a no which means no and yes which is spoken from a position of strength and certainty- an assent that is not coerced, not by poverty, not by manipulation, not by fear. We are the only oppressed groups who are actually required to be in love with our oppressors. We are the only group required to invite and enjoy aggressions. (p. 266)

Emecheta in *The Bride Price* and Desai *Fasting, Feasting*, creates women who set out to control and nullify all patriarchal, gender and cultural stereotypes that have for a relatively long period relegated.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has been to survey societal realities that are characterized by norms that mar peaceful co-existence to the female sex especially in terms of relationships and the concept of marriage. It thus surveys the relationships and the concept of marriage in both the Indian (Hindu) and Nigerian (Ibo) contexts. Our focus was to compare these societal elements that turn to hinder female initiatives, since emphases is laid more on the preservation of tradition rather than individual emancipation. This article also stresses on the consequences that follow such traditional domination on the individual, family and the community at large. It is intended also to show that tradition should give room for personal philosophies whereby each person is responsible for his or her decision. It uses New Historicist, Feminist and Psychoanalytic in the critical perspective; it examined the phenomenon of an Indian - Hindu family based structure as exemplified in the works of Anita Desai. It shows how Desai in her novel makes use of the themes like relationships, marriage, culture and tradition, gendered childhood, dowry and mental imbalance to expose the realities that characterizes her Indian community. The analysis revealed that relationships and the Indian concept of marriage is fraught with hurdles of patriarchy, bias, discrimination, subjugation, both at homes and after marriage is designed to subdue the woman.

In addition, from a New Historicist, Feminist and Psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives, the novels shredded on the various relationships in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. The analysis in this article revealed that obnoxious traditional practices, practically gender biases, oppression, subjugation and female exploitation characterizes almost all female relationships and the concept of marriage in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* and Kehinde. The article validates the hypothesis that Anita Desai and Buchi Emecheta express in their works that tradition and culture are a springboard for relationships and marriage and that self-assertion and education sometimes lead to revolt and are the ultimate goals towards freedom for the female sex.

This article reveals that, though through their socio-historical, political and cultural contexts, Desai and Emecheta share identical broad elements of content on issues such as the castes system, virginity, memory, Diaspora life, gender biases, patriarchy and the payment of the bride price. This article equally displays divergent formal realization, for it is mainly in terms of medaling context and content that the individual novelist's individuality is most manifested. The novelists transcend time and national boundaries because of the humanistic values of their social message, which as this article has proven claims that happy and good relationships before marriage is better for the couple rather than the imposed type that is better flowered with hatred, battery and trauma. The novelists also put forward the fact that women if given a better chance can also contribute positively in nature building progress. As experience has shown that nowadays, women are fast becoming bread winners of their families due to the fact that they are becoming more and more interested in education and this has made many women in the world today to become financially and intellectually independent.

In Desai and Emecheta's works, we realized that women played very important roles, beginning from their families and later to the community in general. One can see therefore from these examples that women are fast abolishing the notion of dependent and inactive in the society by self-asserting themselves to areas that were formerly ascribed to men. The idea of female identity and recognition are not far fetch. Hence, Desai and Emecheta's cry for the wake up of women echoes loudly amongst other feminist writers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Desai, Anita. *Fasting, Feasting*. London: Vintage, Chatto & Windus, 2000
2. Emecheta, Buchi. *The Bride Price*. London: Heneman, 1986
3. Abrah, M.H. *A Glossary of Literature Terms*. Chicago: Wadsworth, 2005. It is a dictionary of literary terms.
4. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1959. Discusses patriarchy as a weapon of discrimination. It also looks on the reverse of male capability to succeed in life. The male child does not succeed in life as the society and father expects. Rather, the female child becomes the bread winner of the family.
5. Ako, Edward O. (ed) *Between and Within: Essays In Commonwealth Literature*. Yaounde:
6. Edition SAAGRAPH, 2003. The text among other things focuses on colonial and colonialist literature: it examines the relationships between the empire and English literature. It explores questions on gender, language and identity it analyses and defines the difference between commonwealth and postcolonial literature.
7. Asheroft, Bill, et al. (eds.) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge 1995. Collective essays on concept and canons of postcolonial literature: Language, culture, marriage and national identities.
8. Bhabha, K. Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. The book examines nations from specific cultutral identities even though these cultural identities are contradictory due to movements and ethnic differences.
9. Chinweizu, et al. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*. Ibadon:U.P.Ltd, 1977. Deals with the effects of colonialism and how it places African tradition in conflict. It also reveals and puts forward a comparative perspective on colonial and postcolonial inheritance.