

Not Created But Man Made Barriers: A Critical View of Culture in Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price

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Abstract- The aim of the paper is to expose the tradition of Ibuza culture and also the struggles undergone by women imposed by the society as well as patriarchy. Marriage was an important tradition in their society. This paper entitled "Not Created But Man Made Barriers: A Critical View of Culture in Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price" gives an awareness of their society and social traditions. The Bride Price is partly autobiographical and partly fictional. This paper deals with the character of Aku and her struggles. She was dad's princess during her childhood. But after the death of her father, her stepfather and the other family members mainly supported her with a keen eye on her bride price she might fetch. This paper shows her life with Chike who comes over the traditions to marry Chike. Her life comes to an abrupt end because the bride price was not paid. But her identity was her baby girl. This paper shows the struggles faced by women from the different quarters of the African Society..

Culture is represented in its art, craft, folklore, religion, clothing, music and languages. Literature is a body of written works mirroring the culture. African Literature shares a huge volume of stories about history and culture, even if the stories are not always pleasant and uplifting. This is the essence of African literature, among the many popular and famous authors of African Literature. Buchi Emecheta stands apart as a writer treating life from the feministic perspective. We find many autobiographical elements in her novels like The Bride Price, The Joys of Motherhood, The Slave Girl, Second Class Citizen, The Rape of Shavi etc. The Bride Price makes a widespread analysis of the struggles of women, male domination, the oppression of women in the society, tradition, and marriage. In short on one side the novel deals with the role of girl as dad's princess and on the other side she is accepted and taken care of as a daughter in expectation of the bride price.

African literature always binds with the tradition and superstitious beliefs. Music plays an overall role in their tradition. Music is a form of communication and it plays a functional role in African society. Songs accompany marriage, birth, rites of passages, hunting and even political activities. In the same way the novel The Bride Price proceeds with the life of Akunna. But somehow, she fought with the society, family and goes on with her life as her wish. Marriage has the highest position in African tradition. Simone de Beauvoir states:

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to

marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious or even indifferent in regard to that institution.

Marriage is praised as a glorious tradition by the Ibuza people. Through the tradition of marriage, they offer their daughter to get bride price. As sons are considered as the heir to the whole family they were given more importance. They give him good education and he is allowed to do whatever he wishes. In such situations, the girls are oppressed. Girls are locked up between the four walls after marriage. According to Ibuza society, women must do their domestic works and also must obey the words of their husband. On the other hand, the main work of the women is to bear children to the family. The society expects the male child not the female. The male child is considered as the next heir to their family property. He has the ability to run the family. In the society male is considered as the head and the backbone to the whole family. The Ibuza people fixed that the women are meant for domestic works and male for farming work. Among the society women are treated as slaves. If the husband passes away and if the wife becomes a widow, she will be inherited by her husband's brother. The society thinks that a woman cannot lead her family.

Buchi in her novel The Bride Price shows the superstitious beliefs practiced by the society the life of Akunna and Chike the most lovable young lovers who try to fight against the society and its traditions to lead their life. Every girl who is born and brought up in her own native land is aware of the superstitious beliefs of her own land. Africa is a colonized country. Aku was born in the city of Lagos where the people follow the way of the whites. The following lines show the way how she was close to her father:

He had named her Akunna, meaning literally "father's wealth" knowing that the only consolation he could count on from her would be her bride price. To him this was something to look forward to Akunna on her part was determined not to let her father down. She was going to marry well a rich man of whom her father would approve and who would be able to afford an expensive bride price (10).

After the death of Ezekiel happiness vanished due to the acne of the inheriting of Ma Blackie by Okonkwo who was the brother of Ezekiel. Ma was accepted to be the fourth wife of Okonkwo. This made them shift to their native land. Ma was happy and busy with her domestic duties. Akunna's brother continues his education, had a lot of friends and enjoys his new life. But Aku knows Okonkwo was allowing her to educate so, that the educated girls would fetch a good bride price. Once she matures she will be ready for marriage. This was the custom in her native land. In School she fell into the hands of the young teacher Chike. But she keeps it a secret until she finished her schooling. If her family comes to know of the affair she will be forced to stop her schooling. So, she hid everything, but love is like a candle light which can overcome the darkness and gives brightness. In the same way the affair came to light that Aku was close to Chike.

Chike was an educated man but the family once belonged to the slave family. From a poor level they came up a higher economic status through the hard work of his father. He had good education and money. But Aku's family members consider Chike and his people as slaves. But they reached high achieved their goal by their hard work under the whites. Okonkwo was very eager to get Aku's bride price but suddenly when he learns of her affair with Chike, he says "If it was true, it was the greatest insult that could befall a family like theirs, which had never been tainted with the blood of a foreigner, to say nothing of that of the descendants of slaves" (79).

According to Iboza society a man can inherit or make a woman to be his wife by cutting a lock of hair from the woman's head. The person who had the lock of hair of the woman can take the woman for himself. Thus, she became his property and nobody can touch her. Men choose the virgin women whereas the man is allowed to have relationship with many other women. In the same way Aku was kidnapped by a boy who was a handicap. The boy was not able to have his pleasure with Aku and so got other men who would help him.

According to the tradition the men themselves would not touch disvirgined girls as they consider such women. This was unacceptable in the family of higher people. Aku planned to tell a lie that she had already been disvirgined by her lover so that she will be free. At the last moment of their forcing that she should cooperate with Okoboshi. She told the shocking news that she was already had a relationship with her lover. Okoboshi refused to touch her and she was beaten by him with the reason that she was disvirgined before marriage which was against to their culture. Aku bore everything for the sake of her true love.

Chike and Aku's brother helped her to be free from the evil superstitious beliefs of the society. Then Aku and Chike went

far away where she gets a job as a teacher and Chike got a job in Oil Company. They were living in Ughelli they got married and lived a peaceful and happy life. But Aku had a fear about the belief behind the bride price, i.e., one who did not get bride price for her family will die during her first childbirth. Though this was a superstitious belief, she had a fear at the corner of her heart. As the result of her love and marriage with Chike she gave birth to a baby girl. And she promised Chike to name her Joy, as they had already baptized the bed as 'Joy'. It was the bed where she has conceived the child. "Our love will never die... Let us call her Joy to the same name we gave to the bed on which she was conceived" (167).

Apart from culture of The Bride Price with marriage and superstitious beliefs. In the beginning of the novel Aku was considered as Ogbanje. In Ibo language it means that 'she was wicked child she was born to die'. The traditional views of the marriage and culture which affects the life of these people draws the sad conclusion. This paper represents their practice of marriage and the submission of women to men. The Bride price is somewhat fictional, but the concept is autobiographical representing the life of Buchi Emecheta. African women must be able to overcome the powerful restrictions of their Iboza culture. But through the novel we learn that the marriage between Chike and Aku gives a new hope to overcome the fixed culture of Iboza as well as the Iboza society. God created this world but not any culture for any society. These cultures traditions and practices are formed by the people binding to themselves. So, these manmade traditions and superstitious beliefs bring about the downfall of them created by God like Aku and Chike.

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